



## **And the 2025 Word of the Year winner is...**

Maybe it's a little early to be predicting the 2025 Word of the Year winner, but we're feeling quietly confident here at Northern CLC. And our tip is 'Partnerships'.

Successful integrated partnerships with service providers are vital to our work. And it's going to be a special focus for us this year. We'll be finding new ways to strengthen and expand these partnerships, leading to more effective, more efficient results for clients.

Speaking of efficiency, we recently created an online portal that service providers can use to refer clients to us. More on that below.

Also in this edition, we look at the booming demand for our services following a highly productive integrated partnership with maternal child health nurses.

We discuss the precarious future of a successful pilot program we've been running in crisis accommodation centres. We've got the skills but need help paying the bills!

And we're delighted to be ringing in the new year with some new faces around the office. As our numbers grow, so do the quality and range of our services. Plus, it's always nice to have new friends around the lunch table!



Finally, from everyone here at Northern CLC, Ramadan Mubarak to all that honour this important month of reflection and coming together as a community.

## **It's never been easier to refer clients to Northern CLC**

We've recently streamlined the process for our partners and other social services to refer clients who need legal help. Check out our new online referral portal!

[REFERRAL PORTAL](#)

But maybe you're not sure whether your client needs referring...?

As always, we are happy to provide training to staff at partner services about how to use 'legal health checks' to identify clients' legal issues. If you'd like to discuss training for your team, contact [cle@northernclc.org.au](mailto:cle@northernclc.org.au).

## **Referrals double in six months: why integrated partnerships need time (and money) to grow**

The number of casework files opened for clients with complex family violence issues has more than doubled in the past six months via one of our specialist partnership pathways.

In 2022, we established the [North-West Enhanced Pathways](#) project in collaboration with maternal and child health nurses. Within this integrated health-justice model, we work with specialist nurses to train them to screen clients for potential legal issues, including issues relating to family violence.

The project showed promise from the get-go. Across the 2023/24 financial year, we helped more than 80 clients with complex family violence matters who were referred by nurses.

Now, demand is booming.

We spoke to a maternal and child health nurse who's involved with the project.

*"The partnership with NCLC has opened a pathway to legal support I did not know existed. [It has] increased my knowledge and confidence to talk about legal rights with parents. Vulnerable families have received the support they need to advocate for themselves and their families... It has been a gamechanger in giving the support needed to empower parents and keep themselves and their children safe."*

The recent spike in casework files opened shows that integrated partnerships take time to reach peak efficacy — and it can take years before

we know the true scale of the issues these partnerships are set up to address. Building trust with other workers requires ongoing training and support.

We are grateful to the Commonwealth government for investing in this project since 2022. Long-term funding helps us recruit and retain staff, and build strong, high-impact partnerships.

## **The fragile success of our outreach work at family violence crisis accommodation**

In the past year, we have helped over 100 extremely vulnerable women fleeing family violence at crisis accommodation centres. But the project that enables us to do this work is in danger of folding.

We are now seeking urgent funding to sustain our Safe Steps to Legal Rights pilot project, which provides on-site legal support to women — and their children — at serious risk of homelessness across three family violence crisis accommodation sites.

For now, we are making space for the most urgent cases by reducing our core services, but we just don't have capacity to help every woman who needs it.

We started Safe Steps to Legal Rights in 2024 as a test model for an integrated partnership with Safe Steps, which is the only 24/7 family violence response centre in Victoria, providing a state-wide entry point for victims/survivors.

Their clients are at the extreme end of risk due to recognised barriers to seeking help:

- 63% are culturally and linguistically diverse
- 13% are aged under 25
- 23% don't have permanent residency

- 10% are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- 10% are LGBTQIA+
- 13% are pregnant
- 16% have disability

We received seed funding for the project from the Mercy Foundation in September and added an outreach to the Salvation Army, which provides short-term and medium-term refuge sites in our catchment.

No family should be left homeless because of their family violence experience. We desperately need ongoing funding for these high-impact partnerships.





## Helping workers from Broady to the border

In February, our CEO Jenni Smith and Managing Employment Lawyer Eliza Meehan travelled to Mildura to promote the [Working Women's Centre](#) at a Sisters Day Out event run by Djirra.

It was a great opportunity to showcase our work in employment law – and promote the fact that, via the WWC, our lawyers can help anyone from the northern suburbs all the way to the New South Wales border.

The Working Women's Centre launched in 2024 to provide legal advice to Victorian women and non-binary people with workplace-related matters. It is a non-government consortium made up of four community legal centres, including Northern CLC.

Working together with local organisations, our specialist lawyers can help with a variety of issues, including:

- Wage theft
- Discrimination
- Unfair dismissal
- Sham contracting
- Workplace entitlements
- Parental leave
- Accessing family violence leave at work
- Discrimination
- Sexual harassment
- Workplace bullying

For legal advice on workplace issues contact the Working Women's Centre on 1800 WWC VIC ([1800 992 842](tel:1800992842)) Monday-Friday 9.30am-3pm. Alternatively, contact NCLC directly on (03) 9310 4376.

## What's coming up at NCLC?

### More handy fact sheets

We're always adding new fact sheets to help clients better understand common legal issues. We'll be adding new fact sheets on scams and employment rights very soon, so watch this space!

You can check out our existing fact sheets (in both English and Arabic) here!

TAKE ME TO THE FACT SHEETS

*Northern Community Legal Centre acknowledges and respects the traditional custodians whose lands we are fortunate to live and work on. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and future.*

**Northern Community Legal Centre**

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