



Our People Multiple Problems Many Solutions



HRCLS shows support for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2019



HRCLS Lawyer Beth Simpson with Albury City Council Deputy Mayor Dr Amanda Cohn, Liz Marmo and Caroline de Koning at Step Out 2018 in Albury



HRCLS Lawyer Deb Fisher with Child First Family Services Practitioner Beth Chester at the Emergency Relief Forum in Wangaratta

Our organisational culture

We support staff and volunteers

HRCLS recognises that our staff and volunteers are our greatest asset. We value their experience and ideas, and we are committed to further developing their legal, community engagement and leadership skills.

Our Strategy 2015-2020 includes a greater focus on working with young clients and clients with complex needs. This will require us to review our professional development programs and to actively manage the impacts of this work in support of staff and volunteer wellbeing.

We communicate with stakeholders

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

We share our skills

We welcome law students passionate about making a difference in the world, and are proud to help them begin their exciting and fulfilling journey.

We educate our stakeholders to provide them with fundamental skills to identify legal problems their clients are experiencing.

We are responsive and innovative

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

Thanks to our Funders

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

We care for our community

As well as empowering and working alongside our clients to address legal problems and remedy injustices, we 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 to minimise our overheads and nurture a dedicated volunteer workforce.

Invisible Hurdles team, Lawyer Andrea Georgiou, project evaluators Dr Liz Curran and Pamela Taylor-Barnett, HRCLS Principal Lawyer Sarah Rodgers, Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre Principal Huw Derwentsmith, NESAY CEO Leah Waring, AWAHS CEO David Noonan and Lawyer Karen Keegan launch the IH Final Report in November 2018



Contents

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HRCLS is auspiced by UMFC.

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 nor 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. Cover pic: Murray Valley Highway over Lake Hume. Picture: iStock images



Our CEO Message

Meeting the needs of people doing it tough in our community requires a flexible approach. From our daily experience, life appears to be getting harder for many, unfortunately.

It makes our Agency proud to be able to offer such a coordinated response through a comprehensive array of services for a community that is facing ever-changing and growing challenges and complexities in everyday life for a raft of reasons.

Our legal service is no different in this regard, with HRCLS helping a growing number of people who have multiple, complex issues. These people can feel their situation is helpless and are overwhelmed by the problems piling up, and this requires a specific approach that cannot be one-size fits-all.

Professional approach delivers the best outcomes

The HRCLS team is passionate and remains committed to delivering a comprehensive service that goes far beyond pure legal advice. We are fortunate to attract lawyers with a keen interest in helping people sort out their problems, and a determination to give support and solutions to get lives back on track.

HRCLS is to be commended for undertaking the professional development it needs to meet current demand and gain the comprehensive skills needed to respond professionally and in line with the legal service's strategic focus. This training goes well beyond the legal scope and provides the skills lawyers need to identify a multitude of problems and solutions to then deliver positive outcomes.

Understanding our community

To also help address the reality, relationships and knowledge of local services is paramount. Our partnerships with community services are more vital than ever, to allow us to respond and deliver a cohesive and collaborative approach. Our Agency co-location in Wangaratta and Wodonga continues to build and strengthens our capacity to provide a coordinated response internally, while externally our community lawyers have excelled in creating beneficial relationships with other community services.

We are blessed to have a flexible, skilled and understanding workforce that can adapt and deliver, and we never underestimate the value of free legal assistance, to help lift the overwhelming weight of challenges and complexities people now experience in our community.

**Luke Rumbold,
UMFC CEO**



Sarah Rodgers (left) with the team, Giselle Hutchins, Tessa Mead, Becky Smith, Ali Maher and Deb Fisher at An Evening with Phil Cleary during Law Week 2019

Our Principal Lawyer Highlights

We have experienced a growth in services this year for people with multiple problems and complex matters. HRCLS is committed to meeting this challenge, and I am confident we have the skills, expertise and dedication in our team to keep adapting to the needs of our community.

A significant lack of legal services exists in our region, and whilst there is capacity for technology to deliver help for some people, we know those in crisis require a face-to-face service or they will undoubtedly fall through the gaps.

Highlights for the year include:

- Working in partnership to provide free legal advice on-site for people.** Thanks to UMFC, Centre Against Violence (CAV), Gateway Health, Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS), Intereach, YES Unlimited, and Women's Centre, we ensure, as best possible, that people receive the full support and care they need to resolve their legal and non-legal issues.

- Increasing our casework focus for the most vulnerable people.** This has included more work in consumer law and debt matters for our clients (the ongoing impact of the 2018 partnership project with the Consumer Action Law Centre), and referrals between HRCLS and UMFC Financial Counsellors.

- Advancing a comprehensive response to family violence.** This was achieved through:

- assisting with a range of legal issues for those escaping family violence, including family violence protection orders, family law, property, debt, consumer issues, child support and victims of crime matters.
- partnering with services on both sides of the border to ensure women escaping family violence can easily access free legal advice at CAV, Women's Centre and YES Unlimited.
- partnering with the Ovens Murray Family Violence Strategic Committee to deliver the Law Week event with Phil Cleary, Working Together to End Family Violence.

- Tendering successfully for the continuation of services into NSW.**

The NSW Government has funded this for another three years. This ensures our outreach continues in places including Deniliquin, Finley and Corowa, and grows to meet the needs identified in various locations.

- Continuing our Invisible Hurdles Project.** With exceptional support from partners Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre, North East Support for Action and Youth Inc. (NESAY) and AWAHS, we are reaching young people and those

"We continue to advocate for regional issues and provide support across the border. We congratulate Victoria Legal Aid and Legal Aid NSW for their work in understanding cross border issues. Co-hosting the Cross Border Report Launch in Wodonga in February was another opportunity to highlight the challenges people face on the Border."

with family violence issues who would not otherwise know about our service or even realise free legal help is available.

- Reviewing our conflict of interest policy.** This creates an environment where people are not needlessly turned away from our service while maintaining our high professional standards.

In the year ahead, we look forward to the important task of reviewing our intake and triage procedures to improve our response and act decisively to direct our service capacity to those who are the most vulnerable.

**Sarah Rodgers,
Manager & Principal Lawyer**



Volunteers and PLT students donated the equivalent of 52 weeks of full-time free legal help, thanks to volunteers like Wei Li Oon and Helen McGowan

The evening clinics in Wodonga and Wangaratta continued this year, staffed by local lawyers who donate their time and their expertise to provide free legal advice to those in our community who would not otherwise be able to access legal help. We were thankful this year to increase the appointments offered in Wangaratta to six each fortnight.

346
advice
Volunteer clinic

"It has been a pleasure volunteering and seeing firsthand the wonderful work HRCLS does in our community in providing holistic legal support and education to those who might otherwise not have the opportunity to obtain advice. This work is so integral to the community and I'm grateful for the opportunity to contribute."

Sarah Notarianni,
Lawyer at Maurice Blackburn

Our Volunteers

2018-19 Volunteers

Lawyers

Jonathan Green
Sarah Pearce
Sarah Noble
Jye Cunneen
Chelsea Campagna
Hayley Graham
Mathew Read
Wendy Couzens
Grahame Ingleton
Vic Campagna
Sarah Notarianni
Jill Smith
Eugene Butkowski
Allison Bruce
Joe Blackshield
Kathryn Hall
Carlene Lamanna
Ross Kearney
Dusan Jovetic
Michelle Matthews
Jessica McKenzie
Narelle Sherwill
Peter Uniacke
Deborah Culhane
Ellie Richardson
Wei Li Oon

Practical Legal Training Students

Giselle Hutchins
Rachel Judd
Hannah Niethe
Katherine Burrows

1058  hours

Sarah Pearce won the UMFC 2018 Betty McLean Award in recognition of her volunteer service. Sarah started as a law student more than six years ago with HRCLS and her dedication was quickly evident. Sarah began helping with administration tasks and researching and preparing Community Legal Education presentations, and eventually advanced into assisting lawyers with casework and advice. Sarah is a wonderful example of going 'above and beyond' as a volunteer. Her valuable input and contribution is acknowledged and deeply appreciated by the HRCLS team.

Grateful for the helping hand

Local private lawyers are to be commended for their contribution, taking on referrals from us, and giving secondary consults on difficult matters, and North East Law Association and the Albury & District Law Society for their ongoing support to our service in general. Thanks also to Clayton Utz for supporting our work and helping people in our area with their specialist assistance. This pro bono effort gives us confidence to refer people to Clayton Utz knowing they have a solid record of getting problems solved.



HRCLS team at Report to the Community 2018

A special thanks to our 2018-19 Operations team, Ashlie Barclay, Tracey Walker, Meaghan Frazer and Hannah Niethe for ensuring the office runs smoothly and efficiently. HRCLS functions at a very high level and this would not be possible without your assistance, expertise and willingness to help out every time lawyers ask for assistance.

"I want to congratulate everyone for their tireless efforts this year and the difference they are making for thousands of people in need of free legal assistance. Through working as a team, we continue to deliver on our commitment to link the community with the law."

Sarah Rodgers,
Manager & Principal Lawyer

Our Team

Staff

Sarah Rodgers

Manager & Principal Lawyer

Ashlie Barclay

Operations Manager

Alison Maher

Senior Lawyer

Deborah Fisher

Senior Lawyer

Karen Keegan

Lawyer

Karen Bowley

Lawyer

Janet Osborne

Lawyer

Sarah Caplice

VLA Secondee Lawyer

Andrea Georgiou

Lawyer

Beth Simpson

Lawyer

Diana Bruce

Lawyer

Jodie Wells

Lawyer

Tessa Mead

Lawyer

Becky Smith

Lawyer/Project Worker

Tracey Walker

Legal Assistant

Sarah Pearce

Paralegal

Giselle Hutchins

Paralegal

Meaghan Frazer

Reception/Administration Officer

Hannah Niethe

Reception

Simon Crase

Community Development Manager
Albury CLSD Regional Coordinator

"I cannot thank you enough for all of your hard work and support with Susie. Your determination and commitment to ensuring that Susie had the best chance at successfully obtaining her birth certificate and subsequent Centrelink income was amazing and truly appreciated. Your patience today at the appointment was commendable. Your support of myself as a Case Practitioner at today's appointment was also truly appreciated. Thanks so much, Andrea, for your holistic support of Susie and our organisation."*

Invisible Hurdles partner

Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre & NESAY

**64 referrals
34 secondary
Consults
49 advices
11 cases closed**

Apology opens door to return to hang out space

Claire* is 15. She was hanging at a café in the local shopping centre with her friends, after they had been at the BMX park with their bikes. One of her friends dared Claire to ride her bike through the shopping centre. She thought it would be funny so she did. The shopping centre security guard saw Claire and started yelling at her. Claire panicked and rode away but the sliding doors at the exit of the centre didn't open quick enough and she crashed into them. Luckily she wasn't hurt and didn't do any damage to the doors. She did fall off her bike, though, and the security guard caught up with her. The security guard then called the police who got her details and then told her to leave.

A few days later the police came to her house and gave her a ban notice saying she couldn't go to the centre for one



Becky (left) and Andrea (right) with AWAHS Drug and Alcohol Counsellor Mechelle Branella at a Community Day in Wangaratta

Clearing Invisible

Invisible Hurdles Stage 2 is building on the strong foundation established in Stage 1. Closer collaboration between partners, Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre, NESAY and AWAHS, means more young people who are experiencing complex and multiple needs will gain confidence to easily connect with a lawyer. Stage 2 includes the exciting introduction of a Legal Project Worker, Becky Smith, to extend the work of the lawyer, strengthen the relationship between partners, and engage with young people to solve problems before they escalate. The Invisible Hurdles project is made possible through funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board Grant Program. Stage 2 funding for a further two years was announced on 29 October 2018.

Helping Jack get his footprints on society's track

How hard is it to prove you exist in today's world? Turns out it can still be difficult, and while the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child, in this instance it took a village to prove one of its residents existed.

Jack* was referred to HRCLS by a worker at a local youth support agency. Jack has an intellectual disability, spent much of his life bouncing between foster homes and was experiencing homelessness at the time he connected with the support service. Jack was turning 18 soon and keen to get his driver licence and find a job, as a way to gain a level of independence. This was under threat, however, because Jack was unable to apply for a Tax File Number (TFN) or apply for Centrelink until he could provide his birth certificate.

For most people, this would be an easy fix. But it appeared Jack's birth had never been registered and unfortunately Jack's mother refused to help fix this.

Previously, Jack's child protection worker had tried on numerous occasions to obtain a birth certificate for the lad but had been unsuccessful every time. The HRCLS lawyer contacted the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, who said Jack would need to submit letters from various sources confirming that he had a "footprint in society."



Albury Police Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer Alison Reed, Jocelyn Wright from AWAHS, Mungabareena Worker Family Violence Rebecca Symonds and HRCLS Lawyer Karen Keegan at the Aboriginal Women's Luncheon at Mungabareena

Hurdles

So HRCLS gathered letters from schools, medical practitioners and other community organisations who had been involved with Jack throughout his life. They were all happy to establish that Jack had indeed walked in society. Thankfully, the Registry accepted the testimonies and Jack got his birth certificate.

During this process, HRCLS and support agency jointly assisted Jack to apply for Centrelink benefits. However this also required a TFN, and Centrelink gave Jack a four-week time frame in which to provide evidence that he had applied for a tax return. As an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Jack could apply via a special form which required less identity documents.

Unfortunately the form could not be downloaded and had to be collected in hard copy from a Centrelink office. It could not be submitted electronically meaning a receipt number could not be generated to provide to Centrelink. The form was submitted to the Australian Taxation Office by fax on two occasions and once by post but was misplaced each time. It took an official complaint from HRCLS for Jack to get his TFN. Finally, Jack could now apply for Centrelink benefits, start looking for a job, find a nice home and get on with his life making more footprints.

The outreach service at AWAHS goes from strength to strength. Our AWAHS solicitor works on the ground at AWAHS for 1.5 days per week, with the majority of the time allocated to advice appointments. Client numbers are increasing and we are seeing people that have never accessed our free legal service before. The community is responding to the consistency of our presence at AWAHS and in a sign of confidence and trust, people are referring family and friends to us. In addition, we give legal education and information to staff and community to help build our connections and empower people. We are now welcomed as an AWAHS 'family' member, at the table, ready to help.

Many legal hands changes life for family violence victim

Often we get just one opportunity to provide advice to vulnerable young indigenous clients. Creating a strong first-up connection gives a much greater chance of the person in need returning for further advice, which is when we can address the more complex legal issues.

When Louise* sought advice during our first appointment about the breakdown of her marriage, a chat about her financial circumstances revealed a significant Centrelink debt which she was struggling to pay. While the debt was in Louise's name, it had been taken on during her marriage, when she was under duress, under threat of physical harm and unable to make decisions for herself.

This is where communication and collaboration within HRCLS shaped a 'wrap around' service for Louise. An 'in-house' referral to a generalist lawyer

37% male
63% female

at financial disadvantage 84%
95% CALD or Aboriginal Torres & Strait Islander
37% Disability or mental illness
at risk of homelessness 3%

105 advices

was made for advice in relation to the debt, while the Family Law lawyer maintained regular contact with Louise, specifically in relation to her safety during and after separation. Louise had all the information she needed and she responded positively to the connections she had made with both lawyers. So when Louise was ready, we were ready.

The steps of advice and referrals were crucial ones, but the decision to maintain ongoing contact by regularly reaching out to Louise gave her confidential and tangible support when she needed it the most. Louise has now separated, albeit under extreme circumstances, and is linked with many other services for ongoing support.

The provision of legal advice and representation to people attempting to exit a violent or controlling relationship is vital, and we understand it is often preceded by hesitant and intermittent contact from someone who is frightened of taking the necessary steps to break free of their situation. The capacity of HRCLS to not only provide legal advice, but also support, can be the difference between a client staying or leaving circumstances that could end up with severe, even tragic, consequences.



Intervention Order Duty List – Wodonga, Wangaratta, Myrtleford

307 clients
represented on a duty basis

74% at financial
11% CALD or
Aboriginal & Torres Strait
Islander people

Disability 35%
10% or mental illness
at risk
of homelessness

Figure includes family violence applicants and respondents, personal safety IVO applicants and respondents, cross applications and adjourned matters on several occasions.

As the senior lawyer in the family law team, Ali has the privilege of working with a group of talented and caring professionals. The type of work the team takes on includes complex family law – children and property, family violence and care and protection matters. The Victoria Legal Aid Family Lawyer Service partnership is into its 12th year, with the secondee lawyer adding to the assistance we offer locally. We also experience cluster issues that need to be dealt with, including fines, debts, child support and tenancy.

Our Family Law/ Family Violence Services

Our team's biggest challenge is matching our capacity to the growing need for legal assistance. This means we must target our services to assist priority groups experiencing issues, such as family violence, mental health, culturally and linguistically diverse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait people and low income.

Our Family Violence Duty Lawyering services continue to be delivered, weekly at Wodonga, fortnightly at Wangaratta and monthly at Myrtleford. In the first half of 2019, we worked hard to provide a more comprehensive response to family violence. A new Thursday telephone advice clinic was put in place, and we have increased support for the people we help in court to address systemic issues flowing from family violence, such as homelessness, mental health, fines, debts and family law.

Refund and counselling helps family violence victim on road to recovery

Melissa's* ex-boyfriend assaulted her and also damaged her vehicle as part of the rampage. Police referred her to the Centre Against Violence (CAV) and charged her ex with assault. Melissa was unaware she needed legal advice, or where

to start accessing assistance, and the CAV caseworker told Melissa a lawyer from HRCLS could help her.

Melissa spoke with the lawyer who told her she was eligible for Victims of Crime Assistance and HRCLS could help with an application. While giving advice, the lawyer discovered Melissa's car insurance had lapsed and the company hadn't notified Melissa of this, and she had tried to claim insurance for the damages but couldn't.

The lawyer contacted the Consumer Action Law Centre on Melissa's behalf and they negotiated with the insurance company. The insurance company allowed Melissa to make a claim, waived the excess because she was a victim of family violence, and waived her first instalment on her new insurance policy, saving her more than \$4000 to repair her car.

Melissa struggled after the assault. She had flashbacks and suffered depression and anxiety. She started studying but couldn't continue as she couldn't focus well enough. The lawyer linked her in with a private psychologist and obtained a successful Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal award of \$650 and 12 future counselling sessions with the psychologist.



Our Victorian Family Violence Project

Our strong partnership with the Centre Against Violence (CAV) supports women and children who have been subjected to family violence to get timely help with their legal issues. This is achieved through a lawyer funded to provide legal assistance at CAV in Wangaratta and Wodonga.

Working together gets best outcomes for stressed mother

A woman and her family now have a new, settled life in Melbourne through a joint effort to get her out of a chaotic situation that threatened to spiral out of control.

Kate's* family violence worker at CAV referred her to our lawyer in 2017 after the relationship with her violent partner ended. Kate met with the lawyer regularly for advice and support around family violence intervention orders and parenting her two-year old daughter with her ex. With Kate's consent, our lawyer and Kate's family violence worker at CAV talked regularly about her circumstances to decide on the best advice and support to help Kate move ahead.

Our lawyer helped Kate apply to vary her intervention order to keep her and the children safe, and represented her at Court to get this done. But despite the intervention order, Kate's ex kept abusing and stalking her. Our lawyer encouraged Kate to report this to police, and her ex was charged.

Kate desperately wanted to pack up and shift to Melbourne, as her 16-year-old son had been accepted in a specialised school, and to be much closer to family. In the hope her ex would allow her to move, Kate took part in family dispute resolution, along with our lawyer. He wouldn't accept this, so our lawyer represented Kate through the Family Law Court process. Kate was overjoyed when the Judge told her she could move, and a huge stress was removed from her life. Kate moved to Melbourne and found a job she loves, and is busy getting her life on track with the support of her mother and adult daughter.

166 clients

86% at financial disadvantage
9% CALD or Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people
Disability 34%
14% at risk of homelessness

**225 advices +
17 clients**
assisted on a casework basis

"For approximately 10 months, HRCLS provided me with extremely valuable representation. Without the expertise and assistance of the lawyer provided by the service I would not have had the opportunity or the ability to prepare necessary documentation let alone any other requirements necessary."

"All advice provided to me was relevant and bought the desired results. Not one point was missed, added to by the fact that Jodie diligently researched and found cases with similar attributes that had set precedences that could be used in my circumstances."

"This service delivered a positive outcome with sincerity and an obvious genuine desire to make everything as easy as possible and with little stress."

CAV client

Picture Above: Family Violence Lawyer Jodie Wells with Court Support Network volunteer Neil Michael at Wangaratta Court



Our Generalist Services

This year has seen a number of significant changes in the Generalist team. In July 2018, it was with much sadness we said goodbye to Karen Bowley as she entered retirement and a well-earned rest. Karen Keegan stepped back from the role of Senior Lawyer for the Generalist Team and took up the role of AWAHS lawyer for the Invisible Hurdles project with enthusiasm and vigour. In October, Deb Fisher was appointed to the Senior Lawyer role.

Deb was also extremely glad for the ongoing support of Sarah Pearce, a long-term volunteer, as a paralegal for three months in 2019.

Throughout these changes, the team has moved from strength to strength, providing access to justice and a wrap-around service to people whose legal problems are very often overwhelming and complex. This past year has seen an increase in in-depth casework with multiple problem types, primarily across the generalist/civil sphere. We are grateful for the continued support of our specialist CLCs, in particular the Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC), without whom we would not have seen such growth in our knowledge and legal capacity. In a positive outcome, we sent 66 individual matters to CALC for their

team to work on during the year. This connection also enabled CALC to progress strategic work around harmful financial products and vulnerable consumers. This work is a testament to the strong partnership fostered between CALC and HRCLS to ensure that people in the Hume Riverina region have access to specialist consumer, credit and debt assistance, and that systemic issues identified in the region are being addressed.

The final report of the Federation of CLC's Specialist/Generalist project was released in August 2018 and Deb joined the other project members down in Melbourne for the showcase. This was followed up by the 2018 NACLC conference in Sydney, where a panel, including Deb, was discussing the impact and outcomes of the project. We are grateful for the opportunity to be involved in this pilot project, for the lessons learned and the relationships built across the centres. When specialists and generalist CLCs work together, there are better outcomes for clients, lawyers feel more supported and more complex work is able to be done more efficiently. The full report is available at www.fclc.org.au/generalist_specialist_clc_project.

"The partnership between HRCLS and the Alcohol and Other Drugs Team at Gateway Health has been mutually beneficial and shown to improve outcomes for our clients. I was able to refer a man in his 20s, with both AOD and mental health issues, which were impacting on his daily life. He had accrued multiple infringement notices and fines related to a motor vehicle he had sold, and the support provided to him by HRCLS was invaluable and resulted in multiple, positive outcomes, including a reduction of his outstanding fines."

Gateway Health worker

145 clients

84% at financial disadvantage
14% CALD or Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people
Disability 55%
12% at risk of homelessness

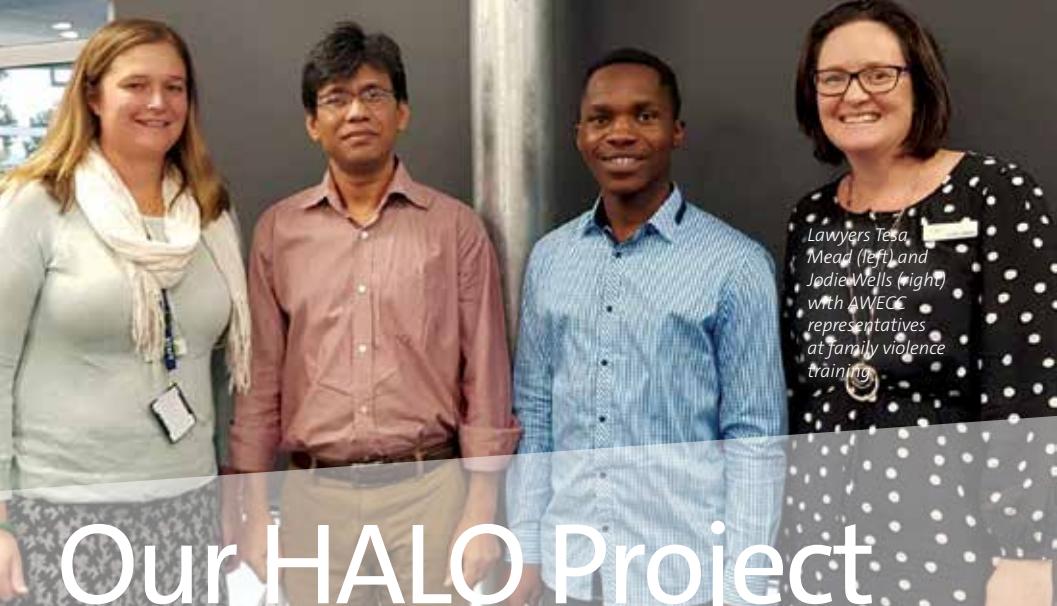
162 advices +
33 clients
assisted on a casework basis

"Thank you, Tessa, for all your help. I felt that Peter is better understood by the court system than I thought he would be which is reassuring."*

Client feedback

Our Health Justice Partnership with Gateway Health, now in its fourth year, continued in Wodonga and Wangaratta. This partnership is flourishing as we work in collaboration with health professionals to help people who visit Gateway Health with multiple and complex legal issues. While advice appointments were slightly lower than last year, the numbers of, and complexity within, casework increased significantly. In Wodonga a deliberate approach was taken to provide a wrap-around service to people, particularly those who come in through the Family Violence team. Lawyer Tessa Mead often met these people at Gateway to discuss the legal issues around their Intervention Order as well as the process, before she saw them in Court in her role as a Duty Lawyer. This also allowed Tessa to identify some of the other associated legal problems, whether they be family law or civil law.

In Wangaratta, Deb Fisher continued to work closely with the Alcohol and Other Drugs Team, as well as the Counselling Intake. This led to cases



Our HALO Project

involving complex consumer issues, responsible lending complaints, junk insurance claims and other debt and fine matters. When people are battling mental health issues, family violence and/or drug and alcohol addiction, removing the pressure of legal issues can provide people with breathing space to take control of their lives and move on.

Deb and Tessa also attended various team meetings at Gateway, promoting the legal service and referral pathways. In early 2019, HRCLS was pleased to welcome Gateway's Executive Team to discuss ways to keep strengthening the partnership and working together. We are grateful for Health Justice Australia's support and look forward to progressing the partnership further in this coming year.

Collaborative approach supports vulnerable family violence victim

Vienna* separated from her then-husband due to his family violence. Wanting to keep her and the children safe, she applied for a Family Violence Intervention Order. Vienna went to Court by herself when the Application was put before the Magistrate. On that day, HRCLS supported her as part of their duty lawyer service role. Vienna was confused about whether her husband should be able to spend time with the children, and also about what she needed to do to sort out the matrimonial home.

We helped her by:

1. Advocating in Court. Vienna had a number of vulnerabilities, so we assisted her in the Intervention Order Proceeding which included multiple court appearances,

drafting Court documents and negotiating with her husband's lawyer. We resolved the matter out of Court and this saved Vienna the stress of a hearing, limited any further conflict with her husband and ensured a quick resolution.

2. Working with major partner.

Through our strong relationship with Gateway Health, we worked collaboratively with Vienna's worker to ensure she was supported in all other aspects of her recovery, including counselling and case management. With her consent and where needed, we shared information to relieve her of the unnecessary stress of retelling her story and updating people multiple times. Our willingness to meet with her in a familiar environment also helped Vienna feel comfortable throughout the process.

3. Providing professional advice.

This included family law, such as information about the mediation process. Vienna then grew the confidence to participate in mediation to set up a parenting plan. Giving her information about how to deal with the matrimonial home, including how to protect her interest, was also important.

This assistance helped Vienna clear her mind to focus on her recovery and care for herself and her kids. Even though she went through a traumatic time, she now has the comfort and protection of an intervention order and a parenting plan to help her and her ex-husband raise their children.

Our People Multiple Problems Many Solutions

Top 5 NSW Locations

189	Albury
106	Lavington
42	Thurgoona
44	Corowa
31	Deniliquin

Top 5 Victoria Locations

512	Wodonga
210	Wangaratta
47	Benalla
31	Myrtleford
29	Beechworth

Top 10 Problem Types

876	Children's Issues
730	Family Violence/ IVO/AVO
439	Property in marriage/de facto
192	Divorce/ separation
189	Credit/Debt/ Consumer issues
169	Personal safety
128	Child protection
108	Fines
94	Victims of Crime
82	Child Support

Community
39 Legal Education
sessions **678**
participants

Highest
appointment
month

July 2018
157

Highest
call month

May 2019
432

Data in the 2018-19 Annual Report
is based on average reports from
CLASS and HRCLS recording.

Who we help

66% female
male **33%**

4% People
from non-English
speaking
backgrounds

Homeless **11%**
indicator

96% financial
disadvantage

Elderly **9%**
65 & over

13% Children
& youth (0-25)

People **61%**
experiencing
family violence

36% People
with a disability
or mental illness

Aboriginal **11%**
& Torres Strait
Islander peoples

156
legal tasks

1914 advices

2040
clients

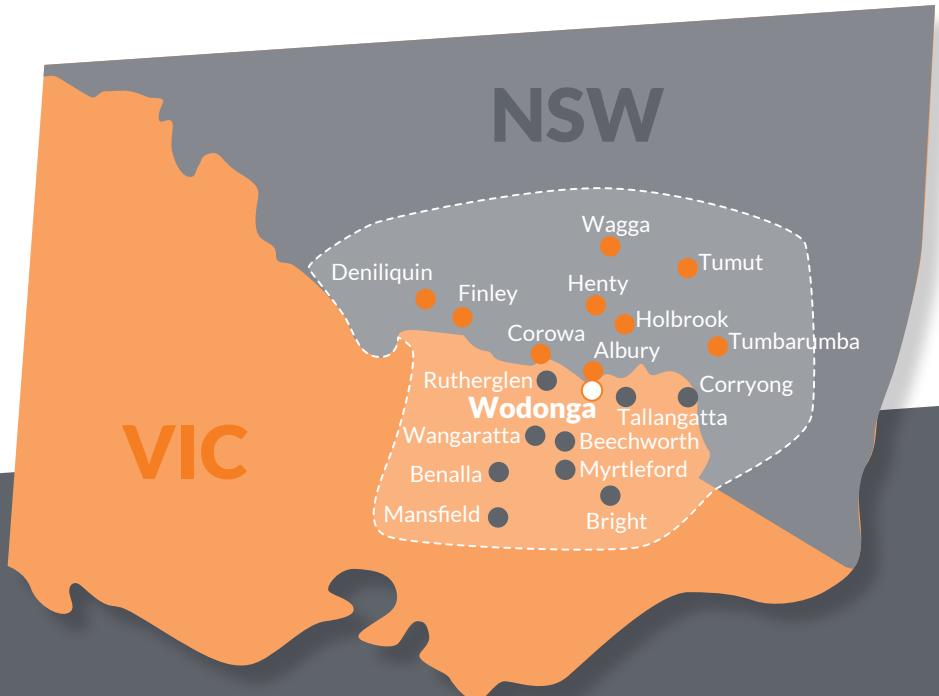
229*
cases opened

196*
cases closed

469 duty
lawyer services

Where we go

17012 km
travelled





Our NSW Outreach

The NSW Outreach program provides face-to-face legal advice at locations in regional NSW including Corowa, Finley, Deniliquin, as well as Albury and Lavington. Our lawyers drive thousands of kilometres a year to help people, some of whom may not have realised they had a legal problem with a legal solution until sitting down with us.

In November, Janet Osborne took leave and Becky Smith joined the team as the NSW outreach lawyer. In early 2019, Becky moved across to the Invisible Hurdles Project worker role. Karen Bowley was brought back into the HRCLS team for a short three-month contract to backfill as NSW outreach lawyer, ably supported by Giselle Hutchins, PLT student and then paralegal.

Stepping in to save young man from debt trap set by someone else

Without our help, a lonely young man ripe to be taken advantage of would have been forced to pay thousands for a phone that belonged to someone else.

A serious accident as a 19-year-old left Tom* with a mild intellectual disability. Now 21, he is unable to work and relies on the Disability Support Pension to survive. Along with all his challenges, Tom also finds it difficult to connect with people and make friends.

One day he met Steve at a local youth café and was thrilled that Steve wanted to be his mate. In conversation, Steve told Tom that he had recently lost his phone and needed a new one. Steve asked Tom to help him get a phone, as Steve couldn't due to his bad credit report. Steve said he would pay Tom each month for the phone bill. Tom already had his own phone bill (with the same company) of \$59 a month but he wanted to be a good friend and went to the telecommunications store with Steve.

Steve picked out a new iPhone 10 on a \$99 a month plan over two years. Tom told the salesperson the phone was for Steve, and Steve did all the talking. Tom just signed the paperwork when it was put in front of him. The salesperson never asked Tom if he could afford \$99 month if Steve couldn't pay.



The transaction was done, and after he got the phone, Steve disappeared with it, leaving Tom to pick up the monthly bill.

Tom started getting calls from the phone company and then a debt collector because the phone bill had reached nearly \$3000. At this time, Tom was living on the streets and had no way to pay the debt. Fortunately, he sought our help and we contacted the company on his behalf alleging various breaches of the Telecommunications Code of Practice, including that the company did not check if Tom could afford to pay the contract.

Thankfully, the company agreed to waive the whole debt, removing considerable stress from Tom and one less challenge in his life.

Seniors Rights Service during Law Week in Wangaratta, and to promote education about elder abuse to the Beechworth community.

And it's never too early to start educating people about the law, and Wangaratta Primary School students in Grade 5/6 gave wonderful feedback on what they learnt from a visit from HRCLS Senior Lawyer Deb Fisher.

39 sessions
678 participants

Our Community Legal Education

Targeted presentations to services has further increased our ability to reach the most vulnerable people needing free legal help to solve their problems. Family violence and family law presentations, along with our promotion of service and Legal Health Check training, gave local support workers valuable information to help

identify potential legal problems and connect people doing it tough with our legal service.

Local law firms such as Halliday Solicitors, stepped in to continue educating the community about Wills and Life Planning. HRCLS was grateful for the opportunity to join



Care Partner Lawyer Beth Simpson (middle) joins colleagues Karen Keegan and Deb Fisher (right) at the 2018 National Association of Community Legal Centres Annual Conference



Our NSW Family Law / Family Violence Services

The Women's Centre for Health and Wellbeing in Albury is a safe place for women to get legal advice in person. The strong relationship and collaboration between our lawyers and the staff at the Women's Centre means women who are experiencing domestic violence get comprehensive help. With women in this situation generally overwhelmed with issues, support such as counselling, safety planning and important legal advice is vital to stop problems escalating.

From isolation to salvation through positive partnerships

A bleak future and potential homelessness faced a woman with no friends, few community connections, and many challenges. Now she has a chance for a more settled life instead of limbo in a foreign country.

When Tami* connected with the Women's Centre, she was extremely vulnerable and in a precarious position. From a multicultural background, and needing an interpreter to communicate, Tami had recently separated from her husband, who was now in long term care.

Tami was living on a farm, which was owned solely by her husband, and despite the isolation, she was deeply concerned the property would be sold and she would become homeless.

Tami was also struggling financially. She was working, but only earning between \$200 and \$300 a week, and had no idea she was entitled to Centrelink benefits.

Our lawyer linked the client with the Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau, who improve people's lives by breaking down cultural barriers. They helped Tami complete the application for a Centrelink benefit, and supported her until the application was approved. They also helped Tami look for suitable housing and employment.

With our guidance, Tami negotiated a property settlement. She got just over \$20,000 before the farm was sold, which allowed her pay off her car loan and put \$10,000 towards settling herself up in new accommodation.

No other service in our local area could have assisted Tami with a property settlement as she was not eligible for legal aid and had no money to pay a private solicitor.

The NSW Care Partner Program focuses on early intervention in Child Protection. Keeping children with a family member, rather than placing them in out-of-home care after they have been found to be at risk, is the aim of this important program.

Part of the lawyer Beth Simpson's role was to represent people in Court where the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) had issued proceedings, and to also assist parents and grandparents with contact issues after Children's Court Orders.

The Women's Centre

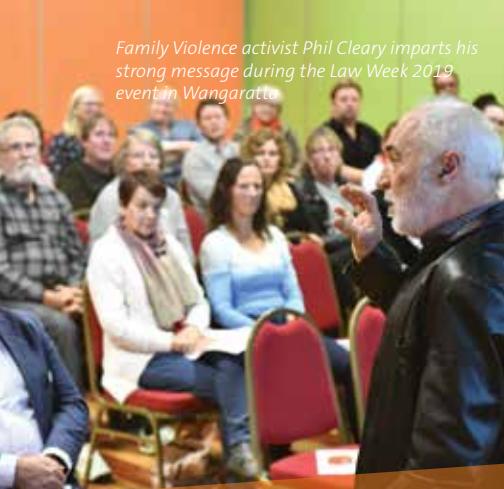
100 clients

82% at financial disadvantage
16% CALD or Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people
Disability 26%
7% at risk of homelessness

Funded by Legal Aid NSW, the position requires the lawyer to work closely where possible with other services, such as FACS, caseworkers, social workers, Out of Home Care providers and other lawyers to achieve the best outcomes for the child. Due to the lack of local lawyers who work in this field, this role fills what would be a gap in Child Protection service delivery.

The weekly legal advice at the Hub in Albury also gives people access to our service, with the majority needing assistance with family law or Child Protection issues.

Family Violence activist Phil Cleary imparts his strong message during the Law Week 2019 event in Wangaratta



Our Law Week 2019

Law Week 2019 on the Border hit the mark on increasing the community's knowledge and understanding of the law and the legal system.

The 11th Women in Law Breakfast drew about 50 people from across the legal sector to hear about the exceptional journey of guest speaker Victoria Legal Services Board + Commissioner CEO Fiona McLeay. Ms Mcleay's story resonated with the audience at the Mantra in Albury, and MC Gaye Pattison did another stellar job in her role.

The second key event was a major collaboration, An Evening with Phil Cleary Working Together to End Family Violence. Mr Cleary became

an ardent campaigner about the role and responsibility of men to reduce family violence after his sister's death in the late 1980s, and his messages to the 70 people gathered at the Wangaratta Performing Arts Centre were centred on creating safer and more respectful communities.

Funding from major sponsor, The Victoria Law Foundation, Rural City of Wangaratta, the Ovens Murray Integrated Family Violence Network and HRCLS, and significant support from Women's Health Goulburn North East resulted in a successful event.

This was an opportunity for a new audience to hear about a range of

areas including:

- gender equity and respect for women
- the primary reasons behind violence against women
- the slow change that has occurred at the judicial level in regard to sentencing
- the need for cultural change
- call to action for people to call out inappropriate behaviour and attitudes.

"The team created a great event. Bringing the mayor together, the footy club, the activists, the professionals and the media was a masterstroke. A great springboard."

Phil Cleary

Our Report to the Community

The launch of the Invisible Hurdles Report, *Overcoming the Invisible Hurdles to Justice for Young People*, was the major focus of the 2018 Report to the Community on Thursday 8 November. Guest speaker, Dr Liz Curran, Associate Professor of Law at the ANU College of Law, led the research and evaluation of the project with Pamela Taylor-Barnett. About 40 partners from across the community service sector heard how the project

research showed that allowing time for natural progression and learning was pivotal. According to Dr Curran, the most important project learning was that young people, the vulnerable, and even professional services providers, don't trust lawyers and the legal system and that trust takes time to build.

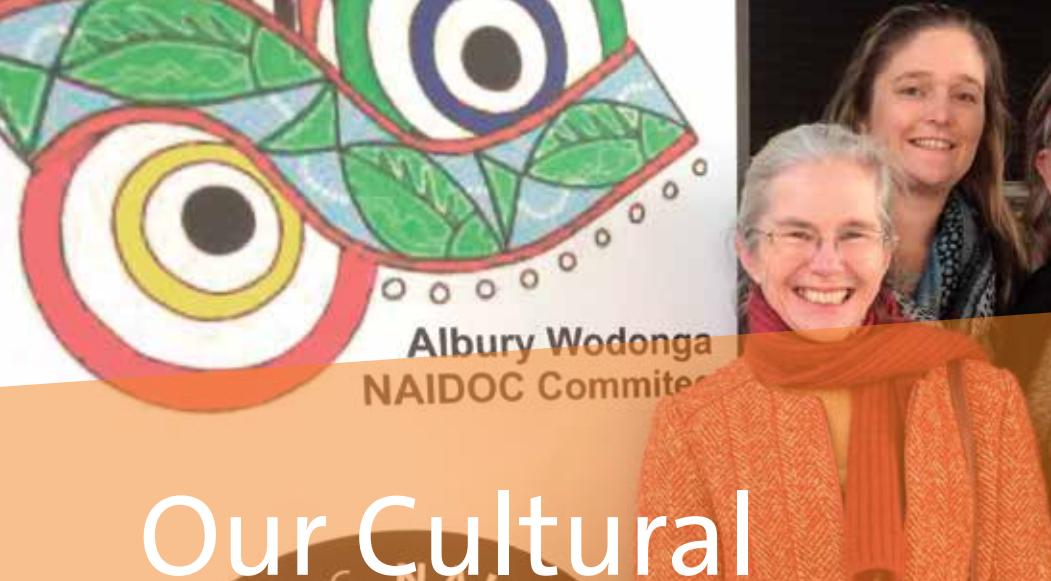
HRCLS volunteer Wendy Couzens performed the MC duties admirably, and Invisible Hurdles partners,

Data from research (cont.)

- In the final year of the project, when these relationships were strong and working smoothly, we saw a massive increase in referrals and circumstances. And in the final 12 months of the project last year, it's been a bit of a challenge.
- The data now shows legal staff responding to clients more effectively than they did before, but now find them a bit more difficult which has been a challenge. It's had the knock-on effect of causing stress and anxiety in themselves and the clients.

Researcher Dr Liz Curran, Associate Professor of Law at the ANU College of Law, explains the significant findings from the Invisible Hurdles Stage 1 Project evaluation

including Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre Principal Huw Derwentsmith and NESAY CEO Leah Waring spoke about the benefits they had seen flow from the project.



Our Cultural Journey

The HRCLS Cultural Working Party, consisting of Chair Karen Keegan and members Ashlie Barclay, Jodie Wells and Simon Crase, met regularly to identify opportunities to grow the connections with local services that help with a variety of needs for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Establishing a connection with the Yarkuwa Indigenous knowledge Centre in Deniliquin was a priority,

and plans were put in place for the first pro bono Wills Clinic to be conducted with the Yarkuwa community through the Aboriginal Carers Project.

Our participation during Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week at AWAHS was important to recognise the efforts of organisations to raise awareness of local culture and share knowledge.

In-house training will be an ongoing focus for 2019-2020, as HRCLS continues to learn more about local

Aboriginal culture and looks at ways to make the HRCLS service more culturally safe for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Thanks for everything, KB!



Karen Bowley (middle) enjoys a richly deserved send-off after 14 years of service to HRCLS



Karen Bowley (second left), founding member and driving force behind the 'Ukelegals', has one final strum and singalong with Ali, Sarah and Deb

We enjoyed a rolling two-day farewell in July 2018 for a highly valued and much-loved member of our team, Karen Bowley. KB, as she is affectionately known, spent 14 years at HRCLS in a variety of roles, including principal lawyer. Under her stewardship, the service enjoyed stability and growth, and she was a strong voice for Rural, Regional, and Remote services and community

legal sector, and fierce advocate for clients. KB also helped create a strong integrated partnership with AWAHS, making a difference for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community on the Border. Another legacy brought music to the ears of many staff, with KB the strumming force behind the formation of the 'Ukelegals'. The music will live on but the notes won't be the same without the Ukelegals' spiritual leader.

KB will be missed - but welcomed back to volunteer at the evening clinics in Wodonga and Wangaratta. Thanks to everyone for helping send her off with a fitting tribute to her contribution to the community legal sector and particularly HRCLS.

KB's journey

Principal lawyer – 2004-2011
NSW Outreach lawyer – 2011-2017
AWAHS Lawyer – 2017-2018



Our CLSD Connection

Albury CLSD partners again made excellent contributions towards the aims of the 2018-2020 Action Plan, with a host of projects delivering positive outcomes. In a first, the Albury & District Law Society (ADLS) offered to conduct the AWAHS Wills Clinic pro bono, with local lawyers donating their time and expertise to hold an information session and draft the Wills for 10 people. The potential exists for the connection between ADLS and AWAHS to grow, and to make the Wills Clinic an annual event, and we are grateful for the ADLS for giving back to its community.

As part of the Action Plan objectives, a new booklet was produced to help people with an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO). Having

been identified through the Albury Wodonga Family Domestic Violence Committee (AWFDVC), the How to Stick to Your Order booklet contains common scenarios and tips on how to act in these situations to avoid the potential for breaching the Order. This booklet followed the production of a new wallet-sized information card, the Men's DV Service Toolkit, also identified and coordinated by the AWFDVC to help men identify local services that can help them in a number of areas.

The Albury Library Museum continued to support the CLSD network with a regular meeting room. Guests included Service NSW making a presentation about the Cost of Living Program benefits, YES

Unlimited talking about the exciting Albury Project getting into full swing from 2019 onwards, and the Regional Disability Advocacy Service outlining their recent changes in service delivery and growth over the years.

CLSD projects

- Bring Your Bills Day (March 2019)
- AWAHS Wills Clinic (May 2019)
- How to Stick to Your Order brochure (May 2019)
- Deniliquin Promotions Roadshow (February 2019)
- Men's DV Service Toolkit (November 2018)
- Women's Legal Health Check (October 2018)

Our Partners & Networks

UMFC

Albury & District Law Society

Albury Library Museum

Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service

Albury Wodonga Family Domestic Violence Network

Albury Wodonga Family Law Pathways Network

Australian National University(ANU)

Centre Against Violence

Community Legal Centres NSW

Consumer Action Law Centre

Cooperative Legal Service Delivery

Federation of Community Legal Centres

Gateway Health

Health Justice Partnership Learning Network

Intereach

Legal Aid NSW

National Association of Community Legal Centres

NSW Police

North East Law Association

North East Support and Action for Youth Inc. (NESAY)

Ovens Murray Integrated Family Violence Network

Rural, Regional and Remote Networks

The Hub, Albury

Victoria Law Foundation

Victoria Legal Aid

Victorian Legal Services Board Grants Program

Victoria Police

Our social media connection

Social media is a direct way to link with our community. Our reach on Twitter and Facebook is expanding, keeping more people informed of what's going on in the legal system and community legal centre sector. We're always keen to support colleagues aligned with our sector and share their messages, and thank them for sharing what we are saying, as we all try to improve the lives of people for whom we care.



Financial Statement

HRCLS is grateful for the significant funding received in 2018-19 and thanks all funders. 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 2018-19.

Source	Purpose	Breakdown	Total
Attorney-General's Department (Commonwealth)	Generalist Commonwealth	\$532,160	
	Family Law/Family Violence NSW	\$179,569	\$773,629
	SACS ERO - Cth	\$61,900	
Victorian State Government (Victoria Legal Aid)	Generalist State	\$218,970	
	Family Violence - State	\$65,095	\$348,185
	SACS ERO - State	\$64,120	
NSW State Government (Legal Aid NSW)	One-off funding	\$106,408	
	Cooperative Legal Service Delivery	\$21,229	\$187,487
	NSW Care Partner	\$59,850	
NSW Public Purpose Fund	Generalist NSW Outreach	\$77,175	\$77,175
Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner	Invisible Hurdles	\$85,000	\$85,000
Department of Justice & Community Safety (Victoria)	Legal Assistance Funding – Invisible Hurdles	\$100,000	
	CLC Assistance Fund	\$50,563	\$251,501
	Family Violence Duty Lawyer Fund	\$50,375	
	Family Violence Fund	\$50,563	
			\$1,722,977

This is a summarised statement of income which is consistent with externally audited financial statements that are available (along with UMFC's Annual Report) by contacting UMFC on 02 6055 8000.

Our voice for change

Our advocacy for change is ongoing, as we focus on several issues impacting people who have accessed our service. From the stories we have been told, reform needs to occur in a number of areas. These include streamlining the birth certificate process for people with distinct disadvantage, and increasing the responsibility on telcos to perform credit checks on potential customers.

We welcomed the banning of direct cross-examination in Court of family violence victims, when The Family Law Amendment (Family Violence and Cross-examination of Parties) Act 2018 was passed in December. It was important for us to support local victims who had experienced cross-examination from an alleged perpetrator in advocating for this change in the law, and we thank them for sharing their stories and

helping other family violence victims to avoid this traumatic experience in the future.

Submissions 2018-19

- Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services 2015-2020
- Response to Review of the Family Law System



27-29 Stanley Street, WODONGA VIC 3690
PO Box 31, WODONGA 3689
P: 1800 918 377 or (02) 6055 8090 F: (02) 6055 8079

www.hrcls.org.au

Monday – Friday: 9am-5pm (closed between 1pm-1:45pm)

We provide free legal advice to people living in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW over a catchment of 17 local government areas. We aim to help people who are disadvantaged or vulnerable and would not otherwise be able to get legal help.



This service is auspiced by UMFC and in 2018-19 received funding from the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Victoria Legal Aid, Legal Aid NSW, Department of Justice and Community Safety (Victoria) and the Victorian Legal Services Board Grants Program. ABN 99 081 624 768 Reg No: A5357 ARBN 081 624 768