

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



**WEstjustice**





Westjustice provides free legal help to people in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne. We help with advice, representation and systemic advocacy for a broad range of everyday problems.

Please call (03) 9749 7720 to find out more about our services or to make an appointment.

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Westjustice acknowledges the Peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters of our region. We acknowledge the Kulin Peoples' ongoing connection to Country, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present. As we work to achieve a just and fair society, we acknowledge the fundamental role of First Peoples in the life of this region, as Custodians of the world's oldest living Culture.

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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# Executive Summary

**This past year has seen quite a significant growth in our size and impact. Our Teams have once again risen to the enormous challenge of servicing a large Western Suburbs community of over one million people. Despite our sharper focus on client centric models of delivery to ensure that we are reaching the people that need our services the most, there is still a high degree of unmet need.**

## Stakeholder relationships

We have enjoyed working with the state and federal governments to increase our understanding of shared policy and priority areas. To this end, we were delighted to be a part of the Federal Government announcement changing the New Zealand Citizenship law. From an impact perspective, this means that the New Zealand Citizens that complete year 12 can access FEE HELP and engage in tertiary education. It also means that many families that were previously denied access to important health, social and economic resources, now can. At state government level, we have deepened our understanding of the Early Intervention Investment Framework, and we are pleased that there is a greater focus on the social and financial benefits of prevention and early intervention strategies.

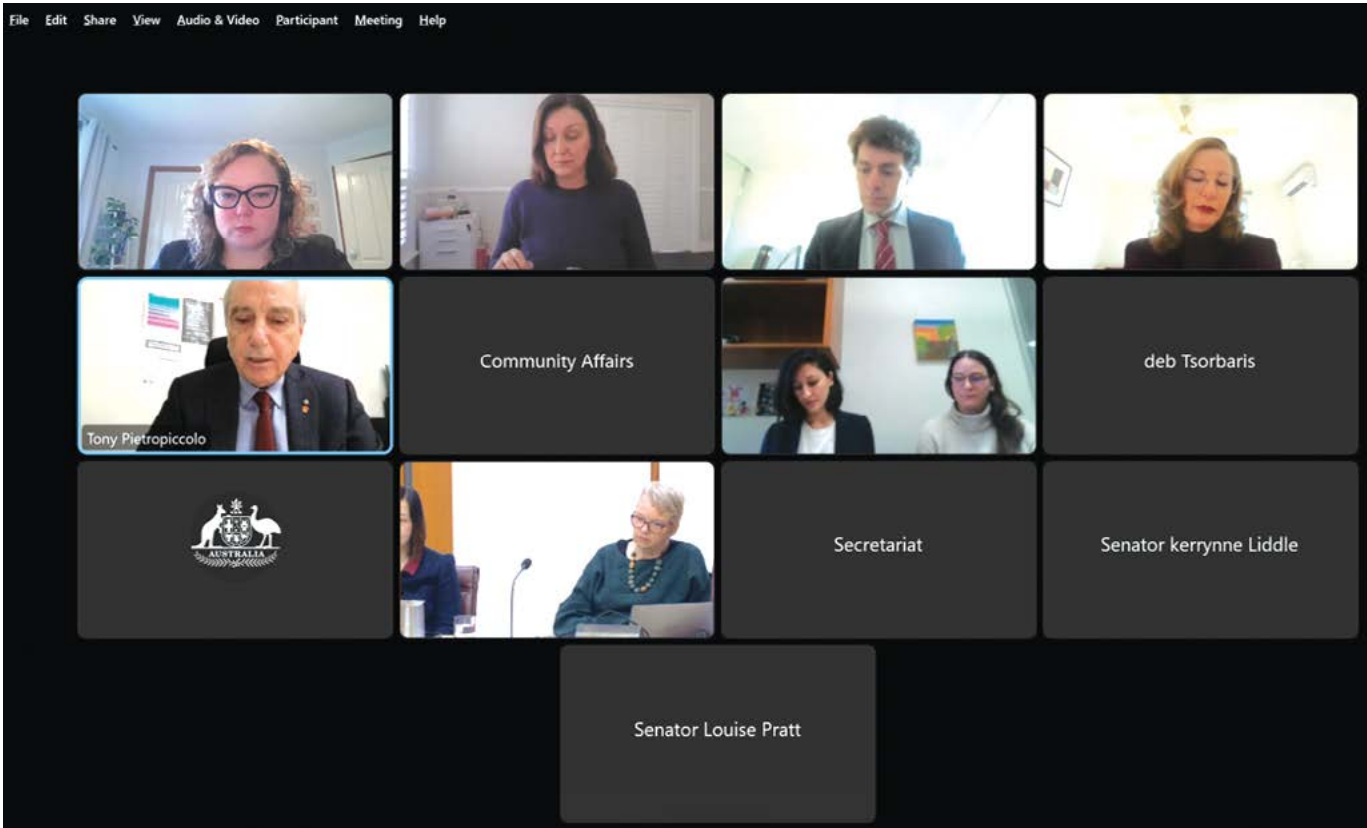
We are also very fortunate to work with community partners comprising schools, hospitals, settlement services, health services, out of home care facilities, multidisciplinary hubs, housing services, universities, with aligned values.

## Reform and Systemic Impact

We have engaged in a number of reform opportunities, and this is detailed throughout the report. At an organisational level, we have provided Submissions to the National Legal Assistance Partnership. Review. We have emphasised the need to increase funding to the CLC sector, for the important human benefits, but also because it makes sound financial sense. As a sector, CLCs are experts in reaching disadvantaged communities through client centric, multidisciplinary integrated models and empowering our clients to access justice and improved life outcomes. This aligns with the Objectives of the NLAP Agreement. We are calling on the Federal Government to reflect this alignment in fair and proportionate funding allocations. We congratulate the Federation of Community Legal Centres and Community Legal Centres Australia on their excellent and thorough CLC consultations and comprehensive submissions.

We have also contributed to the market sounding of the Early Intervention Enabler Fund. We are excited to see this type of initiative coming through the Victorian Government and the leadership in this area of capacity building for not-for-profit organisations.

Finally, we were pleased to have finalised our Victorian Government Budget Submission for 2024. There are many outstanding programs for which we are seeking ongoing funding in order to continue to create positive impact across our Western Suburbs communities.



Whilst we have seen significant growth across our programs and services, we are still only skimming the surface of need in the Western Suburbs - a total population of over one million people. We encourage governments to explore more justice reinvestment opportunities to further the prevention and early intervention initiatives of the CLC sector. We acknowledge recent initiatives such as the Victorian Governments Early Intervention and Investment Framework.

**Melissa Hardham, CEO.**



We have sharpened our capacity to evidence human and cost benefits of deliberate and effective strategies in order to prevent and intervene early with regard to complex societal issues.



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# Message from the Chair and CEO



## Our Vision

Our Vision is for a just and fair society where the law and its processes don't discriminate against people, and where those in need have ready and easy access to legal education, information, advice, casework services, systemic advocacy, and reform.

## Our Mission

Our mission is to service the legal needs in the West in a way that addresses the systemic nature of disadvantage.

## Our Values

**Courage** – providing creative solutions and fearless advocacy.

**Community-led** – accessible and meaningful engagement towards empowerment.

**Real Impact** – targeted and holistic outcomes through collaboration.

**Respect** – continuing commitment to inclusion and cultural safety.

**Kindness** – dedication to helping people.

**Trust** – act with integrity and renowned for producing high quality results.

## Our Impact

We have deepened our impact across our four impact areas including the following highlights:

### People experiencing economic injustice

- Infiltrated devastating scams.
- Attended the launch of the National Anti-Scam Centre in Canberra.
- Launched the Tenancy Stress Victoria service.
- Expanded the Mortgage Stress Victoria service statewide.

### Young People

- Campaigned to Raise the Age to 14 and reform Bail Laws.
- Launched phase 2 of TARGET ZERO – we now have 19 committed partners.
- Expanded the School Lawyer Program into Parkville College.
- Commenced the Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Program.

### People experiencing gender-based violence

- Expanded our Maternity Family Violence Health Justice Partnership.
- Launched our report, [When do I get to tell my story.](#)
- Launched of the Family Law Assistance Report with our project partners.
- Expanded the Restoring Financial Safety Program to the Wyndham Orange Door.

### Culturally and linguistically Diverse Communities

- Launched the Settlement Justice Partnership Report with keynote speaker, the Attorney General, the Hon. Mark Dreyfus KC MP.
- Attended a codesign process with the Department of Home Affairs to improve visa protections for migrant workers.
- Launched the Equality Law Service with keynote speaker, Nyadol Nyuon OAM.
- Celebrated the changes to the New Zealand Citizenship laws after 6 years of campaigning.

### Mortgage Stress Victoria

- Scaled a small pilot into a statewide program.
- Developed the efficacy for the test, try, evaluate, codify model.
- Provided a test case of Community Legal Centres to scale successful initiatives.
- Evidenced early intervention and social investment benefits including avoided costs to government.



## Our Strategy

We have completed our Strategy 2020-23 and have appointed Social Ventures Australia to facilitate the development of our Strategy 2024-27. We have included a high-level summary in this report (page 12).

## Our People

We are always amazed at the calibre of people we attract to Westjustice. It is often difficult work in an environment of large unmet need. Yet our Teams are full of altruistic, hardworking, talented, and creative thinkers, who are relentless in their pursuits of the best outcomes for our clients and impact areas. We thank each and every one of you for your commitment to our organisation and the Western Suburbs communities.

## Our Reconciliation Action Plan

We have completed our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and are in the process of finalising our next RAP. We hope to launch this early 2024.

## Our Communities

We appreciate and thank our communities for your ongoing trust in our work, *with you and for you*. We will continue to find the most effective manner in which to protect your rights to live safely and fairly, and to find solutions to the often complex and challenging issues that you experience.

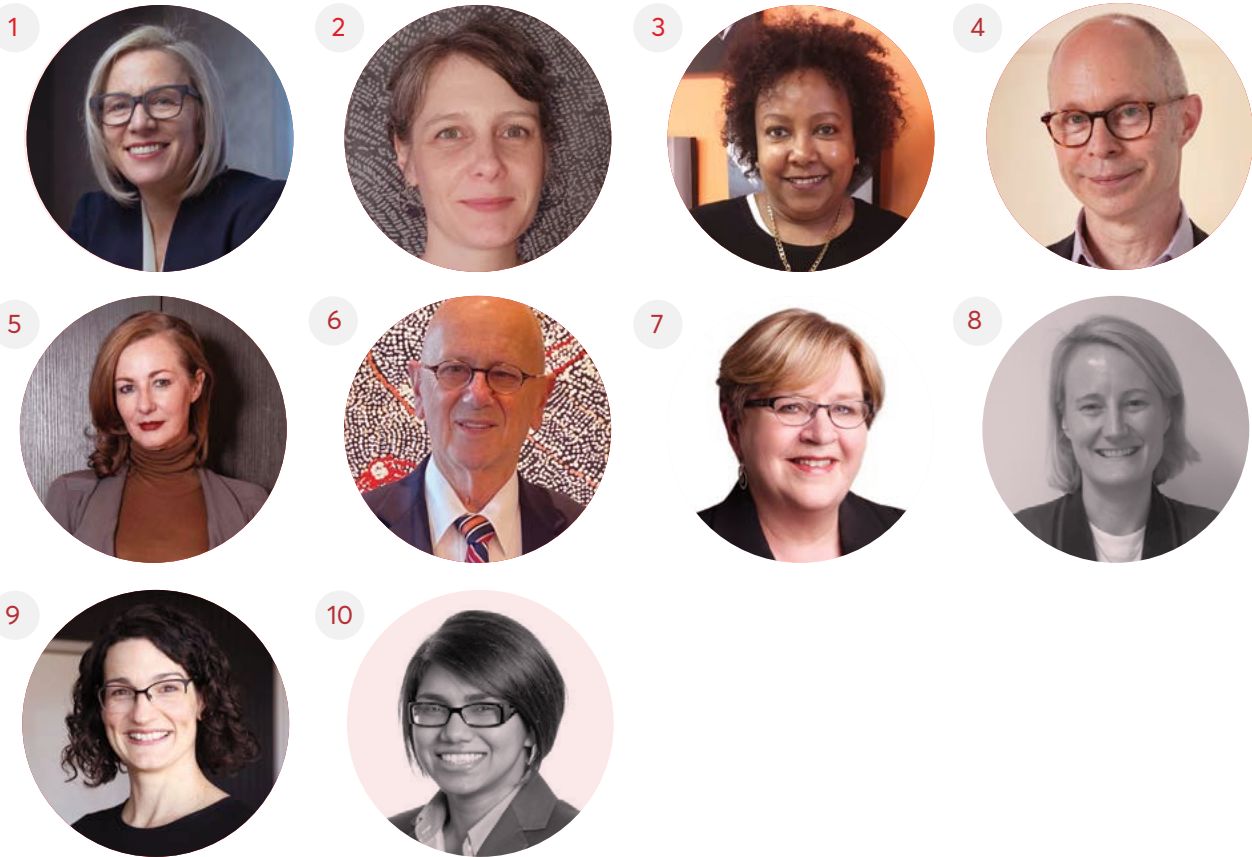


**Dana Nelson**  
Chair of the Board



**Melissa Hardham**  
Chief Executive Officer

# Board Members



- 1 Dana Nelson**  
Chairperson, Director
- 2 Sarah Jane Strapps**  
Secretary, Public Officer, Director
- 3 Meseret Abebe**  
Director
- 4 Stuart Brown**  
Director
- 5 Melissa Hardham**  
CEO and Director

- 6 Greg Levine OAM**  
Director
- 7 Patricia Crossin AM**  
Director
- 8 Susie King**  
Director
- 9 Annamarie Rooding**  
Director
- 10 Dharmini Sivananthan**  
Director

# Welcome to the Board



We welcomed a new Board Director, Dharmini Sivananthan. We are thrilled to have Dharmini join Westjustice. With over 15 years of experience in external audit, financial control, and governance, she is currently responsible for managing the cashflows and investment portfolio of Bupa APAC, spanning insurance, aged care, and health services. Her previous roles include a decade-long career as an external auditor, providing strong foundations in governance and controls.

"I am thrilled to be joining Westjustice. Throughout my induction, I have been truly impressed by the organisation's extensive reach, dynamic pace, and ambitious commitment to advocating for meaningful outcomes for its clients and the community. My goal is to contribute financial expertise and leadership to support your ongoing success.

We also recruited Geoff Gedge to the role of Company Secretary. With the development of our Board Sub Committees and our first Subsidiary, this role required a high degree of skills and experience. Geoff is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and undertook the AICD Company Directors Course in 2020. He holds qualifications in Law, Business and a Masters in International Business, (majoring in Strategy and Management). Outside of his Board roles, he is focused on financial services, circular economy start-ups and hospitality, mergers and acquisitions, advisory and capital raising.



"I am thrilled to embark on this journey with Westjustice. As the newly appointed Company Secretary, I am excited to contribute to the organisation's unwavering commitment to social justice, fostering a community where legal advocacy transforms lives. Joining Westjustice was not just another job; it's a profound opportunity to be a catalyst for positive change, standing alongside a community that values equity, integrity, and the transformative power of law."















# Strategy 2020-2023

## SUMMARY OF FINAL REPORT

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	DETAILS	RATING
<b>Priority One:</b> Embedding a coherent approach to systemic impact work, informed by, and integrated with case work, education and community development.	We have an evidence-based process to determine our impact areas, priorities, campaigns, and areas of focus along with allocation of resources and these are reviewed periodically.	
	We generate and maintain an ethos of uncompromising strategic pursuit of client and community outcomes. We do this through client led, place based, multidisciplinary integrated delivery models.	
	Our systemic impact work is collaborative and sits across all areas of our practice. We share our work through our regular Systemic Impact Working Group meetings.	
<b>Priority Two:</b> Designing an operating model, legal services and processes which are client-centred and provide clients with whole of person support.	Our Operating Model reflects our approach to systemic impact work and responds to the needs of our community. A comprehensive triaging system is subject to funding.	
	Our legal service design is informed by our clients and community needs. This ensures consistency and quality delivery. It is largely place based, multidisciplinary and integrated.	
	We seek out partners who have a shared commitment to provide clients with comprehensive, ethical, and holistic services. We review our partnerships periodically.	
<b>Priority Three:</b> Deepening our organisational culture to build capability, promote collaboration and deliver excellence.	Our performance reflects and aligns with our vision, purpose, and strategic priorities. We have revisited and rewritten our values. We review our strategic priorities annually.	
	We have a strengthened understanding as to how our organisation functions to ensure that our Team are across changes and reforms. We have created several internal Working Groups.	
	We provide opportunities to evolve skills, expertise, leadership, and career development. This includes a designated budget for each staff member and commitment to mandatory training.	
	Our staff are generally engaged, motivated and have opportunities to flourish through work life balance. This is monitored through monthly meetings and development plans.	
	We prioritise staff wellbeing. This was particularly prevalent during the pandemic with multiple wellbeing events and check ins. We will build on the learnings through WISED UP, our new people and culture program.	
	Our diverse workforce reflects our diverse community. WISED UP will build a diversity framework, supported by our Cultural Safety and Inclusion Working Group and Anti Racism Strategy.	



STRATEGIC PRIORITY	DETAILS	RATING
<b>Priority Four:</b> Establishing internal systems and processes to strengthen our foundations.	We have rebuilt our digital management system, and we are about to introduce a new case management system. We have modernized our hardware and software.	
	We reviewed our reward and recognition processes and increased remuneration. We introduced work development plans and a promotions policy along with a flexible work policy.	
	We restructured all teams, roles, reporting lines and support systems. We have recently recruited a new People and Culture Director and will design and implement WISED UP.	
	We developed a communications and media strategy which is implemented across all teams. This enables Westjustice to prioritise external communications and create clarity.	
	We revised the Risk Management System and Risk Register and introduced the Financial Risk and Audit Committee.	
<b>Priority Five:</b> Build fiscal capability and sustainability.	Whilst we have grown significantly and transformed our financial management system, we are still developing our longer term strategy to addresses fiscal needs including workforce security.	
	We have established and maintained strong and impactful relationships with funders and stakeholders. This includes both government and philanthropic sectors.	
	We are starting to gain influence across the trusts and philanthropies sectors. However, we are yet to have a meaningful impact on government grants, including allocations, size, and duration.	
	We continue to explore and research potential revenue streams. We have deepened our relationships which include state budget submissions and a contribution the NLAP Review.	

-  **Green** - Completed and ongoing.
-  **Orange** - Underway.
-  **Red** - Not yet commenced.



# COLLECTIVE IMPACT STATEMENT

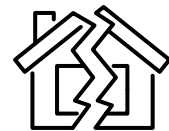
# COLLECTIVE IMPACT STATEMENT



### The Restoring Financial Safety Program waived and recovered



**\$390,877**  
for our clients



The Family Violence and Family Law Program secured more than

**\$429,367**  
for family violence survivors in family law property disputes.

The Youth Law Program waived



**\$119,485**



in fines for young people.

**TOTALLING \$1,176,496 FOR CLIENTS**

Mortgage Stress Victoria prevented repossession at least

**93 times**



and supported **901 individual clients.**

### CLIENTS AGED 25 YEARS AND UNDER



Delivered

**851** Civil Law legal services to  
**372 clients**



The **Youth Law Team** provided legal services to a total of

**449** young people



The Employment and Equality Law Program recovered

**\$85,642**

in unpaid wages, entitlements, waived debts and compensation.

Consumer & Settlement Justice programs created



**\$151,098**  
in financial benefits for clients



Delivered

**416**

Criminal Law legal services to

**240 clients**

We provided

**916**

duty lawyer services in

**family violence**

**intervention order**

**hearings**

at the Sunshine and Werribee Magistrates Courts



We provided services to

**2166 clients**



clients through our Family Violence Early Resolution Service.

WESTJUSTICE PROVIDED

**301**

Community Legal Education sessions



TO

**7768 attendees**



**2344 clients**

assisted with legal and financial issues



We assisted

**1288**

people to address housing insecurity



We assisted

**137**

people to address job insecurity



We assisted

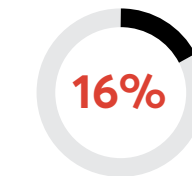
**1144**

people with family violence issues

The top 4 legal matter types in which we assisted with in 2022-23 were:



domestic violence



housing/tenancy



credit and debt



criminal

Hosted



**54**

Victoria University students

# THE WESTJUSTICE TEAM



# THE WESTJUSTICE TEAM





# Learning and Development Program

## Victoria University Clinical Placement Program

Over the last year we have continued to provide internship opportunities to students undertaking a law degree in partnership with Victoria University. We strive to provide a whole of organisation experience for students with opportunities to experience a range of tasks and activities.

Each year we sponsor two awards to recognise exceptional contribution to the organisation. This year the award recipients were:

**Samuel Mander** - Victoria University College Award for Leader in the Community

**Isabella Tumolero** - Cindy Farran Book Award

Isabella reflects that *"although there are many highlights of this internship, a standout would have to be being able to be involved with a file from the beginning... I was asked to perform tasks such as file noting and keeping in communication with the client, along with writing letters to the opposing party in the hope of a resolution. Ultimately, we were successful and were able to get the outcome we were after, an amazing learning experience."*

Her supervisor, Anna, says her highlight was *"seeing Issy running one of my files (under my supervision) from the client interview stage to the very end... However it was the way Issy supporting one of our colleagues through a very challenging client interview that was a highlight to see". She also reflected that "after practising for some time, it is easy to forget some of the fundamentals so it has been refreshing...examining the reasons why we do things that feel so intuitive to us as seasoned lawyers..."*.

### In the last financial year:

- we placed 54 Victoria University students in our organisation
- at least 35 staff members have supervised students
- 5 students who participated in the program subsequently secured employment opportunities at Westjustice

We thank our program funder Victoria University, the students, our Westjustice supervising staff and our Program Coordinator, Sarah Breen, for their ongoing commitment and support.

## Skye Hawkins Annual Volunteer Award

This year we awarded the inaugural Skye Hawkins Volunteer Award, a prize named after our colleague, Skye Hawkins, who sadly passed away in 2020. This award recognises an outstanding volunteer who embodies the values of Westjustice. In this inaugural year it was awarded to Barry Clearwater.

## Learning and Development

We continue to strengthen the cultural safety and inclusiveness of our organisation through our organisation-wide training program. This year training was focused on deepening our skills in working with people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, growing our skills in LGBTIQ+ inclusive practice and developing our trauma-informed practice skills.

We placed

**54**

Victoria University  
students in our  
organisation

at least  
**35 staff**  
have supervised  
students





# Economic Justice Program

## Summary

The Economic Justice team's vision is a Western Melbourne community in which people can access their essential needs through fair systems and services. We have three teams: Consumer & Settlement Justice, Financial Safety, and Tenancy.

## Our People

This year, we welcomed lawyers Paryce Bausch and Nikeshe Goldie and Social Worker Rebecca Jehu to the team. We have also been supported in our economic abuse casework by Jeanette Dusabe, seconded from the Employment and Equality Law Team. We farewelled Anna Nguyen, our tenacious consumer clinic lawyer.



## Our Impact

We delivered the following programs, constituting legal advice, assistance and education:

- A debt and consumer law clinic for disadvantaged people in the West.
- The Settlement Justice Partnership, an in-situ project delivered with Wyndham Community & Education Centre and MiCare where recently-arrived refugees can access legal help through their local settlement agency.
- The Restoring Financial Safety Clinic, where victim-survivors of partner economic abuse are assisted by a lawyer and financial counsellor to rebuild their independence and resolve legal and debt issues.
- The Motor Vehicle Accident Clinic, where low-income drivers who become involved in car collisions can obtain timely debt and insurance advice.
- Our Tenancy Advice and Advocacy (TAAP) program, supported by our accommodation advice and representation service for Melbourne's international students, and a pilot project investigating income and housing precarity for Victoria University students.

### Significant outcomes for our clients included:

- Our Tenancy services offered advice, assistance and representation to over **387** renters, with a focus on preventing evictions, obtaining urgent repairs, and assisting family violence victim-survivors with complex tenancy issues.
- Our Consumer and Settlement Justice programs assisted **180** individuals for a total of **\$151,098.14** in financial benefit.
- Our Restoring Financial Safety project assisted **117** people to waive **\$291,508** of debt and fines and gain **\$99,369** in compensation. Our RFS financial counsellor, Sarah Duane, won the 2022 Rising Star Award at the state Financial Counselling conference. Our Motor Vehicle Accident Clinic, which is part of the Financial Safety team, helped **84** individuals to resolve complex insurance and Magistrates' Court matters.



### Our systemic advocacy included:

- Launching *Don't Settle For Less: Fairer Outcomes For Refugees In Melbourne's West* before a full house with the Hon Mark Dreyfus KC MP, Attorney-General of Australia.
- Advocating to rethink legal and other services to renters in crisis, resulting in the creation of the Tenancy Stress Victoria pilot.
- Hosting the Minister of Financial Services, the Hon Stephen Jones MP to discuss the latest impacts of scams on CALD communities, and subsequently attended the launch of the National Anti-Scams Centre in Canberra.
- Appearing in the media to discuss community legal issues, including the cost-of-living crisis on *The Conversation Hour*, and comment to ABC in Victoria and *South Australia* on *lemon car* and scam issues.
- Advocating for the development of a modern and fit-for-purpose hardship scheme for Victorian ratepayers.

Our Consumer  
& Settlement Justice  
programs assisted  
**\$151,098**  
in financial  
benefit.



- Meeting with Federal Treasury to refine proposals for regulating Buy Now Pay Later as a form of consumer credit, with an emphasis on protections for family violence survivors.
- Participating in national working groups with peak body partners to campaign for reforms to prevent customers being left without effective remedies when sold defective cars, and for better outcomes for victims of banking fraud.

We collaborated with peers, continuing to co-convene the Victorian Infringements Working Group, and participating in the Tenants' Working Group, the Thriving Communities Partnership One Stop One Story Hub, the Economic Abuse Reference Group, the Wyndham H3 Alliance and the Western Settlement Outcomes Network.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our funders the Department of Justice and Community Safety, Consumer Affairs Victoria, the Department of Skills, Jobs, Industry and Regions, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the Ecstra Foundation, the Collier Charitable Fund and Victoria University, as well as our partners Consumer Action Law Centre, Wyndham Community & Education Centre, Thriving Communities Partnership, MiCare, McAuley Community Services for Women, Anglicare, and Study Melbourne, as well as volunteers and staff for their ongoing commitment and support.







More than  
**\$429,367**

secured for family  
violence survivors in  
family law property  
disputes.

# Family Violence and Family Law Program

## Summary

Our vision is for our clients to feel safe and secure. We do this by representing clients in family violence intervention order proceedings, family law, criminal proceedings where they have been misidentified as the primary perpetrator and providing early intervention legal advice to clients being investigated by child protection.

## Our People

We were thrilled to promote our lawyers Caitlin Vaughan and Abigail Stone to Senior Lawyers, and we also welcomed Kirstyn Campbell, Larvynia Fuataga and Marta Vezzosi into the team. We farewellled Beth Griggs and Abigail Stone. We also welcomed Sarah Flint and Lucy Duffy-Krywula as part of the Practical Legal Training (PLT) program. Sarah Flint went on to secure a lawyer role in the team.

## Our impact

Of the 1027 unique clients assisted by the Program during this period:

- **90%** identified as female
- **91%** experienced, or were at risk, of experiencing family violence
- **75%** have children
- **72%** experienced financial disadvantage, more than two thirds of clients receiving Centrelink payments
- **21%** disclosed that they had a disability
- **14%** required an interpreter
- **2%** identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

## Our highlights

The key activities undertaken in this reporting period were:

- More than **\$429,367** secured for family violence survivors in family law property disputes.
- Upskilled internal staff in family law and child protection.
- Returned to onsite, weekly delivery of our service at the Werribee Mercy Hospital and monthly onsite services at IPC Heath - Wyndham Vale Child and Family Hub.
- Engaged Health Justice Australia (HJA) to work with our team to expand our Maternity Family Violence Health Justice Partnership (HJP), including at the Wyndham Council Maternal Child Health Nurse (MCHN).
- Continued to address misidentification and criminalisation of victim survivors as perpetrators and proactive support to clients at risk of child protection intervention.

### Advocacy, systemic reform and policy work

- We released the family violence resistance and agency research [report](#) "When do I get to tell my story?" and are advocating for system improvements for victim survivors from the findings and recommendations.
- We made a submission to the exposure draft of the Family Law Amendment Bill. In addition, we endorsed the Women's Legal Service's [submission](#).
- Joined the 2022 Walk to End Family Violence and raised \$700 for Safe Steps through fundraising.

- We proactively advocated for improvements to the justice system for survivors of family violence, including creating safer spaces and a fairer justice system through the Early Resolution Services, Duty Lawyer Services and judicial behaviour. We also advocated for childcare at courts and undertook research that highlights barriers in the family violence system.
- Actively participated in a number of targeted family violence working groups – Justice at home, the ERS Working Group, Sunshine Magistrates' Court Specialist Family Violence Implementation Working Group, Wyndham Family Violence Network meetings, VicPathways Western Collaboration Group meetings, the FCLC Family Violence Working Groups and the Western Integrated Family Violence Committee (WIFVC) where we share our case work insights and policy reform objectives.
- Actively participated in the Justice at Home Remote Hearing Research project by Northern CLC (focus groups and member of the Advisory Group).
- Participated in advocacy and submissions to increase funding for Specialist Family Violence Court service delivery.
- Provided legal assistance to 14 clients referred to us through the new Child and Family Hubs at IPC Health in Wyndham
- Opened 9 new family law access files, 13 additional family law cases and finalised 32 family law cases during this reporting period, where all clients are victim survivors of family violence.
- Assisted 9 clients facing language barriers prepare further and better particular requests which were filed with the court in intervention order proceedings.
- Represented 10 CALD clients in divorce proceedings.
- Provided advice and court representation to 8 female clients misidentified as the 'primary aggressor' in family violence incidents by the police, resulting in criminal charges, where we achieved some terrific outcomes including withdrawals and Diversion Plans.
- Delivered 12 Community Legal Education events in covering family violence and family law to community and stakeholder groups.
- Legal supervision and mentoring to 9 Victoria University Law Students.

## Our statistics

- 2166 ERS pre-court advice, negotiation and court representation services in the Sunshine and Werribee Magistrates' Courts and advice and court representation for 247 clients referred to our team on the day of Court.
- Legal advice services to 207 clients through our day and night advice services where people at risk of or experiencing family violence are prioritised for associated family law assistance.
- Provided 36 onsite legal clinics at Werribee Mercy Hospital and 48 unique clients serviced through the Maternity Family Violence Early Intervention Clinic with more than 100 separate legal services provided.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to our Program's key funders and administrators including State and Commonwealth governments, Victoria Legal Aid, Department of Justice Clayton Utz and Community Safety, Victoria Law Foundation and our volunteer lawyers who assist clients in our family law after hours advice service. In addition, we thank our partners Mercy Hospital, Wyndham Enhanced Maternal Child Health Nurses and IPC Health. Strategic advocacy and identification of clustered family law, crime and child protection legal problems directly associated with family violence to minimise the damage that can be caused by more complex legal problems.





# Employment and Equality Law Program

## Summary

The Employment and Equality Law Program (EELP) vision is for decent, safe and fair work for all. We address systemic injustice at work by learning from, empowering and advocating for communities in need. Our services are targeted towards young people, newly arrived migrant workers, culturally and linguistically diverse workers, people experiencing family and gender-based violence, and international students.

The most common legal problems we advise on are employment conditions and entitlements, discrimination, recovery of unpaid wages and entitlements, general protections and unfair dismissal.

## Our People

In 2022-23 EELP welcomed four new team members: Rachel Athaide, Vicki Lamb, Jeanette Dusabe, and Briana Ganesharajah. Thea Depold was promoted to Senior Lawyer and we farewelled Cassandra Martin.

## Integrated legal services

Across our five integrated legal services, we:

- Provided **183 legal services** to **137 workers**.
- Recovered **\$85,642** in unpaid wages, entitlements, waived debts and compensation.
- Delivered **60 legal education and information sessions** to over **1290 participants**.
- Published 9 educational social media posts designed to teach young people and intermediaries about work rights.
- Held **20 outreach information stalls** for our Equality Law Service at Sunshine and Sydenham libraries, engaging with **89 individuals**.
- Assisted **68 teachers** across Victoria with our "WRS Teacher's Pack" providing them with lesson plans and teaching aides for the new Work-Related Skills curriculum.

We were actively involved in systemic advocacy for workplace relations, migration system and anti-discrimination law reform, including making **8 submissions** on:

- [Migration worker](#) exploitation
- [Costs for Federal discrimination claims](#)
- [Workplace gender equality](#)
- The [criminalisation](#) of wage theft
- [Casual worker](#) exploitation
- [Employee-like](#) forms of work (gig economy)
- [Stronger protections](#) against workplace discrimination

We continue to chair the FCLC Victorian Employment Law Working Group and participate in stakeholder and community networks convened by the FWO; VEOHRC/VLA; ECCV; VCOSS and WorkSafe.



Recovered  
**\$85,642**  
in unpaid wages,  
entitlements, waived  
debts and  
compensation.

Delivered  
**60**  
legal education  
and information sessions  
to over  
**1290**  
participants



## Highlights

- Successfully launched our Equality Law Service with support from the Sir Zelman Cowen Centre, with Executive Director Nyadol Nyuon OAM providing the keynote address focusing on the intersectional experiences of migrant women. Approximately 60 people attended the launch in person.
- Designed and executed in situ library outreach stalls to provide members of the public with information about discrimination and sexual harassment at work and ways they could access our services.
- Secured funding for all services delivered, including our youth employment law program which was unfunded.
- Expanded the team to 9 staff: one Director, two Program Managers, two Senior Lawyers, two Lawyers, one Senior Legal Counsel and Senior Administrator.
- Interviewed on [ABC's Conversation](#) Hour with Richelle Hunt about our youth employment program.
- Attended the St Albans Local Jobs and Skills Summit to advocate for international students rights.
- Travelled to Canberra for two days as part of the Department of Home Affairs co-design on improved visa protections for migrant workers.
- Contributed to research by the Grattan Institute on Migrant Worker exploitation.



## Acknowledgements

- We thank our funders: the National Legal Assistance Partnership, the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety; the Victorian Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions; the Victorian Department of Families Fairness and Housing, Ecstra Foundation, and WorkSafe.
- We also thank our pro bono partners Maddocks, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Clayton Utz, Slater and Gordon, Maurice Blackburn, Gordon Legal, and volunteers Phoebe Churches, Vialto Partners and Imogen Szmer.



# Youth Law Program

Provided  
**211**  
community legal  
education sessions

We helped waive  
**\$119,485**  
worth of fines and debts  
for youth clients

## Our people

We welcomed Julie Hoang and Briana Ganesharajah to the team. We said goodbye to Nadia Baldassi-Winderlich and Emily Scott, and thank them for their years of service. They have both made a lasting impact in our community and we are grateful for their contribution. We welcomed Phoebe Frost but also said farewell, we thank her for her time here.

## Our programs and projects

### SCHOOL LAWYER PROGRAM

We finished up at Tarneit Senior College after 5 years of great collaborative work. We continue to partner with Wyndham Central College, Hester Hornbrook Academy and The Grange P12 College. We recently partnered with Parkville College and we are now based at their Parkville Youth Justice Centre campus.

### OUT OF HOME CARE LEGAL CLINIC PILOT

We continue to deliver our Out of Home Care Legal Clinic pilot to young people living in Residential Care Homes run by Anglicare. The outreach clinic aims to help young people to identify a legal problem and get help early. An evaluation report will be made public toward the end of 2023.

### YOUTH LAW CLINICS

Our clinics continue offering appointments across two youth hubs for a range of civil and criminal matters. We also re-commenced a drop-in clinic once a week at Sunshine which saw a number of young people come in for urgent assistance who might not have otherwise accessed typical appointments.

### YCPEIP

Our [Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Program](#) continues to get better outcomes for young people charged with criminal offences. The interim evaluation report highlights child remand numbers dropping dramatically and the rates of cautions for kids more than doubling across both Brimbank and Wyndham.

### TARGET ZERO

TARGET ZERO is a 10-year collective impact approach to end the criminalisation of over-represented young people aged 10-25 years old in Melton, Wyndham and Brimbank. The Paul Ramsay Foundation granted Westjustice \$500,000 and we hosted a lunch so they could meet TARGET ZERO stakeholders and hear about the impact of the program.

## Our Impact

During this financial year, there were 331 unique entries for legal assistance for young people across Westjustice. The top five legal issues experienced were:

- Criminal law (177)
- fines (86)
- family violence (38)
- Victims of Crime (30)
- Personal Safety Intervention Order matters (16).

## Our systemic impact

Westjustice continued to support the Raise [The Age](#) campaign with our Director appearing in the ABC news to advocate for keeping young children out of the criminal justice system, and on the ABC [Conversation Hour](#) to discuss targeting zero youth crime. Westjustice co-convoked SJ4YP and continued to participate in its RTA Working Group. SJ4YP handed a petition to raise the age with 65,000 signatures to Fiona Patten MP, who handed it the Attorney General. Our Program Manager Angus went on [3CR](#) to discuss crime and mandatory sentencing schemes.

PI and YLP continued to deliver CLE on our new [Instagram page](#), which now has nearly 700 followers.



## Acknowledgements

Thank you to 3CR radio, Brian M. Davis Charitable Foundation, Centre for Multicultural Youth, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Co-Health, Dr Diana Johns, Dr Mario Puecker, Godwin Masuka, Headspace, Jesuit Social Services, Marie Pewhairangi, Junubi Wyndham, Orygen Youth Mental Health, Victoria Legal Aid, Victoria Police, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Western Metropolitan Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee, Whitelion, Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS), Youthlaw, VACCA, Youth Junction, Youth Now, Aafro, Charis mentoring, MCM, Anglicare Victoria, Brimbank, Melton and Wyndham Councils, Newsboys, Noel and Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation, Paul Ramsay Foundation, Richelle Hunt, The Grange P12 College, Wyndham Central College, Parkville College, Hester Hornbrook Academy, Victorian Legal Services Board, Jack Brockhoff Foundation, Kimberley Foundation, Kate Ballard, Conor O'Bryan and Kestin Mildenhall.







# Community Development, Engagement and Education

## Yoorrook

The CEO, PI and YLP teams prepared a [submission](#) to the Yoorrook Justice Commission and the CEO and YLP Director gave evidence to the inquiry. Their testimonies focused on the impact of cyclic disadvantage in Melbourne's West, and on Westjustice's approach to addressing complex social and justice issues. Our submission made a series of recommendations, including recommending against the over resourcing of the "sticks" – that is the Police Stations, Courts and jails – and investing much more heavily in the "carrots" – that is, interconnected (and real) health, housing, education and economic levers to assist to break the cyclic nature of disadvantage. Their testimony acknowledged that those tasked with the policy development, planning, implementation, and evaluation ought to be our First Peoples.

In this regard, Westjustice defers to, and are led by, Western RAJAC, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS), Djirra and other First Peoples organisations and leaders in relation to the impact of cyclic disadvantage and complex social and justice issues, and supports their expanded presence in Melbourne's West.

## Wyndham Services Hub Proposal

The CEO and the PI Team have continued to advocate for a dedicated services Hub to properly support the new Wyndham Courts and the broader Western Suburbs community. In the new financial year, we will be undertaking detailed community consultations and preparing a business case for the project. This work has been made possible with the generous support of the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, the Paul Ramsay Foundation and the Wyndham City Council.

Our Burmese Financial Counseling Clinic has been operational throughout the year. This clinic highlights the benefits of having community leaders within the Westjustice Team facilitating warm referrals into our services and ensuring that our model is culturally safe and well informed about community needs and issues. It is through this trust and connectivity that we have been able to intervene early to stop harmful scams from spreading further



## Reconciliation Action Plan

After a short break from Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) work due to staff absences, we have commenced our second RAP, the RAP Innovate. We have reengaged the RAP Working Group and are hoping to have our RAP approved by Reconciliation Australia by the end of the year. We look forward to improving our hiring and promoting practices, including embedding an anti-racism policy at Westjustice in collaboration with the Cultural Safety Working Group, and deepening our relationships with First Nations people and organisations in the West of Melbourne to ensure we are doing all that we can to be an ally in supporting First Nations people to achieve justice and self-determination in Melbourne's West.



## Tribute to Nguri

We pay tribute to Dr Za Tuah Ngur (Nguri), one of our Senior Community Development and Engagement Officers, who sadly passed away at the time of writing this report.

Nguri was a significant contributor to our Western Suburbs communities for many years, through both her role with the Burmese Financial Counselling Clinic since 2010 and her leadership with the Chin and Hakha Chin speaking communities. We also acknowledge her extensive skills and experience and her academic achievements, along with her role as a Pastor for the Zotung Baptist Church in Spotswood.

We were extremely fortunate to have Nguri's skills and expertise within our Westjustice Team and we all had the deepest respect for Nguri and her late husband, Pa Hmun.

Nguri will be missed by many but her legacy will remain strong within Westjustice and the broader communities she tirelessly supported with compassion and grace.



# Policy and Innovation Program

## Our People

This financial year, the Policy and Innovation team farewelled Shifrah Blustein and welcomed Annie Belcher to the team as our new Senior Policy Officer. We thank Shifrah for her many years of dedicated work, and thank Annie for hitting the ground running.

## Our Impact

We have had a huge year, with some great advocacy wins and broad media coverage, fighting for the best justice and social outcomes for the people of the West. Under our Strategic Advocacy Framework, we have helped each team to prioritise their advocacy efforts to sharpen our impact to where it is most needed. We have also formalised our submissions process, through which we have delivered fewer submissions but with greater impact. This includes a dedicated effort to follow up on these submissions, giving evidence on key issues like the Yoorrook Justice Commission and the Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Poverty, and focusing on longer term engagement and the implementation of new policies.

You can see our Systemic Impact Reports from the year from [Jul-Dec 2022](#), and [Jan-Jun 2023](#) here.

### 2023-24 Victorian Budget

We successfully received funding for all but one program in our 2023 state budget bid, having made the decision to apply only for lapsing funding in recognition of current budget constraints.

We made  
**18**  
submissions  
to state and federal governments



### Victorian Government Engagement

Post the Victorian election, we held a series of meetings with new Ministers and our local MPs, to support our budget bid and our broader advocacy agenda. This included meetings with Dylan Wight MP, Matthew Hilakari MP, and Katie Hall MP to discuss our budget bid and the unique issues facing the Western suburbs communities. We also met with the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, the Hon. Lizzie Blandthorn MLC, to outline child protection issues experienced by our clients in our FVFL and YLP programs.

This financial  
year we had  
**8 Radio**  
**appearances**  
**54 Instagram posts**  
**100 Tweets**



This financial  
year we had  
**25**  
individual media  
articles

### Federal Engagement

Our engagement with the Federal Government is perhaps stronger than ever. We have strong relationships with all our local members, as well as many portfolio Ministers.

In one of the most beautiful wins for Westjustice, we were invited to join a pre-brief with the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Clare O'Neil MP, on the wholesale changes the Government made for New Zealand citizens to gain Australian citizenship and access to a range of government services. This was a special moment off the back of years of Westjustice advocacy. We celebrated this win with a lunch with local Federal MP, Joanne Ryan.

We have also enjoyed a strong relationship with Federal Attorney General, the Hon Mark Dreyfus KC MP, who has visited our offices twice, including to discuss greater support for community legal centres and the upcoming review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership.

### Media & Social Media

This financial year, we had 25 individual media articles, 8 radio appearances, 54 Instagram posts, and 100 Tweets.

Our Instagram page has over 700 followers, with a range of successful series including on introducing the youth team, your rights when interacting with the Police, and on personal safety. This has been a key way of reaching young people in the West with legal information and education.

We have also continued our strong relationships with the media, appearing in key articles and radio segments on issues including raising the age, youth employment, the cost-of-living crisis, mortgage stress, the criminalisation of poverty and more. We take our role as a trusted voice for the Western Suburbs very seriously, and focus our media appearances on issues that we can speak to with experience and that we know are important to our clients.

## Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks to the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, the Paul Ramsay Foundation and all of the political and ministerial offices who deal with us with patience and good faith.





# Operations and People

## Our People

The Administration Team recently underwent a restructure resulting in decentralisation of this function and more deliberate and coordinated placement within the program teams.

We welcomed Jossel Galang, Zara Gibson, Marina Sooknandan, and Yasmin El Hassan to the Operations Team. We also welcomed Francesca (Frankie) Lai, through an internal secondment, to lead our practice management system upgrade commencing with the introduction of Action Steps. Frankie has considerable experience across legal practice and project management.

Recently we recruited Emma Probert to head our People and Culture Program, together with Annamarie as Chair of our People and Culture team to transform our People and Culture function. As a starting point, we are introducing WISED UP – our deliberate focus on wellbeing, inclusion, safety, diversity, and equity across all teams.

We farewelled Jayde Giggins and Beth Griggs. Jayde assisted Westjustice during the challenges of the pandemic through her support of the CEO function and broader Westjustice leadership team. Beth's work ethic and positive mindset were seminal in identifying areas of improvement across our operations functions and people support. We acknowledge and thank both for supporting the Westjustice Team.

We also thank Shay Fullee and Jacinta Beckley for their contribution throughout the year across our people and operations functions.

## Our Impact

We have almost completed the Digital Management System (DMS) Transformation Project. The final element involves the introduction of Action Steps which will take place early 2024. We partnered with humanIT, using Crayon and Microsoft technology for social impact.

We were invited to collaborate on a [video](#) capturing the process and benefits. We are grateful to William Buckland Foundation for their generous multi-year funding for this project. We cannot overstate the value of their support. It is hard to imagine how Westjustice would have managed throughout the pandemic without these funds and the hardware and software upgrades that this grant enabled.

## Highlights

We presented the results of the DMS Transformation Project to several key stakeholders and emphasised the benefit of large multiyear grants.

We expanded our Administration Team and have commenced an operations system upgrade that is predicted to produce increased efficiencies and staff satisfaction.

We partnered with Good Financials to review and transform our Financial Management System. In addition, they have provided extensive training and upskilling to the Senior Leadership Team. Due to our rapid growth, we now have over 30 programs and services and over 40 different funding streams. Good Financials have worked closely with the Westjustice to ensure that our reporting is efficient and accurate, increasing our credibility and effectiveness.

## Acknowledgements

As noted above, we acknowledge the William Buckland Foundation and Good Financials, we also acknowledge STREAT, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and Bunji Catering for assisting with catering and event services.





# Mortgage Stress Victoria Program

## Summary

Mortgage Stress Victoria helps Victorians in mortgage stress to stay in their homes by providing free legal, financial counselling and social work support, statewide. We prevent evictions, negotiate workable repayment terms with lenders and ensure that victim/survivors of family violence (representing more than a third of our clients) stay safe. Where clients face eviction straight into homelessness, we support them to find and transition into affordable housing.

Mortgage Stress Victoria shields Government from the downstream costs of mortgage stress and homelessness including court proceedings, acute mental health services, crisis accommodation, homelessness supports and public housing.

During the last financial year, ongoing support from the Victorian Government allowed Mortgage Stress Victoria to scale up our service offering and impact.

People assisted July 2023 - June 2024	Number
Households	331
Individuals	901

We’ve seen our client demographic change over time. There’s a new cohort of people in mortgage stress with full time work.

While based at Westjustice’s Werribee office, Mortgage Stress Victoria serviced more than 60 of Victoria’s 79 LGAs.

### Client circumstances:

- 32% - sole parent
- 36% - affected by family violence
- 40% - unemployed
- 35% - do not speak English at home
- 43% - cited that they have a disability
- 40% - cited mental health challenges

## Our impact

In the last financial year, Mortgage Stress Victoria prevented repossession at least 93 times and prevented imminent repossession at least 29 times.

Breakdown of support types July 2023-June 2024:	Number
Legal ongoing representation	105
Legal advice	225
Financial counselling ongoing services	104
Financial counselling discreet services	201
Social work ongoing services	69
Social work discreet services	16



## Testimonial:

A recent client described MSV staff as:

*"..like 'Angels,' on earth! They have been full of heart and clarity amid the recovery of domestic violence endured for half a lifetime....*

*A lot of fees and charges attributed to the financial abuse have been waived successfully due to the assistance of these remarkable people advocating for me, and other victims of crime.*

*The chaos of the forms of abuse made my life and recovery (Mentally, emotionally, and financially) extremely difficult to cope with-especially being on my own with 3 children. Having [them] with me, every step, has helped my family and I feel less isolated and capable of living without fear, again.*

*I can never thank them enough for the extraordinary work they do daily!*

*The best group of professionals whose work has changed several years of 'pain and torture' into a life of 'hope, peace and freedom,' in every way possible. A Huge THANKS to such AMAZING people!"*

# Finance Report Summary

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

Revenue and other income	2023 \$	2022 \$
Revenue from contracts with customers	9,244,892	6,244,034
Other revenue	34,806	7,927
	9,279,698	6,251,961
Less: expenses	2023 \$	2022 \$
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(203,399)	(264,499)
Employee benefits expense	(6,964,590)	(4,877,389)
Occupancy expense	(220,757)	(68,901)
Lease expense	23,606	(20,049)
Organisational expenses	(409,313)	(261,185)
Employment expenses	(80,930)	(85,281)
Other expenses	(461,253)	(411,410)
	(8,316,636)	(5,988,714)
Surplus before income tax expense	963,062	263,247
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	-
Total comprehensive income	963,062	263,247

The surplus of \$963,062 includes \$425,356 of funding recognised as revenue under the accounting standards but which represents funding for projects which will be delivered in the next year, 2023-24. Excluding that revenue, the surplus would have been \$537,706.

BALANCE SHEET

Current assets	2023 \$	2022 \$
Cash and cash equivalents	5,826,896	4,334,889
Receivables	108,918	279,271
Other assets	190,480	173,184
Total current assets	6,126,294	4,787,344
Non current assets	2023 \$	2022 \$
Lease assets	486,311	298,488
Property, plant and equipment	183,328	228,484
Total non current assets	669,639	526,972
Total assets	6,795,933	5,314,316
Current liabilities	2023 \$	2022 \$
Payables	955,636	570,578
Lease liabilities	142,515	160,609
Provisions	692,297	688,733
Other liabilities	2,004,829	2,139,645
Total current liabilities	3,795,277	3,559,565
Non current liabilities	2023 \$	2022 \$
Lease liabilities	373,947	158,748
Provisions	141,374	73,730
Total non current liabilities	515,321	232,478
Total liabilities	4,310,598	3,792,043
Net Assets	2,485,335	1,522,273
Equity		
Reserves	425,356	140,000
Accumulated Surplus	2,059,979	1,382,273
Total equity	2,485,335	1,522,273





We thank our Westjustice Team for their relentless pursuit of the best outcomes for our clients and for their tireless passion and commitment. We acknowledge every client and community member that has put their trust in Westjustice and shared their experiences and stories, despite this often being difficult and traumatic.