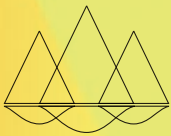


FEDERATION *of* COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES (Victoria) INC.



ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16 | ACHIEVING JUSTICE: COMMUNITY LAW IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT





CHAIRPERSON *and* EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

Belinda Lo
CHAIRPERSON

This year community legal centres (CLCs) continued to work on behalf of vulnerable people in a changing and complex environment. A new National Partnership Agreement altered the way the community legal sector is funded by the Commonwealth; while in Victoria responses to the Royal Commission into Family Violence and Access to Justice Review highlighted the sector's expertise and critical impact. For the Federation, it was a year of advocating on behalf of the sector to ensure that decision-makers were well informed about our members' work and the needs of the vulnerable people they assist.

Supporting members to meet legal need

In 2015–16, Victorian community legal centres helped more than 150,000 people with serious legal problems and provided legal advice and casework services to over 60,000 Victorians. Once again our members witnessed an increase in the number of people seeking their help with legal problems stemming from family violence, tenancy issues, employment and family law.

Nationally, CLCs were forced to turn away nearly 160,000 people from free legal assistance. Despite the overwhelming need, CLCs face an uncertain future. Federal Government funding cuts will see a 30 per cent decrease in funding to the sector from July 2017 and beyond. These impending cuts threaten to undermine free legal help for people who cannot afford a private lawyer and who are unable to access legal aid.

This changing landscape across the legal assistance sector has meant that our role in representing the interests of our members and their clients has become more important

than ever. The Federation worked hard over the past year to advocate and campaign for the reversal of these cuts and secure sustainable funding to meet the growing legal needs of vulnerable Victorians. We contributed to the Law Council of Australia's *Legal Aid Matters* campaign and actively engaged in the *Fund Equal Justice* campaign run by the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC).

More positively, in Victoria, the State Government announced modest but welcome increases to community legal centre funding. These lifted the share of State funding for community legal centres to well over sixty per cent, compared with a Federal contribution of less than forty per cent, even before planned Federal cuts commence.

Supporting a strong sector

With the support of the Federation, CLCs are working hard to improve the way they identify and articulate their impact as individual organisations and as a sector. With funding support from Victoria Legal Aid's Community Legal Centre Innovation and Transformation Fund, we are working to build capacity in seven member centres to identify outcomes and measure and monitor their services. As part of this project, the Federation will also lead the development of a sector-wide outcomes framework, which will provide an overarching narrative of our impact and enhance our collective evidence-base for advocacy.

We continued to provide training and professional development, including offering a CPD Day attended by more than 150 lawyers, which sought to showcase and develop key lawyering skills that are unique to community lawyers. Community lawyers are working in innovative and complex environments, including health-justice partnerships and



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Serina McDuff
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

integrated models with social workers and financial counsellors. They therefore have specific professional development needs and we will continue to ensure those needs are met and key skills are shared.

As part of continuing efforts to improve service delivery, this year also saw the continuation of the NACLCL National Accreditation Scheme, coordinated in Victoria by the Federation. Victorian CLCs' constructive engagement with the scheme confirmed the sector's commitment to quality and continuous improvement.

Advocating for change

This year has seen the Federation at the forefront of efforts to maximise access to justice for Victorians. Early in the year, the Federation and its members participated in the landmark Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Federation made 63 recommendations to the Commission, drawing on our policy expertise in family violence and on the work of a wide range of member centres. We also continued to participate in the Chief Magistrate's Taskforce and State Government family violence forums, as well as contributing to key coronial inquests into family violence homicides.

Throughout the year, working groups drawn from our membership undertook law reform work across a range of areas. The Infringements Working Group produced a position paper outlining a series of reforms to address the disproportionate impact of the infringement system on vulnerable people. The work of this group has been influential in the changes to the *Infringements Act* that will be implemented in 2017, with many of their key

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policy positions reflected in the reforms. Our Tenancy Working Group worked tirelessly to advocate for tenants' rights during a review of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic.)* and many other groups undertook important work, showing the strength of working together.

The Victorian Government announced an Access to Justice Review in October 2015, with the Federation and many of our members committing resources to respond and ensure that our clients and communities were well represented throughout the review.

Effective, evidence-based criminal justice policies were promoted by our Smart Justice Project, with key data and information updated and new infographics published on problem-solving courts and justice reinvestment. We also held a messaging workshop to ensure we utilise persuasive communication.

In February our executive officer, Liana Buchanan, was appointed Victoria's new Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People. Liana provided strong leadership, combining collaboration with centres, stakeholders, funders and government with skilled and reasoned advocacy on key issues, including working to ameliorate and respond to the challenges of a new National Partnership Agreement. In May, the Board appointed respected lawyer, campaigner and advocate, Serina McDuff, as our new executive officer. The Board are confident Serina's skills and experience will make a vital contribution and will help to ensure a strong community legal sector in Victoria.

The Federation's work this year shows what is possible with a dedicated and collaborative community legal sector.

ABOUT *the* FEDERATION *of* COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES

The Federation is the peak body for 49 community legal centres (CLCs) in Victoria, leading and supporting excellence in the community legal sector to make justice accessible for all.

The Federation:

- » provides services and support for community legal centres, working to maintain and develop a strong and effective CLC sector;
- » conducts law reform and policy work to advance social justice and a fair legal system;
- » provides information and referrals to people seeking legal assistance; and
- » promotes the purpose, services, value and accessibility of community legal centres.

The Federation assists its membership to collaborate for justice. CLC workers come together through working groups and other networks to exchange ideas and improve CLC services.

We regularly work in partnership with government, legal aid, the private legal profession and community partners. The Federation is an incorporated association. Its seven-member management committee is drawn from CLCs.



About community legal centres

Community legal centres are independent, community organisations that provide free legal services to the public. CLCs provide free legal advice, information and representation to nearly 130,000 Victorians each year.

Generalist CLCs provide services on a range of legal issues to people in their local geographic area. There are generalist community legal centres in metropolitan Melbourne and in rural and regional Victoria.

Specialist CLCs focus on groups of people with special needs or particular areas of law such as mental health, tenancy, consumer law, employment law, asylum seekers and the environment.

CLCs receive funds and resources from a range of sources including State, Federal and local government, philanthropic foundations, contributions and donations. Centres also harness the energy and expertise of thousands of volunteers across Victoria.

CLCs provide effective and innovative solutions to legal problems based on their experience within their community. It is CLCs' community relationship that distinguishes them from other legal services and allows them to respond effectively to the needs of our communities as they arise and change.

CLCs integrate legal assistance for individual clients with community legal education, community development and law reform projects that are based on client need and preventative in outcome.

CLCs are committed to collaboration with government, legal aid, the private legal profession and community partners to ensure the best outcomes for our clients and the justice system in Australia.



OPPOSITE PG: Carolyn Bond AO and Morgan Koegel made valuable volunteer contributions to the Federation, with Morgan also helping with office coordination.



ABOVE LEFT: Communications Manager, Darren Lewin-Hill, worked with a range of media this year to gain coverage for the work of the Federation, member centres, and the national *Fund Equal Justice* campaign.

ABOVE RIGHT: Victorian Accreditation Coordinator, Jen Missing, this year coordinated our work on a national accreditation scheme, and guided and supported Victorian community legal centres through the process.

Federation Management Committee

Chairperson

Belinda Lo (Eastern Community Legal Centre)

Treasurer

James Ferguson (KPMG)

Secretary

Kristen Wallwork (Springvale Monash Legal Service)

General Members

Zana Bytheway (JobWatch)
Jackie Galloway (Peninsula Community Legal Centre)
Nick Hudson (Barwon Community Legal Service)
Ben Zika (Social Security Rights Victoria)

Victorian Members of NACLAC Advisory Council

Liana Buchanan (To 23 March 2016)
Jackie Galloway
Serina McDuff (From 20 June 2016)

Federation staff

Executive Officer

Liana Buchanan (To 23 March 2016)
Serina McDuff (From 20 June 2016)

Communications Manager

Darren Lewin-Hill

Manager, Operations & Sector Support

Cate Edwards

Manager, Sector Development & Strategy

Katie Fraser

Senior Policy Advisers

Dr Chris Atmore
Michelle McDonnell

Senior Project and Policy Adviser

Bonnie Renou

Wanting Justice Project Officer

Emily Cousins

Accreditation Coordinator

Jen Missing

Project Manager – Outcomes Measurement Framework

Rohan Thwaites

Office Coordinators

Laura Hogan
Veronica Hopkins
Jess McIntosh
Patrick Sloyan (To March 2016)
Nicole Smith

Training & Events Coordinator

Patrick Sloyan (To March 2016)

Finance Officer

Lakmini Welaratne

CLC Law Graduate

Kathleen O'Callaghan

Federation interns and volunteers

Carolyn Bond AO, Audrey Foley, Antonia Kent, Morgan Koegel

Funding and support

Funders

Federal Attorney-General's Department
(Bridging the Distance Project)
Legal Services Board (Wanting Justice Project)
The Myer Foundation (Smart Justice)
Portland House Foundation (Smart Justice)
Victoria Legal Aid's Community Legal Centre Innovation
& Transformation Fund
Victoria Legal Aid Community Legal Services Program (CLSP)

In kind and pro bono

Innovative Knowledge Development (IKD) & Jil Toovey
Reichstein Foundation (Smart Justice messaging workshop)

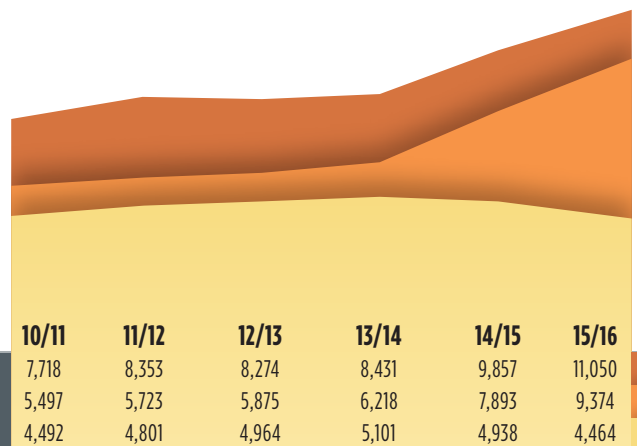
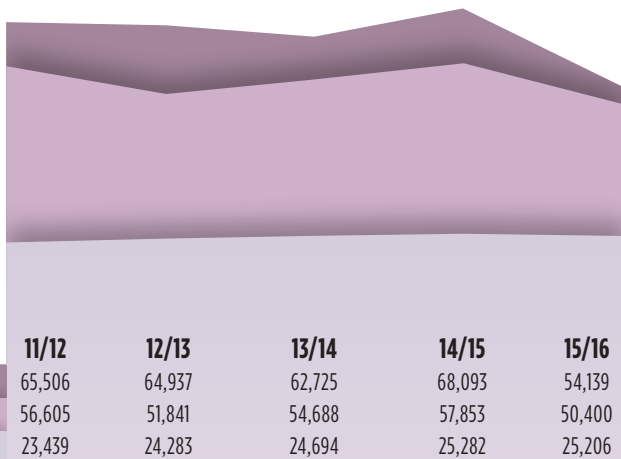
Sponsorship/Donations

Clayton Utz
Russell Kennedy
Baker and McKenzie,
With special thanks to Allens

Victorian CLC services

CLC advice,
information *and* casework
for individuals

Family
violence



Volunteer contributions

1,975 volunteers
contributed

2,612.1 hours
of work per week

Partnerships

76% of CLCs

have partnerships with non-legal
community organisations to
deliver legal services

60% of CLCs

had partnerships, contributing
over 10,000 hours of assistance
to CLCs

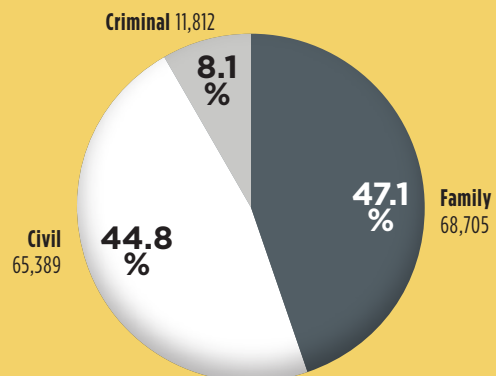
19% spike

in advice compared to the
previous year

12% increase

in cases opened compared
to the previous year

Broad law type



Top five legal problem types

Domestic family violence orders

Family law relating to children

Fines

Traffic and motor vehicle offences

Family law relating to property

Client demographics

Community legal education activities

Client age

<18	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
1,310	21,615	22,925	11,790	5,895

20% of CLC clients identified as having a disability

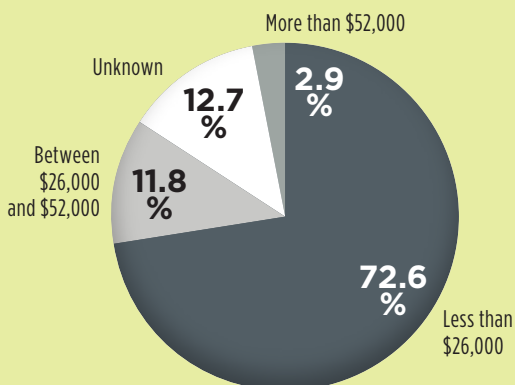
Gender

58% Female **41%** Male



NB: 1% other

Client income



Community legal education

10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
852	908	989	1,159	1,196	1,152

Systemic advocacy & policy reform

80% of CLCs

reported undertaking policy work and systemic advocacy including:

- preparing submissions to inquiries (100%)
- meeting with MPs (76%)
- consulting with and appearing before inquiries and reviews (56%)

71.4% increase

188 law reform and policy projects were recorded on CLSIS, a significant increase from 108 last year

Federation information & referral service

1,216 Victorians assisted in 2015-16

Top five Federation referrals

Employment law	Family violence	Tenancy	Family law	Consumer issues
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OUTSTANDING CLC LEADERS RECOGNISED



In May the Law Institute of Victoria Awards honoured five major contributors to the work of community legal centres.

Among them, Justice Connect Homeless Law and Women's Legal Service Victoria were honoured when Lucy Adams and Emma Smallwood shared the Community Lawyer of the Year Award.

In an acceptance speech, Lucy described Homeless Law's intensive legal representation of 450 of the most vulnerable members of the Victorian community, which prevented 139 people being evicted into homelessness. She also described how Homeless Law had helped 80 people resolve overwhelming fines incurred while homeless through 'things you're much more likely to be doing if you don't have a safe roof over your head'.

Emma Smallwood spoke about the more than 200 women who had been assisted through the Women's Legal Service's *Stepping Stones* project, which succeeded in reducing women's collective debt by more than \$300,000. The debts were accrued in the context of family violence, often by the women's abusive partners, Emma said.

OPPOSITE PG:
The Young Workers Centre this year joined the Federation as a new specialist community legal centre focusing on young peoples' rights in the workplace.

LEFT: Lucy Adams and Emma Smallwood (L to R), shared the Law Institute of Victoria's Community Lawyer of the Year Award on behalf of Justice Connect Homeless Law and Women's Legal Service (Victoria).

RIGHT TOP: Our October 2015 Annual General Meeting saw strong engagement from our member centres.

MIDDLE: Fitzroy Legal Service executive officer, Claudia Fatone, at the launch of the *Law Handbook* last November.

BOTTOM: Stephanie Tonkin and Denis Nelthorpe present at the 2015 CLCs national conference in August 2015 at Melbourne.





FEDERATION MEMBERS

This year saw the merger of the former Moreland Community Legal Centre and Broadmeadows Community Legal Service to form the Northern Community Legal Centre.

In February, the Young Workers Centre was launched as a new specialist community legal centre to protect the rights of young people in the workplace.

Generalist centre members

Barwon Community Legal Service; Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre; Casey Cardinia Community Legal Service; Central Highlands Community Legal Centre; Darebin Community Legal Centre; Eastern Community Legal Centre (incorporating Yarra Ranges Community Legal Centre); Fitzroy Legal Service; Flemington & Kensington Community Legal Centre; Gippsland Community Legal Service; Hume Riverina Community Legal Service; Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre (incorporating Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre); Monash Oakleigh Legal Service; Moonee Valley Legal Service; Murray Mallee Community Legal Service; Inner Melbourne Community Legal; Northern Community Legal Centre; Peninsula Community Legal Centre; Southport Community Legal Service; Springvale Monash Legal Service; St Kilda Legal Service Co-Op; West Heidelberg Community Legal Service; WEstjustice; and Whittlesea Community Legal Service.

Specialist centre members

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service (Victoria); Animal Law Institute; Association of Employees with Disability Legal Centre; Asylum Seeker Resource Centre; Consumer Action Law Centre; Disability Discrimination Legal Service; Emma House Domestic Violence Services; Environmental Justice Australia; Family Law Legal Service; First Step Legal Service; Human Rights Law Centre; inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence; JobWatch; Justice Connect; Law and Advocacy Centre for Women; Melbourne University Student Union Legal Service; Mental Health Legal Centre; Refugee & Immigration Legal Centre; Seniors Rights Victoria; Social Security Rights Victoria;

Tenants Union of Victoria; Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service; Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service; Women's Legal Service Victoria; Young Workers Centre; and Youthlaw.

Associate member

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

Federation member benefits

In 2015–16 members paid an annual membership fee of \$440 to the Federation plus a contribution to the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) which is normally 0.5 per cent of the CLC's annual income. Supported by Victoria Legal Aid, the Federation provides its members with a range of services and benefits, including:

- » representation of the sector's interests to stakeholders and advocacy around funding and sector change;
- » accreditation, including access to best practice templates for organisational policies and procedures;
- » facilitation of networking and collaboration across the sector through working groups and networks;
- » support for CLCs' client-informed law reform and policy work, and advocacy on law reform and policy issues relevant to CLC clients;
- » free telephone industrial relations advice;
- » free counselling services through the employee assistance program for all CLC employees and their families;
- » free management support services for CLC managers through a manager hotline;
- » free or low-cost professional development; and
- » online legal resources and low-cost insurance organised by the NACLC.



LEADING *and* SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE *in the* COMMUNITY LEGAL SECTOR

Leading and facilitating collaboration, coordination and information-sharing between CLCs

The sector development team this year continued to work to build capacity of the community legal sector in Victoria, and to advocate on behalf of the sector to key stakeholders, including Victoria Legal Aid, the Department of Justice and Regulation, and the Federal Attorney-General's Department.

The Federation continues to put together a weekly newsletter for the sector, *Sector News*, which includes information about issues of relevance to the sector, trainings, and news about community legal centre staff and projects.

Working with CLC boards and committees

The Federation ran one event for CLC boards, providing members of CLC boards with an opportunity to meet and learn about some of the work of the Federation and the current challenges for the sector. CLC board members who attended are now receiving regular updates and correspondence from the Federation.

Developing the CLC workforce

Adaptive Leadership Alumni

The Adaptive Leadership Program has been offered to community legal centre staff by Jil Toovey for the last four years. Nearly 80 people have completed the program, which aims to build leadership skills and confidence to deal with some of the complex issues presented by CLC work.

In 2016 the Federation started to work with Jil to identify ways sector capacity can be built to help deliver the program and make it more relevant to CLC work as it continues to evolve.

Ten CLC staff who are 'ALP Alumni' are now working with Jil to build their facilitation skills and will co-deliver the next iteration of the Adaptive Leadership Program in 2017. The Federation is grateful to Jil for her continued commitment to working with and developing the community legal sector.

Philanthropic funding and CLCs workshop

Community legal centres are increasingly accessing philanthropic funding to support their work. Staff and volunteers from member centres came together this year to hear from some of the leading philanthropic organisations with an interest in improving access to justice. Representatives from the Legal Services Board, the Myer Foundation, the Reichstein Foundation, Portland House and Philanthropy Australia discussed how to apply for grant funding and develop good relationships with funders. It was an invaluable opportunity for centres to hear directly from funders and the Federation will aim to make this an annual event.



LEFT:
Committee of management chairperson, Belinda Lo, talks supporting community legal excellence at a Federation event for boards this year with the Federation's Katie Fraser and Rohan Thwaites.

BELOW:
Adaptive leaders enjoy a meal together at the Adaptive Leadership Program Dinner.

Working to improve access for RRR CLCs

The Federation has long been aware that it is difficult for CLCs in rural and regional areas to fully participate in the meetings and networks hosted by the Federation. CLC staff are not always able to travel to the city for meetings, and participation by telephone is a poor substitute. In 2015, the Federation applied for funding to establish video-conferencing in the RRR CLCs. In 2016, after several funding applications, the Federal Attorney-General's Department provided funding for a project to implement video-conferencing in RRR centres and the Federation. A consultant has been engaged and we hope to complete this work by March 2017.



Continuing Professional Development Day for CLC lawyers

The Federation put together a Continuing Professional development (CPD) program for CLC lawyers in March, to help them get the CPD points they need for the year, and to ensure that expertise in 'community lawyering' continues to be shared with the sector. It was the biggest CPD Day ever, with more than 130 attendees from across the sector, and feedback was positive:

'Really fantastic program and set of presenters. One of the very best training sessions I've attended.'

'Richard Cash was fantastic and the sector would benefit from greater training around trauma, as well as investment in appropriate debriefing and other support/supervision in our workplaces (in line with social work and similar fields).'



.....
Really fantastic program and set of presenters. One of the very best training sessions I've attended.

We are very grateful to the Professional Standards Working Group, which helped develop an agenda for the day, and to the CLC lawyers and other staff who took time to present on issues including strategic casework and how CLC lawyers can work with in-house social workers.

Accreditation to ensure consistent quality CLC services

The National Accreditation Scheme (NAS) was introduced by the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) in 2011 to enhance sector capacity to develop and implement effective management systems and to improve outcomes for CLC clients and the broader community. The Standards and requirements for community legal centres were developed in



The Adaptive Leadership Program workshop was a chance to focus on shaping the leadership skills of the community legal sector under the expert guidance of Jill Toovey.

consultation with the sector and complement the NACLC *Risk management guide*. Accreditation is a requirement for full membership of the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

The NAS Phase 2

Following a review of Phase 1 and extensive consultation, the NAS Guidelines were revised and the assessment process further developed to link between the NAS and the annual PII cross-check. CLC governance bodies are more actively engaged, including board member interviews during site visits and board sign-off of improvement plans developed to guide quality improvement activities. All boards and management committees are encouraged to use the NAS standards as a key reference and to constantly encourage, monitor and support activities to strengthen CLC performance and processes.

A new standard, *Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and clients* has been included to reflect a national, sector-wide commitment to promote cultural safety across all services. Making resources and support available to assist CLCs to meet this standard will be a priority for the Federation during Phase 2.

Other changes include streamlined standards for client file management and a requirement that centres have documented grievance procedures for handling employment-related workplace issues.

Phase 2 of the NAS commenced at the start of 2016. By the end of June 2016, 12 Victorian CLCs had completed self-assessments and site visits. All of these centres participated in assessments during Phase 1 and had completed work to address identified gaps. Consequently, most found the process to be less onerous and reports from Phase 2 assessments showed a shift in focus from the task of ensuring documented systems are consistent with the standards to reviewing, consolidating and further refining systems according to the specific circumstances for each CLC.

While self-assessment and site visits will continue to provide some impetus for CLCs to review and update documentation, it is anticipated that as the NAS matures and quality improvement becomes embedded in routine CLC management, planning and evaluation processes, the benefit of effective quality improvement systems to support innovation and creativity will become more apparent. Effective, routine evaluation, monitoring and review

processes can enable centres to explore new ideas and approaches and integrate learning into improved models of work with clients and communities.

Measuring outcomes, improving services

In November 2015 the Federation commenced a two-year project designed to build the evaluation capacity of selected Victorian CLCs and create a shared outcomes measurement framework for the Victorian community legal sector.

The Federation identified that development of the framework would assist the sector to demonstrate, articulate and measure the outcomes it achieves through its activities and service delivery, strengthening the ability of CLCs and the Federation to advocate on behalf of the sector and clients.

The framework will be collaboratively designed through consultation with the sector and will provide an opportunity to identify broad outcomes which recognise commonalities across the sector.

The consultation process and the development of the framework were set to commence in July 2016 with a series of roundtables to be led by Lirata Consulting. A draft framework is anticipated by the end of 2016.

The final framework will be presented to the sector for endorsement in late 2017, after it has been tested and refined through the seven CLCs receiving evaluation capacity-building assistance through the project. This project is funded and supported by Victoria Legal Aid's Community Legal Centre Innovation and Transformation Fund.

Evaluation capacity-building with CLCs

This year seven Victorian CLCs and the Federation received assistance from the project consultants to build their evaluation capacity. By improving their internal monitoring and evaluation skills and processes, the CLCs will be better able to demonstrate their impact and design their service delivery to meet the legal needs of the community.

As part of this work, the consultants worked with the CLCs and the Federation to identify monitoring and evaluation priorities and to plan how to achieve them. The Federation will also use the project to improve our capacity to provide monitoring and evaluation support to the sector into the future.

CLC Law Graduate Scheme

The Federation received funding from the Legal Services Board for a Law Graduate scheme spanning four years. Over the course of the project 15 CLCs have hosted eight law graduates providing the best and brightest law graduates with an opportunity to be employed by the Federation and work in several diverse CLCs over the course of a year.

The scheme did what it set out to do. We have retained most of these excellent law graduates in the community legal sector, and in particular in rural and regional CLCs. Federation Law Graduates are sought-after community lawyers, making a significant contribution to access to justice for Victorians.

Six out of eight previous graduates continue to be employed in CLCs. One was employed at a CLC and is now at Victoria Legal Aid, and one has moved on due to family commitments.

Federation law graduates initiated a Neophytes Network providing training, networking and support to new and young CLC lawyers.

All continue to show leadership capacity and capability, presenting at the National Association of Community Legal Centres conference and various other events. Lee Carnie represents the sector on VLA's Sector Innovation and Planning Committee and is the convener of the Referrals Working Group.

The graduates have received unanimous support from the CLCs where they were placed and glowing recommendations and references.

Due to positive experiences in placements in CLCs and the ability of the Federation to provide them with intensive training and development opportunities, the graduates have been able to demonstrate considerable experience – and present referees from – a number of highly regarded CLCs.

Since the scheme began, CLC law graduates have provided assistance to in excess of an estimated 700 clients and added approximately 14,000 hours of additional support to the communities in which they worked.

The Federation continues to look at how the scheme can be continued, but so far has been unsuccessful with applications for funding to continue the scheme in its current form.



A word from Kathleen O'Callaghan, CLC Law Graduate 2015-16

After six months of practical legal training (pretend lawyering) at the Leo Cussen Centre for Law, I couldn't wait to get started in the two four-month placements (being an actual lawyer) the Federation organised for me as the 2015 CLC Law Graduate.

My first gig was at Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) – and what a way to enter the profession! I spent the next four months in the very nurturing care of the team at ECLC, giving advice on everything from fencing disputes and fines, to car accidents and family violence. I worked all over the East, from Hawthorn to Healesville, with plenty of long days (and long lists of intervention order matters) at Ringwood Magistrates' Court in between.

My next four-month placement saw a significant change of scene, at the Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC). My time at CALC saw me off the road and onto the advice line – advising clients on all things consumer law: from unfair contracts to junk insurance and dodgy car deals. I was also able to take part in CALC's policy and campaign meetings, and the robust discussions that inform CALC's strategic approach to casework and advocacy.

Best of all, when my time as the CLC law grad came to an end, I was lucky enough to be offered a position in ECLC's health-justice partnership project that offers advice and assistance to women experiencing family violence. The Federation's graduate program offered such a unique experience as a pathway for new lawyers into the CLC sector – a sector I intend to contribute to for many years to come.



Kathleen (third from the right at the back) spent part of her placement with the Healesville team of the Eastern Community Legal Centre – also known as Yarra Ranges CLC.



HELPING *the* COMMUNITY ACCESS LEGAL ASSISTANCE

National Partnership Agreement signed

The State Attorneys-General signed a new National Partnership Agreement (NPA) for Legal Assistance Services in the last days of June 2015. The Federation worked with NACLCL to advocate on key terms of the NPA, and won some important changes, including a broad definition of financial disadvantage. The definition, which includes ‘a person who does not have the means to pay for their legal representation without incurring serious financial difficulty’, means CLCs can continue to use Federal funds to assist the vulnerable clients in their communities, without imposing strict means tests.

The NPA fundamentally changes the way in which the Federal Government funds community legal services, moving responsibility for allocating Federal CLC funding from the Federal Attorney-General’s Department to the states. In Victoria, the State Attorney-General’s office has notionally allocated the funding from the Commonwealth Legal Services Program to CLCs for the life of the NPA, until 2020. The funding allocation includes distribution of the cuts in Federal funding, a cut of \$2.7 million in Victoria which will take place from 1 July 2017. In other states, such as Queensland, a tender process is being conducted in which CLCs will apply for a reduced pool of funding in a competitive process. By comparison, the allocation of



The Federation worked with NACLCL to advocate on key terms of the National Partnership Agreement, and won some important changes

ABOVE: The Federation engaged in the *Legal Aid Matters* rally in May to support sustainable funding for all free legal assistance services – including CLCs, legal aid, and Aboriginal legal services.

funding in Victoria gives CLCs much greater certainty and ability to plan. The clarity of the funding allocation has also enabled CLCs to plan in advance for the cuts, and to advocate strongly to the Federal Government by stating which positions and services will be cut in individual CLCs.

The NPA also includes a requirement for the states to conduct ‘collaborative service planning’ to promote discussion of strategies for the delivery of services by legal aid commissions and community legal centres within their jurisdiction. The Federal Government has not provided additional funding to facilitate this work. In Victoria, the collaborative service planning process is underway, and we anticipate it will lead to the development of an evidence base on legal need, which will enable the prioritisation of funding to areas with high legal need.

The Federation worked closely with Victoria Legal Aid to settle the terms of a new funding agreement with CLCs, and funding under the NPA started to flow to CLCs in August 2015.

This has been a time of huge change in the legal assistance sector at a national level. The Federation has undertaken significant advocacy work, including with VLA and the State Department of Justice and Regulation to ensure the interests of CLCs, their communities and their clients were represented. We anticipate further advocacy will be required as the implications of collaborative service planning become clearer.



The Federation participated in the national day of social media action for the Community Law Australia #FundEqualJustice campaign, held on 23 June. The day of action trended on Twitter.



Community legal centres nationally face a Federal funding shortfall of around \$100 million over the four years to 30 June 2020. The Federation estimates that centres nationally require Federal funding of at least \$61.6 million a year to meet increasing legal need from vulnerable people.

Fund Equal Justice campaign

This year the Federation continued campaigning to secure sustainable community legal centre funding following the announcement of a 30 per cent national cut by the Federal Government that is set to impact centres nationally in July 2017.

The focus of this work was the Community Law Australia *Fund Equal Justice* campaign led by the National Association of Community Legal Centres in collaboration with State and Territory community legal peaks.

The year began with State and Territory governments signing the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on Legal Assistance Services, which locked in the cuts amid Federal Government claims of funding 'certainty' for community legal centres.

Despite modest investment in family violence legal help through the Federal Government's Women's Safety Package announced in September 2015, the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook in December 2015, the 2016 Federal Budget and a post-Budget family violence announcement left community legal centres nationally facing a broader funding shortfall of \$100 million over four years.

The cuts contradict the Productivity Commission's Inquiry Report into Access to Justice Arrangements with a Federal Government response before the Federal Budget ignoring a key recommendation that combined free legal assistance services be boosted by \$200 million dollars a year.

Responding to the cuts, the *Fund Equal Justice* campaign sustained a program of media advocacy, working with member centres, State, Territory and national peaks to engage Federal Members of Parliament and Senators on the likely impacts of the funding cuts to free legal help for vulnerable people.

As well as working extensively with the media, the Federation produced an infographic and funding fact-check to explain the cuts, and in June wrote an open letter to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull with the support of 13 community organisations, calling for the cuts to be reversed and funding boosted to reflect the Productivity Commission recommendation.

Federation submissions to Access to Justice Review

The Victorian Government announced an Access to Justice Review in October 2015. This came in the context of the new NPA and the release of the Productivity Commission report, which recommended that State and Federal governments together provide urgent interim funding to the legal assistance sector – community legal centres, legal aid commissions, and Aboriginal legal services – of \$200 million per year, a minimum figure pending further research and evidence on the extent of legal need.

The Federation met with the review team on several occasions and made a detailed submission, in which we provided



The Federation and member community legal centres supported the *Legal Aid Matters* rally held at Victoria's County Court on 17 May.

an overview of the role of CLCs in the mixed model of legal assistance services, the adequacy of existing legal assistance services funding, and CLC efforts to understand and better meet legal need.

We also responded to specific terms of reference of the review, including access to legal assistance services and information, diversion from civil litigation and opportunities for improved triage, factors to consider when expanding use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR), the civil jurisdiction of VCAT, and improving *pro bono* relations.

In addition, the Community Legal Education Working Group of the Federation developed a joint submission with Victoria Legal Aid, in which it sought to provide information about the respective roles of VLA and CLCs in community legal education. This submission provided a powerful example of collaboration between CLCs and VLA, and provided a strong statement about the value of CLE and the lack of duplication between CLCs and VLA when it comes to CLE.

The Access to Justice Review was publicly released as the Federation's annual report went to press.

Federation information and referral services

The Federation provides a direct information and referral service for the public via telephone and our website www.communitylaw.org.au. Our contact details are widely listed as a referral point for CLCs and we assist around 1,500 callers each year, helping them to obtain the right legal assistance for a range of legal issues. Employment law was the most common issue callers were seeking help with in 2015–16. Other common issues included fines and traffic offences, family law, family violence and consumer issues.

Our website hosts and provides links to CLC websites and information on finding legal assistance and information. Over the year the site, excluding the CLC sub-webs, received more than 260,000 page views and more than 71,000 visitors.

COMMUNICATIONS

This year again saw extensive media engagement by the Federation through our executive officer and senior policy advisers, with more than 80 stories across print, online, radio and television.

Family violence was the dominant issue in a year that saw the handing down of the final report of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, with a total of 33 media reports. The Federation's participation in a national funding campaign to address Federal Government cuts also resulted in widespread coverage, with 28 reports highlighting the impact of the cuts on free legal help for vulnerable people.

Coverage was also achieved on justice policy, the coronial system and police accountability.

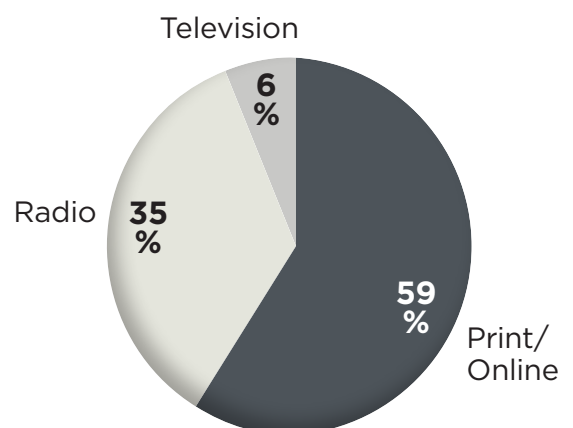
As well as generating its own media, the Federation this year provided media support to ten member centres on related issues,



Family violence was the dominant issue in a year that saw the handing down of the final report of the Royal Commission into Family Violence

together with discrimination, employment law, drug testing and immigration.

The Federation continues to broaden its media networks, this year working with 53 journalists across 28 media channels.





IMPROVING *the* JUSTICE SYSTEM THROUGH LAW REFORM *and* POLICY WORK

A strong year of family violence advocacy

What we want

This year, the Federation continued its work to strengthen Victoria’s family violence system in partnership with member community legal centres, broader family violence organisations, the courts and the Victorian Government.

We aimed to ensure free legal help is a core part of an integrated family violence response in which legal issues are appropriately considered in all aspects of the system.

We want all Victorian women facing family violence to be able to obtain intervention orders tailored to protect themselves and their children, via access to specialist community legal centre lawyers at court. Women and their children also need broader community legal centre help with related issues such as family law, tenancy, and debt arising through past relationships with violent partners.

Currently, only around 28 per cent of women seeking free legal help with family violence intervention order matters are able to access specialist community legal centre help at court. Underfunding and prospective Federal cuts in the context of steeply growing demand threaten to further undermine access to this help, as well as reducing the broader legal assistance available. This will especially affect rural and regional areas, where high need is often coupled with paucity of services.

The appropriate funding of free legal help to escape family violence therefore formed a key part of broader Federation advocacy this year for increased funding of community legal



TOP: Strong advocates for vital change to end family violence – Dr Chris Atmore, Rosie Batty and Liana Buchanan at the NACLC national conference.

ABOVE: A radio studio was familiar territory for the Federation’s Senior Policy Adviser, Dr Chris Atmore this year.

centres to reflect the findings of the Productivity Commission's recommendations in its September 2014 report on access to justice arrangements.

This year we also continued our call for reforms focusing on intervention orders, women's safety at court, and the need for courts to work more effectively to provide safe and effective responses to violence.

What we have done

To work towards these aims, the Federation continued its participation on the Chief Magistrate's Taskforce and in various Victorian Government and community stakeholder forums.

Drawing on our policy leadership and expertise in family violence, we also extensively engaged in Victoria's landmark Royal Commission into Family Violence. Our response included coordinating the work of member community legal centres in making submissions, with a broader Federation submission drawing on extensive member consultations and capturing major themes in more than sixty recommendations to reform Victoria's family violence system.

As well as our submission, the Federation was called on to provide expert oral evidence, and we were active in media advocacy on issues highlighted by the inquiry.

The Federation also continued its work on coronial inquests on family violence homicides, including in our call for a sustainably funded Victorian Systemic Review of Family Violence Deaths – work which also featured in our recommendations to the Royal Commission.

Our impact

Federation advocacy influenced modest, but welcome new Victorian Government investment in community legal centres. Encouragingly, family violence legal help through specialist community legal centre lawyers expanded from 20 centres providing

help at 29 Victorian courts to 23 centres providing help at 41 courts, with a further seven centres providing broader help related to family violence.

At a national level, our advocacy also contributed to a greater focus on family violence and limited new investment in family violence legal help by the Federal Government.

Unfortunately, Federal investment through the Women's Safety Package announced in September 2015 fell well short of reversing broader Federal cuts to community legal centres that will impact not only family violence victims, but broader groups of vulnerable people needing free community legal help.

More positively, a range of the Federation's recommendations was reflected in the final report of Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence, which was released in March this year.

In particular, the Commission recommended the statewide expansion of the Family Violence Court Division, improvements to court safety, better training for magistrates and court staff, the protection of women in circumstances of family violence from laws targeting failure to disclose sexual offences against children, measures to ensure family violence intervention orders are not finalised without



appropriate court scrutiny, and statutory establishment of the Victorian Systemic Review of Family Violence Deaths.

More broadly, the Commission and the Victorian Government response identified weaknesses in a 'silo' approach to responding to and preventing family violence, and instead stressed the need for a genuinely integrated family violence system built on collaboration between government and relevant community organisations, and underpinned by strong governance arrangements.

Valuing such partnerships at both policy and service provision levels makes it much less likely that women and children will 'fall through the cracks' without obtaining the specific supports they need.

The Federation welcomes the opportunity to help build a more holistic and joined-up model, so that rather than encountering an intimidating and confusing system, family violence victims can access a one-stop shop that links them to specialists in order to meet their various needs.

Many of the Royal Commission's recommendations have already met with strong support and investment by the Victorian Government. In the coming year, the Federation will build on its contribution to the Royal Commission report by working alongside government and community partners in the implementation of the recommendations relevant to family violence legal help.

Following on from the Federation's work in the Luke Batty inquest in 2014, we also continued this year to contribute to key coronial inquests into family violence deaths. This included the Federation working with Eastern Community Legal Centre in a joint submission to the inquest into the October 2012 death of Sargun Ragi.

In a finding last October, then State Coroner Ian Gray heeded key recommendations in the submission geared to ensuring police involvement in family violence matters affecting women subject to immigration processes, improving police assessment of risk from family violence, and the creation of a family violence advocacy service.

The coming year will see continued extensive work on family violence focusing on the effectiveness of the legal response, and advocacy for adequate funding to meet growing need for free legal help to keep women and children safe.

As Rosie Batty noted at the Victorian launch of the Royal Commission's report, 'Federal Government cuts to community legal centres have a significant impact for victims of family violence every single day'.

Smart Justice – smart action for a safer community

What we want

We want effective, evidence-based and human-rights-compliant criminal justice policies. We want governments to do what works to cut crime, not what is designed to sound good in a headline. We want to stop murders, rapes, assaults and other crimes by preventing them from occurring through tackling the causes of crime, rather than spending billions of dollars on ineffective punishments that only respond after the damage is done.

While the current government is receptive to a smart justice approach and has acknowledged the need to adopt an evidence-based approach to criminal law and sentencing policy, there's still more we need to achieve, including a government commitment to setting recidivism reduction targets.

We also need a comprehensive public picture on what is, and is not, working with the criminal justice system through better collection and access to justice data. We need to know more about people who do and do not re-offend to begin a legitimate analysis of what is working.

We also call on the government to commit to the roll-out of specialist problem-solving courts to regional Victoria to end 'postcode justice', as well as trials and evaluations of justice reinvestment pilots, where money that would have been spent on prisons is diverted to community-based initiatives which aim to address the underlying causes of crime.

What we have done

Smart Justice has updated data and information about the evidence that should be informing criminal justice policy, publishing new infographics on problem-solving courts and justice reinvestment. We have also

summarised literature and data on areas of criminal justice policy so this can be readily accessible for the community, media and decision-makers in our Smart Justice fact sheets.

In September last year, the Victorian Ombudsman's investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria affirmed Smart Justice advocacy on solutions to the challenges of relying on prisons as an ineffective approach to community safety. The report sets out a blueprint for reform, which has been a focus of the advocacy for our Smart Justice symposium *Remaking Justice* for which extensive planning was undertaken since January this year.

We have continued our core work with the media, developing stories and attracting media attention to growth in the number of women in prison, the connection between overcrowding and the July 2015 riot at the Metropolitan Remand Centre, problems with a harsher parole system and the Ombudsman's landmark prison rehabilitation report.

Three new organisations have joined the coalition – ANTaR, the Penington Institute and the Victorian Association for Restorative Justice. We also held a messaging workshop with key Smart Justice partners in November 2015.

Our impact

Smart Justice has reinvigorated our growing coalition by working closely with key partners on our symposium and through refining our advocacy in our messaging workshop. We are now well placed to extend our reach in informing the community about why we need smart action for a safer community and in achieving a government commitment to data-driven justice to reduce re-offending.



Senior Policy Adviser Michelle McDonnell interviewing Claire Seppings on her Churchill Fellowship and insights into rehabilitative justice in February 2016 for the *Smart Justice Blog*.



WORKING GROUP REPORTS

Access to Interpreters Working Group

Convenor: Suzy Fox | St Kilda Legal Service

The working group oversees the funding allocated to community legal centres (CLCs) for onsite interpreters and translation services by Victorian Interpreting & Translating Services (VITS) and Vicdeaf provided to CLCs by Victoria Legal Aid. Despite this funding, many CLCs do not have access to appropriate levels of funding to ensure all clients who need support with communication can access the service.

The group also monitors CLC use of the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) telephone and onsite interpreting services funded by the Federal Attorney-General's Department. Translating and interpreting services are essential for CLCs to provide a good level of service to members of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, and to those with hearing impairments.

This year has seen some uncertainty in the ability of CLCs to access appropriate levels of service for their communities despite consistent increases in CALD community members accessing CLCs for legal assistance over the last five years. It is important these resources are not only maintained at current levels but increased if interpreter access is identified as a barrier to accessing justice for particular CALD communities.

The working group will continue to advocate on behalf of CLCs to identify interpreting and translation needs and work towards acquiring additional funding and access to alternative interpreting resources such as the use of cost-effective IT remote access to interpreters for regional and rural centres.

TOP LEFT: An esteemed panel: Sam Morgan (Infringements Court), Susan Dobson (Department of Justice and Regulation), Joanne Parkin (Uniting Care ReGen), Judicial Registrar Angela Soldani (Melbourne Magistrates' Court), Damian Stock (Victoria Legal Aid)

Community Development and Community Legal Education Working Group

Convenor: Saskia Weerheim | Peninsula Community Legal Centre

The Community Development and Community Legal Education Working Group (CD & CLE WG) aims to advance justice by empowering vulnerable and disadvantaged people through education. The group provides a dedicated and supportive space for workers to collaborate, innovate and build capacity across the sector.

As well as offering the opportunity for CLC community development and community legal education workers to meet on a formal basis, the working group this year continued to promote CLE as a core component of CLCs, as well as working with each other and with other legal assistance services.

We were pleased to make a joint submission with Victoria Legal Aid to the Department of Justice and Regulation Access to Justice Review. The submission examined the issue of perceived duplication in the development and delivery of CLE with a focus on the collaborative and complementary roles that legal assistance services play in developing and delivering high quality community legal education. We look forward to hearing the outcome of this review.

We have continued to work with VLA and the Infringements Working Group to scope a joint, statewide community legal education project on infringements.

To conclude the financial year in a spirit of collaboration, we organised a speed-networking event at the Victoria Law Foundation. CLE workers from CLCs across the State, VLA, VLF and other organisations that provide community legal education had the opportunity to meet in an informal setting to catch up and share ideas.

OPPOSITE PG: Odyssey House financial counsellor and infringements guru, Garry Rothman, presenting at the Infringements Working Group event.



Family Violence Applicant Lawyers

Working Group

Convenor: Abigail Sullivan |

Women's Legal Service Victoria

The Family Violence Applicant Lawyers Working Group continues to be a great base for networking, support and knowledge-sharing across the State for family violence duty lawyers (FVDL). The opportunity for FVDL to meet and connect face to face to share the challenges and successes of working in family violence has helped strengthen the family violence legal services we provide across the State.

This year focused on expanding the working group's knowledge around legal areas that intersect closely with family violence, such as migration law. In June we had a very informative and enlightening presentation by Jessica Williamson from WLW lawyers on family violence and migration law.

We also experimented with recording the session so people unable to attend could still share in the knowledge. In 2016 we intend to start using Slack as a further way of connecting the working group through technology throughout the year and not just at quarterly intervals.

Infringements Working Group

Convenors: Lucy Adams and Samantha

Sowerwine | Justice Connect, and

Joanne Parkin | UnitingCare ReGen

The Infringements Working Group (IWG) is a joint working group of the Federation and the Financial and Consumer Rights Council. The IWG has worked closely with successive governments to make sure infringements policy is informed by the expertise and experience of practitioners who work daily with clients who are disproportionately impacted by the infringements system.

2015–16 was another big year for infringements advocacy and reform. Highlights included:

- 1. Family violence recognised as a special circumstance** – the March 2016 report of the Royal Commission into Family Violence noted that the Commission 'was greatly assisted by the Infringements Working Group'. Informed by the IWG's submission, the Commission recommended that family violence be

added to the definition of 'special circumstances' in the *Infringements Act 2006 (Vic.)* to recognise the way family violence contributes to victims incurring fines, including for parking and driving offences when fleeing family violence. This was adopted via the *Fines Reform and Infringements Acts Amendment Act 2016 (Vic.)*, and will come into effect in 2017. The IWG continues to campaign for more appropriate mechanisms for nominating another driver, where perpetrators of violence commit driving or toll offences in a victim's car.

- 2. Big steps forward on infringements reform** – in 2014–15 it looked like the Work and Development Permit (WDP) scheme and the options for dealing with fines for Victorian prisoners would be weaker than they should be, but through the persistent advocacy – including at the Infringements Standing Advisory Group, WDP working groups, correspondence with the Attorney-General and Department of Justice and Regulation, and a relationship with the Victorian Greens – the IWG has had some big wins. In particular, Work and Development Permits will be available at all stages of an infringement (including enforcement order and warrant) and prisoners will have an improved mechanism for addressing their fines while in prison and exiting with a clean slate.

- 3. Fines and Reform: What Really Changes?** – in November 2015, the IWG hosted an event at the Melbourne Town Hall for CLCs, government staff and financial counsellors. Introduced by Julian Burnside AO QC, *Fines and Reform: What Really Changes?* featured panel discussions and insights about the current and future infringements system. It was a sell-out event attended by close to 200 community lawyers and financial counsellors and can be watched online.

- 4. On track to fairer fares and fines** – the IWG submitted a detailed, evidence-based position paper to the inquiries of the Victorian Government and Victorian Ombudsman into public transport ticketing enforcement. The position paper contains seven recommendations to correct unfair and discriminatory elements of Victoria's public transport system. It advocated for free travel on public transport for concession holders, as well as shorter-term measures to reduce the negative impact of the system on vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians, including an improved Access Travel Pass scheme, proportionate infringement penalties, and repeal of on-the-spot penalty fares. The Department of Transport's response cites the IWG's submission 10 times and adopts a number of our recommendations, including repeal of on-the-spot penalty fares and improved training, guidance and oversight for authorised officers. Subsequently, members of the IWG worked closely with PTV to develop special circumstances training for authorised officers, as well as meeting regularly with the Department of Transport to improve their procedures in relation to people with special circumstances.

Professional Standards Working Group

Past Convenor: Jenni Smith |

Northern Community Legal Centre

Incoming Convenors: Clare Sauro |

ARCJustice and Graham Wells |

Social Security Rights Victoria

The Professional Standards Working Group wants to thank Jenni Smith for the significant work she has done in maintaining and raising professional standards across the sector. We also want to thank the Federation with all of their much-needed support in relation to the cross-check.

The group continues to promote projects and discussion aimed at building collaboration and raising professional standards.

We have participated in the newly formed Principal Lawyers Network, as well as all things to do with the cross-check.

Jenni, Clare and Graham were also able to meet the other Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) convenors at the NACLCL conference and provide input into the coming amendments to the *Risk management guide*.

Tenancy Working Group

Convenor: Yaelle Caspi |

Tenants Union of Victoria

The Tenancy Working Group is a forum for legal centres and other community organisations to share information relating to tenancy law and practice. The group also discusses wider policy and law reform issues relevant to renting in Victoria.

The work undertaken by members of the group this year included:

- » discussing issues with the Attorney-General and VCAT decision-makers on issues such as tenant access to VCAT Online and VCAT fees;
- » raising issues about the availability of public housing policies with the Department of Health and Human Services – the policies have since been republished on their website;
- » discussing issues about maintenance and repair in social housing – the Victorian Ombudsman has since launched an ‘own motion’ investigation into Office of Housing maintenance debts;
- » engaging decision-makers about the introduction of service of electronic notices; and
- » providing input into legislative reform such as the *Residential Tenancies Act* review and the Access to Justice Review.



NETWORK REPORTS

Integrated Legal and Social Support Network

Convenor: Michelle Cauchi |

Peninsula Community Legal Centre

This network began in December 2015 to create a space for CLCs to work through issues relating to collaborative service delivery and practice in legal settings between lawyers and social workers, or other qualified social support staff.

The ILSSN met bimonthly and involved participation of various representatives from CLCs who employ social support staff. It has been a valuable space for social support staff, lawyers and management to meet to openly share our experiences and learnings and to further explore the associated challenges in our work and how these may be overcome.

Whilst it is apparent that each of the CLCs involved has developed varying models of collaborative/integrated practice, we strongly believe in the overall benefits of such practice, including the opportunity to enhance the provision of more holistic services to clients.

Some flow-on work from the network has included three members of ILSSN being accepted to co-facilitate a presentation on integrated legal and social support services at the 2016 NACLCL conference, to be held in August.

We also contributed to a toolkit being developed by Justice Connect to help manage professional obligations and ethical considerations regarding legal privilege and mandatory reporting. Our work was shared with the broader legal assistance sector.

ABOVE: In November 2015, Julian Burnside AO QC introduced *Fines and Reform: What Really Changes?* – an event of the Infringements Working Group held at Melbourne Town Hall.

LEFT: An esteemed panel: Magistrate Fanning (Neighbourhood Justice Centre), Brendan Lacota (Moonee Valley Legal Service), Sergeant Jane Baldwin (Sheriff's Office), Susan Dobson (Department of Justice and Regulation), Sam Morgan (Infringements Court).



Neophytes Network

Convenor: Lee Carnie |
Human Rights Law Centre

The Neophytes Network has been running for just under a year as a support and information sharing group for new and young CLC lawyers to discuss a range of issues.

The network was established primarily as a support group and safe space to discuss the kinds of challenges new and young lawyers face, and how we can best support each other through the challenges to become better, well-rounded lawyers who stay in the CLC sector.

This year, Dr Richard Cash from Phoenix Australia ran a reflective practice session for new and young CLC lawyers, talking about working with clients who have experienced trauma and how neophytes can equip themselves with tools to prevent burnout and vicarious trauma. We are hoping that the network can find funding for regular quarterly reflective practice for next year and beyond.

We also discussed professional development opportunities and ran sessions specifically targeted at new and young CLC lawyers. For example, the network facilitated Victoria Legal Aid New Lawyer Program trainings, a special Action Learning Process training with Agata Wierzbowski from the Consumer Action Law Centre. Further professional development is planned for new lawyers engaging with the media.

The network also shares key resources all new and young CLC lawyers need to know, and maintains a contact list of new and young CLC lawyers so we can get in touch if we need to ask questions about a particular area of law or the best way to work with another CLC.

New and young CLC lawyers have identified that we would greatly benefit from being paired with a more senior CLC staff member as a mentor to discuss everything from making a first court appearance, to managing challenging clients, to planning career progression. The Federation and the Neophytes Network are looking into the first sector-wide mentoring pilot – watch this space!

Professional Support Network

previously the Administrators Network

Convenors: Katie Fraser 2015;
Veronica Hopkins 2016 |
Federation of Community Legal Centres

The Professional Support Network began in November 2014 as the Administrators Network in an effort to bring administrators and non-legal staff from all the CLCs together and share knowledge, experience and resources. At the beginning of 2016 they confirmed their name change and terms of reference. Over the last year they have met four times to discuss common issues and experiences at their CLCs. They have shared information about relevant training opportunities, resources and solved administrative issues together. They have also engaged in discussions around Orbit (the new referrals system proposed by VLA), and CLASS, (the new replacement for CLSIS).

Often professional support staff are also the frontline staff at CLCs, the first point of contact and those conducting legal referrals either face-to-face or over the telephone. A strong and vibrant network of peers has had a big impact in supporting this work, and giving staff a broader range of contacts across CLCs.

In the future it is hoped the network will continue to grow and collaboratively solve their administrative dead-ends together. Also under consideration is a joint training event in the area of personal safety and security.

Referrals Network

Convenors: Lee Carnie (2015-16) | Human Rights Law Centre; Ben Zika (2015-16) | Social Security Rights Victoria; Bonnie Renou (2016) | Federation of Community Legal Centres

The Referrals Network was established in late 2015 out of the 'Improving Referrals' discussion forum convened by Lee Carnie (HRLC, then Youthlaw) and Ben Zika (SSRV). The forum covered the difficulties in making referrals to and from CLCs and VLA. The ultimate goal of the network is to improve the experience for our client group, and minimise the number of contacts they need to make to reach someone who can help them. We also hope to foster knowledge of the services provided by Victorian CLCs: where, when and how to refer a client into a service effectively.

Early on, the Referrals Network established that there are many service databases used by CLCs, but that information is not complete or up-to-date in any one resource. It identified there was a need to centralise any resource that was developed. The establishment of the network coincided with the development of ORBIT – the *Online referral booking and information tool*, VLA's centralised referral resource. To avoid any duplication, it was recently announced that VLA will include CLCs in ORBIT, and share this resource.

In 2016 the network has been gathering the data required to get CLCs on to ORBIT, for its launch in late 2016.

FINANCIAL REPORT *for the* YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2016

Federation
of Community
Legal Centres
(Victoria) Inc.
ABN 30 036 539 902

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2016

The accompanying notes form part of this financial report.

	Note	2016 \$	2015 \$
INCOME			
Victoria Legal Aid – Recurrent		677,092	663,816
VLA Surplus Carried Fwd		26,112	(560)
ERO State		104,152	73,259
ERO State Carried Fwd		(32,737)	(27,774)
ERO Extra		44,703	38,215
ERO Extra Carried Fwd		(44,703)	(38,215)
Victoria Legal Aid – Other Income		51,237	–
Grant Income – Other Projects		206,995	381,242
Other Income		132,487	165,972
Interest		23,094	19,742
		<u>1,188,432</u>	<u>1,275,697</u>
EXPENDITURE			
Employee benefit expenses		833,269	828,890
Occupancy expenses		20,709	19,912
Operating expenses		70,966	74,460
Project related expenses		250,012	335,848
		<u>1,174,956</u>	<u>1,259,110</u>
Profit before income tax		13,476	16,587
Income tax expense		–	–
Profit after income tax		13,476	16,587
Retained Profits at the beginning of the financial year		<u>300,869</u>	<u>284,282</u>
Retained Profits at the end of the financial year		<u>314,345</u>	<u>300,869</u>

STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES AS AT 30 JUNE 2016

The accompanying notes form part of this financial report.

	Note	2016 \$	2015 \$
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	2	1,369,385	843,539
Trade and other receivables	3	27,795	95,143
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		1,397,180	938,682
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Property, plant and equipment	4	–	2,715
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		–	2,715
TOTAL ASSETS		1,397,180	941,397
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade and other payables	5	133,500	83,949
Amounts received in advance	6	857,487	468,085
Provisions	7	66,883	70,199
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		1,057,870	622,233
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Provisions	7	24,965	18,295
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		24,965	18,295
TOTAL LIABILITIES		1,082,835	640,528
NET ASSETS		314,345	300,869
MEMBERS' FUNDS			
Retained profits		314,345	300,869
TOTAL MEMBERS' FUNDS		314,345	300,869

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2016

The accompanying notes form part of this financial report.

	Note	2016 \$	2015 \$
CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES			
Receipts from Gov't Grants – recurrent		677,092	698,306
Receipts from Gov't Grants – non-recurrent		597,161	74,001
Receipts from Other Sources		336,502	483,070
Interest received		20,185	20,504
Payments to Suppliers and Employees		(1,105,094)	(1,227,794)
Net Cash provided by operating activities	8	525,846	48,087
CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES			
Payments for purchase of property and equipment		–	–
Net Cash provided by (used in) investing activities		–	–
Net increase (decrease) in cash held		525,846	48,087
Cash at the beginning of the year		843,539	795,452
Cash at the end of the year	2	1,369,385	843,539

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2016

Note 1: Statement of Significant Accounting Policies

This financial report is special purpose financial report prepared in order to satisfy the financial reporting requirements of the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (Vic). The committee has determined that the association is not a reporting entity. The financial report has been prepared on an accruals basis and is based on historical costs and does not take into account changing money values or, except where specifically stated, current valuation of non-current assets. The following significant accounting policies, which are consistent with the previous period unless otherwise stated, have been adopted in preparation of this financial report.

a. Cash and Cash Equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents includes cash on hand, deposits held at call with banks, and other short-term highly liquid investments with original maturities of three months or less.

b. Income Tax

The Association is exempt from paying income tax by virtue of Section 50-45 of the Income Tax Assessment Act, 1997. Accordingly, tax effect accounting has not been adopted.

c. Property, Plant and Equipment

Furniture and equipment are carried at cost less, where applicable, any accumulated depreciation. The depreciable amount of all furniture and equipment is depreciated over the useful lives of the assets to the association commencing from the time the asset is held ready for use.

d. Employee Entitlements

Provision is made for the Association's liability for employee benefits arising from services rendered by employees to the end of the reporting period. Employee benefits have been measured at the amounts expected to be paid when the liability is settled. Provision is made for the Association's liability for long service leave from commencement of employment.

e. Provisions

Provisions are recognised when the Association has a legal or constructive obligation, as a result of past events, for which it is probable that an outflow of economic benefits will result and that outflow can be reliably measured. Provisions are measured at the best estimate of the amounts required to settle the obligation at the end of the reporting period.

f. Impairment of Assets

At the end of each reporting period, the entity reviews the carrying values of its tangible and intangible assets to determine whether there is an indication that those assets have been impaired. If such an indication exists, the recoverable amount of the asset, being the higher of the asset's fair value less costs to sell and value in use, is compared to the asset's carrying amount. Any excess of the asset's carrying value over its recoverable amount is recognised in the income and expenditure statement.

g. Revenue

Revenue is brought to account when received and to the extent that it relates to the subsequent period it is disclosed as a liability.

Grant Income

Grant income received, other than for specific purposes, is brought to account over the period to which the grant relates.

Deferred Income

Unspent grant income received in relation to specific projects and events is not brought to account as revenue in the current year but deferred as a liability in the financial statements until spent for the purpose received.

Interest Revenue

Interest revenue is recognised using the effective interest rate method, which for floating rate financial assets is the rate inherent in the instrument.

Donations

Donation income is recognised when the entity obtains control over the funds which is generally at the time of receipt.

All revenue is stated net of the amount of goods and services tax (GST).

h. Goods and Services Tax (GST)

Revenues, expenses and assets are recognised net of the amount of GST, except where the amount of GST incurred is not recoverable from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). Receivables and payables are stated inclusive of the amount of GST receivable or payable. The net amount of GST recoverable from, or payable to, the ATO is included with other receivables or payables in the assets and liabilities statement.

i. Economic Dependence

The entity receives a significant portion of its revenue from Victoria Legal Aid. At the date of this report the Committee has no reason to believe Victoria Legal Aid will not continue to fund the entity.

2016
\$

2015
\$

Note 2: Cash and cash equivalents

Cash on hand	244	250
Cash at bank	571,386	362,289
Term Deposit	797,755	481,000
	<u>1,369,385</u>	<u>843,539</u>

Note 3: Trade and other receivables

Accounts Receivable	18,266	81,681
Prepayments and Sundry Receivables	1,690	8,532
Accrued Bank Interest	7,839	4,930
	<u>27,795</u>	<u>95,143</u>

Note 4: Property, plant and equipment

Furniture and fittings - at cost	129,908	129,908
Less accumulated depreciation	(129,908)	(127,193)
	<u>-</u>	<u>2,715</u>

Note 5: Trade and other payables

Creditors and accruals	84,876	59,714
Salary and wage accruals	48,624	24,235
	<u>133,500</u>	<u>83,949</u>

Note 6: Amounts received in advance

Victoria Legal Aid (ERO) - Extra - Future Years	115,342	70,637
Victoria Legal Aid (ERO) - State (unused)	90,190	57,454
Victoria Legal Aid (recurrent)	588	26,700
Victoria Legal Aid (Outcomes Measurement Program)	244,768	74,001
AG Bridging the Distance	130,000	-
VLA S&G CLC project	152,300	-
Law Graduate Scheme (Legal Services Board)	-	66,870
Smart Justice	38,260	72,423
Wanting Justice	86,039	100,000
	<u>857,487</u>	<u>468,085</u>

VLA (ERO) - Extra includes funds carried forward from 2016: \$44,703, 2015: \$38,215, 2014: \$25,927 and 2013: \$6,493.

Note 7: Provisions

Current		
Provision for annual leave	66,883	70,199
	<u>66,883</u>	<u>70,199</u>
Non-Current		
Provision for Long Service Leave	24,965	18,295
	<u>24,965</u>	<u>18,295</u>

Note 8: Reconciliation of Cash Flow from Operations with Profit from Ordinary Activities after Income Tax

Profit after income tax	13,476	16,587
Cash flows excluded from operating profit attributable to operating activities;		
Non-cash flows in profit:-		
- Depreciation	2,716	5,594
Changes in assets and liabilities;		
- (Increase)/decrease in trade and other debtors	67,348	(76,410)
- Increase/(decrease) in trade and other payables	49,550	110
- Increase/(decrease) in amounts received in advance	389,402	76,408
- Increase/(decrease) in provisions	3,354	25,798
Net cash provided by Operating Activities	<u>525,846</u>	<u>48,087</u>

STATEMENT BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2016

The committee has determined that the association is not a reporting entity and that this special purpose report should be prepared in accordance with the accounting policies outlined in Note 1 to the financial statements.

In the opinion of the committee the financial report as set out on pages 1 to 7:

1. Presents a true and fair view of the financial position of Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc. as at 30 June 2016 and its performance for the year ended on that date.
2. At the date of this statement, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc. will be able to pay its debts as and when they fall due.

This statement is made in accordance with a resolution of the Committee and is signed for and on behalf of the Committee by:

Chairperson: Belinda Lo
Dated: 20 September 2016



Secretary: Kristen Wallwork
Dated: 21 September 2016



INDEPENDENT AUDIT REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF FEDERATION OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES (VICTORIA) INC. ABN 30 036 539 902

Report on the Financial Report

We have audited the accompanying financial report, being a special purpose financial report, of Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc., which comprises the statement of assets and liabilities as at 30 June 2016, income and expenditure statement and the statement of cash flows for the year then ended, notes comprising a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information, and statement by members of the committee.

Committee's Responsibility for the Financial Report

The committee of Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc., is responsible for the preparation of the financial report, and has determined that the basis of preparation described in Note 1 is appropriate to meet the requirements of the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (Vic) and the needs of the members. The committee's responsibility also includes such internal control as the committee determines is necessary to enable the preparation of a financial report that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

Auditor's Responsibility

Our responsibility is to express an opinion on the financial report based on our audit. We have conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Those Auditing Standards require that we comply with relevant ethical requirements relating to audit engagements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance whether the financial report is free from material misstatement.

An audit involves performing procedures to obtain audit evidence about amounts and disclosures in the financial report. The procedures selected depend on the auditor's judgment, including the assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the financial report, whether due to fraud or error. In making those risk assessments, the auditor considers internal control relevant to the association's preparation and fair presentation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view, in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the association's internal control. An audit also includes evaluating the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates made by the committee, as well as evaluating the overall presentation of the financial report.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Opinion

In our opinion, the financial report gives a true and fair view, in all material respects, the financial position of Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc., as at 30 June 2016 and its financial performance for the year then ended in accordance with the accounting policies described in Note 1 to the financial statements, and the requirements of the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (Vic).

Basis of Accounting and Restriction on Distribution

Without modifying our opinion, we draw attention to Note 1 to the financial report, which describes the basis of accounting. The financial report has been prepared to assist Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc., to meet the requirements of the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (Vic). As a result, the financial report may not be suitable for another purpose.

Sean Denham

Dated: 21 September 2016
Suite 1, 707 Mt Alexander Road
Moonee Ponds VIC 3039



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