

Safe Steps to Legal Rights

2024 - 2025 Impact Report



2024-2025 Safe Steps to Legal Rights Project:

Piloting a model of integrated legal assistance to family violence crisis accommodation sites in Melbourne's North West.

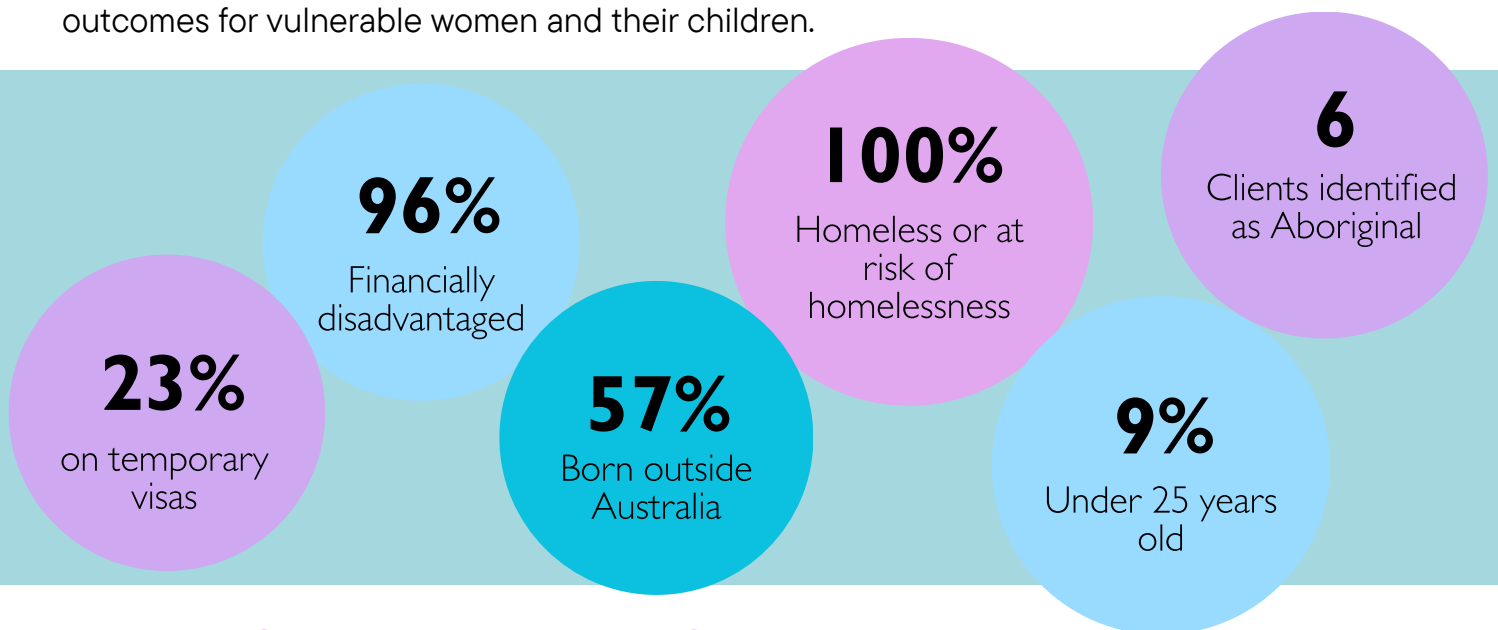


OVERVIEW

The Safe Steps to Legal Rights Project, led by Northern Community Legal Centre (Northern CLC), piloted an innovative model of onsite legal support for victim-survivors of family violence residing in crisis accommodation. Funded by the Mercy Foundation, the project aimed to prevent homelessness by addressing the complex legal needs of women and children at high risk of harm.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Victim-survivors in crisis accommodation face urgent and overlapping legal challenges including access to family violence legal protections, safe parenting arrangements, obtaining independent visa status, changing rental lease agreements, legal separation of finances, and redress for debts and fines stemming from financial abuse. Without timely legal support, these issues can escalate, forcing women to return to unsafe relationships or enter into cycles of homelessness. This project has demonstrated that integrated, trauma-informed legal services delivered onsite at crisis accommodation locations can significantly improve safety, financial stability, and housing outcomes for vulnerable women and their children.



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- 183 women received legal support, more than tripling our original target.
- 229 legal advices provided and 113 casework files opened.
- \$68,000 in direct financial benefits secured through debt waivers and victims' compensation.
- Onsite legal clinics established at three crisis accommodation sites.
- Financial Security Assessment Tool developed and implemented to streamline identification of legal issues.
- Four capacity building workshops delivered to family violence casemanagers to enhance legal literacy and referral capability.

LEGAL SUPPORT THAT CHANGED LIVES

Clients received legal help that achieved:

- Family Violence Intervention Orders in place to protect women and their children from further violence
- Migration and visa independence that enables access to work rights, Centrelink support and Medicare assistance
- Tenancy outcomes that preserve renting history and enable access to future housing opportunities
- Family law parenting arrangements resulting in safe child contact arrangements and reduced opportunities for violence
- Initiation of family law property proceedings to obtain equitable division of shared property pools
- Victims of crime compensation to enhance financial stability and recovery from the violence experienced
- Debt and fine redress to protect financial sustainability into the future.

After escaping financial and sexual abuse, Lida received comprehensive legal support across multiple areas of law including family violence intervention orders, resolution of tenancy issues, parenting arrangements, making a report to police, debt resolution and access to victims of crime assistance.

After experiencing physical abuse, surveillance and financial control, Aisha received legal advocacy in relation to her family violence intervention order. Lawyers helped her to have her name removed from the lease, the bond returned, and her rental history secured. She continues to receive family law support to ensure safe contact for her children with their parent.

After Linh and her daughter experienced family violence, Northern CLC assisted Linh to obtain a family violence intervention order, provided child protection advice, and supported Linh to separate her visa status from her husband under the Migration Regulation's family violence provisions.

Layla experienced significant physical and financial abuse. Her husband controlled the finances and had recently withdrawn \$90k from their joint account. Northern CLC assisted Layla to initiate lawyer-assisted property mediation to seek a settlement in relation to the family property.






TRAUMA INFORMED AND PLACE-BASED SERVICE DELIVERY

- Legal support was provided onsite, reducing barriers to access.
- Clients reported feeling safe, respected, and empowered.
- Crisis accommodation staff noted improved collaboration and trust in legal services over the project period.

SYSTEMIC INSIGHTS

- Migration law was the second most common legal issue after family violence.
- Temporary visa status is a key driver of housing instability.
- Family law property mediation and litigation is essential for economic justice, but systemic barriers prevent victims-survivors from accessing their legal entitlements
- Staff capability at crisis accommodation sites improved significantly through targeted training and use of the Financial Security Assessment Tool.

RECOMMENDATIONS

-  Fund place-based legal services in crisis accommodation settings.
-  Ensure comprehensive legal support is available across family violence, tenancy, migration, family law and victims of crime assistance.
-  Invest in CLCs to provide family law property mediation and litigation support.
-  Resource continuity of legal assistance for clients beyond their stay in crisis accommodation.
-  Include dedicated project management to support implementation and continuous improvement.

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