



NORTHERN  
COMMUNITY  
LEGAL CENTRE



20/21  
Annual Report

Wellbeing  
Through Justice

# acknowledgment

Northern Community Legal Centre would like to acknowledge the Gunung-Willam-Balluk clan of the Wurundjeri people, part of the Kulin Nation, the traditional owners of the land on which our Broadmeadows office stands. Our catchment extends from Seymour on Taungurung Country all the way to Brunswick on Wurundjeri Country. We acknowledge the legacy of colonial resistance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



*NCLC aims to integrate our organisational values of Respect, Innovation, Connection, Passion and Outstanding Service into all the work we do, in order to deliver the best social justice outcomes for Melbourne's North West.*

*Wellbeing Through Justice*



# NORTHERN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-2022

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# Who We Are

Northern Community Legal Centre's (NCLC) purpose is to ensure equal access to justice for all in Melbourne's North West through the provision of legal services, community legal education and law reform initiatives. We prioritise the legal needs of people living with multiple forms of disadvantage and marginalisation, including those with mental illness and other forms of disability, victims/survivors of family violence, young people, newly arrived and refugee people, people who are experiencing homelessness, people who identify as LGBTQIA+, people with drug and alcohol issues and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

NCLC formed in 2016. In our short duration, NCLC has been able to respond to both emerging and escalating community needs. Our catchment of Moreland, Hume and Mitchell Shire is home to communities who experience some of the greatest structural and systemic disadvantage in Victoria. The keystone to our success has been working closely with grassroots community groups, service providers and networks to develop sustainable, community-informed strategies in tune with client needs. Our vision is that the people of Melbourne's North West have access to justice through free legal information, advice, education and casework assistance.



NCLC staff participating in the Walk Against Family Violence, 2020

# A Word from Our CEO



JENNI SMITH

***For so many of us, 2021 has been marked by struggle.***

Struggle to keep physically and mentally well during Victoria's multiple lockdowns. Struggle to find work or even to obtain shelter. Our communities in Melbourne's North West have been particularly affected, with some of the highest rates of COVID-19 transmission and a job loss rate higher than the state average.

Over the last year, 21% of our clients reported they were homeless or at risk of homelessness – a twofold increase from the previous year. With COVID-19 restricting our activities we saw a small reduction in the number of people presenting with legal problems. However, we saw a significant increase in the vulnerability of those who did present: over half our clients reported experiences of family violence, and more than 40% reported having a mental health disability.

It is therefore no coincidence that our theme for this report is 'Wellbeing Through Justice'. NCLC has responded to the past year's many challenges by focusing on wellbeing through several initiatives. We maintained strong communication with our communities via monthly newsletters, and supported resilience through our community development project Towards Equality 2020 and Beyond: our women's groups met online to explore wellbeing topics together, whilst NCLC provided mental health training for the groups' facilitators.

We expanded the reach of our mental health program by providing extended support to clients via our dedicated Mental Health Coordinator, and by partnering with Mind Australia for the Legally Minded Project which explored the impact of legal interventions on clients' wellbeing.

Finally, we responded to community needs with the development of two new clinics: an International Student Clinic and a COVID Clinic. Through these we identified a high proportion of international students needing mental health support.

It has been a hard year, but as we embrace new freedoms we take with us many learnings. Our community's ability to adapt to alternate ways of doing things has been amazing, and means we can now incorporate more flexible options into our service delivery, including telephone and video communication. Finally, having finished the financial year with some energetic and productive team planning sessions, we are clear in our goals and how to achieve them.



# A Word from Our Chairperson

The community of Melbourne's North West has truly experienced unique challenges in 2021. Northern Community Legal Centre has continued to listen to and provide support for this community through strong values of connection, respect, innovation, passion and service excellence.



NICOLE KING

This year's Annual Report shows NCLC has delivered on our goal of improving legal outcomes for those experiencing systemic injustice. Through strong organisational capability and sound financial performance we have delivered legal services and outcomes that are based on a strong understanding of the changing needs of our community.

The Board worked with NCLC last year to set priorities in improving legal outcomes for people living with multiple forms of disadvantage. NCLC has been able to meet those priorities while adapting to our strange new circumstances with courage and dedication. I thank Victoria Legal Aid and our funders on behalf of the Board for enabling this important work this year.

Whilst our strategies to target need and deliver services to our priority groups through triage have been successful, this reflects the importance of using what limited resources we have to support those most in need in the North West.

More sustainable long-term funding is needed to provide services to community groups at the fault line, and to redress disadvantage altogether. In the short term,

NCLC will continue to advocate for greater awareness of the pressures on our communities, so that the impacts of the pandemic do not further widen disadvantage. In particular, the Board is concerned about the increased risk of homelessness due to COVID, and about the employment vulnerability many in our communities are facing.

NCLC's increased focus on data and evidence of legal need helps us both tell the story of disadvantage within our community, and develop proactive solutions. We look forward to working with funding bodies to ensure legal needs are met in the short term, and that the disadvantage gap is diminished over time through these shared efforts.

I would like to thank the incredible commitment of NCLC's partners, who help us connect to our community and with whom we can achieve shared goals, including through a collaborative funding approach.

Last but most definitely not least, NCLC staff are our lifeblood. They continue to work with passion, respect and innovation. On behalf of the Board, I thank Jenni Smith, our passionate CEO, for supporting the wellbeing and dedication of our staff and volunteers throughout another challenging year. Thank you to the team for your hard work.

*thank  
you*



# Strategic Plan



## STRATEGY STATEMENT

By 2024 we will improve legal outcomes for those experiencing systemic injustice through purposeful and responsive legal assistance, collaborative advocacy and targeted community engagement.



NCLC has an ambitious goal: to improve legal outcomes for those experiencing systemic injustice through responsive legal assistance, collaborative advocacy and targeted community engagement.

- NCLC Chairperson, Nicole King

# New Strategic Plan Subgoals

In 2020, NCLC launched a new Strategic Plan with a focus on broadening our intersectional approach beyond our five traditional priority cohorts of newly arrived and refugee people, victims/survivors of family violence, abused older people, young people and people with mental health issues.

In June 2021, the NCLC Board and staff engaged in planning sessions at CERES (pictured) to further develop our subgoals under the new Strategic Plan. The process

provided an opportunity to gather evidence regarding legal needs in our catchment, drilling down into both internal and external data sources and incorporating our staff's expertise based upon client engagement.

These subgoals will be used to guide NCLC's strategic development, ensuring that we remain responsive to the evolving needs of our community, build upon existing resources and identify opportunities to extend our impact.

NCLC staff at our CERES planning session



## Subgoals

### RESPOND

- Deliver a holistic service that integrates legal and non-legal support
- Implement triage process to better identify client needs
- Maximise service accessibility
- Increase reciprocal referrals between NCLC and our outreach partners

### ADVOCATE

- Advocate for sustainable long-term funding
- Embed an evidence-driven approach to advocacy
- Strengthen NCLC's strategic communications approach
- Build on relationships with key influencers

### EDUCATE & RESOURCE

- Target priority clients using a proactive, evidence-based approach
- Incorporate community legal education (CLE) into work plans
- Develop innovative self-help resources
- Evaluate the impact of CLE

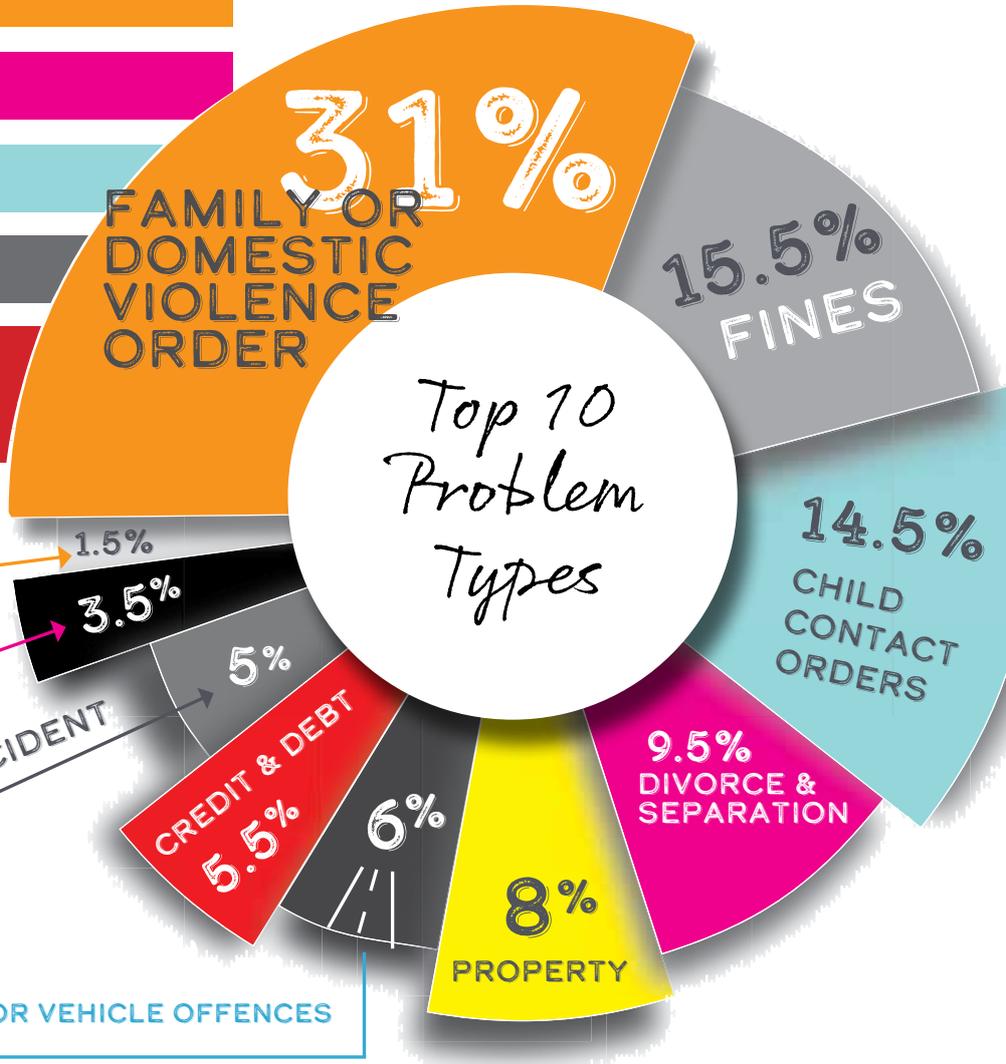
### PARTNER

- Ensure partnerships are strategic, effective and responsive to NCLC's needs and priorities
- Identify new partnership opportunities that align with our priority client groups
- Identify opportunities for pro bono support

### ENHANCE & SUSTAIN

- Enable staff to be involved in strategic activities
- Implement a wellbeing action plan to strengthen workforce resilience
- Upskill staff to be culturally responsive
- Increase professional development opportunities for better staff retention

# Our Clients



## TOP 10 COUNTRIES BY BIRTH

- AUSTRALIA (601)
- India (123)
- Iraq (101)
- Turkey (58)
- Pakistan (43)
- Lebanon (39)
- Nepal (32)
- Syria (31)
- Iran (30)
- New Zealand (24)

NUMBER OF CLIENTS

## CHANGES IN CLIENT PROFILE

|   | 20/21 | 20/19 | 18/19 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| Clients with a disability                   | 48%   | 40%   | 27%   |
| Clients with identified mental health issue | 42%   | 34%   | 26%   |
| Clients with FV Indicator                   | 53%   | 47%   | 39%   |
| Clients experiencing financial disadvantage | 95%   | 95%   | 97%   |
| Clients homeless or at risk of homelessness | 21%   | 17%   | 10%   |

“The increase in vulnerable people accessing our service demonstrates the impacts of COVID, but also our success in reaching our community.”

# Responding to Our Community's Evolving Needs

## COVID RESPONSE CLINIC

In October 2020, NCLC initiated a new clinic in response to legal issues stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. These issues included fines for alleged breaches of public orders, and employment disputes relating to protective clothing or being stood down. Rental arrears were also common as many in our community felt the financial strain of the pandemic. Over a nine-month period, NCLC assisted a total of 57 clients with COVID-related legal issues.



We provide free

legal advice to young people



Video promoting our Youth Clinic

## YOUTH CLINIC

The communities NCLC services are young. In the Moreland, Hume and Mitchell LGAs, young people (people 25 and under) constitute 37% and 35% of the population respectively. NCLC employs two youth lawyers to support our young clients with legal issues related to domestic and family violence, fines and debt, motor vehicle offences, complaints against police, criminal offences and victim's compensation.

In the 2020-2021 financial year, young people were particularly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of work and study opportunities and escalation of poor mental health. Our youth lawyers found that young people commonly received COVID-related fines, and experiences of family violence among this cohort were prevalent. A significant proportion of our young clients experienced multiple legal issues, requiring extensive support.

“Many of our youth clients required critical and fast assistance, as they were coming to us late in their legal dispute because of COVID lockdowns.”

- Cameron Hunter, Youth Lawyer

## MEGAN'S STORY:

*Megan\* is a young survivor of serious family violence perpetrated by her ex-partner. This violence led Megan to homelessness, drug addiction and a diagnosis of PTSD.*

Megan was referred on to our service by a Youth Homelessness Case Worker at VincentCare. Young people like Megan who are subjected to family violence often face multiple, complex legal issues. NCLC's youth lawyer was able to help Megan with these multiple issues.

### **VOCAT**

While most incidents of violence were unreported and Megan couldn't always identify details, NCLC did help her to make an application to VOCAT in relation to one incident where she was hospitalised. She obtained an Award of Assistance, which included expenses for counselling, gym membership and a new computer. The computer was especially important due to her plans to return to study.

### **DEBT**

During her relationship with her ex-partner, Megan had begun an online course with Open Colleges. Megan explained that due to family violence and economic abuse – and the homelessness and

substance abuse it led to – she was unable to participate in any of the subjects. Open Colleges was seeking approximately \$4,000 from Megan for outstanding course fees. We assisted her to apply for special circumstances to waive the debt, and although she did not qualify (for reasons not provided), the debt was still written off.

### **FINES**

Megan had incurred approximately 10 fines – mostly traffic infringements – during her relationship with her ex-partner, amounting to \$2,800. As these were due to the family violence she experienced, NCLC supported Megan to make a Family Violence Scheme application to Fines Victoria. All fines were cancelled and withdrawn.

Megan's story demonstrates NCLC's ability to help young clients with multiple legal issues by working closely and collaboratively with those clients and their support workers.

\*Name changed

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CLINIC

*International students have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In October 2020, NCLC opened an International Student Legal Clinic. Supported by funding from Moreland City Council, the Project employed a dedicated lawyer to provide legal support to international students.*

Key themes emerging from this work related to the financial vulnerability experienced by all clients in the Project, including tenancy issues, insurance issues, migration issues and family violence. Extra financial distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic meant these clients often faced multiple legal issues such as rent arrears, debt and unpaid fines. Financial hardship during the pandemic also put many international students in the difficult position of having to decide if they needed to leave Australia in case they breached their visa conditions by not paying their student fees. International students who are casual workers were particularly financially vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic because they're not eligible for the same government support as permanent residents and citizens and may have work restrictions.

In line with the Clinic's wrap-around model, which addresses both legal and non-legal problems, NCLC directed clients to available government grants, and referred most of these clients onto other organisations for additional support, as well as ensuring internal referrals were made to family violence duty lawyers and our Mental Health Support Coordinator.

In particular, we referred international students to financial counsellors for assistance with other forms of financial aid, and assistance with rent, utilities and living expenses, food materials, and college financial aid. Most of the clients we saw at the International Student Clinic had low or no income. We also referred clients on for extra migration, gambling and cultural support.





## VARSHA'S STORY:

*Varsha\* is a 22-year-old international student studying cookery. When lockdown began, Varsha's casual kitchenhand shifts dried up as she was ineligible for JobKeeper. Financial stress led her to online gambling.*

Varsha rented a scooter to earn money doing food delivery through a gig work app. The owner of the scooter told her it had third-party insurance. While driving the scooter Varsha was in a collision with another car, and the other driver's insurance company claimed she owed nearly \$8,000 for repairs. Varsha contacted the owner of the rental scooter to make a claim on their insurance, but her requests were ignored. As COVID restrictions eased Varsha received some casual kitchenhand shifts again, but her income was not guaranteed and not enough to cover her rent, college fees and bills. Varsha couldn't pay the insurance company and after three months, the bill was referred to debt recovery.

Varsha contacted her local council for food relief and was referred on to NCLC's International Student Clinic. Our dedicated NCLC lawyer gave Varsha free

legal advice about debts, consumer issues and the motor vehicle accident. They also contacted the scooter owner's insurance company to find out why they weren't covering Varsha's accident; it turned out the policy was not valid for rented scooters. Because Varsha didn't have any written proof about the misrepresentations, she decided not to pursue the issue with VCAT.

However, our lawyer was able to help Varsha negotiate an 85% reduction in her debt to the insurance company on the basis of financial hardship. They also connected Varsha with gambling support services. Varsha's vulnerabilities are typical of international students, and her story demonstrates the need for further community legal education for this cohort about their rights in Australia. It also speaks to the success of the Clinic's holistic approach to client care through partner referrals.

\*Name changed

## INDIAN WOMEN'S FAMILY VIOLENCE PROJECT

***The Indian Women's Family Violence Project commenced in early 2019 and concluded in April 2021. The two-year pilot project, funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, provided family violence and migration support for over 150 Indian women on temporary visas, giving them legal options and a pathway to safety.***

NCLC has been strengthening ties with the growing South Asian community of Melbourne's North West since 2015. We focused on the Indian community in particular, as our casework demonstrated that Indian women who were recently married and separated regularly experienced multiple forms of abuse in relation to their migration status. This group were especially vulnerable to family violence due to factors like social isolation, limited English proficiency and trauma, along with a dependency on perpetrators for economic security and the right to remain in Australia. They were also often ineligible for services and support.

The Indian Women's Family Violence Project deepened our understanding of these issues. It also tested out a new integrated service model which combined migration and family law legal advice with community engagement and education in order to be responsive to both the legal and non-legal needs of Indian women. NCLC employed a Project Coordinator and migration lawyer to work alongside our team of family violence lawyers, and strengthened referral pathways with key agencies

including legal services, family violence services, financial support agencies, housing support agencies and culturally specific organisations.

During the course of the Project, 164 Indian women clients sought assistance on a range of legal issues, including family violence intervention orders, immigration, property settlement, victims of crime compensation, divorce, breach of family violence intervention orders, spousal maintenance, fines/infringements and child support. Between 1 January 2019 to 31 January 2021 our lawyers opened 72 files for 47 clients, and an additional 117 clients received our duty lawyer service and/or legal advice and referral to other services. We also helped 17 clients make protection visa applications, and four clients apply for bridging visas with work and/or study rights.

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***NCLC would like to acknowledge and thank the Victorian Legal Services Board for funding this Project, and for extending funding for a migration lawyer for a further year, commencing November 2021.***

# Educating & Resourcing

## Our Community to Prevent & Resolve Legal Issues

### YOUTH COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

An important component of NCLC's work with young people is community legal education, which helps prevent legal issues from occurring in the first place and provides young people with the tools they need to navigate life after school. In 2020 and 2021 NCLC continued this work, presenting on issues such as family violence and age of consent to youth organisations and local community groups.



Cameron Hunter & Tania McKenna present to Good People Act Now (GPAN) as part of our community legal education program. GPAN is a youth-led project working to combat violence against women in the Broadmeadows community.

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK DELIVERED IN 2020-2021:

- 14 presentations to newly arrived community members, and three presentations to professionals working with the newly arrived community members
- Seven presentations to young people, and four presentations to organisations working with young people
- Four presentations on family violence to community members, and 11 presentations to organisations working with women experiencing family violence
- Legal health check training to six organisations
- Three articles written about NCLC in external publications
- Two training presentations to the sector on identifying legal needs in the community
- Six factsheets updated on COVID-related legal issues and translated into Arabic, Hindi, Punjabi and Nepali – twice
- Development and distribution of two videos: one for young people with Arabic subtitles, and one for international students with Nepali subtitles
- Social media campaign for Week Without Violence
- One pilot podcast episode
- Launch of two significant project reports: the Legally Minded Report and the Indian Women's Family Violence Project: Findings and Recommendations
- Development and distribution of 10 electronic newsletters to over 400 contacts
- 10 meetings convened for the Hume Domestic and Family Violence Network



CEO Jenni Smith participating in a family violence prevention event organised by the United Imans and Duaat Victoria

## Didi Bahini Samaj Women's Group



## 2019 TOWARDS EQUALITY 2020 AND BEYOND

Throughout this two-year project, NCLC worked intensively with grassroots community groups to promote gender equity and prevent violence against women and children. Our three Women's Groups – who are partnered with Oorja Foundation for Indian women, Didi Bahini Samaj for Nepalese women, and El Amal (established by NCLC) for women from the Middle East – continued to grow despite being restricted to online engagement for much of the financial year, with occasional picnics and lunches where COVID restrictions allowed. (continued next page)



We got the chance to learn a lot including [about] Aboriginal cultures, and had a wonderful time with delicious food, music, photography, meditation, mindfulness and many more [things].

- A participant on her experience at a weekend retreat in Torquay, organised by Didi Bahini Samaj. NCLC subsidised the attendance of some of our Women's Group members.

Oorja Women's Group



The groups provided an important outlet for social engagement and emotional support during periods of isolation from the women's broader communities. While conducting wellbeing activities including yoga, craft, make-up sessions, mandala making, cooking competitions, recipe sharing and book clubs, NCLC Community Development Workers used the groups to facilitate conversations that encouraged women to safely share and explore the impact of patriarchal attitudes on their own experiences of disadvantage. (continued next page)



El Amal Women's Group



In return, the women identified strengths they have exhibited in their daily lives and celebrated their achievements. The groups also engaged in activities designed to influence broader community attitudes. For instance, the El Amal group recorded a video performing 'Hope Invitation', a song about family violence prevention written by group member Nagham Youisif.



## KANGAN TAFE PROJECT

*From December 2018 to December 2020 NCLC provided community legal education, legal advice and casework services to approximately 800 people of refugee and recently arrived backgrounds enrolled in the Adult Migrant English Programs (AMEP) at Kangan Institute, Broadmeadows.*

Hume has the second highest number of newly arrived Syrian and Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers in Australia, 900 of whom are AMEP students at the Broadmeadows campus. Many articulate a high level of suspicion towards the legal system, stemming from experiences of war, persecution and displacement in their countries of origin. Without intervention, these systemic barriers can further entrench newly arrived communities in disadvantage.

The aim of the Kangan TAFE Program was to build the capacity of recently arrived and asylum seeker students to resolve their own legal issues, or make use of an accessible legal service when their legal problem was more complicated. Using a grant provided by City of Hume, NCLC employed a bi-lingual Paralegal Community Worker to identify and respond to the needs of Arabic speaking students.

NCLC provided weekly outreach legal clinics at Kangan TAFE to improve students' access to legal services. We also conducted regular community

legal education sessions for students in English and Arabic, covering information on common legal issues, how to recognise and avoid legal problems, when to see a lawyer and how the Australian Legal System works. Kangan staff were upskilled in how to undertake legal needs assessments.

Overall, the Kangan TAFE Project has led to an increase in access to justice. By the end of the Project, teachers were more confident in supporting their students to get the right legal advice. Students reported feeling less legal stress while the clinic was in operation at Kangan, and their capacity to self-help significantly improved due to the legal education sessions. Evaluation of the Project reveals that the intergration of community law services into a school program targeted at newly arrived people can lead to effective and integrated service delivery. The strength of the Project was in the ability of the Paralegal Community Worker to connect newly arrived people to support services at the start of their settlement experience.



# Maintaining Strong, Collaborative Partnerships

## MENTAL HEALTH & LEGAL INTEGRATED ASSISTANCE PROJECT

*The Mental Health and Legal Integrated Assistance (MHALIA) Project commenced in mid-2020. The Project addressed the fragmentation between legal and social support services by providing NCLC and mental health service clients with wrap-around support to address their full range of legal and non-legal needs.*

Funding provided by John T Reid was used to recruit a Mental Health Support Coordinator to work one day a week for a six-month period, which was extended to four days when additional funding was secured.

NCLC is one of the few community legal centres involved in health-justice partnerships focusing on mental health. Mental ill-health occurs at disproportionately high levels in our catchment areas.

When averaged across the last financial year, 48% of clients identified as having a disability and 42% of clients experienced mental illness, compared to 40% and 34% the previous year respectively.

In the project period, the MHS Coordinator provided direct support to 80 NCLC clients. 42 identified mental health concerns, while others identified social issues relating to housing, gambling and financial assistance. The MHS Coordinator provided referral information to 62 clients, 35 of whom were provided information on accessing a mental health care plan and therapy support.

In addition, the MHS Coordinator worked to streamline referral pathways and strengthen and extend our partnerships with Mind, NEAMI, Merri Health, Gamblers Help, Banyule Community Health, Consumer Action Law Centre and Settlement Services International. A new MOU was also established with VincentCare for the purpose of providing an outreach legal service in the future.

Training was provided to mental health practitioners in using the legal health check tool. NCLC staff also received training in the mental health system and referral pathways to enhance their capacity to respond to the non-legal needs of clients. Feedback from both cohorts was highly positive: "It was...so good to have Morgan come and give us a better understanding of the complex journey many of our clients are on while we are trying to assist with their legal issues."

The MHALIA Project has shown that nesting a mental health support practitioner within a legal service leads to effective and integrated service delivery. Specific funding is needed to support the next phase of the Project.



“The legal support] taught me that I’ve got a voice, so I can get some outreach help and someone’s willing to [offer] their services, or their help.”

- MHALIA Pilot Program Client

## ANNA'S STORY:

*When Anna presented to us in July 2020, she was distressed with suicidal intonations. She'd been effectively homeless since 2018 and was living in her car during the first COVID lockdown.*

Anna\* had accrued many fines over a 10-year period, totaling approximately \$24,000. Anna lost her husband suddenly to illness in 2010 and suffered an emotional breakdown. She was homeless for around two years, living in her car between her siblings' homes in Melbourne and on the Mornington Peninsula. The majority of fines were for unpaid tolls.

Anna met a new partner in 2015 but they had a significant drug addiction and relied on Anna financially and emotionally. They were violent and stole from Anna on several occasions. When Anna fled the relationship in 2018, she gave up her rental property and became homeless again. She was in poor mental and physical health.

With the assistance of our Mental Health Support Coordinator, NCLC was able to wrap significant support services around Anna to address her homelessness, diabetes and mental health condition.

Once she stabilised, we applied to have her fines waived with Fines Victoria. While we were successful in having \$13,000 worth of the fines withdrawn, the remaining amount was not able to be waived. We discussed with Anna whether she wanted to undertake the Work and Development Scheme (WDP) with Fines Victoria, which would mean undertaking therapeutic work.

Anna was agreeable so we connected her with a mental health practitioner who was able to sponsor her on an ongoing basis while she paid off her remaining fines by undertaking fortnightly counselling. This system is bulk-billed under the Mental Health Care Plan scheme.

***At the time of closing her file, Anna was fully engaged with her new counsellor and her mental and physical health had improved significantly. Anna believes we saved her life.***



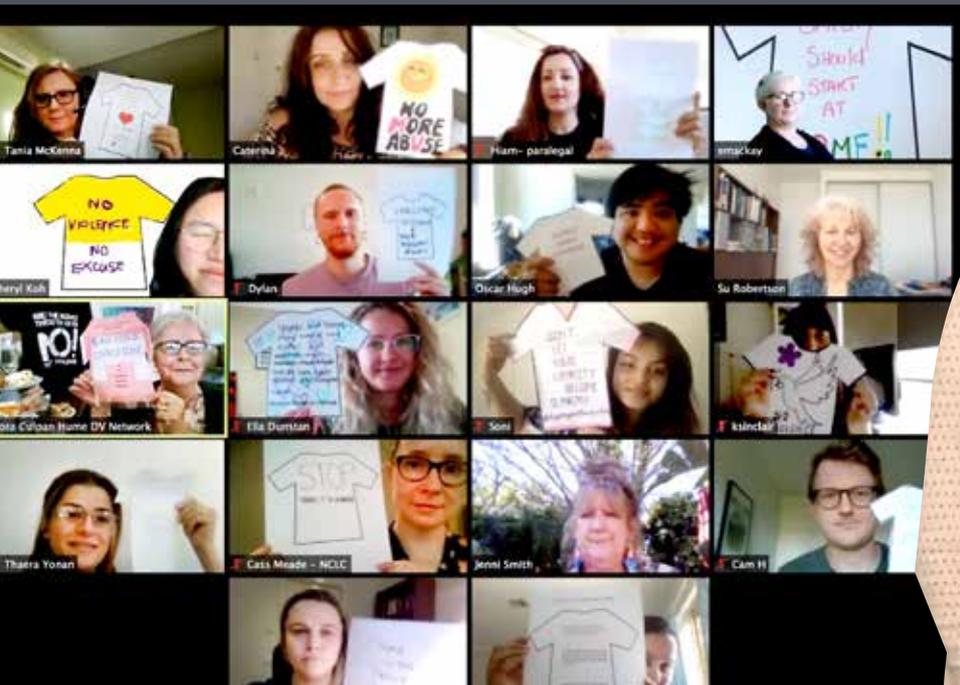
## HUME DOMESTIC & FAMILY VIOLENCE NETWORK

*The Hume Domestic & Family Violence Network, convened by NCLC, met monthly via Zoom throughout 2020 and 2021, with increasingly high participation rates. This coalition of agencies providing family violence support to our community was incredibly important during periods of lockdown.*

The network provided the opportunity to come together to discuss the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to workshop solutions to the challenges of engaging with isolated women living with family violence.

Every October, the Hume DFV Network coordinates local events for Week Without Violence (WWV), a global campaign to end violence against women. Despite Melbourne being in lockdown, in October 2020 NCLC's staff and women's groups wrote out personal messages of solidarity as part of the Clothesline Project and Million Stars campaign, and came together to share them virtually as part of our commitment to putting an end to family violence.

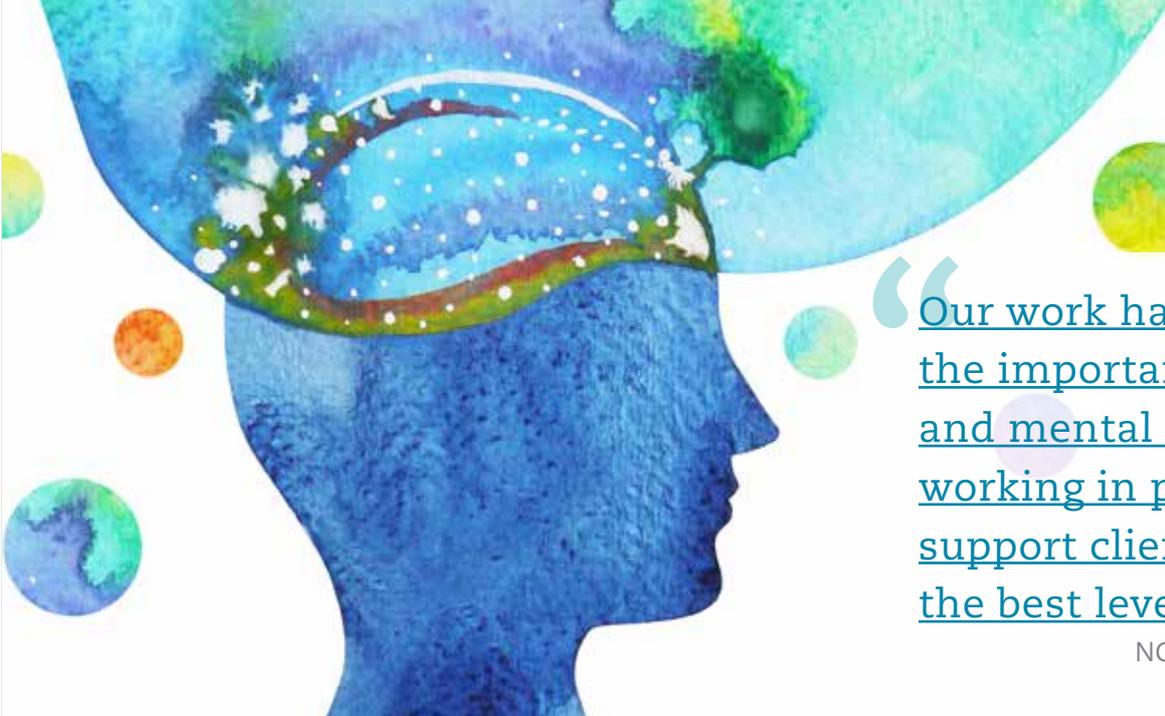
Sadly, it was Flora Culpan's last WWV event as part of the NCLC team. Flora was Covenor of the Hume DFV Network, and Family Violence Coordinator at NCLC. She retired this year after a significant career in the family violence sector, and over two decades working in the community legal sector. Flora was a founder of the Week Without Violence in the northern metropolitan region of Melbourne and has worked tirelessly supporting victim survivors and advocating on their behalf both individually and systemically, including in relation to their court experience.



**Week Without Violence - Clothesline Project**



*Wishing  
Flora a happy  
retirement.*



Our work has confirmed the importance of legal and mental health staff working in partnership to support clients to attain the best level of wellbeing.

NCLC CEO Jenni Smith

## LAUNCH OF THE LEGALLY MINDED REPORT WITH MIND AUSTRALIA

***On 22 June 2021, NCLC and Mind Australia proudly launched the Legally Minded Report. The Project, which ran from July 2020 to March 2021, aimed to understand the impact of legal intervention on the lives of people with mental health issues.***

The project involved a collaborative partnership between Mind Australia – a community-managed specialist mental health service provider – and NCLC for legal in-reach to Mind services in Victoria's northern suburbs.

The Report launch was attended by over 70 participants. NCLC's Champion Justice Rita Incerti opened the event, before hosting a panel discussion with Louise Glanville, CEO of Victoria Legal Aid and Emma King, CEO of Victorian Council of Social Service. Morgan Wright, NCLC's Mental Health Support Coordinator, highlighted examples of how legal intervention had reduced barriers to participants' recovery.

Mind CEO Gill Callister noted that, "Many of the everyday problems our clients experience, such as housing or financial concerns, involve legal issues...Solving legal concerns with the support of legal professionals, and in the context of ongoing mental health support, reduces psychological distress and enables people to focus on their recovery."

After the launch, the Legally Minded Report was forwarded onto other partner organisations and key contacts in the sector. Fines, family violence, insurance claims and financial difficulties can all cause stress and negatively impact mental health. Despite this, there are too few partnerships between mental health and legal services to enable legal interventions like the kind explored in this Project.



# Identifying Systemic Barriers & Advocating for Change

## INDIAN WOMEN'S FAMILY VIOLENCE PROJECT: ADVOCATING FOR REFORM

***As part of this two-year pilot project funded by the Legal Services Board, NCLC employed a migration lawyer to deliver wrap-around services alongside our family violence lawyers to over 150 Indian women. The Project captured these women's stories and identified system gaps and policy reform priorities.***

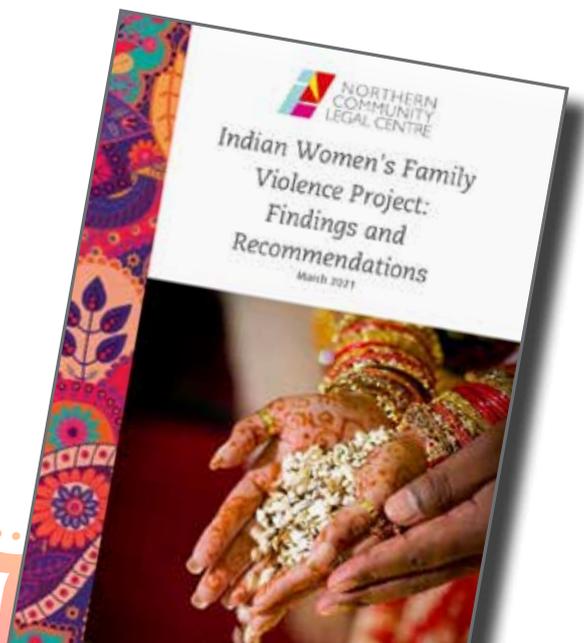
Ten recommendations for both the Victorian and Federal Governments were provided in the Final Report. Key among these was the recommendation that the Project's wrap-around service model be not only continued in NCLC's catchment, but extended to include all women on temporary visas in areas with large populations of recent migrants.

The proposed model incorporates migration legal advice, advocacy and social work support, as well as community engagement and legal education for newly arrived vulnerable women who have experienced family violence.

In March 2021, NCLC held a launch webinar to share the Project's findings and recommendations and to discuss next steps in advocating for change. Guest speakers included Federal Member for Calwell Maria Vamvakinou MP; Minister for Multicultural

Affairs, Community Sport and Youth Ros Spence MP; Supreme Court Judge and NCLC's Champion Justice Rita Incerti; and Nayana Bhandari, Co-Founder of the Oorja Foundation.

NCLC has recently secured ongoing funding to continue delivering the wrap-around service model to our catchment. The proposal to replicate it more widely across the community legal sector is currently being evaluated for scalability. We are excited to continue exploring ways to advocate for women on temporary visas experiencing family violence with our partners and stakeholders.





## LAXMI'S STORY

*Laxmi\* married her Indian-born, Australian citizen husband and moved to Australia to join him, expecting a happily married life in a new country.*

She arrived on a visitor visa with the understanding that he had applied for a partner visa for her, which was still being processed. During their six-year relationship, Laxmi suffered severe verbal and physical abuse, resulting in hospitalisation. Her ex-husband regularly threatened to cancel her visa, demanded dowry payments from her parents and controlled Laxmi's salary. Police charged him with assault, but then Laxmi was pressured to return to India, making it difficult for police to proceed with the case. The prosecution was discontinued.

While Laxmi holds a bridging visa, she is not entitled to Centrelink payments or other government support. She is struggling to support herself and her sons on her current income and would like to return to India, but as she has parenting and

property matters ongoing in the Federal Circuit Court, and her sons are on the airport watchlist, she cannot leave.

NCLC successfully assisted Laxmi to have fines waived on the grounds of family violence. We also provided advice and support with a family violence intervention order, with migration matters and with family law, specifically parenting matters.

Laxmi's story certainly demonstrates the uncertain position that Australia's migration and family law system can put women in. Laxmi can neither return to India with her sons, nor move forward with a life in Australia with a permanent migration pathway option.

\*Name changed





I just felt like I had a new outlook on life. Like a whole weight was lifted off my shoulders.

-A participant after they received legal support regarding an insurance claim

## LEGALLY MINDED PROJECT: MENTAL HEALTH AND LEGAL INTERVENTION

*The Legally Minded Project ran from July 2020 to March 2021 in partnership with Mind Australia. It explored the effects of legal intervention on the lives of people with mental ill-health, and how it can improve their wellbeing and quality of life.*

NCLC employed a Mental Health Support Coordinator one day a week for six months to facilitate collaboration and increase referrals between mental health and legal services.

To gain insight into client experiences of the legal intervention process, eight NCLC clients with mental ill-health and legal issues ranging from family violence to traffic fines were interviewed. Results showed that overall, legal support reduced stress levels, improved mental health, increased peoples' faith in the legal system and led to feelings of empowerment, confidence and self-efficacy. It also helped them to connect to other services – including psychologists and financial counsellors – so they felt less alone with their problems. Participants identified the importance of support services being accessible, trustworthy, reliable and responsive.

The research provides evidence that legal intervention has a positive impact on people with mental ill-health when legal matters are causing concern, and demonstrates the importance of legal and mental health support staff working together to help their clients attain the best level of wellbeing. The Report findings provide an evidence base to support NCLC's advocacy to secure funding for our Mental Health and Legal Integrated Assistance (MHALIA) pilot project, a unique, client-focused service delivery model that integrates legal and mental health support. Currently NCLC employs a Mental Health Support Coordinator, but is yet to secure ongoing funding for this position. Following the positive outcomes identified in the Legally Minded Report, we are continuing to advocate for a fully funded mental health and justice partnership.

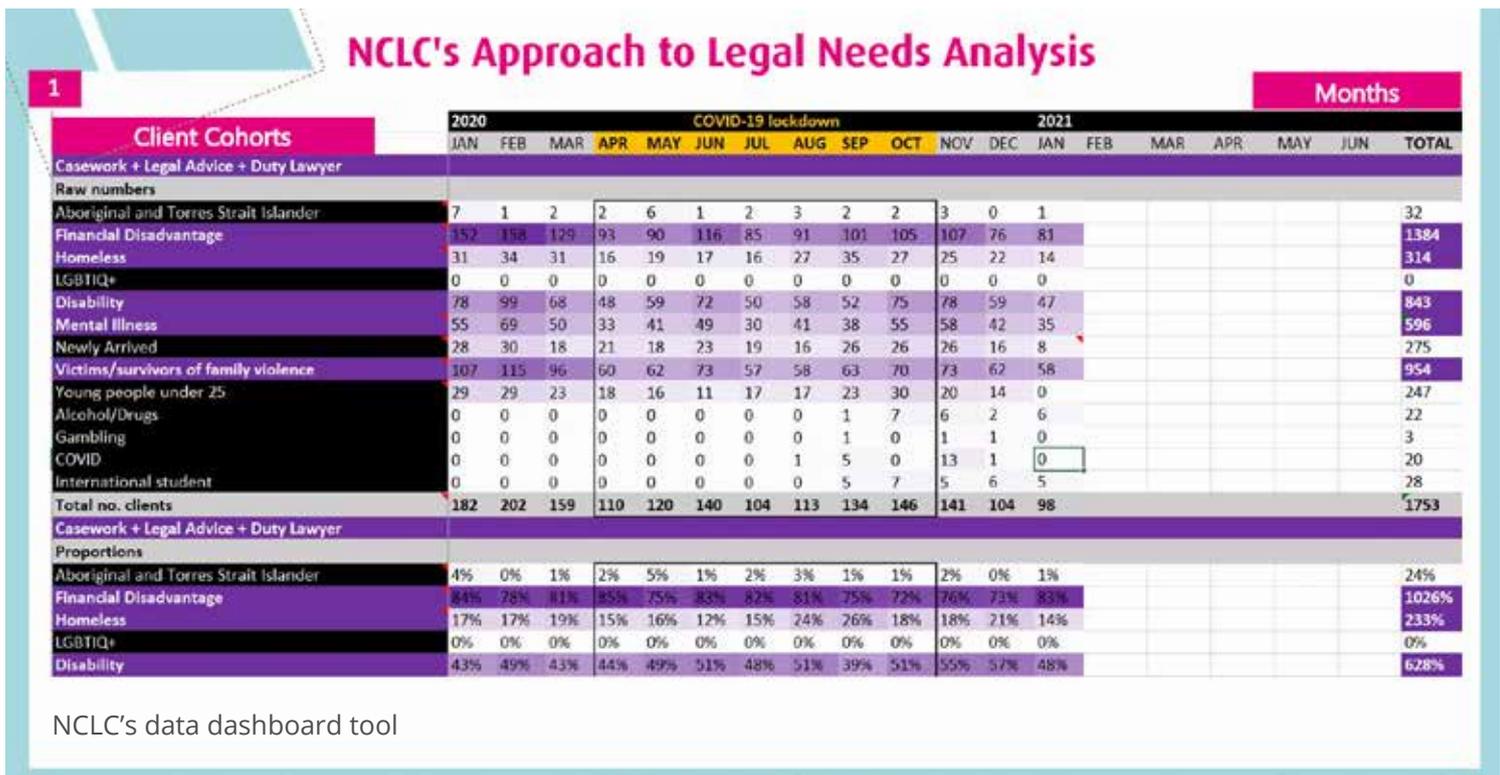


## RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY NEED

In 2020 and 2021, NCLC prioritised better understanding the legal needs of our community to ensure our services were as responsive as possible, particularly in light of the COVID pandemic which disproportionately impacted our regions. We created a dedicated Policy and Evaluation Lead role to improve how we collate and interpret internal data and evaluate the impacts of our programs. This work included collating information from external

sources such as the NDIS and building permit data to identify disadvantage and growth opportunities across our catchments.

This work is enabling NCLC to build our evidence base of unmet legal needs and additional resourcing requirements, creating a foundation for advocacy into the future. We have also shared our learnings across the sector via workshops and forums.



## FINANCIALS

*Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the financial year ended 30 June 2021*

| <b>Our results</b>   | <b>2021 \$</b> | <b>2020 \$</b> |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Revenue and income   | 2,220,370      | 1,916,973      |
| Interest revenue calculated using the effective interest method  | 234            | 1,444          |
| <b>Expenses</b>  |                |                |
| Corporate and administration expense   | (83,894)       | (128,523)      |
| Occupancy expense  | (8,933)        | (34,640)       |
| Employee benefits expense  | (1,922,366)    | (1,502,950)    |
| Depreciation and amortisation expense  | (96,333)       | (111,609)      |
| Finance costs  | (19,521)       | (16,798)       |
| <b>Surplus before income tax expense</b>   | <b>89,557</b>  | <b>123,897</b> |
| Income tax expense   | -              | -              |
| <b>Surplus after income tax expense for the year attributable to the members of Northern Community Legal Centre Incorporated</b> | <b>89,557</b>  | <b>123,897</b> |
| Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax  | -              | -              |
| <b>Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to the members of Northern Community Legal Centre Incorporated</b>       | <b>89,557</b>  | <b>123,897</b> |

## Assets

| <b>Current assets</b>         | <b>2021 \$</b>   | <b>2020 \$</b>   |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Cash and cash equivalents     | 1,050,466        | 985,207          |
| Trade and other receivables   | -                | 166,650          |
| <b>Total current assets</b>   | <b>1,050,466</b> | <b>1,151,857</b> |
| <b>Non-current assets</b>     |                  |                  |
| Property, plant and equipment | 23,256           | 50,589           |
| Right-of-use assets           | 410,586          | 324,541          |
| Other                         | 21,500           | 21,500           |
| Total non-current assets      | 455,342          | 396,630          |
| <b>Total assets</b>           | <b>1,505,808</b> | <b>1,548,487</b> |

## Liabilities

| <b>Current liabilities</b>           | <b>2021 \$</b> | <b>2020 \$</b>   |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Trade and other payables             | 35,149         | 91,044           |
| Lease liabilities                    | 67,714         | 86,573           |
| Employee benefits                    | 206,908        | 130,518          |
| Other                                | 182,393        | 419,327          |
| <b>Total current liabilities</b>     | <b>492,164</b> | <b>727,462</b>   |
| <b>Non-current liabilities</b>       |                |                  |
| Lease liabilities                    | 367,017        | 264,055          |
| Employee benefits                    | 51,003         | 50,903           |
| <b>Total non-current liabilities</b> | <b>418,020</b> | <b>314,958</b>   |
| <b>Total liabilities</b>             | <b>910,184</b> | <b>1,042,420</b> |
| <b>Net assets</b>                    | <b>595,624</b> | <b>506,067</b>   |

## Equity

| <b>Equity</b>       | <b>2021 \$</b> | <b>2020 \$</b> |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Reserves            | 272,297        | 272,297        |
| Retained surpluses  | 323,327        | 233,770        |
| <b>Total equity</b> | <b>595,624</b> | <b>506,067</b> |

# OUR PEOPLE

## Board

**Nicole King**  
Chairperson

**Daphne Hiew**  
Secretary

**Tony Macafee**  
Treasurer

**Brooke McKail**  
Board Member

**John Rutherford**  
Board Member

**Ajit Singh Chauhan**  
Board Member

**Lou Gartland**  
Board Member

## Staff

**Jenni Smith**  
Chief Executive Officer

**Soni Baidar Rajbhandari**  
Community  
Development Worker

**Oscar Cantieni**  
Community Lawyer

**Dylan Goldsworthy**  
Youth Lawyer

**Cameron Hunter**  
Youth & Family Violence Lawyer

**Milka Jankovic**  
Administration Manager

**Alexandra Kersey**  
Family Violence Lawyer

**Emma Mackay**  
Community Lawyer

**Tania McKenna**  
Partnerships and Community  
Development Manager

**Cassandra Meade**  
Community Lawyer

**Caterina Medici**  
Administration Officer

**Marquita Nolan**  
Legal Practice Manager

**Gagandeep Sharma**  
Community  
Development Worker

**Karisse Sinclair**  
Administration Assistant

**Shauna Stanley**  
International Students Lawyer /  
Community Development Worker

**Amelia Sturton**  
Senior Lawyer

**Morgan Wright**  
Mental Health Support  
Coordinator

**Thaera Yonan**  
Community  
Development Worker

## Casual Staff

**Bridget Dwyer**  
Community Lawyer

**Su Robertson**  
Project Coordinator

**Pippa Whishaw**  
Community Development &  
Communications Officer

**Helen Yandell**  
Community Lawyer

## Departing Staff

**Cameron Bloye**  
Complex Case Coordinator

**Tania Cass**  
Project Officer

**Flora Culpan**  
Family Violence  
Community Coordinator

**Ella Dunstan**  
Family Violence Lawyerr

**Heyam Haddad**  
Paralegal Community Worker

**Joseph Ishow**  
Family Violence Lawyer

**Cheryl Koh**  
Policy Officer

**Alana Ray**  
Family Law  
& Family Violence Lawyer

**Nhirushni Somasundaram**  
Immigration Lawyer

## Volunteers

**Thomas Kelly**  
La Trobe University

**Kiara Fernando**  
La Trobe University



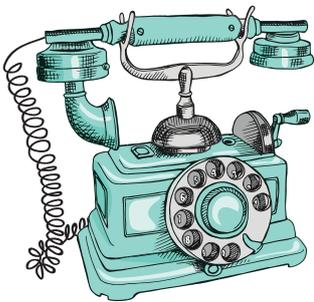
## FUNDING AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Thank you to all our funders, pro bono partners, community partners and supporters*

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| Anglicare   | Headspace<br>(Craigieburn Central)   | North-West Primary Care<br>Partnership          |
| Arabic Welfare  | Hope Street (Brunswick)  | Oorja Foundation                                |
| Banksia Gardens Community<br>Services   | Hume City Council  | Refugee Legal                                   |
| Berry Street  | Hume Domestic and Family<br>Violence Network   | Ridley College                                  |
| Broadmeadows Magistrates'<br>Court  | Hume Whittlesea LLEN   | Russell Kennedy Law Firm                        |
| Brotherhood of St Laurence,<br>Broadmeadows   | InTouch  | Safe steps                                      |
| Centre for Culture Ethnicity<br>and Health  | InTouch  | SBS Punjabi                                     |
| Communities for Children,<br>Uniting  | John Moore, Barrister  | Shahed Sharify Barrister                        |
| Consumer Action<br>Legal Centre   | John T Reid Charitable Trust   | Spectrum  |
| Corrs Chambers Westgarth  | Josef Kangan Institute<br>Broadmeadows   | Sunbury Cobaw Community<br>Health Centre        |
| Dallas Neighbourhood House  | La Trobe University  | Tenants Victoria                                |
| Department of Education<br>and Training – Respectful<br>Relationship North West<br>Region | Marie Segraves,<br>Monash University   | Thorne Harbour Health                           |
| Department of Social Services   | Maria Vamvakinou, Federal<br>Member of Parliament for<br>Calwell & Deputy Chair of the<br>Joint Standing Committee on<br>Migration | Tom Battersby Barrister                         |
| Didi Bahini Samaj   | Maternal and Child Health  | United Imans & Duaat<br>Victoria                |
| DPV Health  | Mitchell Shire   | Uniting   |
| Family Relationship Centre<br>(Broadmeadows) – McKillop                                   | Melbourne Polytechnic<br>Broadmeadows  | Urbis   |
| Family Services   | Merri Health   | VICSEG  |
| Fawkner Primary School  | Mind Australia   | Victoria Law Foundation                         |
| Federation of Community<br>Legal Centres  | Moreland City Council  | Victoria Legal Aid                              |
| Foundation House  | Moreland Family Violence<br>Network  | Victoria Legal Services Board<br>& Commissioner |
| Gamblers Help, Banyule<br>Community Health  | Multicultural Centre for<br>Women's Health   | Victoria Police                                 |
| Glenroy Secondary College   | North West Area Mental<br>Health Service   | VincentCare                                     |
| Glenroy Youth Projects  |  | Women's Health in the North<br>Youth Projects   |



# NORTHERN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE



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*Find us*

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