

WEstjustice

Annual Report

2021

Annual Report
2021



2021



We have much to reflect upon this year - the strength of our communities, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Western suburbs, the need to advocate for more funding for services in the West. We celebrate the achievements of our Team which include high quality advocacy for prevention and early intervention initiatives and effective solutions to complex problems.

Footscray

Level 1/72 Buckley Street,
Footscray VIC 3011
Tel: + 61 3 9749 7720
Fax: + 61 3 9749 8276
Email: admin@westjustice.org.au

Werribee

Level 1/8 Watton Street,
Werribee VIC 3030
Tel: + 61 3 9749 7720
Fax: + 61 3 9749 8276
Email: admin@westjustice.org.au

Sunshine

Visy Cares Hub,
80B Harvester Road,
Sunshine VIC 3020
Tel: + 61 3 9091 8237
Fax: + 61 3 9091 8207
Email: sunshine@westjustice.org.au

WEstjustice acknowledges the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Kulin Nations, who are the Traditional Owners of Western Melbourne, the country we are located on. As we work to achieve a just and fair society we pay our respects to the deep knowledge embedded within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and Aboriginal custodianship of Country. We acknowledge this land as a place of age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal, and that the Kulin peoples' living culture has a fundamental role in the life of this region.

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.



Annual Report



Executive Summary

Extreme Times

Over the past 12 months we have witnessed many extremes. The Western suburbs communities have been greatly challenged throughout the coronavirus, revealing increased risk of family violence, and deeper entrenchment of poverty, disadvantage, health and social inequities. The long-term impact is yet to play out, so we need to be prepared to ensure that the legal, health, education, employment, housing, and social services are properly resourced and equipped to ensure that our communities get what they need. We offer many programs and services which have been tested, tried, codified and are ready to scale.

New Developments

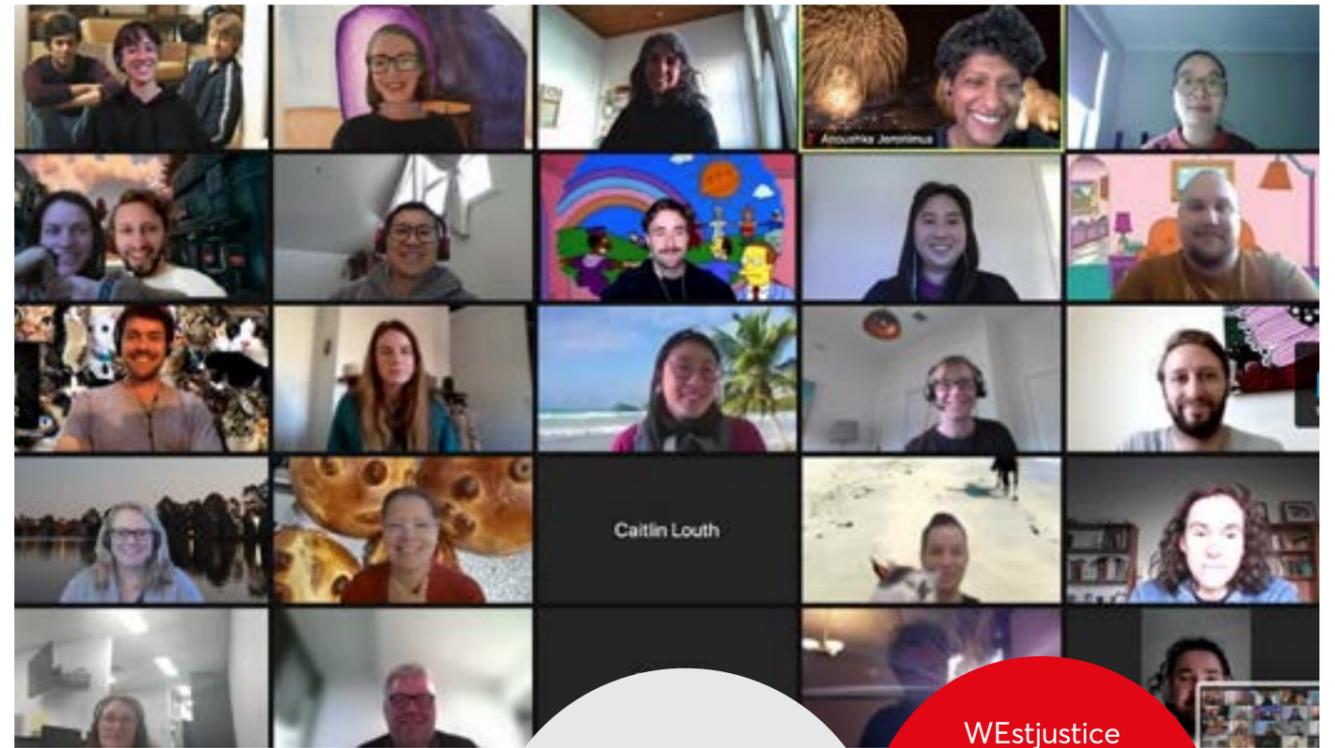
We welcome new initiatives in the West, such as the new Wyndham Justice Precinct (WJP). The WJP has the potential to provide a more comprehensive and therapeutic approach to justice issues, particularly if there is a comprehensive youth and families community hub nearby. This will ensure that the emphasis is not just on justice and community safety but also on other critical social and health determinants. We will continue to work with our communities, partners, and government to ensure that these initiatives reach their potential.

As an organisation, we have also grappled with the impact of the coronavirus whilst managing major internal reforms and developments to our strategy, structure, digital system, management team and service delivery models. Lockdowns have been hard for our staff and communities. Whilst our teams have managed remote service delivery very well, many have found it difficult not to be able to see clients in person, particularly high risk and highly vulnerable people. We are very keen to return to our offices and placed based settings.

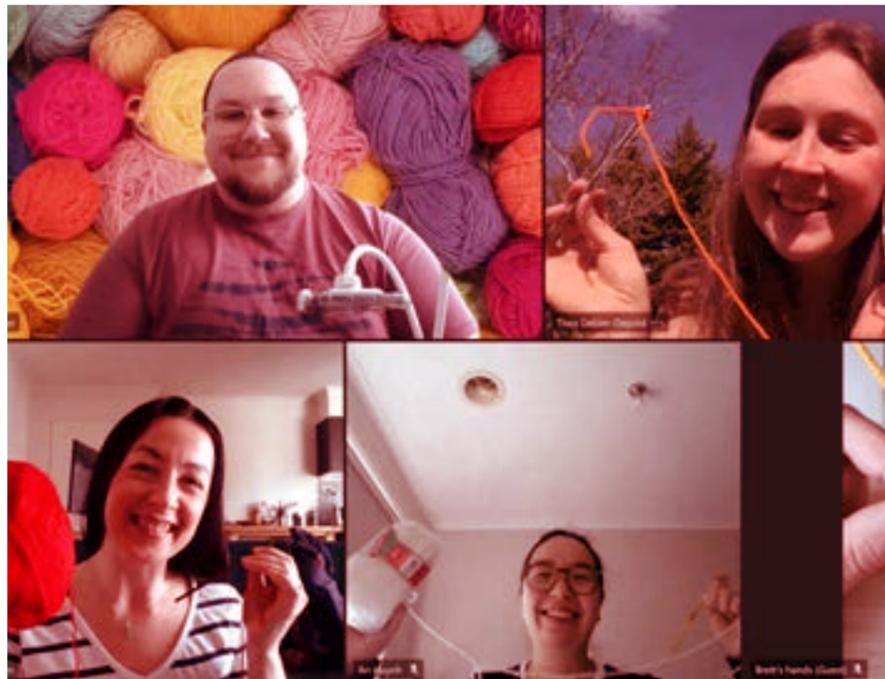
To assist our Team, we introduced a *Bit of WEstjustice Fun*. This included wellbeing events and competitions including PJ & Crazy Pants Day, Favorite Shoes, Loud Shirts and photographic competitions. We also ran a talent competition and a knitting class.

Board Changes

We are thrilled to welcome new Board Directors, Dana Nelson and Greg Levine along with Susie King in 2022. Our founding Board Chair, Vern Fettke, has decided to resign and Dana has recently accepted the role. Vern's legacy as the driver behind the formation of WEstjustice will always remain part of WEstjustice's narrative and history.



Our Team has been incredible throughout these confronting times. Overall, they have remained positive and engaged to the best of their abilities. 20/21 will be remembered as one of the most challenging periods for WEstjustice, but also as a time of extraordinary dedication and commitment from our staff to our organisation, our clients, and the broader Western suburbs community.





The long-term impact of the coronavirus is yet to play out, so we need to be prepared to ensure that legal, health, education, employment, housing, and social services are properly resourced and equipped to ensure that our communities get what they need.

Contents

2020-2021	9
Message from the Chair and CEO	10
Acknowledgements	12
Board members	13
Finance report	14
SAYING FAREWELL	16
Vern Fettke	18
THE WEstjustice TEAM	23
Economic Justice Program	22
Family Violence and Family Law Program	24
Employment and Equality Law Program	26
Youth Law Program	28
Community Development, Education and Engagement Program	30
Policy and Innovation Program	32
Operations Program	34
COLLECTIVE IMPACT STATEMENT	36





2020-
2021

2020-
2021

Message from the Chair and CEO

We welcome you to our Annual Report 2021. Although, this year has been heavily impacted by the coronavirus, the volume and quality of work produced by our WEstjustice Team has been constant and unfaltering.

Challenges and Strategies

We welcome you to our Annual Report 2021. Although, this year has been heavily impacted by the coronavirus, the volume and quality of work produced by our WEstjustice Team has been constant and unfaltering. We acknowledge the extraordinary effort of our staff throughout this period.

Our communities in the West have been some of the hardest hit in the State. We have seen this firsthand through workplace exploitation, increased exposure to debt, fines and shams, increased levels of family violence, higher levels of poverty, overrepresented in the criminal justice system, to name a few.

However, we have also witnessed significant strength and collaboration during some of the toughest times. We are very fortunate to be working with our Western suburb's communities, sharing their stories and experiences, and being entrusted with their problems and issues.

Moving forward, we will continue to deepen our impact and ensure that we make the best use of our finite resources for both our communities and staff.

Our Vision

WEstjustice seeks a fair and just society where the law and its processes don't discriminate against people, and where people in need can access legal education, information, advice, casework, services, systemic advocacy, and reform.

Our Purpose

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

Our People

We are fortunate to work with a very dedicated, talented, and empathetic group of people who have worked tirelessly throughout this year to ensure that our clients received the best possible assistance despite the challenges of remote services delivery. Our organisation has grown, and we have significantly expanded our middle management. This is part of our succession planning and acknowledgement that we have many talented and capable staff who deserve to be extended and promoted, where possible.

We have also enjoyed considerable support from the philanthropic community, particularly the multi-year funding that has enable many of our projects and initiatives to demonstrate significant social impact and longer-term positive outcomes for our communities.

Most of our programs are delivered 'in situ' through our partnerships. Therefore, we are fortunate to have longstanding relationships with organisations across health, mental health, education, employment, housing, and financial services. These strategic and effective partnerships enable us to deliver our services in a multidisciplinary setting thus reducing referral fatigue and multiple story telling often experienced by our clients.



Strategy and Impact Areas 2020-23

We have completed the first year of the implementation of our Strategy 2020-23. This has included the introduction of our new Structure and People Management System, along with the commencement of our Digital Management System upgrade and review of our Financial Management Systems.

We have also refined how we identify policy and systemic reform through our large body of casework - to ensure that we capture and percolate larger social justice issues to the surface whilst still maintaining an excellent standard of practice. This has been achieved through the development of internal working groups and 'cross team' collaboration along with external steering committees.

Recently we reviewed our Impact Areas and Priorities. We remain committed to working with the following groups:

- Young People.
- People experiencing gender-based violence.
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Economic Injustice

We have also completed the first year of our Reconciliation Action Plan and rolled out cultural safety training across our organisation.

Farewells and Tributes

We farewell Vern Fettke, our founding Board Chair. Vern commenced his relationship with the CLC sector as a Director of Wyndham Community Legal Centre in 2010. He steered WEstjustice through the amalgamation and became our first Chair in 2015. He worked closely with the founding CEO, Denis Nelthorpe, for just under 5 years and was seminal in supporting the transition to the new CEO and leadership team over the past 18 months. Vern has always been deeply committed to our staff and has strong links to our communities through his various voluntary roles. We thank Vern for his thoughtful and compassionate leadership and wish him a very happy and healthy retirement.

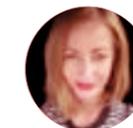
Concluding Remarks

We have much to reflect upon this year - the strength of our communities, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Western suburbs, the need to advocate for more funding for services in the West. We celebrate the achievements of our Team which include high quality advocacy for prevention and early intervention initiatives and effective solutions to complex problems.

Special thanks to our Board and Senior Management Team (current and past) for steering us through a very challenging period and our staff for their loyalty and dedication.



Dana Nelson
Chair of the Board



Melissa Hardham
Chief Executive Officer

Acknowledgements

ACCAN | Anglicare | Aunty Georgina Nicholson | Bonnie Renou – locum | CDC Victoria | Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare | Centre for Multicultural Youth | Christie Davis Design | Clayton Utz | Cohealth | Collier Charitable Fund | CommUnity Plus Services | Community Support Fund | Consumer Action Law Centre | Consumer Affairs Victoria | Corrs Chambers Westgarth | Council to Homeless Persons | Deb Bryant Consulting | Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions | Department of Education and Training | Department of Families, Fairness and Housing | Department of Health and Human Services | Department of Home Affairs | Department of Justice and Community Safety | Department of Premier and Cabinet Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division | Department of Transport | Djerriwarrh Health Services | Dr Diana Johns | Dr Karen Hart | Dr Mario Puecker | Economic Abuse Reference Group | Ecstra Foundation Limited | Federation of Community Legal Centres | Finrea Pty Ltd | Gillian Davy (Consultant) | Godwin Masuka | Gordon Legal | H3 Alliance | Ha Le (Consultant) | Headspace | Helen Macpherson Smith Trust | Hobsons Bay | City Council | HumanIT | HWL Ebsworth | Ian Mackinnon | Infoxchange | Insurance Council of Australia | Jesuit Social Services | Justice Connect | JobWatch | Justitia | K&L Gates | Kimberley Foundation | King & Wood Mallesons | Kingston Reid | Junubi Wyndham | Laverton Community Hub | Lilian Darmono | Lirata Ltd | Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation | Maddocks | Maguire Consulting | McAuley Community Services for Women | Maribyrnong City Council | Maurice Blackburn | Melbourne Social Equity Institute | Melton City Council | Metro Trains | MiCare | Migrant Workers Centre | Mind Australia | MinterEllison | National Association of Community Legal Centres Australia | National Union of Workers | Noel & Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation | Newsboys Foundation | Orygen | Phoenix Youth Centre | Pitcher Partners | PriceWaterhouseCoopers | Public Transport Ombudsman | Public Transport Victoria | R E Ross Trust | Rowena Price – Eternal Earth Connections (RAP Consultant) | Slater & Gordon | Social Change Projects – Daniel Scoullar | Social Security Rights Victoria | Social Ventures Australia | South-East Monash Legal Service | Sunshine Family Relationship Centre | Sunshine Magistrates' Court | Stephanie Mulder | Stephen Dyt (Consultant) | Study Melbourne Student Centre | Sze Lim—Locum | Tarneit Senior College | Tenants Victoria | The Grange P-12 College | The Jack Brockhoff Foundation | The University of Melbourne | Thriving Communities Partnership | Tim Rob Don Dow | Transdev | Transport Accident Commission | Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal | Victorian Legal Services Board + Commission | Victoria Legal Aid | Victorian Ombudsman | Victoria University | The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency | Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation | Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service | Victoria Police | Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust | Victorian Women's Trust | Visy Cares Hub Sunshine | Werribee Magistrates' Court | Werribee Mercy Hospital | Western Metropolitan Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee | Werribee VCAT | Whitelion | The William Buckland Foundation | Women's Health West | WorkSafe Victoria | Wyndham Central College | Wyndham City Council | Wyndham Community and Education Centre | Wyndham Youth Resource Centre | Youth Junction Inc | Youth Now | YouthLaw | Youth Support and Advocacy Service

Board Members



1 Dana Nelson
New Chairperson, Director

1 Vernon John Fettke
Former Chairperson, Director

3 Sarah Jane Strapps
Secretary, Public Officer, Director

4 Meseret Abebe
Director

5 Stuart Brown
Director

6 Meredith Blackstock
Director

7 Greg Levine
Director

8 Patricia Crossin
Director

9 Melissa Hardham
CEO

Finance Report

INCOME	2021 \$	2020 \$
Government Grant Funding	3,501,090	3,193,101
Philanthropic Funded Projects	964,618	1,167,941
Other	705,629	578,524
TOTAL INCOME	5,171,337	4,939,566

EXPENDITURE	2021 \$	2020 \$
Administration	170,293	125,133
Depreciation	51,659	24,704
Employment	37,395	39,832
Occupancy	183,029	252,101
Organisational	133,380	121,949
Right of Use Asset - Leased Premises Expenses	121,243	42,623
Staff Salaries and Wages	4,185,989	3,686,425
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	4,882,988	4,292,767

NET SURPLUS ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE COMPANY	288,349	646,799
--	----------------	----------------

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION	2021 \$	2020 \$
ASSETS		
Current Assets	3,329,850	3,329,850
Non Current Assets	701,347	701,347
TOTAL ASSETS	4,031,197	4,031,197

LIABILITIES	2021 \$	2020 \$
Current Liabilities	2,477,618	1,749,202
Non Current Liabilities	294,553	30,718
TOTAL LIABILITIES	2,772,171	1,779,920

NET ASSETS	1,259,026	970,677
-------------------	------------------	----------------

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS	2021 \$	2020 \$
From Operating Activities	2,477,618	1,749,202
From Investing Activities	294,553	30,718
From Financing Activities	2,772,171	1,779,920
NET INCREASE/DECREASE IN CASH HELD	1,271,343	566,197

CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS AT BEGINNING OF FY	1,913,998	1,347,801
---	------------------	------------------

CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS AT END OF FY*	3,185,341	1,913,998
--	------------------	------------------

* The Cash and Cash Equivalents at End of FY of \$3,185,341 includes Deferred Income Received in Advance for the 30 June 2022 financial year of \$1,312,178.

SAYING FAREWELL



SAYING FAREWELL

Farewell to Vern Fettke

Vern Fettke joined the Committee of Management (CoM) of the Wyndham Legal Centre around 2010/2011 when he was asked by The Hon Tim Pallas MP (the then Chair of the CoM) to “take a look at the Legal Centre”. The Centre was located in a small office in Station Street Werribee and was considered to be under performing. Shortly after Vern joined the CoM, the Labor Government was elected in Victoria, Tim Pallas was appointed Treasurer and Vern was elected Chair of the Legal Centre.

The Merger

In discussions with Victorian Legal Aid (VLA) and the Federation of CLCs, Vern suggested combining a number of smaller Legal Centres into one larger Centre to combine resources and reduce duplication. This was agreed and VLA supported Vern to implement his recommendation.

Vern Chaired the CoM of Wyndham Legal Centre; reshaped the Board and employed a new CEO (Denis Nelthorpe) in June 2012. Vern set-up and Chaired the working party with representatives from Western suburbs, Footscray and Melton / Brimbank legal centres to combine the Centres into one. Agreement was reached between Wyndham, Western suburbs and Footscray and on 1st July 2015 the Western Community Legal Centre commenced trading. The Board of the new entity consisted of two of the existing members of each of the three centres.



First WEstjustice Board Chair

Vern was elected Chair of the new entity and has led WEstjustice to where it is today, supporting the CEO Denis Nelthorpe to review the operations of the Centre focusing on systemic injustice, impact areas and innovation (eg. school lawyer program) and less on case work. The Werribee office was relocated into the Wotton Street premises and Vern assisted in seeking funding from philanthropics, expanding funding opportunities and in providing better job security for our staff.

Support to Incoming CEO

Following Denis Nelthorpe’s resignation in November 2019, Melissa Hardham was appointed to the role of CEO of WEstjustice. Vern worked closely with Melissa and supported her while she restructured and grew WEstjustice even further.

Leaving a Legacy

In August 2021 Vern tendered his resignation from the role of Chair and Director of WEstjustice. Vern leaves us with the Centre in excellent shape.

Congratulations Vern on 10 plus years of work, we will miss you, we wish you well for the future.



THE WESTJUSTICE TEAM



THE WESTJUSTICE TEAM

Economic Justice Program

\$737,587

in debt waivers on
landlord insurance
claims

The Economic Vulnerability Team changed its name to Economic Justice. The name change recognises that we have an intrinsically inequitable economic and legal system, and accurately reflects our systemic impact work dealing with economic injustice experienced in the Western suburbs of Melbourne in the tenancy, financial services, consumer, and settlement justice spaces.

Tenancy

The Tenancy Team navigated major reforms to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic) during a time of great unrest with the COVID-19 pandemic impacting heavily on renters. We provided representation in the first VCAT possession order application heard under the COVID-19 Emergency Measures, which became the standard authority of the newly implemented "reasonable and proportionate test" for eviction matters. We also provided representation in a VCAT case which determined that a rental provider's economic rights are secondary to a renter's right to housing.

We operated one of the busiest and most sought after Tenancy Assistance and Advocacy Programs (TAAP) in the state. Our TAAP and international student accommodation clinics (ISAC) provided a total of 777 client consultations.

The ISAC saw widespread exploitation of international students in a marginal rental sector in Victoria. To address this, Caitlin Louth launched our International Student Housing Project Report with the Honourable Melissa Horne, Minister for Ports and Freight, Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Fishing and Boating, and Dr Heather Holst, Commissioner for Residential Tenancies. The report called for stronger, more proactive regulation of rental providers, amongst other reforms, to protect international students from being exploited.

The TAAP also assisted many renters who were being pursued unfairly by landlord insurers for the costs of accidental damage to their property or damage not caused by the renter. We launched a media campaign with consumer advocate CHOICE calling for landlord insurers to eliminate their harsh recovery practices of pursuing renters for accidental or unintentional damage. The campaign has led to significant policy reform, with an exciting update coming soon.

Financial Services

The Financial Services and Consumer and Settlement Justice Teams joined a coalition of community legal, financial counselling and charity organisations to oppose the Federal Government's proposed repeal of responsible lending laws. In addition to our written submission to the Federal Senate, we appeared at the Senate Economics Legislation Committee Enquiry into the National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment (Supporting Economic Recovery) Bill 2020 giving evidence of the impact the repeal would have on family violence victim-survivors. To date, the responsible lending laws have not been repealed.

The Financial Services team has provided expert consultation to the Insurance Council of Australia's Consumer Advisory Committee, Insurance Australia Group's Consumer Advisory Board, Commonwealth Bank's Community Council, and Suncorp's Consumer Advocate Day over a number of years. This has led to reforms protecting consumers experiencing economic injustice and family violence victim-survivors from harsh debt collection practices and inequitable claims handling processes.

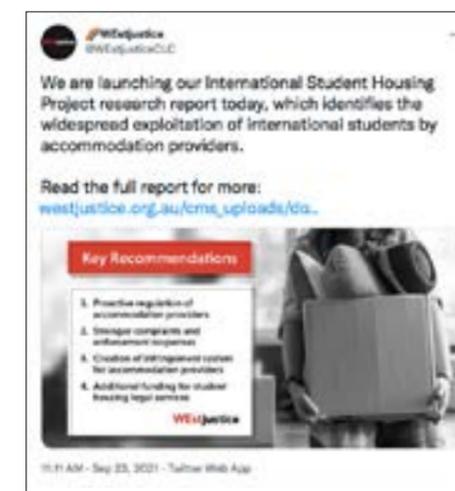
Our expertise has greatly expanded this year with consultation provided to Fines Victoria on the Family Violence Scheme and its new online web forms, and evidence given to the Victorian Ombudsman in its investigation into how local councils respond to ratepayers in financial hardship. The Ombudsman made a number of recommendations in line with our suggestions. We have now written to relevant Ministers urging them to empower the Essential Services Commission to carry out the recommendations made in the Ombudsman's report. We also joined the Steering Committee and assisted with the launch of



777
legal advices
provided

the Thriving Communities Partnership One Stop One Story Hub, a world first program that enables people in our community who are experiencing vulnerability to navigate and connect to support programs offered by corporate organisations simply and easily.

Dacia Abela launched our Restoring Financial Safety: Transforming Financial Security Project Report in August 2021 with the Honourable Gabrielle Williams, Minister for Women, Prevention of Family Violence, and Aboriginal Affairs, and Jocelyn Bignold OAM, CEO of McAuley Community Services for Women. Amongst many systemic change results and recommendations to assist victim-survivors of financial abuse, the report called for funding to expand our economic abuse clinic model. We have since embarked on a campaign 'Jobs and Money' with McAuley Community Services for Women, seeking government funding of our services to provide support to women with employment issues and financial abuse – a comprehensive initiative to ensure women are financially secure and independent. We also made a submission to the National Summit for Women's Safety with recommendations stemming from our report.



Consumer and Settlement Justice

The Consumer and Settlement Justice Team launched the Settlement Justice Partnership in tandem with our partners at MiCare and Wyndham Community and Education Centre, providing legal advice, education and advocacy services to refugee clients despite the restrictions of the Melbourne lockdown.

We led advocacy regarding a major scam targeting and harming refugee communities in Melbourne's West and addressed this with stakeholders – including the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC), the Australian Banking Association, refugee and migrant peak bodies, and the four major banks. Our advocacy and submission to ASIC on the urgent need for better consumer scam protections and reforms to the ePayments Code has led to new communication lines for scams between the banks and peak ethnic community bodies and tens of thousands of dollars in compassionate refunds for clients.

We initiated training and best practice sessions between the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages and community workers for a further iteration of the MyName Project to help the Burmese community of Melbourne's West access name change processes more equitably and easily.

Indicative of our expertise in consumer law, the Australian Communications and Media Authority's Consumer Consultative Forum and the Telstra CEO Roundtable host our Consumer Team as a representative for the community sector. We also provided the groundwork for a 2022 campaign for reform of lemon car laws to enable easier access to justice for consumers, and representation on the Wyndham Humanitarian Network, including its Consumer, Housing and Legal Working Group.

Family Violence & Family Law Program

We have yet again experienced another unprecedented year in the legal practice. Our team has shown an enormous amount of resilience and adaptability as we navigated this last year in and out of lockdown. Some of the team's highlights include:

- ongoing provision of family violence intervention order services to people attending Sunshine and Werribee Magistrates Court. As lockdowns lifted and were reinstated our team responded flexibly, assisting more clients this year than in the year prior. Our service delivery continues to emphasise early contact with clients leading to the early resolution of disputes;
- ongoing operation of the early intervention family violence program in partnership with Mercy Hospital in Werribee, focused on assisting high-risk clients with family violence matters whilst also building the capacity of hospital staff to identify and refer clients;
- ongoing delivery of family law and family violence clinics, some of which we could not have operated without the commitment and support of a number of highly-skilled private family lawyers, many of whom have been volunteering for years. We wish to acknowledge their tremendous support especially during the most recent extended lockdown;
- assisting women who have been misidentified as perpetrators of violence, helping them with criminal law and family violence matters. Our lawyers have achieved outstanding results and we look forward to continuing this work in the next year;
- embarking on a new family law capacity building project in partnership with Women's Legal Service, Brimbank Melton CLC, Barwon CLC and VLA. This project has delivered in-depth family law legal assistance (including litigation) through a project model that also seeks to simultaneously build the legal capacity of the lawyers and their supervisors. Our staff have enjoyed growing their skills through this valuable project;
- strengthening partnerships with key community groups such as IndianCare and MiCare through the delivery of online community legal education sessions; and
- contributing learnings from our work to a number of key policy submissions and sharing our knowledge with local networks.

We look forward to continuing our work in all of these areas and more in the next year. Finally, we wish to acknowledge Priyanka Shetty and our resilient and hard-working family violence and family law team members, without whom the above results could not have been achieved.



38
 Clients assisted through the Mercy Hospital Health Justice Partnership

580
 Clients assisted with intervention order matters at Sunshine and Werribee Magistrates Court



As we emerge from the pandemic there is no doubt that the demand for family violence and family law assistance will continue to increase.

Employment & Equality Law Program

Vision and Purpose

The Employment and Equality Law Program (EELP) vision is for better employment outcomes, improved community participation (social cohesion) and reduced disadvantage for vulnerable workers. We provide quality legal education, advice and casework on employment law issues for vulnerable workers in Melbourne's West, and use the evidence from this work to effect systemic policy or legislative change aimed at improving the lives of all workers. EELP was formerly known as the Employment and Discrimination Law Program.

It's been a year of change for the EELP. We have been pleased to welcome senior lawyers Cassandra Martin and Tess Matthews to the EELP team to join Francesca Lai and Thea Debler-Depold. We also said an emotional farewell to legal directors Catherine Hemingway and Tarni Perkal, who have taken up opportunities with the newly established Migrant Justice Initiative, as well as Liz Morgan who supported the team both as EELP director for a time, and through her role as Director of Policy & Innovation. You will all be dearly missed.

Integrated Legal Services

Throughout 2020-2021 we continued to provide legal support and education to international students through the International Students' Employment and Accommodation Legal Service (ISEALS) at Study Melbourne Student Centre, in partnership with JobWatch and Springvale Monash Legal Service. The ISEALS program is funded by the Victorian Government Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR).



We also provided embedded legal services through our Youth Employment Justice Project (YEP), with funding from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust (HMST), providing accessible employment-related legal services to young people under 25 through the school lawyer program and Youth Hubs. We completed this project on 30 June 2021.

In total, we provided legal advice assistance to 98 young workers and international students.

Targeted Education

Targeted community legal education (CLE) has continued to be a major focus of the EELP. In the last financial year, we delivered a total of 57 CLE sessions reaching more than 1500 participants.

We produced videos for social media with Study Melbourne Student Centre highlighting international students' work rights.

We partnered with WorkSafe and WCEC to deliver a Workplace Safety Community Information Session for WorkSafe Safety Month in October 2020 for migrant community leaders featuring a Worksafe representative, a WEstjustice EELP lawyer and a specialist OHS lawyer.

As an alternative to our final rollout of the Train the Trainer Program in Gippsland (which was interrupted by COVID-19), we piloted a graphic advocacy project in the form of the Infographics Project, to create a suite of resources for use in legal appointments. The Infographics – which were co-designed with migrant community leaders – use simple clear language and illustrations to assist EELP lawyers to provide complex advice to clients from CALD backgrounds. The Infographics Project was funded by the Victorian Government Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) and would not have been possible without our design team: Tim Rob Don Dow, Stephanie Mulder and Lilian Darmono.



Our Outcomes and Impact

We recovered \$148,000 in unpaid wages, entitlements and compensation throughout the year. We also assisted 3 clients to obtain apologies from their employers, a further 2 clients to be reinstated to their roles and we negotiated for 2 employers to undergo anti-discrimination and sexual harassment training.

In addition, we used our client stories and evidence from our legal service and education programs to advocate for systemic change through four legal policy submissions:

- *Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Job Security* (March 2021)
- *Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment 'Fair Work Amendment (Supporting Australia's Jobs and Economic Recovery) Bill 2021'* (February 2021)
- *Further Submission: Report of the Inquiry into the Victorian On-Demand Workforce* (Joint Submission with Springvale Monash Legal Service and Jobwatch, October 2020)
- *Submission to the Senate Select Committee Inquiry into Temporary Migration* (Joint Submission with Springvale Monash Legal Service and Jobwatch, July 2020)

We demonstrated our strong collaborative work ethic by continuing to co-convene the Victorian Employment Law Working Group and Fair Work Ombudsman/CLC forum, and participate in other community/sector-led consultation and stakeholder committees such as: the Discrimination Law Service Providers Network, the WorkSafe Vulnerable Workers Stakeholder Working Group and the ECCV Policy Advisory Committee on Employment, Education and Training.

We recovered
\$148,000
In unpaid wages,
entitlements and
compensation



Highlights

An ISEALS client provided this testimonial: "This service helped me with low payment rates and with the doubt about a new work contract. Giving me a lot of knowledge and tools for current and future jobs. With this, I feel confident that as an international student I am not alone in legal matters. I love the job Casi, she made everything easy. She did keep updating and giving advice after each moment that was needed. And had a lot of patience with me. I have no idea how to thank you for her great service."

98
young workers and
international students
provided with legal
advice and assistance



Youth Law Program

We assisted
158
youth clients during
the financial year

Summary

We assisted 158 young people over the financial year. The majority (74%) were aged 18-25 years old and the remainder 10-17 years (26%).

The top three matters experienced by our clients were criminal charges, fines and debts.

Our People

Thank you to the team for remaining committed to high quality outcomes for our clients during what was an extremely challenging year of rolling lockdowns and other COVID-19 related restrictions. We welcomed Josephine Choimes, Emily Scott, Brett Walker and Anoushka Jeronimus into the team and farewellled Melissa Hardham as Director. Vincent Shin was promoted to Youth Law Program Manager and Emily Scott to Senior Lawyer. Angus Woodward, Criminal Law and Youth Clinics Program Manager also achieved his Law Institute of Victoria's accredited specialisation in criminal law.

Our Programs

We were grateful to be able to continue to deliver our School Lawyer Service and Youth Clinics online. We continued to work closely with our service partners at the schools and hubs to minimise service disruption to clients. We were able to waive \$25,729 worth of fines for our clients; \$5,825 worth of debts and achieve diversion outcomes for more than half of those child and youth clients with criminal law matters. We also delivered 44 community legal education sessions in young people in our schools.

We worked with multiple partners across the justice sector in the west to settle the design of the Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Project (YCPEIP). YCPEIP aims to increase the rates of cautions and diversions for children and young people in the Brimbank and Wyndham Police Service Areas, in particular those overrepresented in the justice system.

Thank you also to Anglicare Victoria for partnering with us to deliver our Out of Home Care Legal Clinic early in the new financial year. The clinic aims to help young people in residential care to identify a legal problem and get help early to address them.

Our Impact

We commenced co-convening Smart Justice 4 Young People (SJ4YP) with Youthlaw and remained active in the #RaisetheAge campaign. We also convened a new sub-group of the SJ4YP involving interested academics, community legal sector workers, advocates, and government representatives to work at a systemic level to end the over-representation of particular groups of children and young people in the criminal justice system.

We supported Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service's (VAL) calls for bail reform and also voiced concerns about the presence of police in schools.

We also conceived of TARGET ZERO with CMY; an ambitious collective impact project to end youth criminalisation and overrepresentation in Brimbank, Melton and Wyndham. To develop the idea, we established an interim working group comprising of representatives from allied organisations who have been collaborating to grow the vision for TARGET ZERO.

Finally, we helped co-ordinate SJ4YP's sector-wide response to the Victorian Government's proposed Youth Strategy as well as making our own.



Waived
\$31,554
of fines and debts



ABOVE On 20 October 2020, Vincent Shin joined a panel of community lawyers convened by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare to discuss the legal issues faced by young people in residential and out of home care.



ABOVE WEstjustice continued its support of the Raise the Age campaign. Our Youth Law Director Anoushka joined a panel to discuss her experience of being a lawyer for children under the age of 14.

Community Development, Education & Engagement Program



WEstjustice staff participating in a Royal Botanic Gardens Cultural Walk as part of NAIDOC week celebrations 2021

Community Development, Education & Engagement

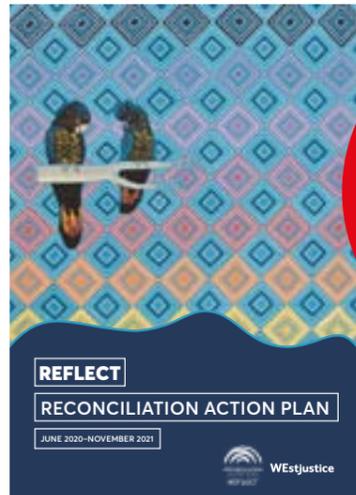
Community engagement is all about human connection, so there is no doubt the pandemic has impacted on our work in so many ways. These challenges have, however, brought into sharper focus so many positives about our programs and provided opportunities for us to learn, grow and change. The past year has also given us some pause to reflect and consider how we can do our work in more considered and client-centred ways, as we have seen with the roll-out of our Community Legal Education Framework. What has really shined through is the resilience of our staff, our volunteers and the community leaders we've had the privilege of working alongside in responding to legal need for many who have been hit the hardest by these difficult times.

Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

Our first Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan has set us firmly along our path toward our vision of reconciliation and the RAP Working Group has worked solidly to build momentum behind our commitments. We are particularly grateful for the support of partnerships, forged or deepened along the way, with special thanks to VACCA in supporting us through our first cultural safety audit. This step has been one of many we have taken over the past year towards providing more culturally safe and responsive services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a growing and thriving community of Melbourne's West.

Victoria University Clinical Placement Program

Students participating in our Victoria University Clinical Placement Program demonstrated incredible resilience and flexibility, with all 61 students successfully adapting to remote working and completing their 4-month placements this year. Supervising staff also did an exceptional job under the circumstances, with approximately 95% of students indicating they had a positive experience and would recommend the program to other students. We also thank Victoria University for their steadfast support in helping us navigate all the pandemic challenges.



1st
Completed our first RAP report for Reconciliation Australia



Working with Community - Highlights of 2020-1

While periods of office closure have reminded us of the importance of in-person service delivery for many communities, the Communities of Burma Team worked very hard to maintain a high level of trust and connection. This importantly led to the team identifying and responding to a particularly nasty scam that targeted many community members during the pandemic.

The release of our Pasifika Project Report has been another highlight for our program this year. We look forward to continuing our work in support of the community through the Tangata Wyndham Restorative Justice Advisory Group into 2021-2.

Change in Leadership

We farewelled Sarouche Razi and thank him for his leadership, in particular the introduction of our first Reconciliation Action Plan. We welcomed the fabulous Annie Davis, who joined as the new Director of Community Development, Education and Engagement.

"Even through lockdown, the needs are still there. It still helped every week being online, even though we couldn't see people face-to-face. If we closed down, there would be nobody there to help."

- Za Tuyah Ngur (Nguri), Community Worker, Communities of Burma Clinic

95%
of students had a positive experience and would recommend the program to other students

61
students successfully completed their 4-month placements this year



Policy & Innovation Program

Summary

We farewelled the wonderful Liz Morgan and are thrilled to welcome Caitlin Caruana. We produced our first formal Budget Submission to the State Government, resulting in funding for a statewide expansion of the WEstjustice Mortgage Wellbeing Service. We have deepened our stakeholder engagement and been active across issues that relate to the impact of COVID-19, particularly the changes to tenancy legislation, mortgage moratoriums, and the increased exploitation of various groups of people.

Through the refinement of our Impact Areas 2020-23, we have been able to focus more deliberately on our four impact groups:

- Culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- People experiencing gender-based violence
- Young people
- Economic Injustice

Submissions & Inquiries

We have produced many submissions for state and federal inquiries and provided evidence at the Senate Economics Legislation Committee on Economic Abuse and Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria.

We contributed to the Youth Strategy and the Youth Justice Strategy and participated in a range of conferences on pertinent topics such as children in out of home care, impact of COVID-19 on the West, and navigating rental rights and responsibilities.

Diseminating Information

During the pandemic we provided information through webinars including 'Workplace safety in the time of COVID-19', 'Tenancy rights and responsibilities', 'Financial stress in outer urban growth areas'.

Advocating for Improved Systems

Over the years we have lobbied the Victorian Government and Court Services Victoria to introduce a new justice precinct in the West. Therefore, we were thrilled when the government announced funding to build a new Wyndham Law Courts complex which will include a large number of therapeutic and specialist courts. We are now focused on assisting with the design process and ensuring that a comprehensive integrated multidisciplinary hub is also developed to complement and support the Courts.

We have been active in many areas of reform, such as, tenancy, mortgage stress, workplace exploitation, circumventing scams, and irresponsible lending, Raising the Rate for Good, police profiling, fines, Raising the Age, reducing overrepresentation of certain groups in our criminal justice system, bail reforms and many other important campaigns and initiatives.

Boards, Steering Committees & Advisory Groups

Many members of our management team sit on boards, steering committees and advisory groups enabling WEstjustice to contribute to decision making and prioritisation of certain reform across industry, governments, and sectors.

Lodged **29** submissions to various state and federal government inquiries

We advocated for VicRoads to create a family violence process for the transfer of vehicle registration.

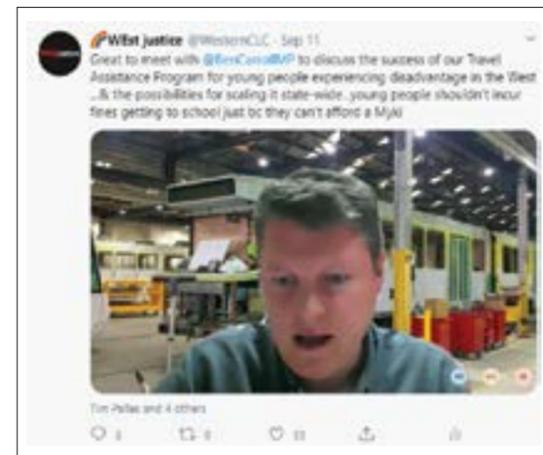
Achieved the **largest** known point-in-time VCAT-ordered rent reduction under section 540 of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic).

Reports

This year we launched two reports – the Travel Assistance Program (TAP) Report and the Health Agencies to Court (HACP) Program Report. The Honourable Ben Carroll, Minister for Public Transport, was our keynote speaker at the TAP Report launch, along with the former Public Transport Ombudsman, Treasure Jennings. We continue to advocate for pre-paid travel for students travelling to and from school and integrated service delivery models such as our partnership with the Mercy Hospital.

Integration Across Teams

A significant achievement over the past 12 months is our internal cross team collaboration through our Systemic Impact Working Group. We are looking forward to more collective impact opportunities and acknowledged the incredible work of our Teams - identifying comprehensive solutions to complex problems.



ABOVE In September 2020 WEstjustice met with Minister Carroll (Minister for Public Transport) to discuss the Travel Assistance Program and advocate that pre-paid Myki cards be provided to all disadvantaged young people across Victoria.

Operations Program

COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 continues to be felt by staff and the community. We wish to acknowledge the continued resilience and dedication of the staff during these challenging times and the leadership of the Senior Management Team and Board.

Digital Management Strategy

In 2020, WEstjustice began the work to transform our digital management system to create a more integrated system that serves our innovative and evolving organisation. The project has the following stages:

Stage 1: Develop a Digital Management Strategy, and Stage 2: Implement this Strategy over three years.

We engaged Infoxchange for Stage 1. They reviewed our current system, consulted with staff and key partners to develop a strategy that met the needs of WEstjustice.

We have just commenced Stage 2 and have engaged humanIT to assist us with our digital transformation over the next few years.

We would like to thank the William Buckland Foundation for their generous support.

Organisational Structure

It has been one year since our new structure came into effect as of 1 July 2020. The restructure has largely resulted in positive changes including:

- Clear responsibilities and accountabilities
- Team connection
- Improved support and supervision for staff
- Clear and transparent communication at all levels
- Positive workplace culture
- Opportunities to participate in organisational improvement

We will continue reviewing our structure, along with Impact Areas and Strategy each year.



Farewell to Carol McNair

We said farewell to Carol McNair this year and thank her for her many years of service and positive impact to the sector.

"Congratulations on 30 years in the community sector. It was an absolute delight working with you."

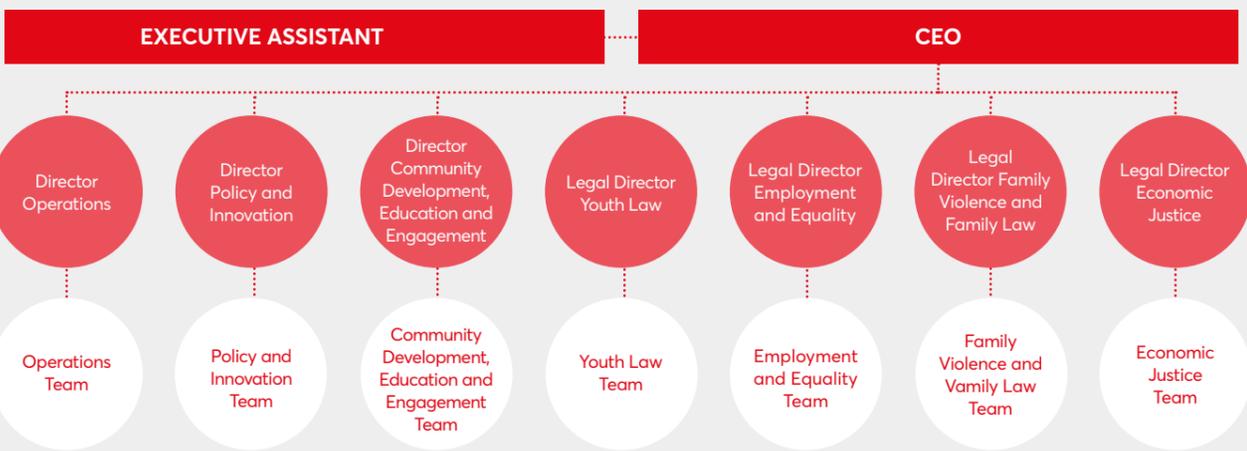
"You have been the heart, the strength and the fierceness of our community legal centres in the West for decades."

"Thank you for your extraordinary commitment to WEstjustice and the Western suburbs communities".

"You've done so much for the service and for the people of the West with all of your diligence, care and commitment."

"Congratulations Carol on an amazing effort to support the community of Footscray and the greater West over more than 30 years."

Organisational structure



People

We wish to thank all staff for their hard work through the year.

We welcomed:

Anna Nguyen | Anoushka Jeronimus | Brett Walker | Caitlin Vaughan | Caroline Atkinson | Cassandra Martin | Hannah Shedden | Jayde Giggins | Joseph Nunweek | Josephine Choimes | Sarah Breen | Stephen Bruce

We said goodbye to:

Banafsheh Abedali | Carol McNair | Catherine Hemingway | Ella Trickey | Hilary Knack | Maria Nocera | Paryce Bausch | Rachel Gregory | Sam Elkin | Sarouche Razi | Sharon Blazier | Tarni Perkal

COLLECTIVE IMPACT STATEMENT

COLLECTIVE IMPACT STATEMENT





1110 clients received family violence and family law assistance

2313 referrals made to other services

100% of the young people we surveyed agreed that after receiving our help, they felt prepared to stand up for their rights at work

100% of the young people we surveyed reported improved working conditions

93% of our CLE participants agreed they would stand up for their employment rights if something went wrong

We recovered more than **\$140,000** in unpaid wages, entitlements and compensation

We delivered CLE sessions reaching more than **1500 participants**

The top 3 legal matter types in which we achieved outcomes in 2020-2021 were



Over **\$25,000** worth of fines were waived and many others were converted into Work Development Plans

2030 clients assisted with legal and financial issues

59% of our clients had no/low income

Achieved the **largest** known point-in-time VCAT-ordered rent reduction

We **advocated for VicRoads** to create a family violence process for transfer of vehicle registration.

86% felt positive about the outcome of their case and one third reported feeling amazing

89% felt that working with WEstjustice and other services really helped them

92% reported that staff were helpful or enormously helpful

\$45,214 in debt waivers for motor vehicle accident and insurance matters

\$549,233 in compensation and debts waived for Mortgage Wellbeing Service clients

IN DEBT WAIVERS

\$360,885 in compensation and debts waived for economic abuse victim-survivors

\$190,000 in debts waived and money recovered in consumer matters

