



hume riverina  
community legal  
service

# *making a difference*



*HRCLS provides free legal advice on a range of issues, including family law, family violence, youth law, credit and debt issues, consumer complaints, separation and divorce.*

# Our organisational culture

## **We are responsive and innovative**

We provide high quality services that are evidence-based and targeted to community need. We undertake regular need analysis to identify and address unmet legal need. We evaluate our programs to check they are delivering the necessary benefits to our community and to inform improvements. We are open to piloting new approaches to legal service delivery.

## **We care for our community**

We empower and work alongside our clients to address legal problems and remedy injustices, and advocate for the interests and wellbeing of regional and remote communities.

## **We are resourceful**

We make smart use of limited funds, including sharing administrative resources with our auspice organisation UMFC to strengthen the services we offer and nurture a dedicated workforce.

## **We support our staff and volunteers**

We recognise that our staff and volunteers are our greatest assets. We value their experience and ideas, and we are committed to further developing their legal, community engagement and leadership skills. Our 2015-18 Strategy includes a greater focus on working with young clients and clients with complex needs. We ensure that staff have access to relevant professional development programs and to actively manage the impacts of this work in support of staff and volunteer wellbeing.

## **We share our skills**

We are proud to be a teaching practice and welcome law student volunteers, training new lawyers and encouraging everyone's passion for social justice.

## **We communicate with our stakeholders**

We consult regularly with our stakeholders and partners about client care, emerging issues, new initiatives and opportunities for shared ventures to ensure the greatest benefits for our clients and community and to avoid duplicating resources.



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*We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we work and pay our respects to their elders, past and present*

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*Disclaimer: client stories are a 'snapshot' of a legal issue and do not contain the complete details of their full circumstances. Client stories in this Annual Report must not be relied upon as legal advice. People should always seek their own legal advice. Names\* used in client stories in this report have been changed to protect identities.*

HRCLS lawyers Cam Bloye, Ali Maher, Michelle Matthews, Deb Fisher and UMFC CEO Luke Rumbold welcome the growing HRCLS presence in Wangaratta



# From the CEO

Looking back on the impact Hume Riverina Community Legal Service (HRCLS) has had in the past 18 years, I'm impressed with the significant difference that has been made for our communities. It's been a tremendous social justice win for Albury-Wodonga and surrounding communities, with low income families and vulnerable people getting access to justice they would not have had otherwise.

At the local and sector level, HRCLS has won respect and recognition for the work it has done and they are embedded as part of the legal sector in our area. This is a testament to everyone who has worked for the service, which continues to support vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our communities.

## Funding win

The highlight of the past year was the systematic and professional approach taken by the legal sector to get consensus on the funding for the community legal centre (CLC) sector. I'm pleased we were able to play a role, with HRCLS Principal Lawyer/Manager Sarah Rodgers advocating locally with MPs, and UMFC director client services Sheri Moulton putting a strong case to

senior officials in Attorney-General George Brandis' office for funding to continue. It was very positive to see the legal sector consensus for the important role community centres play and this must have been tremendously encouraging for the CLC sector to be recognised in this way and have widespread support.

## Making a difference

While the impact at a local level is broad through the hard work of the law team, I would like to acknowledge Cam Bloye's work in the Invisible Hurdles project. It's a concrete example of what can happen in a tremendous partnership with the education sector to help vulnerable young people. The Family Violence work being done, particularly in the Continuity of Service pilot led by senior lawyer Alison Maher, will continue to make a difference for people enduring the stress of family violence.

The relocation under one roof at 27-29 Stanley Street in March was a huge positive move and the impact has been noticeable: increased daily interaction and collegial work across programs has been beneficial for UMFC and HRCLS, with the mix of family welfare, child protection and family law enriching everyone's experience and knowledge, which benefits service users down to the case level.

Our Agency staff have greater education about the legal rights of people, staff have increased access to this knowledge through the lawyers, and there is an avenue of expertise for the Board to access pro bono legal firms for assistance. HRCLS has also been exposed to new ideas, including supervision as a concept to help grow staff as part of the continual improvement process.

## Understanding our region

On a weekly basis, HRCLS and UMFC are up against cross-border issues, and working through these takes a certain level of expertise. This aspect of the work is not fully appreciated and while this environment can be frustrating, the situation won't change in the short-term and highlights the inconsistencies we face that are peculiar to this part of the world.

**Luke Rumbold UMFC CEO**

UMFC building launch, May 2017  
- Victorian Legal Services Board +  
Commissioner representative, Susan  
Ball (Manager, Grants & Risk), Victorian  
Commissioner for Children & Young People  
Liana Buchanan, Consumer Action Law  
Centre training and outreach manager  
Preethi Vergis, HRCLS principal lawyer  
Sarah Rodgers and lawyer Deb Fisher  
enjoy the gathering



# Principal Lawyer/Manager

A highlight of the year has been our co-location with UMFC's head office in Wodonga. We are enjoying our new premises and already seeing the benefits of being on the same site as other services provided under UMFC such as Child and Family Services and Out of Home Care. We have experienced an increase of clients being referred between our programs, and a strengthening of our relationships with other staff.

At the time of our relocation we also launched a new brand, including a logo and website, for which we thank Dutch Media for their design work.

It has been a difficult year fighting the threat of funding cuts, which took time and energy in advocating to our MPs and the Commonwealth Attorney-General about the value of our work. These funding threats put into jeopardy our ability to plan our future service delivery, and to provide security of employment for staff. I am proud of the way our team got on with the job of helping the most vulnerable and disadvantaged despite this threat. Thanks to the Commonwealth Government for listening to our sector concerns. Fortunately as we head into the next year we celebrate that we have now achieved some certainty regarding our ongoing

core funding and will not have to lobby against a funding cut in the year ahead.

However there is still more work to be done as too many people, who cannot afford to pay for a private lawyer or access free services, continue to miss out on help.

## Helping people

We're continuing to make a difference in our family violence work on both sides of the border, which is a key strategic priority for our service. Legal assistance is being provided to high numbers of people affected by family violence in all of our services not only in Albury Wodonga, but also in towns such as Benalla, Wangaratta, Deniliquin and Corowa. There have been fantastic achievements in some Victorian-funded projects, including the Invisible Hurdles Project (targeting young people with family violence issues) and Continuity of Service project (ensuring those affected by family violence receive timely family law assistance), as detailed later in this report.

Our regional presence is increasing and we offer more appointments on outreach to rural communities such as Wangaratta in Victoria, and Holbrook and Henty in NSW.



The UMFC senior management group has also been a wonderful support to us. This is seen in the new premises they secured for our home, their continued management of our financial and operational needs, and the personal support they provide to me.

We have many partner agencies named throughout this report, who have worked with us this year across our catchment area to help us reach those most in need of our services, and without them we could not be effective.

I also acknowledge the efforts of our peak bodies including the Federation of CLCs, CLCs NSW and NACLIC who advocated for our funding and have ensured our sector is strong, so we can continue to make a difference.

Lastly I thank all of our funders who enable our work. Without their support we could not achieve our vision and mission in this region.

**Sarah Rodgers,**  
**HRCLS Principal Lawyer/Manager**



HRCLS prides itself on helping vulnerable and disadvantaged people who would otherwise have no access to legal advice

# Who we are

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service has been the major provider of much-needed free legal assistance to communities in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW for more than 17 years. We play a unique role as a community legal centre in this region, and make a difference to people living in Albury-Wodonga, Wangaratta, Benalla, Corowa and Deniliquin, and other towns across 17 local government areas in Victoria and NSW.

We are a vital part of a broader service network making a positive impact through integrated support for regional and remote communities. We proudly work alongside social service partners and private legal practitioners to give communities fair access to legal, social, financial and health support. We acknowledge and respect the strengths, skills and capabilities of our numerous partners, and welcome their expertise to help guide us in the important work we all do.

As one of the few cross border community legal centres in Australia, we pride ourselves on having full knowledge of Victorian and NSW laws to deal with the legal challenges for people living in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW. People close to the Border regularly move back and forth interstate without any knowledge of the differences in laws.

This can make legal problems more complex to resolve, so it is paramount that HRCLS lawyers are experienced and competent with laws in NSW and Victoria, and under the Federal jurisdiction. We will keep advocating for greater consistency among these laws to benefit people on the Border.

We are auspiced by UMFC, and during 2017 became co-located in Wodonga. This will help strengthen a productive relationship and improve access to a range of quality services for Wodonga and surrounding communities.

## Why we exist

We believe people deserve equal opportunities to access legal assistance and the law, wherever they live in Australia and regardless of their place in society. We are determined to provide a legal safety net for people in regional and remote communities in Victoria and NSW. We help people:

- understand their legal rights and responsibilities
- consider their options to fix problems
- get through legal processes and systems
- achieve fair outcomes.

Our long-term vision, along with improving access to justice, is to see:

- communities getting better help through equitable resourcing of support services
- people managing legal problems before they reach crisis point
- our vulnerable and disadvantaged having greater control over their lives.

## What we do

We give free legal assistance to people who are unable to access legal help for family, civil and criminal law problems. Most clients have been disadvantaged through long-term financial stress.

Our key client groups include:

- people with a disability or mental health issues
- children and young people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- older people
- people experiencing family violence.

We represent people in legally assisted dispute resolution and provide advocacy services in local Magistrates' Courts and the Federal Circuit Court in Albury. We enhance the community's awareness of legal rights and responsibilities to help people avoid or manage legal problems.

We make submissions to State and Federal governments, and provide evidence and expertise to help create fairer and more effective law and policy. This improves community wellbeing and cut down on costly legal cases.

## How we are funded

We receive funding from the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Victoria Legal Aid, Legal Aid NSW, Department of Justice (Victoria) and the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner Grants Program.



# Our Team

## Staff

**Sarah Rodgers**  
Principal Lawyer/Manager

**Ashlie Barclay**  
Operations Manager

**Sarah Caplice**  
VLA Secondee Lawyer

**Gary Lung**  
VLA Secondee Lawyer

**Alison Maher**  
Senior Lawyer

**Karen Bowley**  
NSW Outreach lawyer

**Janet Osborne**  
NSW Outreach Lawyer

**Andrea Georgiou**  
Lawyer

**Deborah Fisher**  
Lawyer

**Beth Simpson**  
Lawyer

**Rebecca Deverell**  
Community Development  
Coordinator

**Tracey Walker**  
Legal Assistant

**Meaghan Frazer**  
Reception /Administration Officer

**Karen Keegan**  
Senior Lawyer

**Eugene Butkowski**  
Policy and Projects Worker

**Michelle Matthews**  
Lawyer

**Jodie Wells**  
Lawyer

**Mae Mactier**  
Lawyer

**Lorraine Murray**  
Acting Operations Manager

**Simon Crase**  
Community Legal Education  
Coordinator



Gary Lung,  
Victoria Legal Aid family law/  
family violence lawyer



Operations manager  
Ashlie Barclay

*"I want to thank the wonderful team at Hume Riverina Community Legal Service for their tireless work in serving our community, as well as the positive work culture that each person has contributed towards."*

Sarah Rodgers,  
Principal Lawyer/Manager



Legal Aid NSW CEO Brendan Thomas, Legal Aid NSW director family law Kylie Beckhouse, Legal Aid NSW Riverina Murray solicitor in charge Nicole Dwyer, Legal Aid NSW lawyer Dione Garwell, HRCLS principal lawyer Sarah Rodgers, UMFC director client services Sheri Moulton and UMFC CEO Luke Rumbold tour the new building at 27-29 Stanley Street

# Our Networks

## Our connections

Cooperative Legal Service Delivery  
 Invisible Hurdles  
 Ovens Murray Integrated Family Violence Network  
 CLC NSW and Federation of CLCs networks  
 Corowa Interagency Network  
 Koori Interagency Network  
 Berrigan Jerilderie Interagency network  
 Deniliquin Interagency Network  
 Yarrawonga Mulwala Interagency Network  
 RRR Meetings  
 CD CLE Working Group Meetings  
 Youth Area Network Meetings (YAMS)

Legal Aid NSW, Victoria Legal Aid, Department of Justice  
 Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department  
 UMFC  
 NESAY  
 Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre  
 Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service  
 Yes Unlimited  
 The Hub, Albury  
 Centre Against Violence  
 Women's Health Goulburn North East  
 The Women's Centre, Albury  
 Intereach  
 Gateway Health  
 Wodonga TAFE  
 Albury Library Museum  
 Anglicare  
 Victoria & NSW Police  
 Hume Region Homelessness Network  
 Beyond Housing  
 Junction Support Services

Australian National University (ANU)  
 Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau  
 Goulburn Valley CLC  
 Regional Disability Advocacy Service  
 Dispute Settlement Centre, Hume  
 Legal Aid NSW  
 Victoria Legal Aid  
 Merri Health Victims Assistance Program  
 MIND  
 North East Multicultural Association  
 North East Law Association  
 Albury & District Law Society  
 Albury Wodonga Health  
 Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner Grants Program  
 WestJustice  
 Women's Centre for Health & Wellbeing  
 YouthLaw  
 Wodonga Senior Secondary College  
 St David's Uniting Care



# Our Volunteers



Principal lawyer Sarah Rodgers, volunteers Eugene Butkowski, Ross Kearney and Joe Blackshield during Volunteer Week 2017



Student lawyer Annabelle Burgess, and volunteers Mathew Read and Grahame Ingleton at the Wangaratta evening clinic with supervising lawyer Deb Fisher

*"I joined HRCLS as a volunteer lawyer in 2001 to support the Tuesday evening volunteer clinic. The experience has expanded my skills and horizons through providing legal advice to HRCLS clients, of which many are considered the most vulnerable in our society.*

*This privilege has allowed me to participate in the HRCLS vision to provide a free legal safety net to the Albury Wodonga community and surrounds.*

*I would encourage any lawyer to assist in this satisfying and worthy experience."*

Eugene Butkowski, volunteer

Winner of 2008 NSW Law and Justice Foundation Community Legal Centres Volunteer Award and 2008 UMFC Betty Maclean Award

## 2016-17 Volunteers

Lauren Howlett  
Adam Koster  
Dusan Jovetic  
Tristan Ferris  
Hannah Gostelow  
Beth Simpson  
Karen Keegan  
Derek Norquay  
Ross Kearney  
Sascha McCorrison  
Michele Kampen  
Eugene Butkowski  
Allison Bruce  
Peter Uniacke  
Simon O'Halloran  
Joe Blackshield  
Dirk De Zwart  
Sushama Johnson  
Carlene Lamanna  
Sarah Noble  
Tim Jackson  
Jye Cunneen  
Wendy Couzens  
Jonathon Green  
Danny Frigerio  
Sarah Pearce  
Vic Campagna  
Chelsea Campagna  
Emma Murphy  
Jill Smith  
David Joseph  
Grahame Ingleton

## Practical Legal Training Students

Mathew Read  
Gerard Hynes  
Diana Thomas  
Narelle Sherwill  
Annabelle Burgess

**1040**   
**hours**

**310**   
**hours**

Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre principal Huw Derwentsmith, NESAY executive officer Leah Waring, AWAHS CEO David Noonan, to Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner representative, Susan Ball (Manager, Grants & Risk), ANU evaluator Dr Liz Curran, HRCLS principal lawyer Sarah Rodgers and youth lawyer Cameron Bloye at the Invisible Hurdles program launch in May 2017



## INVISIBLE HURDLES PROGRAM: Cameron Bloye



### Why I do what I do

*"I am passionate about being a community lawyer because I believe that by providing legal education and assistance to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our community I can empower people and help promote social justice."*

*Cameron Bloye, youth lawyer*

The Invisible Hurdles Project, generously funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner Grants Program is helping improve the lives of young people in North East Victoria who are at risk of family violence. As the connection has grown with clients at the Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre (WFLC), the Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS), and North East Support and Action for Youth (NESAY) in Wangaratta, results are being achieved and young people are getting the help they need to deal with legal issues that would otherwise compound.

In May 2017, the official launch of this integrated justice partnership took place at WFLC, with Victorian Commissioner for Children & Young People, Liana Buchanan and funder Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner representative, Susan Ball (Manager, Grants & Risk) as our special guests.

Working one day a week at each service, the youth lawyer also does secondary consults with staff members on a range of legal issues, focusing on clients experiencing family violence. Dr Liz Curran and Pamela Taylor-Barnett of the Australian National University continue to evaluate the project.

*"We think the law is meant to work fairly for everyone. Sadly it often works against young people - particularly those doing it tough."*

*A small legal issue can become a major problem, especially if a young person is too busy surviving to think about their legal issues. This means they can end up in a world of trouble, and for some their legal problems can really feel like the last straw.*

*We know that for most young people experiencing disadvantage, seeking out legal help will be low on their list of priorities. Yet many young people need legal help, and they need it early. That is why this is such an important, sensible and successful project.*

*The project makes lawyers accessible, and allows them to build trust with young people who have been so burned throughout their lives that trust comes slowly.*

*It's a no-brainer this project should continue, and I hope you get the support you need to keep it going."*

*Liana Buchanan, Victorian Commissioner for Children & Young People launching Invisible Hurdles project, May 2017*

### Impact

*"Our students tend not to have great connections with the legal system, and when they do it's under moments of stress, so for a lawyer to be able to come into our environment and work with our students on a regular basis and to build a relationship with our students and to build a rapport is invaluable"*

*Huw Derwentsmith, Principal Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre Campus*

# FAMILY VIOLENCE TO FAMILY LAW CONTINUITY OF SERVICE PROJECT: Alison Maher

In July 2016 HRCLS received Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) funding for a two-year project to give better continuity of legal services to people experiencing family violence and family law issues. The Family Violence to Family Law Continuity of Services Pilot assists people with family law issues, as often they come into contact with lawyers for the first time when they are at the Magistrates Court about Intervention Orders. This is when family issues can be identified and clients helped through the family law system to potentially resolve matters earlier.

I provide advice and ongoing assistance about family law matters, including representation at family dispute resolution or in the family law courts.

Along with my colleague, Michelle Matthews, I see clients at the Magistrates Courts in Wodonga, Wangaratta and Myrtleford, and other outreach locations. I also give advice over the phone.

HRCLS Paralegal Tracey Walker provides valuable assistance in the pilot and collects all the data.

## Service delivery

- Every Wednesday – lawyer attends Wangaratta Magistrates' Court
- Every Wednesday – lawyer attends Wodonga Magistrates' Court
- Myrtleford Magistrates' Court every sitting (depending on lawyer availability)
- Every Monday – 4 face-to-face appointments in Wangaratta
- Each Thursday – 4 face-to-face appointments through Family Relationships Services UMFC (Albury-Wodonga)

- Every Thursday – 4 telephone appointments
- Appointments as required

## Key achievements to date

- Building strong working relationships with:
  - Magistrates Court and Federal Circuit Court staff
  - Victoria Police, including family violence unit and police prosecutors
  - Private practitioners working in the family violence and family law areas
  - Service providers including Centre Against Violence and Gateway Health UMFC Family Relationship Services, Family Services, and Financial Counsellors.
- Reaching the 'right' clients (those with multiple priorities), shown through high numbers of advice sessions
- Providing ongoing family law assistance following initial advice
- Continuing legal service delivery without needing to refer clients to other legal providers
- Giving valuable service when clients are often most vulnerable, such as recent separation, reduced financial circumstances, and homelessness. Comments made to lawyers from clients include "I feel stronger having strong women around me" and "I feel as though I am now being heard. That I am a human and not helpless".
- Advising and assisting for men and women as applicants, affected family members and respondents in family violence matters and family law proceedings
- Supporting clients with legal and non-legal services through holistic approach
- Growing greater expertise amongst HRCLS family law services.



## Why I do what I do

*"Sometimes I don't think I make a difference, that I am not doing enough, and then I have a client tell me how much I have helped them, how I have explained a process or how I have supported them through a really difficult time.*

*"I have a law degree and therefore can explain to clients what the law means and how it will impact on them and their children. It feels like an obligation to use something you have to make a difference in people's lives."*

*Alison Maher, senior lawyer*



## CASEWORK:

# Michelle Matthews

HRCLS and the Family Relationship Centre, which is part of the UMFC Family Relationship Services (FRS), continue to enjoy a close working relationship.

A weekly legal clinic is conducted for clients referred by FRS to get information and legal advice about their family law situation. This is currently held in Albury UMFC office and bookings can be made through the FRS phone line. Examples include any family law matters, such as recovery orders, parenting plans/ consent orders, locating the other parent and a “where to from here” regarding separation. In the last financial year 2016-17, 59 clients attended this clinic.

I also delivered presentations to FRS team meetings where practitioners discuss Family Violence Intervention Orders, ask questions regarding family law orders, how passport enquiries may be dealt with, and have the opportunity to learn about our services. A film clip made by HRCLS several years ago, covering general family law advice, is shown at the FRS Information Session. People attending any FRS programme – Children’s Contact Service, Parenting Orders Programme, Post Separation Counselling and Family Relationship Centre attend this session which gives general information about separation, children and the impact of conflict.

## Trust and relationship key to positive outcome

Becky\* had separated from her partner John\* and was caring for their young children. John continued to threaten Becky after they separated, and Becky was worried for her safety and the children’s. Becky went to the Magistrates Court and got an Interim Order against John. John had not been served with Becky’s application, so she had to go back to court. Becky was given information about the Intervention Order and her family law problems. John did not consent to the Intervention Order and Becky’s application was listed for a contested hearing. We helped Becky get legal aid for the contested hearing. Becky’s matter was prepared for the hearing and a barrister was briefed. At the hearing, John also had a barrister. After discussions at court, John consented to the Order, without admissions, for 12 months.

Becky still needed assistance for her family law problems. We helped Becky get legal aid for mediation. Becky and John each had lawyers and the mediation was successful in resolving some issues.

Because Becky had the one lawyer she was able to build a relationship of trust and another benefit was she wasn’t made to tell her story again. Becky was able to focus on her children, and look to the future.

### Why I do what I do

*“I believe people should be able to access legal advice as early and easily as possible. Working at HRCLS means I can be part of this accessibility. Seeing a solicitor can be a daunting task. My personable nature means people feel at ease, they feel comfortable to tell me things that are often hard to talk about, and ask questions which ordinarily they might not feel comfortable to ask.”*

*Michelle Matthews,  
family lawyer*

## CASEWORK:

# Jodie Wells

My role as the family violence specialist lawyer is funded by the Victorian Department of Justice and Regulation, and I provide timely and efficient legal advice to victims of family violence in the North East of Victoria. I hold advice clinics at the Centre Against Violence (CAV) in Wangaratta and Wodonga, and also undertake ongoing casework to victims of family violence who would otherwise be unable to obtain such assistance and are not eligible for Legal Aid. In particular, this covers the areas of tenancy, small property settlements and victims of crime assistance. I also give legal information to support workers at the CAV through targeted presentations.

I have found that working closely with a major family violence centre (CAV) is helping victims in stressful situations to get effective help to deal with significant legal problems.

### Mother and children safe and secure

Keziah\* fled a small town where she lived with her husband and children after he choked her until she blacked out. She had endured violence throughout their whole relationship. He had promised to change when the family had moved to Australia the year before, but he didn't.

Police referred Keziah to CAV and got an Intervention Order for her and charged her husband with assault. Keziah was scared. She had only lived

in Australia for a year and her husband kept telling her that he would send her back home.

The CAV family violence support worker brought Keziah to see me. Keziah was worried about her and her children's safety. The husband did not know where she was and was not asking to see the children. I gave her advice and Keziah was relieved to know her options and what to do if her husband attempted to spend time with the children. She also knew to contact us if she needed more legal assistance down the track.

During the appointment with Keziah, I learnt about the violent crimes and that her husband had been charged. I spoke with police on Keziah's behalf and was able to explain to her what would happen with the criminal process. Keziah was told she could make an application to the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal to help with her recovery. Keziah had not known this was available, and with my help to do the application, she accessed financial support for her and her children.

### Our Impact

*"It has been fantastic to have reliable legal advice on hand for women experiencing family violence. To be able to link them to Jodie easily and quickly is a huge relief for many women that we work with during a highly stressful time."*

*Mim Poyner, Family Violence Crisis Care, Centre Against Violence*



### Why I do what I do

*"Knowledge is a valuable tool that empowers people to make positive changes in their own life. It is a privilege to share my knowledge and skills with those who are at their most vulnerable so they are better positioned to make informed choices for themselves and their children."*

*Jodie Wells, family violence lawyer*

## CASEWORK - CARE PARTNER: **Beth Simpson**



### Why I do what I do

*“Through this program, funded by Legal Aid NSW, we have provided an essential service in our community for people who could not otherwise access a legal aid solicitor or did not have funds to pay for private representation.”*

*Beth Simpson, lawyer*

Helping parents and grandparents to see their children is at the core of the NSW Care Partner Program. My role for three days a week is to assist mainly parents and grandparents involved in NSW Child Protection issues. Many of these clients are from a disadvantaged background, dealing with mental health, drug or alcohol issues, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The program’s focus is on early intervention before matters go to court. The other focus is on contact arrangements, usually following court orders, where contact has broken down or someone wants to change the arrangements. Alternative Dispute Resolution processes can be used for this purpose.

Legal advice is provided via telephone appointments on any aspect of NSW child protection. Due to a shortage of legal representation locally, I also represent clients through the Children’s Court process in Albury.

Relationships have been built with staff at the Department of Family and Community Services, as well as other relevant stakeholders.

Through this program, funded by Legal Aid NSW, we have provided an essential service in our community for people who could not otherwise access a legal aid solicitor or did not have funds to pay for private representation.

### Successful outcomes

- I represented grandparents of two children, one of whom had been taken interstate and the other was in their care. Eventually the matter was transferred to a private lawyer for the hearing with the outcome that both children were placed with the grandparents in a kinship care placement.
- I represented a father with disabilities in negotiating where his children would live and the contact arrangements with him.

## CASEWORK:

# Sarah Caplice

The Family Lawyer Service gives legal assistance to clients experiencing difficulties with family law, family violence and child protection issues. This occurs through a telephone advice clinic, and by providing ongoing casework, court representation and family dispute resolution for clients who are eligible for a grant of legal assistance. This service was formed by a partnership between Victoria Legal Aid and the Community Legal Service sector in July 2006. I am the current lawyer in the Family Lawyer Service position, and also a trained Independent Children's Lawyer. As a cross border service, we are able to assist clients who have legal aid funding in either Victoria or NSW.

### Child back with Mum

A distraught and frightened mother who just wanted her child returned was successfully reunited through taking hasty legal steps. Betty\* is a young mum who recently separated from her abusive partner. She lives in a remote town, and does not have a lot of support. She has two children from the relationship, a two-year-old and a six-week-old. The parents were able to make arrangements for the father to spend time with both children following separation. The father then decided to keep the older child in his care without the mother's

consent. Betty was scared and didn't know what to do. She called us for help. We wrote to Betty's ex-partner asking him to return the child to Betty, and put forward some more formal arrangements in place for the children to spend time with their dad. Unfortunately, Betty's ex-partner did not agree to return the child, so we made the decision to issue an urgent Court application requesting the child be given back. On the day of court, a duty lawyer assisted the father and he agreed to return the child to Betty. Now there are court orders in place to support the ongoing relationship between the children and their father, and the parents are also doing mediation to discuss the longer term arrangements for the children.

### Impact

*"Sarah Caplice is one of our regular family law solicitors to attend the Albury Registry of the Federal Circuit Court and we consider Sarah to be a genuine asset to the family law process. Sarah has an approachability that immediately puts the clients at ease and is always willing and able to assist Registry staff when requested. Sarah's knowledge and professionalism is greatly appreciated."*

*Jenni Schilg, Senior Client Services Officer, Albury Registry, Family Court & Federal Circuit Court of Australia*



### Why I do what I do

*"I help to guide people through the family law system, people who are often going through the most stressful time of their lives. It is challenging work, but mostly very rewarding."*

*Sarah Caplice, family lawyer*

# Projects deliver for community need

Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) projects conducted through cooperation are meeting the program aims of enhancing access to justice for disadvantaged people. This remains one of the key objectives of the program, along with identifying ongoing and unmet legal needs and providing services to meet this need, and planning and delivery is carried out through a coordinated approach by CLSD service partners. The Albury – Southern Riverina NSW CLSD region undertook the following projects in 2016-17.

## **1. Coordinated clinics – Deniliquin, Finley and Corowa**

Gives clients access to free legal advice each Thursday at Intereach Hubs. Other services available on the CLSD coordinated service delivery day include Financial Counselling, employment services for people with a disability, disability advocacy, tenancy advice and mental health support.

## **2. Wills information session – CALD community**

Through a collaboration with key partner Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau (AWVRB), about 70 people from the Bhutanese community gathered to hear from HRCLS lawyers, Janet Osborne and Karen Bowley about wills and life planning issues. AWVRB Multicultural Settlement Officer Frank Johnson coordinated the project held at Mirambeena Community Centre in December 2016.

## **3. Family Law Pathways – bilingual services brochure launch**

UMFC Family Law Pathways officer Kerrily Jeffery led a coordinated project to translate the family law pathways brochure to French and Nepali for use by two large migrant communities in the Albury area – the Congolese and the Bhutanese. Kerrily and HRCLS lawyer Janet Osborne spoke at the event, through the assistance of interpreters. TAFE teachers from Victoria and NSW attended, as they are often a significant point of contact for these communities.

## **4. Westside Community Centre – Family Violence Information day**

'A Safe and Caring Community – Continued Conversations on Family and Domestic Violence' forum brought community members together with CLSD partners including Legal Aid NSW, HRCLS, mental health workers and advocates, tenancy and housing and financial services. The day was run by Westside Community Centre coordinator Keith Edwards and the success of the event is likely to lead to more forums in the future.

## **5. Bills and Fines Day – Thurgoona Community Centre**

HRCLS joined numerous partners and lead agency Anglicare Financial Counselling in a project in May during Law Week to assist people understand bills and fines to help them take action to solve their problems. Anglicare Financial Counsellor, Susan Cheetham, coordinated the event, which included two lawyers and law student, financial counsellors, employment ombudsman and Fair Trading.

*"Yes Unlimited really values our partnership with the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service, particularly in regards to the outreach services provided through our site The Hub in Albury. As a service working primarily with people who are homeless or experiencing some kind of crisis, we know that legal and financial difficulties can really impact people's ability to lift themselves out of their situation. The people we work with are often working with lots of services, have limited access to transport or just have a lot going on, so being flexible enough to meet the person where they are at, by coming to places like the Hub, makes all the difference. HRCLS's scope of practice has really enhanced our service response supporting people to address fines, mounting debt and a range of other general legal issues that come up. Aside from the good service we really appreciate the great people, who are persistently optimistic and set a great tone of working together. We often observe people walking out of their appointment with HRCLS sighing with relief, knowing they have someone to help them navigate what can be a really overwhelming quagmire of legal issues. We look forward to continuing our work together in the future."*

*Jon Park- Client Services Manager- Yes Unlimited*

**1809** up from 1580 last year  
**clients**  
14% increase

**2291** up from 2124 last year  
**advices**  
8% increase

up from 401 last year **532**  
**cases closed**  
33% increase

**130 duty  
lawyer services**  
**27334 km  
travelled**

**Where  
we go**



## CASEWORK: Mae Mactier



### Why I do what I do

*"I try to assist those who without legal support wouldn't have the ability to deal with their legal problems."*

*Mae Mactier, lawyer*

As a Generalist Outreach Lawyer I run face-to-face legal advice appointments at Gateway Wodonga every week and Benalla Health every fortnight. Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre also delivers legal advice to help cover the community needs in Benalla. In addition to this, I provide weekly advice over the phone to clients. This ensures that regardless of where a person lives in our catchment in North East Victoria, they have easy access to legal advice.

I also represent applicants and respondents in Family Violence and Personal safety Intervention Order matters. My advice to clients gives them options to make decisions about the application, and I also represent them in court.

### Lifting weight off Daniel's shoulders

Daniel\* had property of a friend left at his house and did not know how to deal with it. Daniel asked his friend numerous times to pick up the property but his friend refused. The property was taking up room in Daniel's house and this caused him significant distress. Daniel did not know what to do and was referred to us by a support worker. I met with Daniel and explained the first step was to ask his friend in writing to collect the property. However

Daniel was illiterate and could not write to his friend, so I wrote the letter on Daniel's behalf. Despite the letter being sent, the friend did not collect the property. We explained to Daniel how to deal with the property correctly to ensure he did not get in trouble. Daniel disposed of his friend's property according to our legal advice and was no longer overwhelmed by the situation.

### Impact

*"At Benalla Health we work closely with a large number of clients with a range of complex needs including Family Violence and who may need support from a variety of services, not just health related. Having the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service available to assist clients with their legal issues ensures that client needs are met without having to go to another location or service. Our goal is to develop a 'One Stop Shop' that helps clients with their needs. Hume Riverina Community Legal Service helps us achieve that."*

*Neil Stott, Director  
Community Health Benalla CHS*

## CASEWORK:

# Debi Fisher

HRCLS has continued to expand its presence in Wangaratta, providing free legal advice to the people of this region. In 2015 there was a fortnightly visit to Wangaratta with four face-to-face appointments and a further three appointments offered in the evening, thanks to the local volunteer lawyers. HRCLS now offers in excess of 25 free legal advice appointments each week across four days (and after-hours every second Tuesday) at five different locations around town, as well as the duty lawyer service at Wangaratta Magistrates' Court. This has made a huge difference to people in Wangaratta and surrounds who would otherwise have to travel nearly an hour, or rely on city telephone services, to access free legal advice.

UMFC has graciously provided a home for us in their Wangaratta office and appointments are offered there three days a week. We celebrated this increased presence in Wangaratta with UMFC CEO Luke Rumbold in February 2017.

In addition, our investment in the health-justice partnership with Gateway Health continued, despite our funding grant ending during the year. More than double the amount of clients were seen compared to the previous year across both Gateway Health sites (Wangaratta and Wodonga). Many of these people have mental health issues/disability, have

experienced family violence and/or are at risk of homelessness, and most have never seen a lawyer before. This shows the health-justice partnership model delivers access to justice.

This year, the vast majority of Gateway Health clients came in with civil law problems, mostly fines/infringements, as well as debt matters, motor vehicle accidents and employment issues. This change in subject matter (from a predominantly family law focus) reflects the emphasis we placed on raising the profile of civil law issues and providing legal health check training for case workers, along with the alternative family law specialist appointments now available. Without our involvement, the majority of these civil law problems would have remained unaddressed, adding to people's stress, anxiety and other emotional and social issues in their lives.

We help people clearly identify their legal issue, understand the options and the services available to help them and they are then empowered to take steps towards resolving their legal problem. For those people who are unable to do this on their own, we can step in and provide ongoing casework and assistance. This means we work with counsellors or case managers, and act on people's behalf to get the fine/debt waived, or negotiate an appropriate payment plan.



### Why I do what I do

*"I am passionate about making a difference in our local community. The people that come to see me are often overwhelmed, confused and intimidated by lawyers and the legal system. Every individual has value and dignity and should be treated that way. If they see a friendly face, feel that they have been listened to, and leave my office understanding a bit more about the law and their options, then I believe I have made a difference and that's important to me."*

*Debi Fisher, lawyer*

Centacare Partners in Recovery Program support facilitator Kate Wright with outreach lawyer Janet Osborne and HRCLS community development coordinator Rebecca Deverell during a visit to Finley



## CASEWORK: Janet Osborne



### Why I do what I do

*“My approach is to build relationships in the different places that I visit. I love getting out on the road and meeting both clients and support service providers, so that we can work cooperatively to build good referral pathways and most importantly, achieve meaningful outcomes for our clients. But the most important part for me is that chance to interact with clients face to face. When people are facing a difficult time in their life, they need to know you are there to listen and to help and support them. That’s why I do this work.”*

*Janet Osborne,  
NSW outreach lawyer*

During the past twelve months, along with my counterpart, Karen Bowley, I saw clients in Deniliquin, Corowa and Finley on a monthly basis. In addition to this work, I also visited Holbrook and Henty in the Greater Hume Shire, where our services have been warmly received.

In Albury, we worked on developing our strategic relationships, and continued to see clients at Yes Unlimited in Albury, located at The Hub in Macauley Street. A new service was also launched at The Women’s Centre in Albury for referral-based advice every second Wednesday.

The power of these relationships cannot be overstated, as we are able to assist clients and workers, and ensure there is a good understanding of the many ways in which a lawyer can help people sort out a range of different issues.

### Advice on the money

Millicent\* wanted to change back to her maiden name after being separated from her husband for more than 20 years. They had split up all their property years ago but had one bank account. She approached her banks to change her name on the bank accounts and was told without a divorce, no name change was possible.

After being told she had to get a divorce, Millicent rang HRCLS and sought a family law appointment. I contacted Millicent to make an appointment in Deniliquin and in explaining her situation, told me the only reason she wanted a divorce was to change the names of her bank accounts. She was also unable to do the bank’s paperwork, which is an electronic form.

I suggested Millicent make an appointment to see a customer service officer at the bank and take a support person with her. Millicent took this advice but the bank refused her request again due to bank policy, even though Centrelink had given pension and ID cards with her maiden name on them.

So Millicent had four options:

1. **Divorce** - complicated as Millicent had no computer access, no credit card to make the electronic fee payment, and needed to save for months to pay the reduced fee
2. **Change of name** - State government regulations - cheaper than divorce
3. **Advocacy** - Take lawyer to bank appointment to see if they would change their mind or tell us why they have this policy
4. **Close bank account** - go to new bank with 100 points of ID and open new bank account.

After considering her options, Millicent decided not to get a divorce as she really just wanted her name changed to create a new bank account. The problem was solved through a collaborative approach, family law advice and assistance from an Intereach support worker.

This highlighted the disadvantages some older clients, or those isolated in rural and regional settings, face when filing for divorce, including lacking computer skills or computer access, and not having money to pay for the divorce electronically.

*Note: Comprehensive advice was also given in relation to property settlement and Wills and estate issues.*



Outreach lawyer Karen Bowley with Howlong Men's Shed and community members after a Life Planning presentation in late 2016

# CASEWORK: Karen Bowley

My role as a NSW outreach lawyer sees me on the road three days a month, with regular visits to Deniliquin, Finley, Corowa, Albury and Lavington, and every Wednesday to the Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS).

Along with Janet Osborne, who also does three days a week as a NSW outreach lawyer, we provide face-to-face legal assistance once every two weeks in Finley, Deniliquin and Corowa for people in rural and remote areas and in a non-threatening and familiar environment. Our increased services and regular attendance means clients can rely on access to legal services. We thank Intereach for being an active partner, providing us with a premises and referrals in our remote locations.

Our service at AWAHS has been consolidated with our Invisible Hurdles project lawyer giving legal advice once a week. This has increased client numbers and secondary consults and strengthened our relationship with staff. The value of this service is due to legal advice being given in a familiar environment, and staff making referrals, scheduling appointments and ensuring clients attend.

*"You have been an absolute pleasure to work with, thank you for your hard work and great advice for our clients. This is amazing work performed by your legal service throughout the region and we at AWAHS are proud to be associated with you and your colleagues. We look forward to this service continuing beyond 2017. Keep up the great work."*

Sharryn Ward, AWAHS  
Administration Manager

## Family keeps home through our help

Brian\* was able to avoid potentially losing his house through swift legal intervention. He had a huge debt from a credit card and came to us for help. A Statement of Claim had been issued and Brian couldn't cope with sorting it out. Brian suffered from PTSD and he and his partner also had serious physical and mental health issues. I got the legal action put on hold straight away after contacting the Credit Industry Ombudsman (CIO). Then it was a matter of negotiating via the CIO and the creditor to waive or minimise the debt. A financial counsellor helped calculate an amount Brian could afford to pay in a lump sum to settle with the creditor. After lengthy discussions the creditor accepted this amount. This was a great result as Brian owned the family home, and this would have been at risk if the creditor had issued bankruptcy proceedings. This fear had also been a heavy weight on Brian and his partner's shoulders and the outcome left them relieved and grateful for the assistance.

I also assisted Brian and his partner with Powers of Attorney, Enduring Guardianship and Wills through the Subsidised Wills Scheme, a partnership between HRCLS and private solicitors.

## Service delivery:

- Wednesday – weekly, AWAHS
- Thursday – fortnightly, Finley, Corowa, Deniliquin
- Thursday – monthly, Lavington and Albury Outreach



## Why I do what I do

*"I feel I make a difference by matching our service to the capacity of the client. Where possible, I empower the client to help themselves by giving them an understanding of the law that applies to them and their potential options. This gives them confidence in their abilities and builds their self-esteem. This is especially important for the most vulnerable in our communities."*

Karen Bowley, outreach lawyer



*"I work in the community legal sector by choice. It allows me to best help clients who cannot help themselves, or don't have the financial means to pay for legal advice or representation. I see the difference that I make in the outcomes we achieve in our casework. In particular, we can identify the key legal problem that if fixed can have a flow-on effect across many aspects of a client's day-to-day life. What appears to be minor legal advocacy or advice actually results in having a major positive impact to our clients."*

*Karen Keegan, senior lawyer*

ultimately improves our systems, and inevitably the way we provide services to clients in responding to the ever-changing political environment that impacts funding and the services HRCLS can deliver.

One of the standards we have to meet is on cultural safety. It was exciting to have staff volunteer to be on our first Cultural Working Party, ensuring our services are done respectfully. The development of our cultural governance documents including a reconciliation action plan mean that we get to consult with local Aboriginal elders in our areas, map our relationships and find out what other organisations are doing. The staff are learning a lot and enjoying the journey so far.

# Our Operations

## Our administration team

Behind every fine team of lawyers is an administration team just as deserving of praise. Without this proficient team keeping the HRCLS wheels greased, the vehicle for helping people with legal problems would crawl to a halt.

Acting operations manager Lorraine Murray filled Ashlie Barclay's seat and arrived in her role during big change for HRCLS, and seamlessly took over the responsibility of getting the re-branding work completed. Since then Lorraine has been overseeing extensive policy development and was instrumental in starting the Cultural Working Party, which will become a significant aspect of HRCLS's role in the community. This adds another level of professionalism to the operations and will stand HRCLS in good stead for years to come. Lorraine liaises with staff on all operational matters and in conjunction with principal lawyer Sarah Rodgers, has the office running smoothly to meet and overtake key targets.

Paralegal Tracey Walker plays an invaluable role in the administration team. Along with overseeing CLASS data input and running reports, loading Legal Aid applications, and a multitude of other tasks, Tracey acts as Family Law assistant to the Family Law team, filing court documents, managing files and speaking to clients about their matters when lawyers are unavailable. Her assistance to the Family Law-Family Violence Continuity of Service Pilot allows the lawyers in the program

to concentrate on helping people in vulnerable situations with complex and multiple legal issues. In 2017, Tracey celebrates 10 years of service with HRCLS, and is one of the reasons the service continues to excel and be a trusted service in our community.

Administration officer Meaghan Frazer is the 'face' and 'voice' of HRCLS on reception, greeting people at the counter and over the phone and handling their enquiries with professionalism. Meaghan ensures appointments are taken and categorised appropriately, and people have all the initial information they need before they speak with a HRCLS lawyer.

Among the many varied administration tasks that fill the day, Meaghan takes care of all the outreach appointments and preparation, conducts data entry and compiles monthly client statistics. In helping with the open/closed case filing, Meaghan makes sure there is easy access to files when needed.

## Accreditation and Cultural Diversity

HRCLS is accredited by our national body every three years against a range of standards. HRCLS was fully accredited in 2016 but the continuous improvement part of accreditation never stops.

For continuous improvement to work it requires input from all staff – to not only come up with improved ways of doing things but also be flexible when change happens. This staff flexibility has certainly been the case in the past financial year, with staff joyfully going the extra mile to meet our accreditation requirements. They understand this

# Our voice in the media

Communicating with our community remains an significant component of our work. It is an important role for us to stand up for social justice, highlight how the legal system can be improved, and join partners to advocate for a better way to deliver services and positive outcomes for people. As a trusted source, we are regularly sought for comment when legal issues arise that affect our community. Thanks to our local newspaper, TV and radio outlets for the positive coverage and support. Combined with our growing strong social media presence, the news coverage on the Border gives people a sense of the work we are doing to support our clients and community about legal issues, including sector funding, family violence, elder abuse and supporting young people with legal problems.



IT'S UP TO YOU: Ovens Mummy Strategic Family Violence Network committee members (from left) Kim Greening, Debi Fisher, Tanya Tolson, Luan Waring, Marie DeLara, Korry Burns and Sandy Wiggins have a strong message to share over a 10-day campaign against violence. PHOTO: Emma Hillier

## More action on family violence

CHANGES under the State Government's 10-year Family Violence Strategy will give victims legal support to victims of family violence across Victoria.

At a time when people who need the support are most vulnerable, new laws will be created, courts will be upgraded and police will be given the tools they need to hold perpetrators of family violence to account, while putting victims first.

The Labor Government will introduce new laws in early 2017 to deliver on a number of the most urgent recommendations from the Royal



EMMA HILLIER

Commissioner of Police. The Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) will be made more victims friendly by permitting the use of video and audio recorded evidence in some proceedings, expanding courts' powers to issue FVDOs, and prevent perpetrators from drawing out court proceedings.

Specialist Family Violence Courts will be rolled out to ensure victims are supported and perpetrators are held to

them under applications right through to family law," Ms Burns said.

"This will make a substantial change because victims will have one longer path throughout the process and consistency is so important - it's a real win for this year."

Homelessness Community Legal Service officer Debi Fisher said in the state's of Federal Government into the State Government has really stepped up.

"In the region, there is a need to ensure that people get first legal services for people on the ground to provide that level of consistency," she said.

"These measures go beyond just legal services. Beyond legal services, we are looking at housing and employment and... giving people... on top of... and... that all... these... ways of... someone... Agreed... that... of... in 2000."

## Lawyer says education the key to tackling issue



HERE TO HELP: Lawyers Deborah Fisher and Cam Hoyle believe educating young people can help to reduce instances of crime.

A LEGAL family lawyer has called for more resources and education among young people who are vulnerable to industry crime and violence in Warragonee, bank and family violence lawyer, Cam Hoyle offers that legal advice is young people in Warragonee as part of Homelessness Community Legal Service (HCLS) and NESAY's

industry health project.

"The overwhelming majority of young people caught up in the criminal justice system have experienced some sort of family violence or childhood trauma," Ms Hoyle said.

"By trying to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and abuse through helping people at a young age, we can hopefully stop that pattern of violence that

agrees in the same families."

Ms Hoyle said he hoped that by helping young people deal with their legal issues, he could prevent civil or family matters from escalating into a criminal matter.

"Many young people see the law as something that's done to them and they feel that they don't really have a lot of agency in the legal system," he said.

"By working with NESAY, we're standing a lot of vulnerable people around Warragonee that otherwise wouldn't get access to a lawyer or other support services."

HCLS lawyer and

Deborah Fisher said she agreed that early intervention and education was essential to breaking the cycle of family violence.

"By educating them about the law and legal system, they know where to go before it gets matters into the courts," Ms Fisher said.

"What we're trying to do is support on these kids who are vulnerable to their experiences and that adds to their perception of authority and the legal system."

Ms Hoyle said he has seen many positive results from young people in the South-East, including Warragonee. He urged anyone to meet with him, confidential legal assistance to visit him at NESAY on Thursday.

Deborah said HCLS is



EMMA HILLIER

## Backflip on funding cut stirs local hope

Community legal service awaits confirmed end to 'uncertain' financial year due to insufficient resources and the cuts would have prevented a further 500 people from receiving legal advice, most of who would be seeking advice for family violence, children's matters and personal safety.

The Warragonee Clinic is has previously reported that a 30 per cent cut to their services from July 1 this year despite nationally funding away some 160,000 dollars per year due to existing funding shortfalls.

HCLS - which serves Warragonee and the border - turned away around 300 people in the last financial year due to insufficient resources and the cuts would have prevented a further 500 people from receiving legal advice, most of who would be seeking advice for family violence, children's matters and personal safety.

"People in our region often experience legal issues on the other side of the border to which they live, making these legal issues even more complicated."

Ms Rodgers expects the funding announcement to relieve pressure on its current free services and help people who need it most and are facing major legal issues, including family law, civil disputes, family violence, and debt problems.

"We are yet to receive specific details about what this will mean for HCLS and we are looking forward to hear back about what vision funding, which will mean," Ms Rodgers said.

"If this is the case, we'll immediately see how we have been able to continue to run HCLS - the only legal centre between it and Canberra - but it presents a vast possibility need for legal assistance."

Ms Rodgers said the 254 free, locally coordinated Justice to Justice Arrangements lawyer acknowledged how funding community legal assistance had a positive impact on several people in other areas.

"She said she was thankful for the support of Cam McGovern (MHR, Ind) and Susan Lee (MHR, Furrer), both of who supported HCLS in their efforts to reverse the funding cuts."



EMMA HILLIER

## Heart-breaking cases give rise to action



RODGER'S Susan Hoyle's Community Legal Service volunteer lawyer Eugene Ballewells, principal lawyer Dawn Rodgers and case manager Sarahie Murray with people in the Warragonee Clinic.

OLDER people seeking support in the state's most remote area lawyers at Homelessness Community Legal Service take on, and there is evidence of other abuse everywhere.

Principal Lawyer Dawn Rodgers welcomed four such cases to the older abuse inquiry, including where one elderly man didn't realize his daughter had reported his bank account and he had to pay his nursing home bill.

"There would be a lot more people taking advantage, particularly of their parents and they think they have a right to money or property."

"It's elderly people doesn't want to take up the system, we give them, but even they don't have resources, people aren't coming."

"I don't definitely want to be able to change anything in the community."

Ms Rodgers said volunteer at given who made it not an elderly abuse, it could not be undertaken by lawyers.

"There's definite knowledge in Warragonee compared to other parts of the state, and it's the power of advocacy and enduring documents," she said.

"These things can be managed if people get legal help but it doesn't help if the laws are different."

Ms Rodgers said a lawyer accustomed to be involved in health services once a week, but health and community organisations would do more to reach people at risk.

"We talked to our subscribers to the law reform inquiry about the police having a bit more of a role in helping elderly people with international visitors or even just having a talk to the family," she said.

"We need to get elderly people legal advice in the first place and we need to manage expectations of other clients in law."

"I don't know what else we need to do, it's an area we need to be in."

# Social media

It's the easiest and quickest way to keep our community informed, spread news and information and everything that's relevant in our sector. Our Facebook and Twitter pages help us connect with our community and keep them up-to-date with everything that's happening. The support from our colleagues in the community legal sector and the willingness to share information, news and media highlights is appreciated.

Our reach keeps expanding and we were thrilled to hit 400 likes on Facebook and more than 600 followers on Twitter – thanks to everyone for their support and helping get our important messages out to the community!



# We educate

## Community Legal Education

The first Community Legal Education (CLE) Plan was completed to bring this key component of the service's work more in line with the HRCLS Strategic Plan 2015-18. This will result in our CLE work being more proactive and targeting the four strategic focus areas, while allowing for a reactive approach when legal issues flare in the community. This approach results in CLE being targeted, joined-up, timely and appropriate, in keeping with findings from the Law and Justice Foundation Community Legal Education and information: model priorities and principles paper. (Law and Justice Foundation Community Legal Education and information: model priorities, June 2017, pg. 1)

The Plan will result in HRCLS working closer with partners to deliver CLE, particularly in the areas of Family Violence, Sexting, and Legal Health Checks for staff to identify legal issues their clients may be facing. A CLE schedule will create a fair distribution of presentations among lawyers, and give them the capacity to include CLE as part of their workload.

Simon Crase was responsible for creating the CLE Plan and driving its implementation, as well as updating CLE relevant material to reflect the HRCLS re-branding.

HRCLS staff were kept busy with CLE presentations, including Bhutanese Wills Planning Day, Ageing with Grace seminar in Holbrook, and numerous Promotions of Service and Family Violence/Family Law and Sexting sessions being held.



Community Development Coordinator  
Rebecca Deverell

**733** participants  
**42** CLE  
Delivered

*"The Hume Riverina Community Legal Service has been a stand-out partner in supporting the Border North East Older Adults Mental Health 'Healthy & Wise program' to make available key information and service details to older members of our local rural communities. The feedback from program participants indicates the legal session is a highly valued part of our program. In particular, participants appreciate the opportunity to access credible information, ask questions and meet friendly professionals who de-mystify the complexities of getting their legal affairs in order. They also speak of their increased confidence in accessing the legal service for support. We look forward to continuing to work with you in bringing vital information to our rural communities."*

Marie Williams, Older Adults Mental Health Promotion, Albury Wodonga Health



Senior lawyer Karen Keegan, Human Rights Law Centre director of legal advocacy Ruth Barson, North East Multicultural Association president Su Ingleton and senior lawyer Alison Maher during Law Week 2017 activities

# Law Week



Lawyer Jodie Wells at the Wangaratta Law Week stand in May 2017

Welcoming a prominent human rights lawyer to our region was the highlight of Law Week 2017. Director of Legal Advocacy at the Human Rights Law Centre Ruth Barson was keynote speaker at the Women in Law Breakfast, with her appearance attracting a crowd of more than 60.

Her reflections on the successful challenge to the Victorian Government's decision to hold children in Barwon maximum security adult prison, and her work in Western Australia with the family of Ms Dhu—an Aboriginal woman who tragically died in custody—left the audience inspired with how taking up a cause can make a significant impact in the lives and fortunes of others.

Ms Barson's talk also reiterated the importance of human rights being protected in law, and how improvements to our justice system occur when it is challenged through robust discussion. Her courage and willingness to seek positive changes to ensure disenfranchised groups of people do not suffer injustices left a lasting impression on the audience.

ABC Goulburn Murray chief of staff Gaye Pattison did her usual sterling job as MC, and Riverdeck Café in Albury prepared delicious fare enjoyed by all.

Ms Barson was full of praise for the community legal sector's work in regional Australia. "*Community legal centre lawyers work at the coal face and play a crucial role upholding the human rights of people entangled in the law,*" she said.

Ms Barson also hosted an information session at UMFC for service partners and the local legal fraternity, in which she outlined how the Victorian Human Rights Charter can be used to advocate for clients. This included the story of the Barwon challenge in which the Charter was used to contest the Government's decision to house young offenders.

Information stands were set-up in Wodonga, Lavington and Wangaratta, giving the public an opportunity to learn about how the community legal centre helps through a range of legal assistance. A series of Law Week posters were produced with a number of scenarios outlining certain legal issues in key target areas, and were displayed at many services partners in Albury-Wodonga and Wangaratta.

Legal health checks were conducted for people who may have legal problems and need to connect with our service for assistance. Plans are

already underway for Law Week 2018, with exciting events and activities sure to attract plenty of attention and discussion around the law.

## Law Week highlights

62 attendees at Women in Law Breakfast at Riverdeck Café Albury – 17 May 2017. Highest number of attendees in recent times. Media coverage of Ruth Barson visit - ABC GM and Border Mail.

## Promotion stalls

- Wangaratta PO
- Wangaratta Co-Store
- Wodonga Plaza
- Albury Library Museum
- Wangaratta GOTafe
- Thurgoona Bills & Fines day



#WalkForAwareness supporting #WhiteRibbon Campaign with Junction Support Services and DHHS representatives, local police and HRCLS Community Development Coordinator Rebecca Deverell.  
*Top Right:* Michelle Matthews snaps the HRCLS team dressed in purple to mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.  
*Bottom Right:* Lawyer Michelle Matthews, Wodonga Police Acting Sergeant Troy Bakic, Lawyer Cam Bloye support the #equaljustice campaign

# Involved in the Community

The strength of any community lies in the forming and maintaining of positive and mutually beneficial partnerships. We take care in building and nurturing our partnerships and are grateful for the respect and relationships we have with all service partners within our sector. The commitment we see from everyone we interact with on a daily basis inspires and encourages us to keep improving our high quality service to help people. Through joining campaigns, be they to promote White Ribbon, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day or Fund Equal Justice, we help ensure the message is promoted through our community.

*'I find your service an asset in the community health service sector. I don't feel there needs to be any changes as you make appropriate referrals and clients I have referred have been satisfied with your support and acknowledge.'*

*From a holistic perspective, legal issues play a significant role in the alcohol and other drug sectors and by Hume Riverina Community Legal Service providing support you are assisting our clients, the community and us to do a better job.*

*Thanks for the great job you do.'*

Vanessa Carroll  
 Care Recovery Co-Ordinator  
 Clinical Services  
 Gateway Health



*'The Hume Riverina Community Legal Service is a boon to me as a worker and makes a major difference by further empowering the clients I assist.'*

*In common with my Financial Counsellor colleagues throughout the region, I am experiencing a significant increase of new clients presenting with multiple, complex financial difficulties.*

*Frequently these involve reviews and appeals of fines and Centrelink debts, as well as matters relating to relationship breakdowns and Family Violence.*

*For me and my clients, it is a huge advantage to have access to timely and accessible legal advice.'*

David Newport  
 UMFC Financial Counsellor



# Our Voice for Change

## Submissions

HRCLS has a long and proud history of making submissions and providing comment for legislators to consider law reform. With HRCLS at the forefront of assisting vulnerable and disadvantaged people, lawyers identify areas which could be improved to help clients get positive outcomes through fair access to justice. Submissions also provide lawmakers with a true picture of how laws impact clients and may include unintended consequences from law changes that hinder achieving fair and reasonable results.

The relationships with State and Federal governments are productive and mutually beneficial. During the year, we met with NSW Attorney General Mark Speakman, and UMFC director of client services Sheri Moulton met with a senior advisor and chief-of-staff to Attorney-General George Brandis to discuss the impact of the touted funding cut for community legal centres. We wrote to Federal Member for Farrer, Sussan Ley, and Federal Member for Indi, Cathy McGowan, to secure their support to advocate on our

behalf to keep funding for the sector, as well as Mr Brandis calling for the cuts not to be introduced.

HRCLS will maintain a focus on being a positive voice for change in the sector, particularly to help the key groups who need community legal centre assistance and representation.

## Our input for reform

- Parliamentary Inquiry into better support and protection for Family Violence victims
- Australian Law Reform Commission - Elder Abuse Inquiry
- Victoria Legal Aid - Means Test Review
- 2016 COAG National Summit on Reducing Violence Against Women and Their Children
- Letter to Family Law Court of Australia - concern over move to online Divorce applications
- NSW Government - Justice for Everyday problems consultation
- Response to Senator for Victoria Jane Hume community survey - seeking support to advocate for funding cut reversal
- Letters to MPs and Attorney - General seeking support to advocate for funding cut reversal

# Eugene Butkowski – his contribution



HRCLS volunteer Eugene Butkowski flies the HRCLS flag with principal lawyer Sarah Rodgers

Helping improve our legal system is a key component of the work HRCLS does on an annual basis. This makes a difference in our communities, with clients getting better legal outcomes as a result of law reform.

In March 2017 I was given the role to provide policy review. This role afforded me the opportunity to produce and submit a response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into a Better Family Law System to Support and Protect those Affected by Family Violence.

After review by the Principal Lawyer Sarah Rodgers and further input by HRCLS senior lawyers, this response was submitted in May. The policy review component allowed me to generate a 'Policy Review Strategy.' This policy emanated from the HRCLS 'Our Strategy 2015-2018' and articulated the four focus points detailed in the 'Our Strategy' document. Included as a fifth focus point was the HRCLS recognition that Law Reform was, and is, an important component of the HRCLS activity.

A separate brief policy document on Law Reform process was also produced.

A database providing hyperlinks to many of the websites and resources available at HRCLS was also created. This database will enable the HRCLS to identify and review many of its useful resources and upgrade them where needed. In addition, it will also provide a useful platform for upgrading resource links on the newly developed HRCLS website.

As a volunteer lawyer at the HRCLS for the past 17 years I have developed many friendships with a 'bunch' of excellent, dedicated lawyers and paralegals. My three months as a fulltime contributor was a privilege and further enhanced and cemented my view of HRCLS's value and need for the service within the community.

My hat goes off to all of the dedicated and committed staff at the HRCLS; I value their friendship and collegiality and the constant availability of teaching and upgrading provided to me as I assist in a voluntary capacity.

**Eugene Butkowski**  
**Policy Projects Worker**

# Financial Statements

The HRCLS appreciates the efforts of all funders and is grateful for the significant funding received in 2016-17. These vital contributions allow HRCLS to give much-needed legal assistance to vulnerable and disadvantaged people in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW.

The table below details the sources, purpose and funding for 2016-17.

Source	Purpose	Breakdown	Total
Attorney-General's Department (Commonwealth)	Generalist Commonwealth	\$515,484	<b>\$557,782</b>
	SACS ERO – Cth	\$42,298	
Victorian State Government (Victoria Legal Aid)	Generalist State	\$210,467	<b>\$815,461</b>
	Family Violence – State	\$63,507	
	SACS ERO – State	\$41,487	
NSW State Government (Legal Aid NSW)	Continuity of Service (two-year grant)	\$500,000	<b>\$74,427</b>
	Cooperative Legal Service Delivery	\$21,229	
NSW Public Purpose Fund NSW Outreach (Commonwealth)	NSW Care Partner	\$53,198	<b>\$152,424</b>
	Generalist	\$75,984	
Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner Grants Program	Generalist NSW Outreach Services	\$76,440	<b>\$110,000</b>
	Better outcomes for young people experiencing family violence in North East Victoria	\$110,000	
Department of Justice & Regulation Victoria	CLC Assistance Fund	\$4,996	<b>\$102,368</b>
	Family Lawyer Duty Lawyer Fund	\$52,174	
	Family Violence Fund	\$45,198	
			<b>\$1,812,462</b>



Michelle Matthews celebrates her admission in December 2016 with sons, Addison Matthews and Harry Gibbs

## Icing on the cake

A happy child blowing out candles on a birthday cake should be far removed from the legal system, but without our swift intervention, a boy would have missed this special occasion.

Marie\* came to see us on a Friday morning in an extremely emotional state wanting to make an application for a recovery order. Her and her former partner, Mark\*, had a week-about arrangement for care of their young son. Mark accused Marie of being violent towards their son, and Mark felt the boy was at risk of psychological damage in his mother's care.

Mark had kept the child for several days beyond the arrangement, and was refusing to return the child to Marie. Feeling desperate, she went to Mark's house, and he called

police. They told her if she returned they would arrest her.

Marie denied Mark's accusations and gave us detailed information about her volatile relationship with him, his controlling actions and the history of family violence.

Her son's birthday was on Monday and Marie had already arranged a birthday party at the park and sent out invitations to her son's friends.

Our lawyer contacted Mark and advised him we were assisting Marie. We asked what his proposal was for his son's care and the child's time with Marie. On Marie's advice, our lawyer asked Mark if he would agree to look after the birthday party if Marie wasn't there. Mark would not agree to take the boy to the park for his birthday party.

We gave Marie help for her to prepare material over the weekend

to include in an affidavit to support her application for a recovery order.

On Monday morning Marie contacted us to say on the previous Friday evening, Mark had a change of heart and agreed to return their son for the party. She believed it was our early intervention and the lawyer advocating on her behalf that made the father reconsider his breaking the agreement. This quick planning and action led to the boy enjoying the birthday party with his friends in the park.

Marie is confident that when Mark discovered she had sought legal help, he knew he wouldn't be able to control the situation.

"He was just doing this to try to control me...because he found out I had a solicitor he knew he couldn't control me anymore."



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