

2026 IMPACT REPORT

STRENGTHENING ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN MITCHELL SHIRE

Between 2021 and 2046, the population for Mitchell Shire is forecast to increase by 171,941 persons (345.99% growth), at an average annual change of 6.16%.

Community growth in Melbourne's northern corridor is outpacing the availability of housing, employment opportunities and health services.

As a result, residents are experiencing declining housing affordability and availability, rising unemployment, and an increase in family violence incidents.



Members of Parliament, Northern CLC board and staff at the launch of the Wallan Office

While these are significant societal challenges, many have legal dimensions and can often be addressed through legal solutions at an individual level. Northern CLC identified the growing legal need and with funding support from the Victorian Legal Services Board & Commissioner, Northern CLC established a legal site in Wallan in September 2024.

SUPPORTING THOSE MOST AT RISK

The service has successfully reached people experiencing significant disadvantage. Delivering place-based services has increased the number of Mitchell Shire residents we reach (155% increase) and services we provide (138% increase).

Clients supported through this project experience systemic disadvantage that not only contributes to legal issues but also creates significant barriers to resolving them. In Melbourne's northern corridor, access to disability support services, language assistance and crisis accommodation is particularly limited, making timely legal support both critical and often the key to securing broader assistance and protection.

80%

Financially disadvantaged

75%

exp. Family Violence

25%

Homeless or at risk of homelessness

17%

Born outside Australia

35%

Living with a disability

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Wallan office has enabled local residents to access timely legal assistance, reducing barriers associated with travel, cost and lack of local service availability. Clients received support across family violence, family law, employment, tenancy, migration, debt and child protection matters, reducing the personal, social and economic impacts of unresolved legal issues.

HOUSING



Tenancies secured and mortgage stress relieved

EMPLOYMENT



Employment retained or compensation paid

CRIME



Diversion and charges withdrawn

FINANCES



Debts waived and property entitlements accessed

PARENTING



Children living safely with parents

VICTIMS SUPPORT



Compensation and referrals

*Legal assistance generated more than **\$87,665** in recorded financial benefits*

***100%** of surveyed clients told us that wait times were reasonable, and staff were skilled and knowledgeable*

AVREEN'S STORY

A specialist family violence worker referred Avreen, a newly arrived migrant woman, to Northern CLC after learning about the service through local network engagement. Avreen and her teenage daughter, Amrit, had fled serious family violence and relocated to lower Mitchell Shire. Following her disclosure of abuse, Avreen had experienced isolation from her community and faced complex legal issues across both Victoria and New South Wales.

Northern CLC provided immediate legal assistance, advising on intervention orders, family law and property matters, while coordinating with a NSW lawyer to respond to a malicious intervention order application brought by the perpetrator. Through this collaborative approach, final intervention orders were obtained to protect both Avreen and Amrit.

Northern CLC continues to support the family with Victims of Crime Assistance applications, helping them recover from years of physical, emotional and financial abuse. Through integrated legal and cross-jurisdictional advocacy, Avreen and Amrit secured safety, legal protection and ongoing support to rebuild their lives.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY CAPABILITY

Northern CLC delivered legal education activities to increase community legal knowledge and capability and strengthen pathways to assistance. These activities increased community awareness of legal rights and available supports, helping residents recognise issues earlier and seek assistance before problems escalated.

Over two years, the project delivered:

- 11 community legal education activities reaching over 450 people
- Community forums addressing family violence, financial abuse and housing stress
- School-based engagement activities
- Community outreach events and information stalls
- The Take the First Step peer education program supporting culturally diverse women to become community leaders and advocates



Take the First Step Program Participants

STRENGTHENING SECTOR RESPONSES

The project has strengthened the community sector's capacity to identify legal issues and connect people with help earlier.

Northern CLC:

- Established referral pathways with health, family violence, housing and community service organisations
- Delivered training and professional development workshops for frontline workers
- Participated in regional family violence and community networks
- Supported service providers through legal secondary consultations and advice.
- Referral data demonstrates the strength of these relationships, with 304 referrals received from a broad range of community organisations and professional networks.

More than 90% of training participants reported increased confidence identifying legal issues, explaining legal options and making referrals for legal assistance following workshop participation

STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS RESPONSES

Through its growing local presence, Northern CLC provided an informed legal perspective within regional planning, service development and policy discussions, ensuring the legal experiences of local residents contribute to system improvement efforts.

The project contributed to:

- Family violence service system reform discussions
- Mitchell Shire Council's Health and Human Services Gap Analysis
- Regional advocacy through family violence networks
- Law reform submissions relating to violence against women and children
- Advocacy that contributed to additional government investment and funding sustainability.

Recognising the potential impact of natural disasters on the local community, Northern CLC has invested in building its organisational readiness, systems, partnerships and workforce capability to enable an effective legal response during and after disaster events.

BUILDING ON STRONG FOUNDATIONS

What began as a small legal service has evolved into a growing place-based model supported by coordinated legal assistance, strong community partnerships, and growing community trust. The establishment of the Wallan office has embedded legal assistance within the local community, increased access to justice for vulnerable residents, strengthened sector capability and created a foundation for ongoing social impact across Mitchell Shire.

After two years, the impact evaluation has demonstrated that place-based legal services deliver significant and measurable outcomes for individuals, communities and local systems. With program funding ending in 2028, continued investment will provide an opportunity to consolidate and expand this impact, ensuring that residents of Mitchell Shire continue to benefit from accessible, locally embedded legal support into the future.

Northern Community Legal Centre acknowledges the support of the Victorian Legal Services Board & Commissioner, the Victorian Government, Mitchell Shire Council and our many community and service sector partners who have enabled and contributed to the success of our place-based Wallan service.