

# Systemic Impact Report

January – June 2023

**WEstjustice**

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*WEstjustice provides free legal help to people in the Western suburbs of Melbourne. We can help with a broad range of everyday problems. Please call (03) 9749 7720 to find out more about our services or to make an appointment.*

# WEstjustice

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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.

## Westjustice Vision

Westjustice believes in 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.

## Westjustice Mission

To service the legal needs in the West in a way that addresses the systemic nature of disadvantage.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

In the Westjustice Strategic Plan 2020-2023 Westjustice committed to reporting regularly on our Systemic Impact work. This is the sixth of these reports. The first, second, third, fourth and fifth reports are also available.

In 2020-2023, we committed to focusing on the following four priority client groups:

- People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- People experiencing family violence or gender-based violence
- Young people
- People experiencing economic injustice.

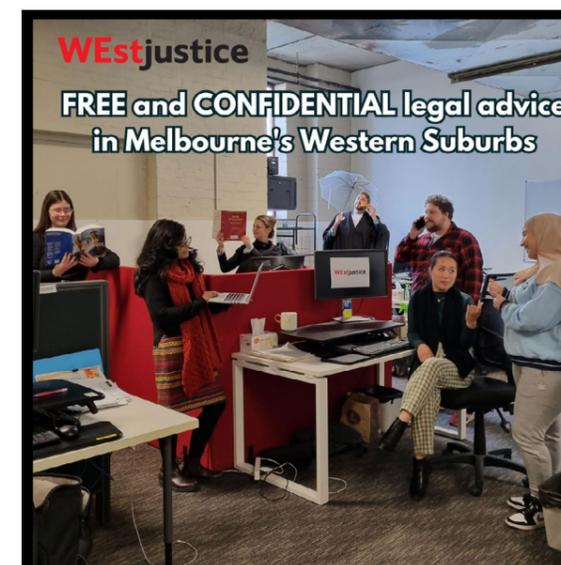
The full text of those priorities is set out in our [Impact Areas 2020-2023](#). Under each impact area, we have set out the priorities we will focus on.

This report addresses the systemic impact work we have undertaken in line with each of those priorities for the January to June 2023 period. Throughout these six months, staff continued to deliver strong legal and policy outcomes for the West as well as continuing to deliver legal education to the broader community and commencing new legal clinics, campaigns and partnerships.

## ORGANISATION-WIDE DEVELOPMENTS

Westjustice has had one of the busiest and strongest starts to the year ever, with continued advocacy, the implementation of new programs, and securing new funding. Outlined below are the whole-of-organisation highlights for the year, followed by our systemic impact work for January to June 2023 period by impact area.

- Westjustice successfully received funding for all but one program in our 2023 **state budget bid**. The CEO, Melissa Hardham and PI Director, Caitlin Caruana decided late last year to acknowledge the budget constraints and apply only for lapsing funding, a strategy that has paid off well.
- The senior leadership team welcomed **the Attorney General, the Hon. Mark Dreyfus KC, MP** and local Member for Lalor, Joanne Ryan MP, to our Werribee office, to discuss our work and key programs in the Western Suburbs. The Attorney General has been a key support of the community legal centre model and of Westjustice's innovative work. We look forward to continuing our work with him on the upcoming review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership.





The Senior Leadership Team with the Attorney General and Joanne Ryan MP at our Werribee Office, Feb 2023

- We have enjoyed **strong engagement with the state and federal governments** over the last six months. This included post-election, pre-budget meetings with local members, 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 consider child protection issues experienced by our clients through our FVFL and YLP programs.
- Federally, we met with the **Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services, the Hon. Stephen Jones MP** to discuss the disproportionate impact of scams and Buy Now Pay Later schemes on people living in poverty, particularly recently arrived communities. We also met with the Chair of the Community Affairs References Committee, Senator Janet Rice, to discuss our [submission](#) to the Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Poverty in Australia, which focused on the intersecting nature of poverty and how it impacts our communities. We've been invited to give evidence to this inquiry later this year. Finally, we met with local member, Dr Daniel Mulino MP to discuss support for the legal needs of migrant communities.
- After advocating since 2018 for improved **pathways to citizenship for New Zealand citizens**, we were invited to attend a pre-briefing with Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon. Clare O'Neill, who informed us that a direct pathway would become available from 1 July 2023. It was a heartfelt and joyous occasion to celebrate an advocacy win alongside many tireless advocates for this cause, including OzKiwi, Anglicare Southern Queensland, and the Nerang Neighbourhood Centre. We celebrated with a lunch with local member Joanne Ryan MP, and many members of the New Zealand, Māori and Pasifika communities. You can view a video of the really beautiful sentiments from the lunch [here](#).
- The CEO and the PI team continued to advocate for a **dedicated services Hub to properly support the new Wyndham Courts**. We were awarded a \$300,000 grant from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, with a \$20,000 contribution from the Wyndham City Council, meaning we can undertake community consultation and prepare a feasibility study on the Hub proposal. We have also applied to the Paul Ramsay Foundation for an addition sum of \$200,000.

- Westjustice, in collaboration with La Trobe University and Fitzroy Legal Service, launched the **'When do I get to Tell My Story: Agency and Resistance in Family Violence Intervention Order Narratives'** report. The report was based on a research project with funding from the Victoria Law Foundation Knowledge Grants program to investigate how women's agency and resistance to family violence are portrayed in applications for intervention orders, depending on the author of the application. The key finding was that there is no clear, transparent, or easily accessible map of the process of applying for a Family Violence Intervention Order for anyone involved. More information about the report and a compelling video from the researchers can be found on our website [here](#).
- The Paul Ramsay Foundation (PRF) granted Westjustice \$500,000 for the **TARGET ZERO initiative**. We hosted the PRF at our Sunshine Office so they could meet TARGET ZERO stakeholders and hear about the impact of the program.
- The EELP team officially launched **the new Equality Law Service** at the Sir Zelman Cowen Centre with a keynote address from the Centre's Executive Director, Nyadol Nyuon OAM. The Service is funded by the National Legal Assistance Partnership and will allow Westjustice to provide free and confidential legal advice to clients, and community legal education to communities on workplace sexual harassment and discrimination.



EELP Director, Jennifer Jones, CEO Melissa Hardham, Nyadol Nyuon OAM and EELP Program Manager, Nilanka Goonetillake at the Equality Law Service launch.

- The EJP successfully launched the new **Tenancy Stress Victoria pilot**. Modelled on our successful mortgage stress program, the pilot provides wrap around support for renters in crisis or at risk of homelessness. With in-house lawyer and social worker case-work support provided by Westjustice, and financial counselling assistance delivered by Anglicare, the project is primarily targeted at flood relief for renters affected by last year's floods in Western Melbourne and Victoria generally.





**IMPACT AREA 1: CULTURALLY &  
LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES**

## IMPACT AREA 1: CULTURALLY & LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

### Statement:

We recognise that culturally and linguistically diverse people experience disadvantage as a result of exclusion and racism.

### Aim:

Our aim is to assist and empower these communities to identify and enforce their legal rights and understand their responsibilities through case work, community development and education.

Our case work and educational programs inform our reform agenda and systemic impact work.

### Key Priorities:

1. Address adverse impact caused by implied and express racism

- The CEO, Melissa Hardham and YLP Director, Anoushka Jeronimus gave evidence at the **Yoorrook Justice Commission Public Hearings**, highlighting the ways in which the legal system fails First Nations children and the need to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14.



YLP Director, Anoushka Jeronimus and CEO, Melissa Hardham giving evidence at the Yoorrook Justice Commission Public Hearings

2. Expose the practices of organisations, people and systems taking advantage of newly arrived people and advocate for change

- The CEO, Director of EJP, Joseph Nunweek and the PI team met with the Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services, **the Hon. Stephen Jones MP**, to discuss how scams and 'by-now-pay-later' products are disproportionately affecting recently arrived migrants and people with low English literacy. Further, the EJP Director attended the Canberra announcement and subsequent sector briefing by Minister Jones of the National Anti-Scams Centre and related policy initiatives in May 2023.



Top: Financial Services Minister and Assistant Treasurer, the Hon. Stephen Jones MP meeting with Westjustice staff in Westjustice's Footscray office, 16 March 2023.

Bottom: Consumer representatives (including Westjustice, Choice, and Consumer Action Law Centre) meet with Financial Services Minister and Assistant Treasurer, the Hon. Stephen Jones MP in May 2023.

- The EELP Director, Jennifer Jones attended a two-day co-design workshop in Canberra at the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) to **advocate on behalf of non-unionised and low-paid migrant workers**. The workshop specifically related to the Federal Government plan to introduce a firewall between DHA and the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO), create a new workplace justice visa to support and protect workers who take action against workplace exploitation, and evidentiary requirements and referral mechanisms.
- EELP endorsed an [open letter](#) by the Support Network for International Students (SNIS), promoting the "Scrap the Cap" campaign to scrap the working hours cap on international student visas.

3. Correct the systems causing financial exclusion and disadvantage for newly arrived people

- The EJP has provided **feedback on a number of processes and practices that may disadvantage newly arrived people** who do not speak English confidently in dealing with everyday utilities and services. A meeting with VicRoads in April 2023 allowed us to highlight case studies of people who were unable to effectively engage on urgent matters due to language barriers. In June 2023, they also relayed concerns to the Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, about the extent to which it appeared telco companies were not proactively engaging interpreters for clients with hardship or basic account queries, leading to overcharging or disconnection.
- The EJP has also continued to emphasise **the need for people from CALD backgrounds to be placed at the heart of effective scam responses**. This includes to the Minister for Financial Services and the ACCC that a National Anti-Scams Centre should be responsive to people with language barriers in terms of its resources and embark on proactive outreach to communities to prevent their exposure to scams in the first instance.

- Westjustice (including staff past and present) has worked since 2018 on advocating for improved pathways to citizenship – or at least better access to fundamental social security safety nets – for **New Zealanders living in Australia**. Our initial focus was on young people who could not safely reside with their parents and guardians and their need to be able to obtain Centrelink. A Westjustice-led coalition of groups wrote an open letter to the Prime Ministers of both Australia and New Zealand seeking an extension of support and participated in media campaigns in both countries. This was followed by a Westjustice-hosted colloquium in 2019 where a range of groups discussed the appropriate campaign approach given the significant financial detriment for New Zealand citizens, who were denied access to FEE HELP, NDIS, and most Centrelink payments. Yet Australians in New Zealand could still access a large range of benefits and enjoy streamlined citizenship processes. In April 2023, it was announced that New Zealanders will have a direct pathway to Australian citizenship irrespective of income or health status. This will make a huge difference for many in Melbourne's West. Our advocacy was recognised by the Minister for Home Affairs, and in the Federal Parliament [in a speech](#) by one of our local members, Dr Daniel Mulino MP. We celebrated this with a lunch at our Werribee Office with members of the local community and another of our local members, Joanne Ryan MP.



Lunch at the Westjustice Werribee office celebrating the New Zealand citizenship changes.

- The EELP met with the Grattan Institute in February to discuss the **causes of migrant worker exploitation** and contribute a CLC perspective on solutions to their report released in May 2023, *Short-changed: How to stop the exploitation of migrant workers in Australia* by Brendan Coates, Trent Wiltshire, and Tyler Reysenbach.
- The EELP met with the Wage Inspectorate Victoria (WIV) to discuss their compliance approach to **migrant business owners**; their focus on regulation of young workers, and the approach WIV takes has when a worker has made a complaint to both WIV the FWO.
- The EELP met the FWO to discuss the **experiences of international students** who deal with the FWO and the ways their experiences can be improved.
- The EELP made a **submission** to the Commonwealth Attorney Generals Department in relation to the **proposed costs model for litigation under Federal anti-discrimination law** (which currently is an economic factor preventing our clients from using the Federal jurisdiction). EELP submitted that there should be an asymmetrical costs model implemented to ensure an applicant can both have their costs paid by the respondent when successful, but not be penalised by paying the respondent's costs if they are not successful. EELP also submitted that there should be an ability for an individual (non corporation) respondent to apply for costs orders to be set aside if they are also part of a disadvantaged cohort, e.g. they have a disability.

#### 4. Identify and address labour exploitation and unsafe workplace practices

- In the first half of 2023, the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) undertook significant consultation on a broad range of workplace relations and employment law issues. The EELP met with DEWR policy staff about reforms to **support gig-economy workers and the criminalisation of wage theft** and then drafted or co-drafted four submissions and endorsed a further two written by other CLCs:
  - o The EELP made a **submission** identifying issues relating to **casual worker exploitation** and making recommendations regarding the definition of casual workers, the casual conversion process and dispute resolution for casuals. This was submitted by Westjustice jointly with SMLS and JobWatch.

- o The EELP made a **submission** on Federal **criminalisation of wage theft** and associated defences identifying disproportionate risks to migrant workers who, due to systemic racism, inequality or economic circumstances, may have become small business owners who then would be subject to the same penalties as large corporations who breach wage theft laws. The submission also identifies ways to mitigate these risks in the investigation of wage theft breaches by the appropriate Federal regulator.
- o The EELP made a **submission** on the regulation of **"employee-like forms of work" (gig economy reform)** – jointly drafted by Westjustice and SMLS and submitted jointly by Westjustice SMLS and Job Watch.
- o The EELP made a **submission** on updating the *Fair Work Act 2009* to provide **stronger protections for workers against discrimination** – jointly drafted and submitted by JobWatch, SMLS and WEstjustice.
- o The EELP endorsed the submission on **Small Claims Process**, drafted and submitted by JobWatch.
- o The EELP endorsed the submission on **"Same job same pay"** regarding the pay and conditions for labour hire workers – drafted and submitted by JobWatch.
- The EELP endorsed the SMLS submission to the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry into **employers/contractors who refuse to pay invoices**.
- The EELP made a **submission** to the Office for Women (OFW) in the Commonwealth Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet on **workplace gender inequality**, as part of the OFW's consultation on the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality.
- The EELP provided feedback to WorkSafe Victoria regarding their proposed webpage for **health and safety for gig-workers**.

#### 5. Provide a culturally safe and accessible service for our client groups

- Westjustice continues to offer in-situ services in existing and known agencies to people from **recently arrived backgrounds**, including:
  - o Services delivered on site and conjunction with **Study Melbourne** for our International Students Employment & Accommodation Legal Service;
  - o Workplace Equality Law outreach delivered at **libraries in Brimbank** with information stalls, referral options and drop in legal appointments available on-site; and
  - o Services delivered on site and conjunction with Wyndham Community Education Centre and MiCare for our **Settlement Justice Partnership**, including tailored Community Legal Education sessions delivered through interpreters on utilities and road rules.





**IMPACT AREA 2: PEOPLE EXPERIENCING  
FAMILY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

## IMPACT AREA 2: PEOPLE EXPERIENCING FAMILY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

### Statement:

We recognise that family and gender-based violence are serious community concerns that disproportionately affect women, gender diverse people and children.

### Aim:

Our aim is to enable and assist these groups to respond strongly to family and gender-based violence and its effects. This includes providing targeted legal services, addressing injustice in systems and institutions, and engaging in evidence based systemic advocacy.

### Key Priorities:

1. Advocate for a justice system that meets the needs of people experiencing family and gender-based violence
- The FVFL team launched the, **"When do I Get to Tell My Story – Agency and Resistance in Family Violence Intervention Order Narratives"** in May. Since the launch there have been a number of presentations of the findings across the family violence legal and social sectors. The report was based on a research project conducted by academics from La Trobe University and legal practitioners with experience in family violence from Fitzroy Legal Service and Westjustice. The project involved gathering a sample of 20 anonymised FVIO applications, with the consent of AFMs. Among the applications, half were written by the police, while the other half were authored by AFMs or their advocates. To analyse the narrative elements of the applications, a linguistics scholar conducted a quantitative analysis, while socio-legal scholars performed a qualitative analysis. The key finding of the research is that there is no clear, transparent, or easily accessible map of the process of applying for a FVIO for anyone involved, from Affected Family Members through to Magistrates. In addition, greater transparency from the Court about their FV processes especially the role of Registrars in rewriting, editing and amending IVO narratives.

The research findings also underscore the need to acknowledge the agency and resistance of AFM authors in their decision to seek or refuse a FVIO. The full report can be found [here](#), and a video of the team discussing the outcomes [here](#).



Westjustice's Family Law Access Project Team

- **The Family Law Access Project was launched in April**, to provide access to comprehensive family law legal services in Melbourne's inner West and Greater Geelong – areas of high family law legal need. The legal centres involved in the program now have established family law litigation and casework practices for clients experiencing financial disadvantage and other barriers. There are now more opportunities for family lawyers to work at community legal centres, and for family law counsel and private practice to collaborate with these centres. The Family Law Access project and our Program's work was also featured in the Law Institute of Victoria [March newsletter](#).
- Additionally, FVFL Legal Director, Cleona Feuerring, represented Westjustice on a panel hosted by VLA in May. This was an excellent opportunity to showcase the achievements of the Family Law Access Project and network with other key organisations delivering family law services in a community legal centre setting.



FVFL Director, Cleona Feuerring on the VLA Family Law Access Panel, May 2023

- In January 2023, the Federal government released an exposure draft of the **Family Law Amendment Bill 2023** and a Consultation Paper. Neshi Sooknandan, Program Manager, attended meetings with the Federation of Community Legal Centres and interested community legal centres to discuss the questions raised in the Consultation Paper and the proposed amendments. After these discussions and further discussions with the team, the Family Violence and FVFLP prepared and made a written submission to the Attorney-General's Department. Following further consultations with the Federation of Community Legal Centres and other community legal centres, Westjustice endorsed submissions made by the Federation and Women's Legal Services Australia.
- Mortgage Stress Victoria consulted with the **Australian Banking Association** on the issues of non-customer victim-survivors of family violence having little control over their housing situation and victim-survivors being lent mortgages irresponsibly, with some changes in practice to be implemented by member banks as a result.

4. Provide early intervention opportunities to circumvent family and gender-based violence and promote positive relationships for education and empowerment.

- The FVFLP delivered a **legal education session to Mercy Hospital staff** in April where we worked through a number of key case studies to assist nurses, social workers and other hospital staff to identify and refer maternity clients to our service.
- The FVFLP also had their first Family Violence Early Intervention Maternity **Health Justice Partnership** Workshop in the Werribee office in June with Health Justice Australia, Mercy Hospital and Wyndham Enhanced Maternal Child Health Nurse teams. It was an inspiring morning of visionary exploration, strategic planning, knowledge sharing and collaboration; a powerhouse of intelligent, skilled, passionate, and driven community workers coming together to strengthen our joint purpose in supporting the safety and wellbeing of children and their carers in the West.

2. Address misidentification and criminalisation of victim survivors as perpetrators

- The FVFLP continue to act for clients who have been charged with family violence related offences as primary victims, many of which have been withdrawn. FVFL and YLP also met with Victoria Police to scope a collaborative project to reduce the **misidentification of victim of survivors of family violence** in the West and are working closely with YLP team in this important initiative.

3. Remove economic abuse and restore financial safety and independence for those experiencing family and gender-based violence.

- FVFLP senior lawyer, Caitlin Vaughan, gave a presentation to the MSV team on **Family Law Property Disputes**. The FVFL team also continue to increase their impact in obtaining fair and equitable property settlements for victim survivors of family violence with more lawyers in the team also overseeing family law property files.



Wyndham Enhanced Maternal Child Health, Mercy Hospital, Westjustice and Health Justice Australia partnership workshop

5. Identify and address causes of family and gender-based violence

- The FVFLP delivered 9 **CLE sessions on family violence** in the context of family relationships and the law, including community legal sessions at the Yarraville Community Centre as part of Victorian Law Week.



Top: FVFLP lawyer and Program Manager delivering community legal education (Wyndham Park Community Centre).

Bottom: FVFLP lawyer delivering community legal education (Yarraville community centre).



A large, stylized red number '3' with a white outline, positioned in the center of the page. A white rectangular box with a black border is superimposed over the middle of the number.

**IMPACT AREA 3: YOUNG PEOPLE**

## IMPACT AREA 3: YOUNG PEOPLE

### Statement:

We recognise that young people (10 to 25 years inclusive) are marginalised and often excluded from the legal system and youth support services.

### Aim:

We aim to offer holistic, youth centred, multidisciplinary services as a response to a legal system that is often not appropriately designed for our youth.

We support young people to exercise their agency and legal rights in their family life, community, and society.

Our case work and educational programs provide the evidence for our reform agenda and systemic impact advocacy.

### Key Priorities:

1. Divert children and young people away from the criminal justice system
- The YLP Director, Anoushka Jeronimus continues to co-convene the **Smart Justice for Young People** coalition. A key piece of work currently being finalised is an Action Plan to end the overrepresentation of First Nations children and young people; multicultural young people, girls and young women with complex needs; and children in residential home care aged 10-25 years old in the criminal justice system. The asks are at the system level (as opposed to program level) including, among other things, bail reform, removal of the need for police consent to Diversion and treatment of young people in detention. The group also continues to advocate around the 'Raise the Age' campaign and increased police accountability.
  - The YLP team and some members of senior leadership hosted the Paul Ramsay Foundation at our Sunshine Visy Cares Hub office to recognise their significant funding contribution to **TARGET ZERO**, alongside TARGET ZERO stakeholders. This was a special event where we expressed our gratitude for the funding and outlined some of the ways in which it would have a profound impact on the young people TARGET ZERO will support.



The Paul Ramsay Foundation and Westjustice staff at our Sunshine Office

2. Advocate for a fairer and more equitable system which includes better access to services.

- The YLP and EELP Program Managers, Vincent Shin and Francesca Lai went on [ABC Melbourne's Conversation Hour](#) to discuss the importance of our School Lawyer Program and the need for integrated services and legal support for young people. This included an explanation about our Youth Employment Justice Program.



YLP and EELP Program Managers on ABC Melbourne's Conversation Hour

- The **YCPEIP Pilot** was written up in the [March edition](#) of the Law Institute Journal as part of a broader piece on the Raise the Age campaign.
- The **Youth Law Clinics** continue to operate at full capacity. We offer telephone and in-person appointments at the Visy Cares Hub as well as a drop-in clinic on Wednesdays. We have seen a number of young people access the drop-in clinic after we recommenced the service this year (it ceased during Covid). We are also offering appointments at the Youth Resource Centre again in Hoppers Crossing, although this is currently on hold while that centre is being renovated.

- The YLP have focused on promoting DFFH's [Framework to Reduce Criminalisation of Young People in Residential Care](#) through its Out of Home Care Legal Clinic Pilot. The intention is that through this informal advocacy, carers will only call police to attend the home when necessary and in accordance with The Framework.

3. Address discrimination, workplace exploitation and inequality affecting children and young people with a focus on the systemic drivers of disproportionate involvement with the justice system

- The YLP delivered 10 discrimination and the workplace community legal education sessions through our School Lawyer Program in collaboration with the EELP team.

- The EELP team has developed a practical program to teach students about their work rights and responsibilities and prepare them for work, culminating in the creation of a 'WRS Teacher's Pack'. The Teacher's Pack contains lessons plans, resources and teaching materials to support teachers to deliver the new Work Related Skills (WRS) curriculum. The WRS Teacher's Pack has been accessed by at least 65 teachers in schools across Victoria.

4. Amplify the voice of children and young people and enhance agency through education and engagement

- The YLP delivered over 60 CLE sessions at our **School Lawyer Program** schools in the first half of this year. This education piece is a tool used to try and prevent young people from getting involved with the justice system by helping them make better informed decisions on behaviour that could be subject to police involvement.

- The YLP also delivered 2 CLEs through our **OOHCLC** project where we outreach to 8 residential care homes for children run by Anglicare Victoria.

5. Collaborate with and influence stakeholders to maximise potential for positive life outcomes for young people

- The **YCPEIP pilot** is beginning to move to Phase 2, which involves expanding the pilot to 18-24 year olds. We believe this cohort are often overlooked but face many of the same issues that children do, and evidence around brain development of young adults suggests that they should be afforded similar leniency when it comes to prosecution – with a focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment. Phase 2 will allow cautions to be issued to these young people for a much broader range of offences, as well as an increase in referrals to support services. We continue to work collaboratively with Victoria Police and other key stakeholders to ensure the effective roll out of this pilot.

A large, stylized number '4' in a vibrant red color. The number is composed of two overlapping shapes: a top-left section and a bottom-right section, creating a sense of depth and movement. A white rectangular box is superimposed horizontally across the middle of the number.

**IMPACT AREA 4: ECONOMIC  
INJUSTICE**

## IMPACT AREA 4: ECONOMIC INJUSTICE

### Statement:

We recognise that we have an intrinsically inequitable economic and legal system, a consequence of which includes the criminalisation of poverty.

### Aim:

Our aim is to assist people to navigate and enforce their rights within the justice system and effect fundamental and necessary improvements. Our case work and educational programs provide the evidence for our reform agenda and systemic impact advocacy.

### Key Priorities:

1. Challenge organisations that take advantage of people experiencing hardship or barriers to accessing economic justice

- The EELP delivered a free webinar for Victorian Law Week on "Your Rights at Work", focusing on **sexual harassment and discrimination**, the kinds of claims that a worker can take, and the pathways these claims would follow. The webinar is now available to re-watch on our YouTube page [here](#).

2. Improve the systems, policies and procedures of government, industry and other parties which create economic injustice

- MSV and the EJP made a joint [submission](#) to the Essential Services Commission to assist with its advice to Local Government Victoria on what should be included in the ministerial guidelines around Council rates hardship practices, to be released later this year.
- MSV and the EJP also made a joint [submission](#) responding to the AFCA's proposed additions and changes to its Rules and Operational Guidelines to better protect consumers experiencing vulnerability.

3. Investigate pathways to promote and protect fundamental human rights including the right to safe housing, access to food and utilities

- The EJP launched a new Tenancy Stress Victoria service as of May 2023, modelled on the clear success of the Mortgage Stress Victoria model and in the belief that this structure of wrap-around support could have clear benefits for renters at risk of homelessness. With in-house lawyer and social worker case-work support provided by Westjustice, and financial counselling assistance delivered by Anglicare, the project is primarily targeted at flood relief for renters affected by last year's floods in Western Melbourne and Victoria generally. However, we see clear benefit in extending the supports beyond flood-affected renters to at-risk renters generally, in light of the current housing and cost-of-living crises. We launched the service with social media coverage and a story in the [Maribyrnong Star Weekly](#) and addressed a group of residents with community legal education and information in June 2023.

- MSV has been consulting with the big four banks on a proposed pilot project where banks pay for customers' home insurance premiums if they have enough equity in their home but cannot afford home insurance, which would be repaid to the bank with no interest when the mortgage ends.

4. Enhance agency to improve people's ability to navigate, legal, housing and financial systems

- MSV presented to hundreds of attendees including consumer advocates, industry and government at the Financial Counselling Australia Conference on how to tackle mortgage stress.



MSV's Matthew Martin and Ebony Bake presenting to the Financial Counselling Australia Conference

5. Explore methods by which to advocate for a fair and generous safety net

- Westjustice prepared a [submission](#) to the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs, Inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia. We provided the Committee with responses to their terms of reference, with reference to our casework, client stories and community experiences.
- The EJP Team is currently exploring increasing the capacity of its staff to assist people with social security issues (including debts and access to full entitlements). They are in discussions with VLA about developing a partnership arrangement to assist in this capacity building, training, and eventual case work. The likely first phase of this work will be assisting Victim Survivors of Family Violence through our Restoring Financial Safety work, and eventually into our Settlement Justice Partnership project.



## ABBREVIATIONS USED:

**CDEE** – Community Development, Education and Engagement

**EELP** – Employment and Equality Law Program

**EJP** – Economic Justice Program

**FLFVP** – Family Law Family Violence Program

**MSV** – Mortgage Stress Victoria

**PI** – Policy and Innovation

**YLP** – Youth Law Program

**ABA** – Australian Banking Association

**AFCA** – Australian Financial Complaints Authority

**CALD** – Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

**FWO** – Fair Work Ombudsman

**SMLS** – South-East Monash Legal Service

**VLA** – Victoria Legal Aid

**YCPEIP** – Youth Crime Prevention Early Intervention Program

**WEstjustice**