

PARTNERING FOR JUSTICE



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

OUR REGION



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



// This artwork represents Wadawurrung country, created by a proud Wadawurrung man, it depicts many important land features. The yellow and white dots symbolise Papul's ochre, which is found along the Barwon region's coastline, the leaves represent welcoming you onto country and cleansing you, the waterways are to symbolise our freshwater and saltwater. Bunjil, the ancestral Wedge-tailed Eagle, is the creator of Wadawurrung country, and the meeting place in the middle showcases where we are today, gathered on Wadawurrung country. //

Artwork: Delama Wadawurrung Dja ('Embracing Wadawurrung Country') 2022.
Artist: Billy-Jay (Bj) O'Toole, Papul Art.

Barwon Community Legal Service acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we work and we pay our respects to elders past and present. We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' deep and ongoing connection and stewardship of Country, and that the land on which we work was stolen and sovereignty has never been ceded.

We aim to challenge the systemic injustices that cause harm and to listen to and learn from our Aboriginal communities, with full acknowledgement that we have a lot to learn and we will not always get it right.

We acknowledge the sorrow caused by the Stolen Generation and the ongoing impacts that colonisation and the justice system have on our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also recognise the resilience, strength, and leadership of Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander communities and the ongoing contribution they bring to our whole community.



Barwon Community Legal Service wholeheartedly supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and endorses a 'Yes' vote in the First Nations Voice to Parliament referendum.

Our support for the 'Yes' vote is anchored in our vision for a just society where all people have equal access to, and status under the law and a legal system that is humane, fair and equitable.

VISION AND MISSION

OUR VISION

A just society in which all people have equal access to, and status under, the law; and a legal system which is humane, fair, and equitable.

OUR MISSION

To challenge systemic disadvantage and enable our priority communities to access the support they need to understand their legal rights and overcome their legal problems.



Our team during a team building workshop 2023.

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CHAIR & CEO REPORT



Tom Lynch
Chair



Bryanna Connell
CEO

We are honoured to present our Annual Report 2023. Throughout the following pages you will have the opportunity to read about our service delivery, response to gaps and emerging needs.

The past year was marked by the growth and enhancement of our services, with a focus on strengthening and broadening our partnerships to improve access to justice. We are proud to provide a comprehensive overview of our accomplishments and efforts throughout the year.

Over the past 12 months we saw a 50% increase in funding and staffing, which has allowed us to enhance our capacity to serve the community. We have expanded our team to include project, administrative, and client engagement positions, ensuring that we can enhance how we work, and meet the ever-increasing demand for our services.

New partnerships

New funding has enabled us to grow our service offerings by establishing and enhancing critical partnerships with like-minded organisations to improve access to justice.

Two of our new partnerships focus on the civil law needs of young people. We know that legal problems limit a young person's opportunities – in housing, employment,

day to day safety, and impact their mental health and overall wellbeing. Young people are 2.4 times more likely to experience legal problems compared to other age groups, and are much less likely to seek advice from professionals. For many years we have been well aware of the lack of access to local, tailored legal services for young people in the Barwon Region.

We were therefore grateful to receive funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner to partner with The Geelong Project, and from the Federal Government's Safer Communities Fund to launch our Law for Life Skills program in partnership with Meli. Both of these programs aim to address the civil law needs of young people who are engaged with The Geelong Project and Meli youth and family programs. These new partnerships will help young people to recognise their legal needs and know where to access help and support.

Our Family Law Access Program pilot, which concluded in December 2022, received continued funding to provide Family Law, child and property assistance for women experiencing family violence. This program facilitated the seamless launch of the Family Advocacy Support Service, a Commonwealth-funded initiative offering Family Law duty lawyer services in the Federal Circuit and Family Circuit courts in Geelong and Warrnambool, as well as additional casework capacity.

New State Government funding enabled us to expand our Health Enhancing Legal Pathways Health Justice Partnership, to partner with health services in the Colac Otway and Surf Coast regions. These areas were identified as under serviced communities in our 2022 Legal Needs Analysis, making our partnerships a significant step in connecting people in these regions to our services.

To enable these partnerships to work, we delivered considerably more community legal education to health and community workers, through our Law for Community Workers online education program, webinars and in person sessions.

It is our vision for all Victorians, no matter where they live, or where they go to school, to have access to justice through partnerships with schools, community organisations and health services. We know that people experiencing legal problems are more likely to seek assistance from these professionals rather than a lawyer, so partnerships are the gateway to legal services, and we are very grateful to have received much needed funding to make this a reality in the Barwon Region.

Strategic planning

We are excited to announce the development of our 2023-2026 strategic plan, which outlines our vision for the future, ensuring that we continue to effectively support the most vulnerable and marginalised in our community and that we remain adaptable and responsive to their evolving needs.

Acknowledgements

We express our deep gratitude to our funders whose unwavering support has made our work possible. Your contributions are instrumental in advancing our mission.

Team commitment

We are continually inspired by the dedication and passion of our team members. Their hard work and commitment to our cause have been the driving force behind our achievements.

Board appointments

We're pleased to welcome new board members Maree Herath and Olivia Nicholls. Their expertise and leadership undoubtedly contribute to strengthening our organisation's capabilities in the years ahead.

In closing, we want to thank our community for their trust and support. As we look ahead to the future, we remain committed to serving our community with dedication, compassion, and resilience.

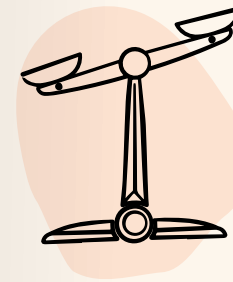
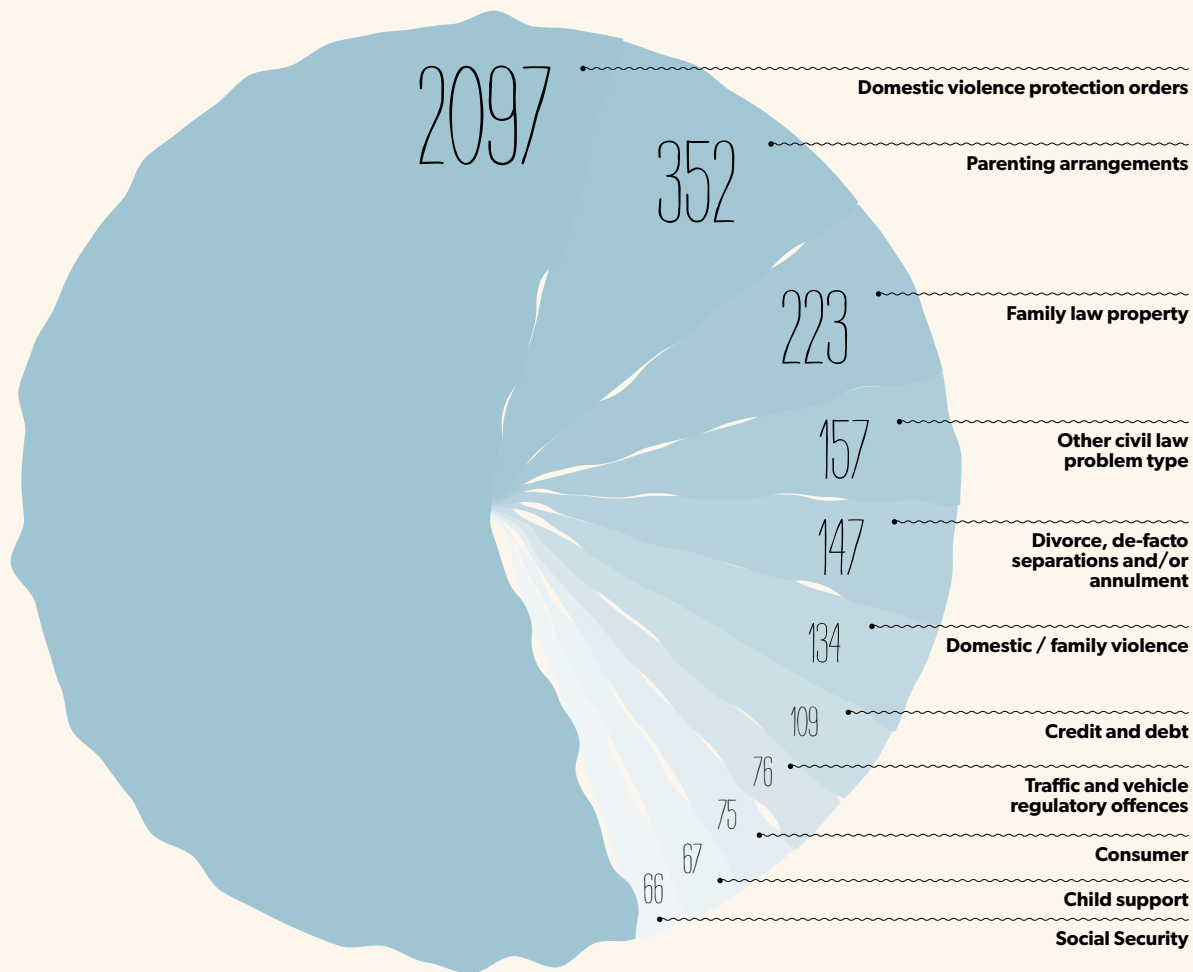
Our work



3825

We provided 3825 services to 1708 clients

Our most common legal issues for 2022/23 financial year



1464

Legal advices



553

Referrals

827

Duty lawyer services



Supported by volunteer lawyers, we conducted

40

night service clinics, providing

235

clients access to legal advice outside regular hours



62

Completed casework files



Legal advices given on family violence matters

569

We ran

63

Community legal education and engagement sessions

that reached

1435

individuals

333

Pre-court FV advices (trriages)

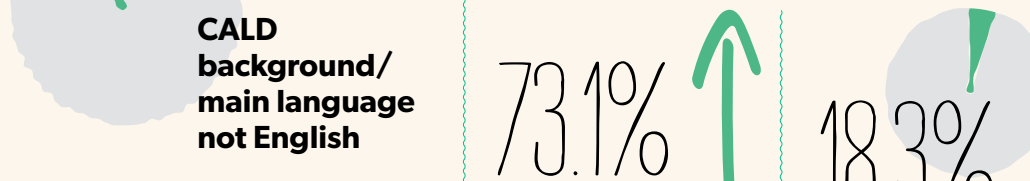
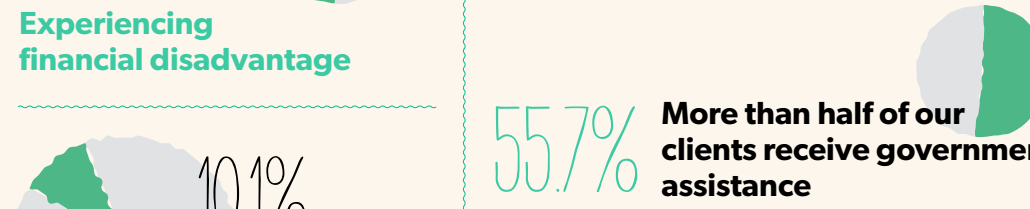
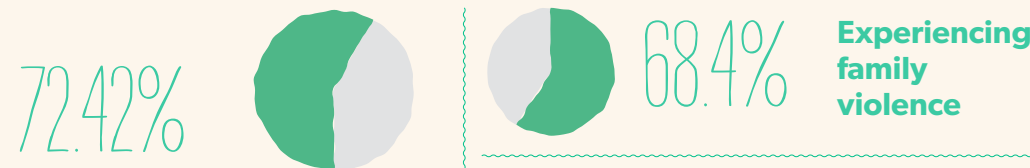
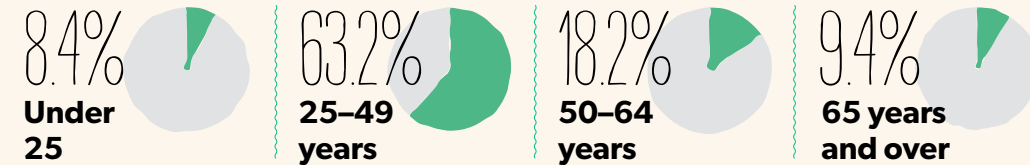
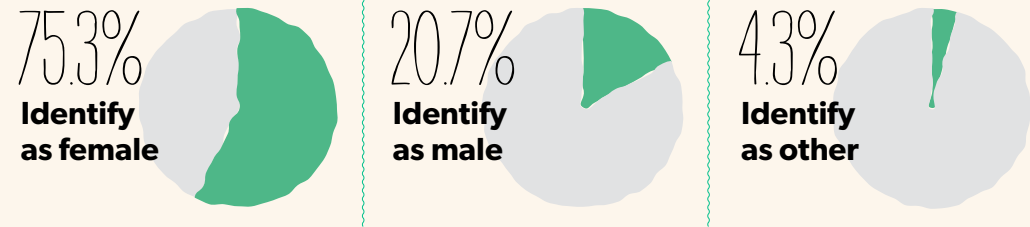
We actively participated in over 50 networks and engaged with stakeholders on more than 150 occasions

150+

Our clients

We experienced a 15% growth in the number of clients we assisted, totalling

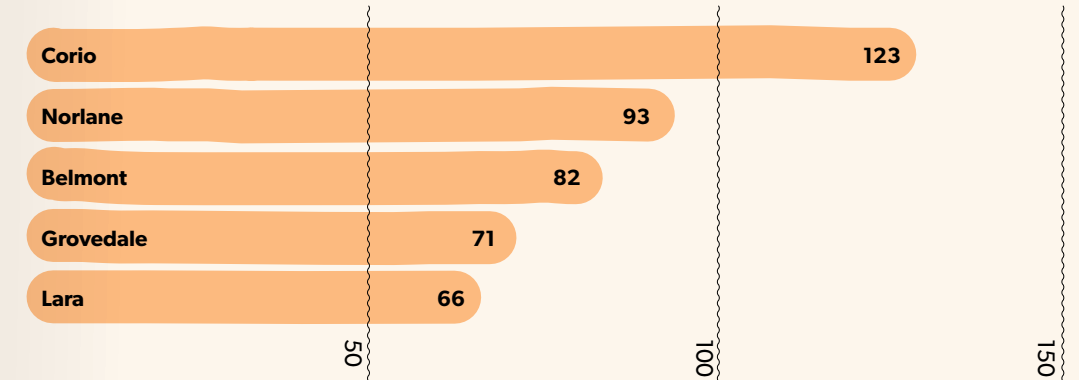
1,708



Our region

Where do our clients live?

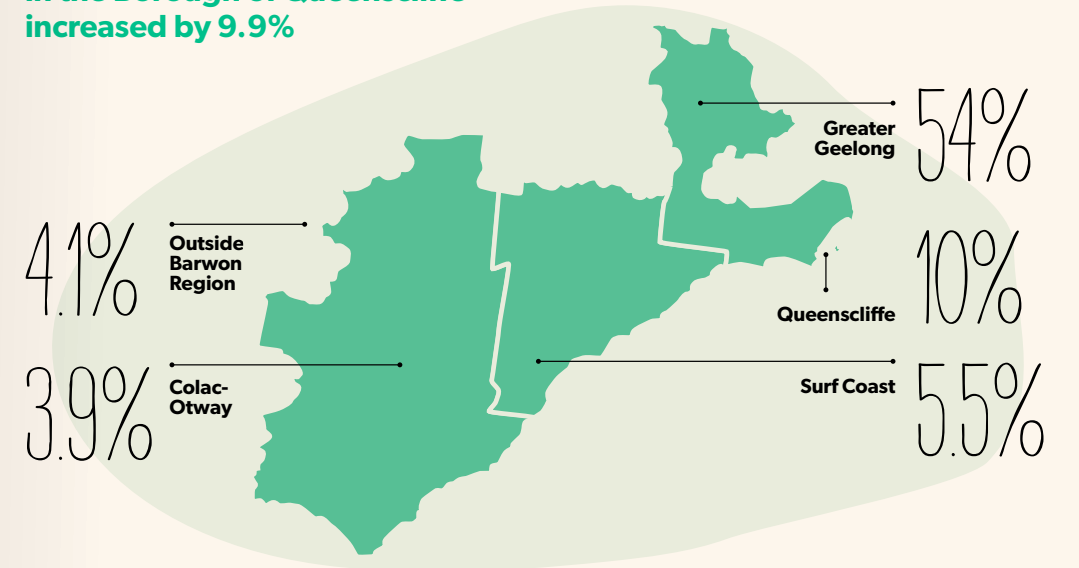
Top 5 suburbs



According to Victorian Council of Social Services data, Norlane has the highest percentage of individuals living in economic disadvantage within our region, with Corio following closely behind. Our numbers demonstrate that our outreach efforts are effectively reaching the most at need people in our community.

Top 5 LGA receiving most services

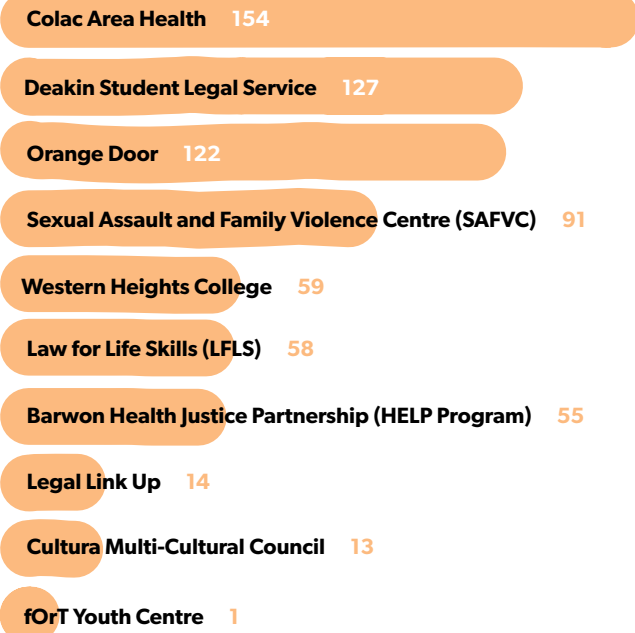
The number of our clients living in the Borough of Queenscliffe increased by 9.9%



ENHANCING OUR PARTNERSHIPS TO REACH PRIORITY GROUPS

689

We provided 689 services through our 10 community partnerships



Expanding our Health Justice Partnership to include regional services

WHERE WE ARE ON SITE

- Barwon University Hospital
- Newcomb Community Health Centre
- Corio Community Health Centre
- Colac Area Health



The Health Enhancing Legal Pathways (HELP) program stands as a dynamic Health Justice Partnership, born from the close collaboration of key stakeholders including Barwon Health, Colac Area Health, Hesse Rural Health, and Great Ocean Rd Health services. With funding from the Anthony Costa Foundation the HELP program initially provided legal services to Barwon Health patients facing family violence issues, but has now expanded to the Colac and Otway regions, thanks to funding from the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety. The success of our program is partly due to the synergy between health and legal services and the direct involvement of our program lawyers, operating seamlessly within health settings and building relationships with services and staff.

We have now secured Department of Justice and Community Safety funding through to 2025 which will facilitate continued access to legal assistance for patients, and in turn, provide comprehensive care where health and justice intersect.

Our HELP program team and representatives from our partnering organisations at the HELP pilot launch.



AHMAD'S STORY

A worry-free future

Ahmad, an elderly man, is referred by Barwon Health staff. He is unwell and moving into a nursing home. He is on a pension, has few savings, cannot afford a solicitor, and has trouble accessing a legal service. While he is still well enough, he is keen to make an Enduring Power of Attorney and a Will to enable a trusted family member to make sure his wishes

are carried out. We were able to take bedside instructions from Ahmad at the hospital, then subsequently visit him at the nursing home to execute the documents. With the assistance of our lawyer, Ahmad has secured his future and acquired the necessary documents at no cost, through a hassle-free, easily accessible, and efficient process.

Reaching young people with legal need in our region

Our Youth programs don't just provide legal advice and answers; they build connections and facilitate opportunities for improvements to the lives of young people across our region.

143

This year, we assisted 143 people under the age of 25



Fostering hope and support for at-risk young people



The Law For Life Skills (LFLS) program is a potential turning point for young people. Nestled within Meli's Youth Hub and outreach sites in the Greater Geelong and Colac regions, this program offers more than just legal guidance – it offers hope. Funded through the Safer Communities Fund and in partnership with Meli, it provides tailored early-intervention legal support for young people up to the age of 25.

Our work in this space isn't just about the law, it's about a new way of helping youth in a holistic way and facilitating informed decision making. Through on-site engagement activities and personalised support, we work to raise young people's awareness of their rights and how to access legal support. A significant aspect of this partnership is about our connections with Meli's youth workers, providing secondary consults and upskilling staff to spot legal issues early.

Bridging civil law gaps for school students



LEGAL LINK UP

Legal Link Up is a partnership with The Geelong Project (TGP) at Meli. TGP aims to intervene early with school aged young people at risk of disengaging from, or leaving school, becoming homeless and entering the justice system. TGP works directly with seven state secondary schools in the Greater Geelong region.

Funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board, Legal Link Up is a pioneering youth law initiative that integrates a lawyer into TGP, offering legal information and guidance to secondary school students supported by TGP. Our program focuses on assisting young people with their civil law matters as well as training to strengthen legal literacy among TGP workers and school wellbeing staff.

To help us turn great ideas into a working program, Lauryn Borthwick, TGP Senior Early Intervention Response Worker, was seconded to our service as the Legal Link Up Project Coordinator. Lauryn brought a suite of diverse non-legal skills to successfully plan and coordinate the program, especially the referral pathways and embedding an evaluation process. Lauryn's comprehensive expertise in her field of work and her internal promotion of the program was crucial in facilitating early referrals and secondary consultations.

Legal support on campus

Western Heights College School Lawyer Program

Our school lawyer continued to deliver an energetic service and build relationships with staff and students at Western Heights College. We enhanced our delivery of legal education sessions to students in their classrooms through engagement activities, responsive sessions addressing topics such as antisocial behaviour and vaping, as well as working to demystify accessing legal support as a young person.

// **The students are always asking about you and when you're next going to come into class. It's amazing.**
— Teacher

// **It's so good to have you so that I can come and talk to you about things. I never even thought about chatting to a Lawyer about what happened to me until you came into class.**
— Year 10 student



DATA SNAPSHOT

43

We presented a total of 43 legal education sessions to years 7 to 11

Education sessions reached

90.2%

of all year 7 students and an average of

68%

of all year 9 and 10 students



60

students

33

staff

Our lawyer chatted to 60 students and 33 staff about the law and legal issues

Deakin Student Legal Service

For over a decade, we have partnered with Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) and the Deakin University Student Association (DUSA) to provide legal support to university students through the Deakin Student Legal Service (DSLS). This service has helped numerous students from both the Waterfront and Waurn Ponds campuses with various legal issues such as tenancy, fines, and family law whilst also running accessible legal education sessions to upskill students about their rights.



Lawyer Jessica Wensley during Deakin Waurn Ponds O'Week.

Resolving fines through collaborative support

Through our collaboration with DUSA and the Work and Development Permit Scheme (WDP), we've assisted Geelong students in resolving their outstanding fines through referrals from our Lawyers to the DUSA Financial Counsellor. Eligible students, facing financial hardship or other challenges, opted for this program to address their fines, resulting in \$12,467.25 worth of fines being worked off as at September 2022. Students engaged in various WDP activities, including courses, counselling, and treatment, ultimately preventing further legal complications and fines escalating to warrant stage. Without this referral pathway and our relationship with DUSA, these students would have been left with outstanding fines and no options. This partnership underscores the value of collaborative efforts in helping clients resolve legal issues.



Delivering transformative legal assistance



Lawyers Sarah Eid (Left) and Kerrie Ruffels (Right).

// This has all been made possible because of your great eyesight in spotting the problem. Without your help, I would have had no chance. I want you to know how humbly grateful I am for the wonderful service you have provided; without your help I could have easily ended up on the street with nowhere to live.

I think I owe you my life, I will forever be in your debt. I can't really put into words what you have done for me, I am so humbly grateful.

I will forever be grateful to Barwon Community Legal Service.

Thank you from my heart, you are amazing at what you do, and how you do it.
— Our client

The Orange Door

Our outreach Lawyer continued to develop and nurture relationships with The Orange Door (TOD) staff, management and practitioners. The presence of a lawyer on-site, readily available to provide immediate in-person advice to clients, has proven to be invaluable. TOD reception staff have reported noticeable positive transformations in clients' demeanour, both upon their arrival and after their legal appointments.

One notable achievement this year was expanding our partnership with TOD Colac office. Thanks to the strengthening bonds between our services, secondary consultations from both Geelong and Colac have surged.

We are currently in the planning phase to expand our service and promote increased collaboration, including opportunities for greater exposure to partnering services, informal morning tea network gatherings, legal education lunch-and-learn sessions, and the development of specialised reference guides.

DATA SNAPSHOT

300+

We received over 300 referrals through our co-location at TOD



Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre (SAFVC)

Providing holistic legal help to clients at a family violence service involves a comprehensive and integrated approach, which specifically addresses the complex legal needs of individuals. It recognises that victim survivors of family violence often require support beyond just legal representation, and consideration of the intertwined emotional, physical, and financial aspects of their experience.

DATA SNAPSHOT

91

we provided 91 services to clients through the SAFVC



SELENA'S STORY

A journey to safety, support and confidence

Selena was referred to us by a SAFVC crisis housing worker, for support and advice about parenting orders for her child Dominic after leaving a long-term abusive relationship. Our Lawyer was able to represent Selena in both her family law and intervention order matters. The legal proceedings were lengthy and complex, offering numerous learning opportunities for our Lawyer.

Throughout the course of the parenting proceedings, the intervention orders underwent several extensions and variations, with multiple breaches reported to the police due to Selena's ex-partner persistently refusing to comply with the orders. Our generalist duty lawyers collaborated internally with our co-located SAFVC lawyer to provide comprehensive support to Selena during her family violence legal proceedings in the Magistrates' Court.

Selena experienced significant advantages through the consistent support provided to her. Our trauma-informed and holistic service approach ensured a continuous and seamless experience, sparing her the need to recount her story repeatedly and fostered a strong rapport with our lawyers. This enabled her to stay actively engaged in the proceedings, which might otherwise have proven overwhelming.

Ultimately, Selena was granted sole residential care and parental responsibility for Dominic, with the added protection of an intervention order for several years. This outcome means that Selena will no longer be required to interact with her violent ex-partner regarding parenting matters, allowing her to make decisions for her and Dominic's future, confidently and safely.

PROVIDING
SERVICES FOR
BETTER LIFE
OUTCOMES

Serving our community's legal needs



Caleb Leitmanis
Practice Manager (Generalist)

// **Community Legal Services are an invaluable resource within our communities to bring the scales of justice back into balance so that those who are not equipped or resourced to seek private legal assistance are, at a minimum, given advice, direction and knowledge of their options.**
— Caleb Leitmanis,
Practice Manager (Generalist)

MEI'S STORY

Pursuit of delayed aged pension benefits

Mei and her husband sought help from a service to apply for the Aged Pension before retirement age. Her husband's application went smoothly, but Mei's application was delayed for nearly 6 months through no fault of her own, causing her to miss out on nearly \$8,000. Mei herself had tried for over a year to resolve the issue with both the service and Centrelink, but received no answers to her questions or clarity as to what had gone wrong. Mei contacted BCLS as she had run out of ideas and was both frustrated and fed up. We helped Mei to clarify who was to blame for the delay, but despite our assistance with several letters of demand, the service did not adequately respond or clarify the delay. We therefore assisted Mei in preparing documents to take the matter to VCAT stating a breach of Australian Consumer Laws, in that the service had not been done in a timely manner nor with due care and skill. Mei successfully lodged the application, and prior to the hearing, the service decided to settle the matter, resulting in Mei being paid the \$8,000 of aged pension benefits she missed out on.

// **Many thanks for your wonderful support and all the hard work done for me. It would never have happened without your big help.**
— Mei

Welcoming the Specialist Family Violence Court

The Geelong Magistrates' Court is now a Specialist Family Violence Court providing targeted services in family violence matters. Under this new model, not only are Magistrates specifically trained in hearing family violence matters, but counselling orders can be made against people who use violence, and specialised applicant and respondent practitioners provide support to people at Court, including referrals to appropriate services.

In addition to providing services to clients on the day of their court hearing, we recognise the importance of early advice and support for our clients experiencing family violence. Many clients accessing our duty lawyer service have underlying related legal issues that, due to caseload and time constraints, cannot be appropriately dealt with on the day of court.

To address these issues, we have welcomed our Enhanced Family Violence Project. Our intake and post court services have been restructured to provide best practice and trauma informed legal assistance that intervenes earlier, prioritises safety, wellbeing and allows clients to move on with their lives.

// Thanks again for your dedicated, empathetic, and generous time, thought, efforts, and support on this heinous matter and dialogue. It has been an absolute pleasure working with, and kindly being assisted and supported by you. Thank you immensely.
— Family Violence client



Tamara Kotowicz
Practice Manager
(Family Violence & Family Law)

DATA SNAPSHOT

827

Duty lawyer services



333

Pre-court FV advices (trriages)

569

Legal advices given on family violence matters

JANE'S STORY



A journey to rebuild bonds and reconnect with her daughters

Jane was facing a life without a relationship with her 5 year old twin daughters. Jane had been affected by family violence, was living with drug and alcohol dependence, and without safe and stable housing. Jane began to work with support agencies to overcome these challenges and was ready to address her relationship with her children.

When Jane came to us, she had not spent any regular time with her children for almost three years and was wanting

to make a change to restore her relationship with her daughters. We were able to work with Jane and her support team, and negotiate with her ex-partner to re-establish a regular and consistent contact schedule to increase the amount of time spent with the children, all without going to court.

Our Lawyers will continue to work with Jane to assist her with her other legal needs to help build her confidence and capacity to co-parent her children.

Enhancing access to family law services - our evolving practice

The success of our Family Law Access project (FLA) over the past few years has enabled us to continue to build our family law practice. Our family lawyers have diverse expertise, including assisting with generalist legal matters, and regularly representing clients as Family Violence Duty Lawyers. This approach ensures we can offer a comprehensive and all-encompassing service to our clients, many who are facing several legal issues at the same time.

We have continued to see a growing divide between clients who can afford private lawyers and those who are eligible for grants of legal assistance. We provide comprehensive, easily accessible, and thorough family law services to clients who find themselves in these gaps, many of which face complex barriers when it comes to obtaining legal advice.

We are now proud participants in the Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS) as duty lawyers in the Geelong and Warrnambool Circuits of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. Our involvement in FASS was made possible through FLA, which strengthened our internal capacity through education and guidance from Women's Legal Service. This service recognises the unique challenges of the legal system faced by individuals experiencing family violence and extends beyond legal assistance to include mental health and specialist family violence support. Collaboration among various service providers remains a central focus to ensure optimal outcomes for our clients.



Principal Lawyer, Geordie Stapleton presenting on the success of FLAP at a panel discussion alongside VLA, Women's Legal Service, Brimbank Melton CLC and WEstjustice.

DATA SNAPSHOT

483

Total number of clients advised on family law issues

Number of family law casework files:

Our family law casework files run for a minimum of 3 months each.

11

Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS)

32

Family Law Access Project (FLAP)



Geordie Stapleton
Principal Lawyer

WORKING TO ACHIEVE SYSTEMIC CHANGE



UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES

Not having a copy of a birth certificate can hinder a young person's meaningful participation in the community, limiting access to vital services and benefits requiring proof of identity. This includes healthcare, employment, housing, driver's licenses, and government assistance to name a few.

A Meli case worker referred a young person without a birth certificate to our LFLS program lawyers. Our lawyers assisted by explaining how to navigate the process of obtaining a

copy of a birth certificate in the absence of photo ID and writing a statutory declaration, ultimately securing the young person a copy of their birth certificate. Whilst this process may seem relatively straightforward, it changed the young person's life through granting them access to vital services alongside enhancing the case worker's knowledge of how to tackle these issues. With this new information, the worker can now help other clients and share expertise with colleagues, strengthening our partnerships capacity to support young people across our region.

Effecting change through collaboration



We recognise that by addressing the civil law needs of young people, we can reduce their likelihood of encountering the criminal justice system in the future. Combining legal assistance with a comprehensive focus on general wellbeing, is a powerful means for driving substantial change and shaping the course of entire futures.

Through our partnerships with Meli, we've not only improved our interactions with young people, but gained valuable insights into the challenges they face. Using the expertise of Meli staff, we've streamlined our client journey, creating a more accessible and holistic avenue for young people to access legal support. This collaboration has enhanced the quality of our service, enabling us to better support our community and will open doors for advocacy efforts in the future, creating brighter futures for our young people.

We asked Meli Staff to comment on the best parts of our partnerships:

// **The availability and easy access of a Lawyer for young people who present at the access point. The ability to discuss and work through legal issues then and there so they don't end up being protracted, building up and getting worse or accumulating.**

// **Building confidence of young people to speak to a lawyer.**

// **Informing young people of their legal rights and awareness of the consequences if legal issues are not addressed.**

Using media to drive change and awareness

In the digital age, media plays a pivotal role in driving awareness and information out to the community. Through strategically using media, we can amplify our mission, engage wider audiences and spark conversations about important issues. Media serves as an important catalyst, fuelling awareness, advocacy, and progress, giving us a powerful tool to use in our drive for systemic change.

DATA SNAPSHOT

12,486 We had 12,486 views of our website

Our most visited web pages were our information pages about police powers, buying a car privately and Centrelink



Here at BCLS, we support a 'Yes' vote in the upcoming First Nations Voice to Parliament Referendum.

A reminder that if you can't get to a polling place on 14 October, early voting is now open either in person or via post.

Find out where you can vote early: <https://www.aec.gov.au/referendums/voting.htm> #start

How to apply for a postal vote here: <https://www.aec.gov.au/referendums/vote/postal-voting.html>

#Yes23 #yes23au



Barwon Community Legal Service supports #PocumsLaw to ensure a fair and just bail system.

#JusticeforVeronicaNelson #Springst



We are one of 50 organisations supporting Southside Justice Switchboard Victoria Victorian Pride Lobby Transgender Victoria asking the State Government of Victoria for urgent anti-violence reforms to protect LGBTIQ+ Victorians, see our joint statement https://southsidejustice.org.au/news_articles/a-call-for-further-action

We support trans & gender diverse rights



There are fears victims of family violence could struggle to get the help they need, unless a funding shortfall is urgently addressed.



geelongadvertiser.com.au
Fears family violence victims could miss out on legal support

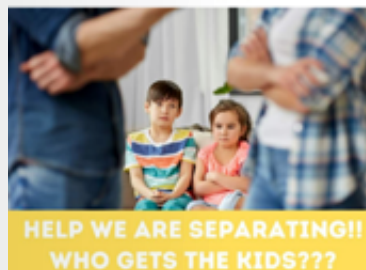
CEO Bryanna Connell, Chair Tom Lynch and Practice Manager Tamara Kotowicz feature in a Geelong Advertiser article about legal services remaining unfunded in light of the new Geelong Specialist Family Violence Court.



We get a lot of clients asking how they should approach making arrangements for their children following a separation.

Our blog on Parenting Arrangements explains the steps to take and what to do if you cannot reach an agreement. Read more here <https://www.barwoncommunitylegal.org.au/parenting-arrangements/>

#childcustody #separation #familylaw #freelegaladvice #communitylegal



This year we are empowering community members to take a stand against ageism. Ageism is one of the key drivers of elder abuse. Like & follow our page to see CEOs and community leaders demonstrate their commitment to preventing elder abuse by calling out ageism in the Barwon Region. Here is our CEO Expense Council taking the #EveryAGECounts pledge. Support this campaign by taking the pledge here: https://www.everyagecounts.org.au/the_pledge



The EveryAGE Counts campaign challenges age discrimination and calls for a world without ageism where we all feel valued, respected and acknowledged, regardless of our age. We ran this social media campaign as part of our BEAPP network and engaged the CEOs of Cultura, Wintringham and Elder Rights Advocacy to take the pledge alongside us.

Geelong Times

Friday, October 13th, 2023

Community service workers drive important social conversations

May 19, 2023 • BY Times News Group



Ally Upton and Alex Jones with two of the planned 1,000 houses to be created and exhibited in local libraries throughout June to mark World Elder Abuse

Community Development Manager Alex Jones and Community Engagement Officer Ally Upton spoke to the Surf Coast Times about working in the community sector and the BEAPP project.

BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY TO UNDERSTAND AND EXERCISE THEIR LEGAL RIGHTS

Enhancing community workers' legal issue spotting skills through virtual training sessions

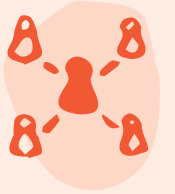
We built on our online Law for Community Workers Training by offering a series of enhanced virtual training sessions on specific areas of law. Sessions were presented by our Lawyers and covered fines and infringements, family law basics and family violence intervention orders. By equipping community workers with the skills to identify legal issues their clients may be experiencing, we can establish effective referral pathways that not only allow community members to assert their legal rights at an earlier stage but ensure they receive a holistic service.

Remarks and feedback from a selection of the participants:

// **I have so much clarity - such a complex topic and you made it sound almost easy!**

// **All presenters were excellent, very approachable and knowledgeable. Topics covered and examples presented were all very relevant and real-world.**

219



community workers from various organisations registered to attend. On average, participants reported that their understanding of the law had grown by 50% following the session.



Practice Manager Tamara Kotowicz presenting a training session.



Community Development Manager Alex Jones presenting on our Law for Community Workers Training at the Community Legal Centres Australia national conference.

Designing education sessions at Wathaurong

We designed and held 3 training sessions for staff at the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative. These sessions reached 99 staff members and covered topics of legal issues affecting young people, family violence and family law, and consumer credit and debt in collaboration with Consumer Action Law Centre. During these sessions, our goal was not only to share our knowledge and how to link into legal help, but also to actively engage with Wathaurong staff by sharing stories and learning from their experiences, insights, and ideas.

SPOTTING LEGAL ISSUES



Legal issues:

- feel complex and stressful
- arise in clusters
- escalate if not addressed
- disproportionately impact communities experiencing disadvantage, social and health issues
- are easily ignored by clients who are unlikely to access a lawyer for help.

Community Development Manager Alex Jones with Katie Fraser and Jacqui Watkins from Consumer Action Law Centre.



Raising awareness of elder abuse: Project highlights

We continued our work convening the Barwon Elder Abuse Primary Prevention Network (BEAPP) focusing on preventing elder abuse before it happens. We embarked on an array of projects aimed at raising community awareness and providing education about elder abuse, including social media campaigns, radio interviews and intergenerational activities.

Our most notable achievement was the reinvigoration of the Barwon Warm Safe Home Community Art Project, which uses craft to encourage conversations about respecting older people and spreads the message that everyone has the right to live in a warm safe home. The artfully decorated homes were on prominent display at the Geelong Library and Heritage Center and Colac Community Library and Learning Centre. The exhibitions served as conversation starters, increasing community awareness around the importance of preventing family violence and increasing the respect and dignity of older people.

They all look so beautiful! So many people have been asking me so many questions about this, it has been great!

DATA SNAPSHOT

1000+

Craft kits distributed

439+

Completed crafted houses



16,285

Total visitors to libraries during exhibition period



Community Development Manager Alex Jones and Ally Upton, Community Engagement Officer being interviewed on 94.7 The Pulse with Loretta Hart.



Expanding horizons beyond legal education



Our Lawyers from the Law for Life Skills (LFLS) program extended their involvement beyond the legal sphere, actively participating in various engagement activities with young people. These activities combined legal education with cooking sessions, personal training boxing sessions, and even the exciting possibility of initiating a youth arts project. These not only increased young people's understanding of legal issues and available support, but crucially dismantled barriers between lawyers and youth while making connections.

FROM OUR BOXING SESSIONS:

At the first session, no one knew who we were and what a community legal service was

By the end, 100% of the young people knew that we offer a free legal service to young people

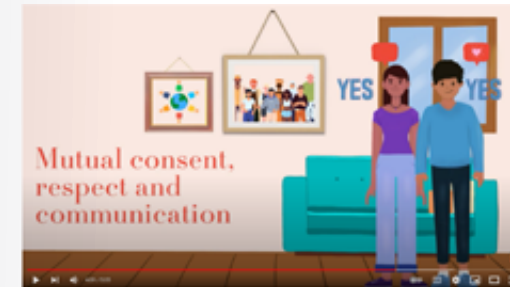
100%



88% of the young people that attended feel that some of the information provided to them will be useful in their future

Youth voices: Creating multilingual consent education videos

Led by Cultura, Geelong's multi-cultural council and newly arrived young people, we were part of a co-design process to create informative videos that focus on the rights and responsibilities of young people relating to sexting and consent laws. These videos were created entirely by young people for young people, ensuring they are culturally appropriate and relevant. They have been translated into 5 languages and are the only resource of their kind in our region, offering a valuable tool for initiating conversations, raising awareness, and educating our community on these crucial topics.



Consent and the Law Video in Dari available on YouTube.



Co-design members at the video launch.

Community initiatives #VicLawWeek2023

The Lotus Kitchen initiative at Cloverdale Community Centre not only enhances participants' culinary abilities but also provides an opportunity to practice their English language skills. This program plays a crucial role in addressing various challenges faced by migrant women, including their unfamiliarity with the legal system, experiences of family violence, language barriers, and limited employment prospects. Our Principal Lawyer, Geordie Stapleton, and Michele Tucker from Deakin Law Clinic, delivered a presentation to the Lotus Kitchen participants on the Family Law system in Australia. Discussion centered around divorce, child custody arrangements, and property division and was followed by an engaging Q&A segment highlighting how to access legal assistance, and inform women of their legal rights and how to exercise them.



Principal lawyer Geordie Stapleton at the Law Week event with Liz Bonner and Issara Saeyim from Cloverdale Community Centre and Michele Tucker from Deakin Law Clinic.

BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

Learning from the Social Security specialists



To enhance our knowledge in the field of social security law, we seconded our Senior Lawyer, Emma, to Social Security Rights Victoria (SSRV). This secondment facilitated valuable connections between our organisations and increased Emma's knowledge, which she was able to pass on to our team. Thank you to SSRV for facilitating this secondment, and your expertise, guidance and support.

Senior Lawyer, Emma Cvitak (right) and SSRV Principal Lawyer Laura Jordan (left).

Our Team - The Heart of Our Impact

Meet Ally



Ally Upton
Community Engagement
Officer

“I am Ally Upton, and for the past year I have worked as the Community Engagement Officer at Barwon Community Legal Service. I love my job, and I am so grateful to be part of this organisation.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck and the 2020 lockdowns became a reality, I began to re-evaluate my life and contemplate what truly matters. It was during this period that I made the decision to spend more of my life focusing on improving the lives of others and was fortunate to stumble upon an administrative position at Barwon Community Legal Service. While I wasn't particularly drawn to the field of law, an internet search revealed that BCLS was committed to social justice, and worked with marginalised and disadvantaged individuals. I was intrigued and applied for the role.

What I appreciate most about my job, are the conversations I engage in with people. There's something profoundly inspiring about meeting individuals who are passionate and determined to overcome challenges and hearing their success stories. It brightens my perspective on the world. I aspire to contribute my part every day, in helping create more success stories.

Meet Madelaine



Madelaine Landini
Senior Lawyer

“I joined BCLS from ARC Justice (Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre) in April 2023. Things started with an early pivot to remote working, following my efforts in social tennis and an injury which delayed my relocation to Geelong. I am now in full 'swing' on our youth programs and duty lawyer service.

I became a lawyer to help people and initially practiced as a personal injury lawyer for 5 years, in Geelong and London. After repatriating home from the UK at the height of the pandemic, I reassessed my work during a three month mindset mentoring program aimed at unlocking my values and purpose. I believe that our social, economic, and political structures do not provide an equal opportunity to all people. So, I joined the Community Legal Centre sector and have not looked back. The Legal Link Up and Western Heights College School Lawyer programs provide the opportunity for me to help young people understand and enforce their legal rights and, in doing so, address inequality.

At BCLS, I've been focused on forming genuine and positive relationships with the team, and using insights gained from private practice to make suggestions about the way we work, including our systems and processes. Outside of work, I've taken up watercolor painting while working hard at sports rehab to get back on the tennis court.”

We express our appreciation to our staff members and Board who have made extraordinary contributions not only to our work, but also to our vision, mission, and community. It's our remarkable team who make it all possible.

OUR BOARD

Tom Lynch
Chair

Dominique Saunders
Secretary

Myra White

Maree Herath

Natasha Powles
Deputy Chair

Charles Agar
Treasurer

Paul Blane

Olivia Nicholls

OUR TEAM

Leadership Team

Bryanna Connell
Chief Executive Officer

Geordie Stapleton
Principal Lawyer

Alexandria Jones
Community
Development Manager

Caleb Leitmanis
Practice Manager
(Generalist)

Tamara Kotowicz
Practice Manager
(Family Violence and
Family Law)

Our Staff

Ally Upton
Community
Engagement Officer

Annette Campbell
Project Coordinator

Barbara Paolini
Executive Assistant

Brett Hogan
Senior Lawyer

Charmaine Floyd
Administration Manager

Carol Stuart
Senior Lawyer

Elsie Stokie
Senior Lawyer

Emma Cvitak
Senior Lawyer

Grace Forrest
Administration Officer

Jessica Scott
Senior Paralegal

Kate Rowland
Paralegal

Kerrie Ruffels
Lawyer

Jessica Wensley
Lawyer

Libby Murphy
Senior Lawyer

Louise Thorsen
Senior Lawyer

Madelaine Landini
Senior Lawyer

Mahima Bhandari
Lawyer

Megan Alford
Senior Lawyer

Olivia Drazzi
Paralegal

Phoebe Stephens
Paralegal

Sam Hawkins
Senior Lawyer
(left June 2023)

Sarah Eid
Lawyer

Scarlett Kennedy
Lawyer

Victor Galaz
Senior Lawyer

OUR VOLUNTEERS

Our organisation relies on the support of dedicated volunteers, including students and lawyers, to deliver our services. We extend our appreciation to all our valued volunteers for

their continuous dedication and contribution. Your commitment to advancing access to justice cannot be understated, and we are extremely grateful for all the work you do.

FINANCIALS



EST. 1905

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF BARWON COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES INC

Opinion

We have audited the financial report of Barwon Community Legal Services Inc (the association), which comprises the statement of financial position as at 30 June 2023, the statement of comprehensive income, the statement of cashflows and the statement in changes in equity for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies, and the certification by the board of directors on the annual statements giving a true and fair view of the financial position and performance of the association.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial report presents fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the association as at 30 June 2023 and its financial performance for the year then ended in accordance with the accounting policies described in Note 1 and 2 to the financial statements and the requirements of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 (ACNC Act)*.

Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report* section of our report. We are independent of the association in accordance with the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110: *Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants* (the Code) that are relevant to our audit of the financial report in Australia. We have also fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

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

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 for the association for the purpose of fulfilling the directors' financial reporting responsibilities under the *ACNC Act*. As a result, the financial report may not be suitable for another purpose.

Other Information

Those charged with governance are responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the association's annual report for the year ended 30 June 2023, but does not include the financial report and our auditor's report thereon.

Our opinion on the financial report does not cover the other information and accordingly we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial report, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial report or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.

If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact. We have nothing to report in this regard.

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Stephen Wright CA
Stephen Kirtley CA

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Responsibilities of the Board for the Financial Report

The board is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial report in accordance with the financial reporting requirements of the *ACNC Act* and for such internal control as the board determines is necessary to enable the preparation and fair presentation of a financial report that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, the board is responsible for assessing the association's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters relating to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the board either intends to liquidate the association or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of this financial report.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial report is located at the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board website at: <http://www.auasb.gov.au/Home.aspx>. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

Stephen Kirtley
Director

Dated this 6th day of October, 2023

Davidsons Assurance Services Pty Ltd
101 West Fyans Street
Geelong, Victoria 3220

/ GEELONG / TORQUAY

davidsons.com.au

Statement of comprehensive income for year ended 30 June 2023

	2023 \$	2022 \$
Revenue from ordinary activities	2,804,347	2,153,825
Expenses from ordinary activities		
Employee benefits expense	(2,395,712)	1,800,386
Depreciation	(22,824)	33,635
Administration expenses	(377,890)	302,293
Total expenditure from ordinary activities	(2,796,426)	2,136,314
Net result from ordinary activities	7,921	17,511
Other comprehensive income for the year	–	–
Total comprehensive income for the year	7,921	17,511

Statement of changes in equity for the year ended 30 June 2023

	Retained Earnings \$	Reserves \$	Total \$
2023			
Balance at 1 July 2022	734,487	9,040	743,527
Total comprehensive income for the year	7,921	–	7,921
Balance at 30 June 2023	742,408	9,040	751,448
2022			
Balance at 1 July 2021	716,976	9,040	726,016
Total comprehensive income for the year	17,511	–	17,511
Balance at 30 June 2022	734,487	9,040	743,527

Note:

- (a) The concise financial report cannot be expected to provide as full an understanding of the financial performance, financial position and financing and investing activities of the entity as the financial reports of Barwon Community Legal Service Inc; and
- (b) further financial information can be obtained from the financial reports of Barwon Community Legal Services Inc and these reports are available, free of charge, on request to Barwon Community Legal Service and from its website barwoncls.org.au

Statement of financial position as at 30 June 2023

	2023 \$	2022 \$
Current assets		
Cash	1,785,070	1,522,013
Trade & other receivables	49,632	31,022
Total current assets	1,834,702	1,553,035
Non-current assets		
Fixed assets	64,301	70,306
Intangible assets	361	1,358
Total non-current assets	64,662	71,664
Total assets	1,899,364	1,624,699
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	802,168	568,968
Employee benefits	320,510	295,504
Total current liabilities	1,122,678	864,472
Non-current liabilities		
Employee benefits	25,238	16,700
Total non-current liabilities	25,238	16,700
Total liabilities	1,147,916	881,172
Net assets	751,448	743,527
Equity		
Reserves	9,040	9,040
Retained profits	742,408	734,487
Total equity	751,448	743,527

Cash flows from operating activities for the year ended 30 June 2023

	2023 \$	2022 \$
Payments		
Payments to employees	(2,362,168)	(1,803,636)
Payments to suppliers	(149,517)	(230,935)
Government grants received	2,729,385	2,104,942
Interest received	4,095	1,176
Other Operating Income Received	57,483	135,893
Net cash provided by/(used in) operating activities	279,278	207,440
Cash flow from investing activities		
Payments for purchase of fixed assets	(16,221)	(4,960)
Net cash provided by/(used in) investing activities	(16,221)	(4,960)
Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents held	263,057	202,480
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of year	1,522,013	1,319,533
Cash and cash equivalents at end of financial year	1,785,070	1,522,013

TOGETHER
WE
ACHIEVE
MORE.



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Design — rodeo.com.co