

# Westjustice

Fairness, safety and justice for Melbourne's West



**Budget Submission**  
2026-2027

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September 2025

# Executive Summary

Westjustice is a rights-based community legal centre servicing Melbourne's West on the lands of the Bunurong and Wurundjeri peoples and including the local government areas of Wyndham, Maribyrnong, Hobsons Bay, Melton and Brimbank. This area covers a population of over a million people.

Melbourne's West is home to Australia's most diverse and fastest growing population as well as the country's largest per capita youth population. Unfortunately, many people in the area experience barriers to accessing the services they need, when and where they need it.

In the last financial year, Westjustice provided wrap-around multidisciplinary services to approximately 3,000 distinct clients with on average three different service needs totalling almost 9,000. We provide social work, financial counselling, community education, community engagement, advocacy and more. We aim to provide as many legal services as possible to assist our clients to address their issues and deliver sustainable life and justice outcomes. We also learn from our clients what they need us to advocate for to address the drivers of disadvantage that they experience. This includes free public transport for young people and citizenship parity for New Zealand citizens among others.

Westjustice also partners with multicultural and racially marginalised communities across Melbourne's West to ensure that their expertise and lived experiences help develop, shape, improve, and evaluate Westjustice services and our advocacy priorities. Our approach ensures community development and engagement is ongoing and reaches to where people are, so we can bring our services to them in way that respects the diverse lived experiences, histories, and needs of the communities we serve.

Our 2026-27 Budget Submission aims to continue and expand our services to help people in the west get the services they need to achieve the life outcomes they want. Westjustice can be the open door for people across the west to access these services and intervene early to prevent them or their families experiencing further disadvantage or coming into contact with the justice system.



# Executive Summary

Our aim is to support the cohorts that need the most help. This includes mothers and their children in the Melbourne's West with complex legal issues and that face a risk to their safety and their children's future. For instance, the mothers we help in Specialist Family Violence Courts or the FVIO duty lists are often the mothers of children we see in the School Lawyer Program. We rely on ongoing funding for these programs to help all members of local families thrive and stay in pro-social spaces like jobs and schools.

Outlined below are the items we are proposing, including:

- Wyndham Community Services Hub, to support the Wyndham Court Complex set to open from November 2025.
- Programs with lapsing funding that need urgent support (**\$1.135 million annually**)
- Successful programs with opportunities for expansion to meet unmet demand and continue to avoid costs to government (**\$4.030 million annually**).
- New programs that have been designed to meet an urgent need to the people we provide services to (**\$1.7 million annually**).

We have prioritised the programs in our budget bid to those with the most pressing need for funding, and that make the biggest impact to our communities and cost savings to government.

Through this budget, we aim to support the government to bring fairness, justice and safety to Melbourne's West. We aim to help achieve a thriving and safe community in the western suburbs of Melbourne and want to be the touch point for people to get the services they need to get the best chance at life and keep Victorians safe.



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# Wyndham Community Services Hub

## Problem

With the Wyndham Law Courts set to open in November 2025, the site needs a dedicated Wyndham Multidisciplinary Community Services Hub to ensure people can access the services to address the needs that led them to the justice system in the first place. Wyndham has a population of approximately 300,000 people and is projected to reach over 500,000 by 2041. Wyndham’s rapid growth has created a thriving, multicultural community, while also placing additional strain on infrastructure and services. This includes the justice system and the services that address the cycles of disadvantage that lead to offending and reoffending and keep Mebourne’s West and Victoria safe.

## Solution

Ernst & Young have completed a business case for the development of a Wyndham Community Services Hub on the corner of Sneydes Rd and the Princes Freeway, to enable easy access from the courts and across Wyndham.

By restoring the project to its original design, people accessing the court can be referred to onsite family violence, health and mental health, financial counselling, housing and other services that prevent crime for occurring and keep the community safe. It also ensures that the existing services in the western region, including Werribee, Hoppers Crossing, Tarneit, Point Cook are not overrun and people can get access the services they need to address the causes of their offending.

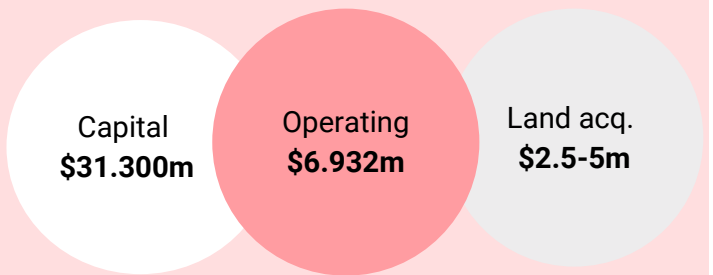
## Outcome

The court will be able to refer people to the services onsite, addressing the underlying causes of offending and reoffending.

People accessing the court will also be able to access community services and ensure improved wellbeing, social and economic participation. This includes a reduction in recidivism rates and avoided costs to government in healthcare, legal, social, housing and other services.



## Funding sought



## Avoided costs to government

**\$71.3 million**  
over five years\*

## Wyndham Services Hub - Community Feedback

“It’s a place to welcome and embrace people - preventative, referral, follow up etc. The community can play a real role in shaping this.”

I can’t walk through Watton St in Werribee. I need to drag my foot when I walk due to my disability...but that’s where all the services are.”

I am a carer for my husband with disability, getting to the city for medical appointments is hard and a taxi to the city is \$140, is there any help for people who need to get around?”

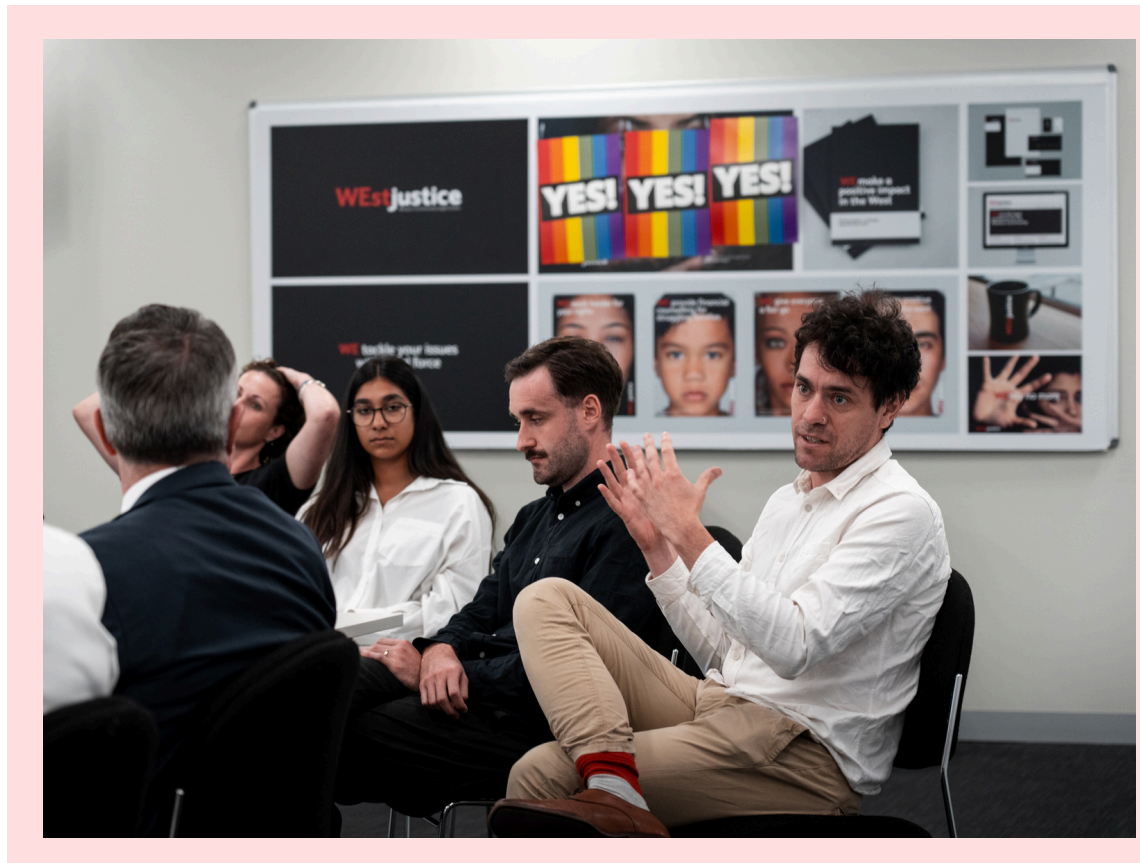
\*Wyndham Community Services Hub Business Case, EY, January 2025.

# Lapsing Programs

Westjustice currently provides critical services in the western suburbs that are at risk of lapsing, resulting in a loss of vital services for people.

This includes:

- Health Justice Support for Families.....7
- Family Law Access.....8
- Continue Westjustice Tenancy and Renter Support Programs .....9
- Citizenship in the West Project.....10



# Health Justice Support for Families

## Problem

Women and birthing parents who are pregnant or have newborn children are at heightened risk of the onset or escalation of family violence from an intimate partner. 24 per cent of antenatal women who experienced violence did so for the first time while pregnant. Without support, their children can be at risk of entering child protection and being without a supportive family structure. However, antenatal women experiencing family violence are more frequent users of health services and are more likely to disclose their experience of family violence to a health professional whom they trust, often while seeking health assistance for themselves or their child or children.

## Solution

Since 2016, the Westjustice Health Justice Support for Families program has provided legal services to mothers and families that are simultaneously accessing health services and experiencing violence in the Werribee Mercy Hospital and Wyndham’s Maternal and Child Health team.

Our lawyers attend hospital weekly for scheduled and on-the-day referrals and electronic referrals from the hospital staff and social workers, supporting antenatal women in a way that is safest for them so antenatal women can make informed decisions about their legal rights and safety options. We also provide training for health and social partners to identify family violence cases and make confident referrals.

## Outcome

Between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025, Westjustice provided legal assistance to 87 at-risk antenatal women referred to us by our primary partners with a total of 515 services provided across multiple areas of law. This includes 99 services involving a Family Violence Intervention Order, 13 child protection proceedings and 20 family law matters. Westjustice also provides ongoing casework support for antenatal women.

85 per cent of clients understood how to deal with their legal problem and 100 per cent of clients felt empowered to seek help if they have another legal issue.

## Funding sought



## Avoided costs to government



## Case study

Mandy was experiencing family violence at the hand of her partner whilst caring for her one-year-old child full-time. She was also experiencing financial strain, due to being on maternity leave and paying all the rent for the family home. After a referral, the Health Justice Support for Families team achieved a full no-contact intervention order, achieved stability with child support payments, helped achieve secure parenting orders and ensured housing stability through tenancy law support. Mandy and her children are now secure and safe.

\*See KPMG’s [The Cost of Family Violence in Victoria 2017](#), which informed the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

# Family Law Access

## Problem

Family violence does not end with victim-survivors leaving the relationship or obtaining an intervention order. Often, family violence escalates once a victim decides to leave the relationship due to parenting or property issues, or both. However, there is very little access to free family law services in Victoria. Victoria Legal Aid is only available for those who meet strict guidelines. Even if a client is eligible, fewer private lawyers are taking on legally aided family law work for vulnerable clients, and specialist expertise is required to represent victim survivors. The Victorian Law Foundation’s Public Understanding of the Law Survey indicates that family law issues have the highest percentage of unmet legal need (70%). Also, 47% of young people in Victoria’s youth justice system are victims of family violence.

## Solution

Access to family law services in the west is essential for the recovery and healing of victim-survivors and for safe parenting arrangements and financial security. These services should be free and accessible for all victim survivors across Victoria, including in areas of higher demand such as Melbourne’s West.

Westjustice is funded to continue to build and maintain our family law practice through the continuation of the Family Law Access Program until July 2026. This extension will allow us to continue these vital services.

## Outcome

Between 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, we delivered 283 family law services to 194 clients who were victim-survivors of family violence including complex case work files involving representation in mediations and court.

Since the commencement of FLA in 2021, we have achieved a total of \$1,196,294.11 in property settlements including superannuation entitlements. We also achieved the re-apportionment of debts, and goods and chattels. Such outcomes would be otherwise out of reach for many of our clients.

The continuation of this program would allow Westjustice to continue to build and maintain our support for victim-survivors across Melbourne’s West. In addition, it will aid in addressing community safety, with respect to the high proportion of young people in the criminal justice system with a history of family violence.

## Funding Sought

Program  
**\$180,000**  
per year, ongoing

Cost per client  
**\$4,019**

## Avoided costs to government

**\$11,250 - 16,250**  
Per person  
experiencing FV\*

Approx.  
**\$2.1 million**  
saved to date (194  
clients)

## Case study

Tina came to Australia in 2019 to be with Tony. They leased a property and had three children. After they separated, Tina was the sole carer of three children under 5 years and her partner was not paying child support. Tina received a notice to vacate and was experiencing financial abuse from Tony. Westjustice helped Tina access the Family Tax Benefit and get back-to-back payments from Centrelink so she could pay the cost of her rental property. She also attained parenting orders, allowing her to return home to access support from friends and family with her children.

# Continue Tenancy and Renter Support Programs

## Problem

For over 20 years Westjustice, and its predecessor organisations have offered free residential tenancy legal support and representation to Victorians living in Melbourne's West. Westjustice's tenancy law team is currently one of the largest dedicated residential tenancy law teams in the State. Our integrated multi-disciplinary services then provide wrap around support to clients, including additional tenancy information in relation to budgeting, debt management, and referrals to other social support. Since 2012 these services have been offered and funded as part of the Tenancy Advocacy and Assistance Program. Unfortunately, this program is about to lapse. This would mean our tenancy service will need to end and we will now longer be able to support our clients on tenancy matters, despite the current cost of living crisis.

## Solution

Westjustice is well-placed to deliver the new Renters Rights Service - offering local access to advice, support and advocacy for renters across all local government areas in Melbourne's West.

Since 1 July 2021, we have provided legal services to 2,031 clients, providing 17,556 total service hours across 1,435 cases. Westjustice is therefore experienced in providing all Rental Rights Service types, including providing 3,841 hours of tenancy information and legal advice, 2,602 hours of negotiation and advocacy, 9,212 hours of assistance with VCAT hearings and dispute resolution processes through casework representation services. Westjustice is well-placed to deliver these services in Melbourne's West.

## Outcome

For many years Westjustice provided tenancy support to Melbourne's West, including prioritising clients who are from key cohorts such as people affected by gender-based and family violence, First Nations renters, migrant and refugee renters, renters with a disability and older renters. W By delivering the RRS, Westjustice will be able to continue to deliver high-quality, tenancy support services to the residents of Melbourne's West.

***"Westjustice saved my life. We were in the pits of despair and [I] was pulled out in the nick of time"***  
**Adrianne\***

## Avoided costs to government

**\$25,615**  
per person diverted  
from homelessness\*

Approx.  
**\$1.3 million**  
saved to date

## Case study

Adrianne was renting in Melbourne's West with her partner and four children when she was about to be evicted due to rent arrears. She was struggling with three jobs, a recent hospital stay, experiencing family violence and a criminal law issue. Westjustice requested a stay on her conviction, and connected her with a social worker who co-ordinated urgent food relief and rental assistance. Westjustice supported her with her criminal proceedings and guided her to financial assistance for her kid's school expenses through a no-interest loan scheme.

\*See SGS Economics [The case for last resort housing: Providing housing for homeless is cheaper and better for society.](#)

# Citizenship in the West Project

## Problem

Obtaining Australian citizenship is a significant pathway to employment opportunities, educational access, and a sense of belonging and social cohesion. It is also a critical safeguard against justice system interactions for young people which may otherwise result in visa cancellation and lead to the separation of families. Melbourne’s West now has two significant cohorts of young people who currently have unrealised pathways to citizenship, permanent humanitarian visa-holders who arrived in Australia as refugees and 444 Special Category Visa holders from New Zealand. However, a number of these young people lack knowledge about what citizenship can enable, the risks of not having it, and are unsure as to what their visa or migration status is generally.

## Solution

The Youth Citizenship in the West project is now in its second iteration and aims to empower and assist young people and their communities by providing direct legal advice and assistance to young people and their families who are applying for citizenship individually or as a group. As well as community legal information and education about citizenship and visa cancellation issues, assisted by in-reach into communities through our partners including settlement agencies and schools.

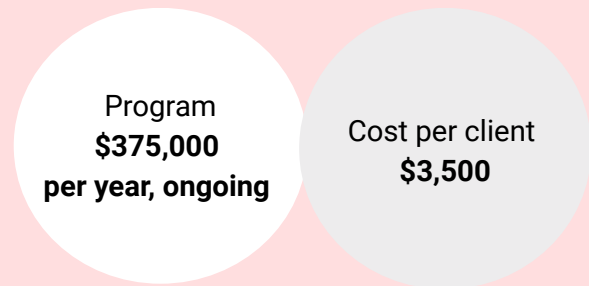
## Outcome

In the first 12 months of the project, 384 individuals were assisted. Half of the clients (52%) were from Myanmar, followed by Sudan or South Sudan (17%) and Democratic Republic of Congo (10%).

Further funding would allow Westjustice to continue delivering citizenship law services directly through the expertise of our existing experienced lawyer, employ a community development worker to reach priority community groups, and ensure the program is sustainably managed and supervised and that there is capacity to escalate systemic barriers and opportunities for reform.

If the program was refunded to this scale, we would also seek to extend outreach, advice and assistance to New Zealand citizens and integrate the citizenship advice and assistance capacity into our Settlement Justice Partnership, Tenancy Stress Victoria, and Restoring Financial Safety, and Migrant and Refugee Employment Clinic services.

## Funding Sought



## Avoided costs to government



# Expansion of Current Programs

Westjustice has developed the following proposals to expand access in currently successful programs, that will further address the cycles of disadvantage that impact the most vulnerable people in Melbourne's West.

This includes:

- Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Project.....12
- Settlement Justice Partnership.....13
- Restoring Financial Safety.....14
- Youth Employment Program.....15



# Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Project (YCPEIP)

## Problem

With the concerning rates of youth over-representation within the criminal justice system from Melbourne’s West, we worked closely with Victoria Police to establish a different model, where children and young people are provided appropriate referrals and supports so that Police feel confident to caution or otherwise divert them away from the system. Westjustice and Victoria Police established the YCPEIP with key youth service providers in the Western Suburbs to trial a caution and diversion program, with the first part of the project aimed at 10-17 year olds, and the second at 18-25 year olds. This program is now properly funded for Melbourne’s West, but we are seeking funding to match Victoria Police’s funding to roll the program out state-wide.

## Solution

As part of the initial trial project, Westjustice created a process to enable early referrals from Victoria Police to legal and non-legal support services and Victoria Police created a bespoke local standard operating procedure alongside. Westjustice also trained members on this new process and rationale for increased cautions and diversion. By fully funding the expansion state-wide (Latrobe, Sepparton, Geelong, Mildura, Frankston and Dandenong), Westjustice can train other CLCs across the state to ensure Victoria Police will be able to caution and divert children and young people into services to help young people avoid re-interaction with the system and save costs to government.

## Funding Sought

Program  
**\$3.8 million for 6 additional sites**

Cost per CLC  
**\$400,000**

## Avoided costs to government

**\$8.6 million annual savings from YCPEIP to date, and three times this amount if new sites are added\***

## Outcome

YCPEIP is estimated to have reduced youth reoffending rates among first-time offenders from 54.7 per cent to 30.5 per cent. We have received 600 youth referrals from police and successfully linked 32 per cent of those young people to critical support services (e.g. drug and alcohol counselling, housing services, education & employment support, legal services etc.). This percentage is above the average rate for voluntary engagement with services by young people and is continuing to improve. YCPEIP is enormously successful due to CLC and Victoria Police partnerships.



\*Allen and Clarke Consulting (2024). Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Project Final Evaluation Report

# Settlement Justice Partnership

## Problem

A historically 'hard to reach' group, recently arrived refugees typically face a multitude of intersecting barriers to self-advocacy and access to justice, including limited or no English literacy, lack of knowledge or trust of justice systems, a reliance on social security or financial insecurity, limited established community networks or ongoing trauma of displacement or their experience prior to arriving in Australia. Unresolved or recurring legal problems can be deeply disruptive to successful settlement, causing considerable confusion and distress for people already navigating novel administrative and social systems.

## Solution

The Settlement Justice Partnership (SJP) is a place-based justice partnership which has been delivering in-situ legal services to recently arrived refugees and humanitarian visa holders for the past four years at two partner settlement agencies, Wyndham Community and Education Centre (WCEC) and MiCare.

Designed as an early intervention project, the SJP engages with recently arrived refugees to identify, and avoid escalation of, emerging legal problems. In addition to continuing the lapsing amount, an expanded SJP will access further outreach sites (AMES and CatholicCare), and expand the legal services to social security matters, employment law and citizenship pathway referrals as well as community legal education programs.

## Outcome

In 2024 and 2025, we delivered 422 legal services (representation, advice, tasks, CLE and referrals), across a range of areas of law including civil matters, fines and infringements, consumer disputes, motor vehicle accidents, insurance, family violence, tenancy, employment law, minor criminal matters. The program also recovered over \$120,000 in worker entitlements and over \$125,000 in compensation for unlawful terminations.

If supported, this program could be expanded into further outreach sites, and our migrant and refugee legal service can be expanded to regional Western-Victoria (in alignment with the Working Women's Centre Victoria) and expand on the suite of legal services available to these communities.

## Funding Sought

Program  
**\$1m**  
per year, ongoing

Current funding  
**\$333,233**  
per year to 2028

## Avoided costs to government

**\$25,615**  
per person diverted  
from homelessness\*

**\$5,000**  
per criminal court  
matter

## Case study

Faegheh lives with her husband, children, her father who requires care, and a member of her community in-need, Markus. Markus began threatening the family and causing distress. When she reported it, the police misunderstood and thought Markus was a tenant. When Faegheh came to the SJP, Westjustice supported her to re-engage with police. After better understanding the safety risks, the police joined with a mental health response team and Markus was removed from the property. Now, Faegheh's family is safe.

\*See SGS Economics [The case for last resort housing: Providing housing for homeless is cheaper and better for society.](#)

# Restoring Financial Safety

## Problem

Economic abuse entraps many women in violent relationships, damaging financial and social wellbeing in the long term, and increasing the cost to community and government. Existing support services are currently overburdened and often siloed, making it more difficult for victim-survivors to receive holistic support and fully recover. Since 2017, Westjustice has delivered legal and financial services at McAuley Community Services for Women and since late 2022 at The Orange Door Western Melbourne. These wraparound, in-situ services have proved integral to disentangling hundreds of women from the debilitating and long-term impacts of economic abuse.

## Solution

Our existing RFS program is very successful but unfortunately confined to two sites – McAuley and The Orange Door Western Melbourne, leaving many suburbs in the Melbourne’s West underserved or un-served.

Expansion funding would enable us to take the program to all partner sites in the ‘Western Multidisciplinary Integrated Service Partnership’, creating a more holistic service and providing better outcomes for clients. In addition, it would allow us to properly fund the costs of program managers for the project rather than such positions needing to be funded at the cost of full-time casework.

## Outcome

We anticipate that at each new site we could assist up to 100 women and their children a year with civil and financial matters affecting their housing, fiscal independence, and employment prospects.

This would mean more women experiencing economic abuse and related issues can access comprehensive and integrated support in places we know they already go.

It would also enable us to provide more education and training to staff across these new partners sites to assist in warm referrals and capacity building.

## Funding Sought

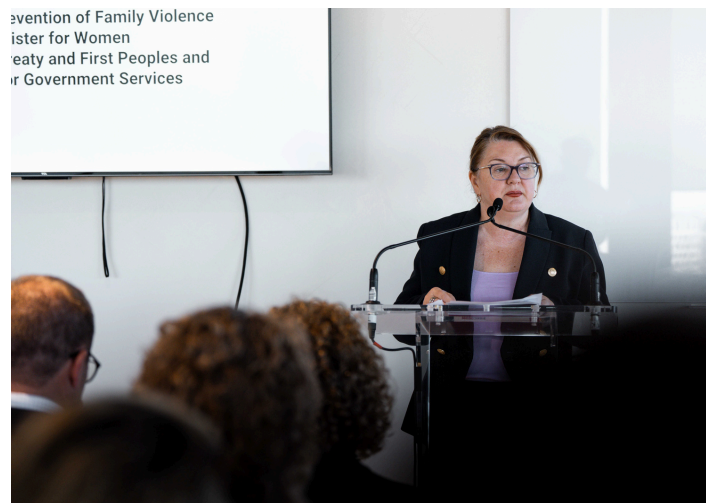
Program  
**\$1.5 million**  
per year, ongoing

Current funding  
**\$300,000**  
per year to 2027

## Avoided costs to government

**\$25,615**  
per person diverted  
from homelessness\*

**\$11,250 - 16,250**  
Per person  
experiencing FV



\*See SGS Economics [The case for last resort housing: Providing housing for homeless is cheaper and better for society.](#)

# Youth Employment Program

## Problem

Despite penalties in the Fair Work Act 2009 for businesses that underpay and mistreat young workers, exploitation is still rampant – especially in Melbourne’s western suburbs where young workers are often unaware of their rights and frequently engaged in precarious work. We are addressing this by developing and delivering community legal education to young people and work rights resources for teachers, while achieving significant outcomes for many of our young clients through legal advice and casework.

## Solution

Our Youth Employment Program equips young people with their workplace rights, to help them avoid issues or know where to get help if they encounter them. This program is uniquely placed to increase our impact through local and regional expansions.

Firstly, we are proposing a pilot-phase regional rollout with the aim of a state-wide expansion in coming years. Additionally, we are seeking funding for a Young Worker Ambassador Program in Melbourne’s West to be co-designed with young people, which will allow us to amplify our impact by training young workers to share their stories of standing up for their rights at work with larger groups of their peers.

## Outcome

Between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2024, the YEP provided 153 legal services to 103 young worker clients, of which 45 per cent were from a culturally and racially marginalised background.

We have recovered over \$35,000 in lost and stolen wages for our young worker clients. We also ran 54 Community Legal Education sessions in 12 schools, reaching 618 students.

Westjustice is uniquely positioned to scale the YEP to the regions, having piloted and developed Mortgage Stress Victoria from a small program to a state-wide, standalone organisation which launched on 1 July 2024.

## Funding Sought

Program  
**\$530,000**  
per year, ongoing

Regional  
expansion  
**\$350,000**  
per year to 2027

## Avoided costs to government

**\$2.2 million**  
saved to government  
over four years\*

## How Australia’s Employment Laws are Failing Young People

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM IMPACT AND INSIGHTS REPORT



JANUARY 2025

Westjustice

**\$35,949.26** Recovered for clients in unpaid wages, compensation and unpaid debts  
**\$2.2million** In avoided government costs over four years\*

### TOP 3 LEGAL ISSUES

1. Workplace conditions and entitlements
2. Unfair dismissal
3. Discrimination

**23** Low Reform Submissions and Open Letters

LGA



\*How Australia’s Employment Laws are Failing Young People, Westjustice - [westjustice\\_yep-impact-and-insights-report-\(2025\)-web.pdf](#), Appendix Two

# Programs Currently Unfunded

These programs provide opportunity to take on successful programs that are limited in their capacity due to a lack of government support.

This includes:

- Youth Law Clinic.....17
- Motor Vehicle Accidents and Rapid Insurance Response.....18
- Pre Court Engagement for Wyndham.....19
- Child Protection Practice at Westjustice.....20



# Youth Law Clinics

## Problem

Melbourne’s West has the biggest per capita youth population in comparison to the rest of the state. Our young people often have complex and multifaceted legal issues which can prevent them meaningfully participating in social, economic and civic life. This includes that they are overrepresented in the justice system and are part of a community with the highest rates of people from newly arrived backgrounds and socioeconomic disadvantage. Young people in the west are managing multiple, competing commitments including working and contributing to household finances, assisting parents and carers while also training and studying. Children and young people need legal services in their own right that are free and where those young people are.

## Solution

We currently provide free legal services to young people at the Visy Cares Hub in Sunshine and Wyndham Youth Resource Centre. The Youth Law Clinic is currently partially funded by philanthropies, but we can’t meet the increasing demands of our services with the current funding. Providing ongoing quality legal advice and representation, as well as wrap around support to young people, is a vital component of our early intervention work.

Youth Law Clinics are co-located with other youth services to allow for effective cross-referrals. Funding will enable us to help more young people as well as provide early intervention and referrals for wrap around support services that helps to divert young people away from the criminal justice system and back into training, further education and employment.

## Outcome

In the last financial year at our Visy Cares Hub Drop-in clinic alone we saw 160 young people, many presenting with multiple legal issues. This is despite the fact we had to pause the clinic from March 2025 through to May 2025 because it was over capacity and experiencing high demand.

86.25 per cent of those clients were aged 18-25 years. With increased and secure funding, the Youth Law Clinics could support more young people to get the care they need, where and when they need it.

## Funding Sought

Program  
**\$550,000**  
 per year, ongoing

## Avoided costs to government

**\$1,471**  
 per young person  
 per court  
 finalisation

**\$235,360**  
 saved on court costs  
 over four years (160  
 young people)



# Motor Vehicle Accidents and Rapid Insurance Response

## Problem

Melbourne’s Western Suburbs are heavily car-dependent and rely on an extended set of arterials for people to get to work, study and care. Our busy motor vehicle accident and insurance clinic assists people in seeking debt relief and recovery, insurance disputes, and appropriate advice around civil litigation and referrals as needed. Westjustice's general access MVA clinic is currently now on indefinite hiatus due to lack of funding. We continue to receive other complex general insurance claims, particularly in relation to insurance claims for damage to the family home in the wake of natural disasters or weather events. Our capacity to take this on is also limited as our CAV-funded Consumer clinic is ordinarily fully booked with long waiting lists.

## Solution

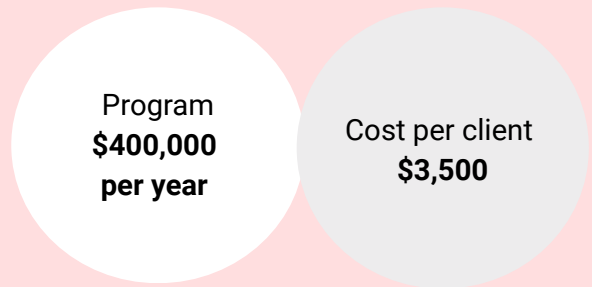
Westjustice can deliver a lawyer and senior lawyer to recommence the motor vehicle accident general access clinic, allow home and life insurance matters to be considered by an experienced senior lawyer in the team, with surge capacity to manage future disasters in Melbourne’s West and the western parts of the state.

## Outcome

Our MVA Clinic ordinarily sees 90-100 clients a year, with significant debt waivers to clients (ensuring they can afford essential costs to remain housed and healthy), negotiations to keep matters from proceeding to court (saving the state money), and outcomes involving client vehicle repair getting them back on the road and economically mobile.

The reintroduction of the service will address significant unmet need in Melbourne’s West. Car accidents are one of the most common reasons for inbound calls at Westjustice, and need is most acute among clients with intersecting disadvantage, including gig economy workers, international students, older people, and people living with a disability or health condition.

## Funding Sought



## Avoided costs to government



## Case study

Brian lived in the western suburbs and advertised on Facebook for housemates to live with him. When his house was flooded causing extensive damage, his insurance claimed he was running a ‘boarding house’ and denied his claim. Westjustice took on Brian and fought back on the decision, including successfully advocating to the Australian Financial Complaints Authority. Brian was found to not be operating a boarding house and the insurer’s conduct was heavily criticised.

# Pre Court Engagement at Wyndham

## Problem

Pre Court Engagement (PCE) is a key service that provides earlier intervention support in family violence matters by linking self-represented litigants with duty lawyers before the court date. Westjustice provide this service at the Specialist Family Violence Court of the Sunshine Magistrates Court and to support our duty list work at the Family Violence Intervention Order list at the Werribee Magistrates Court. However, there is no funding for this vital service when the Wyndham Law Courts open in November 2025 even though the service provision will double when compared to the current Werribee Law Courts. It will be an integral service at the new Wyndham Courts with an FVIO list sitting 7 times a week, and with a Specialist Family Violence Court due to open in 2027.

## Solution

Additional and ongoing funding is required to ensure Westjustice can maintain their capacity to deliver this crucial service at the Wyndham Law Courts.

The PCE program allows clients to provide their instructions and obtain advice outside of the stressful and re-traumatising environment of Court. Lawyers are then able to provide the clients with adequate referrals to support services and make appropriate arrangements for the day of court, including access to safe areas and/or remote hearing. It also aims at starting negotiations towards a resolution before the Court date to improve client outcomes, increase Court efficiency and reduce delays.

## Outcome

Between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025, Westjustice helped 431 clients across two Courts (Werribee and Sunshine Magistrates Court) by delivering 924 services overall including 264 information and advice sessions and 366 court appearances.

The service is essential for affected family members. It supports clients by linking them in with relevant family violence services that help to resolve more matters early. Westjustice has seen a significant improvement in the experience of affected family members who often feel more supported and safer in this service. It also reduces costs on the court and there are fewer delays.

## Funding sought



## Avoided costs to government



## Case study

Throughout her marriage of 20 years to Peter, Julia experienced significant emotional, psychological, physical, and financial abuse. After they separated, the children also felt unsafe when staying with their father because they were scared of his flatmate. Westjustice was able to successfully support Julia through the Sunshine Pre Court Engagement service to achieve two intervention orders against Peter and his flatmate. Westjustice also helped Juiia with a safe parenting plan. Julia is now safe and the children can safely maintain a relationship with Peter.

\*See KPMG's [The Cost of Family Violence in Victoria 2017](#), which informed the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

# Child Protection Practice at Westjustice

## Problem

Westjustice are regularly seeing parents and children with child protection legal matters that need our help. However, we don't have sufficient resources to provide the legal assistance required to provide the best service to keep families safe and, where possible, together. Without help, young people with a child protection history often end up in youth justice, with over 60 per cent of young people in the justice system having a history in child protection. Establishing a robust child protection practice at Westjustice would mean we can best serve our clients and provide fully integrated legal services to the people of Melbourne's West.

## Solution

To be able to provide holistic, integrated and wrap around services to our clients (aka a one-stop-shop), we need to establish a child protection practice at Westjustice that can receive referrals from across the entire organisation and our partners.

This would complement and bolster our existing legal practices, as well as support our Out of Home Care Legal Clinic through Anglicare Victoria's eight residential care homes in Melbourne's West, and our work with Tweddle Child and Family Services, Werribee Mercy Hospital, Wyndham Maternal Child Health services and others to ensure we intervene early and get our clients the care they need, where and when they need it. When we can address all of a client's needs in one place it is better for the client and more cost effective for the government.

## Outcome

By funding two additional senior lawyers, a manager and a legal administrator, Westjustice will be able to provide legal assistance to people in Melbourne's West looking for help with their child protection legal matters. We will also be able to expand our out of home care support and into community services providers in Melbourne's West, to provide early intervention and diversion from acute government services. This will also mean we can intervene early with young people who might be at risk of offending or coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

## Funding sought

Program  
**\$800,000**  
per year

Cost per client  
est. **\$5,000**

## Avoided costs to government

**\$608,542 to \$1.2**  
million  
Per child deferred  
from care\*

Help reduce  
**\$2.2 billion**  
cost to govt of out  
of home care

## Case study

We are seeing a number of birthing parents who are experiencing family violence referred to us because child protection has been notified specifically for their unborn baby. These parents need help to ensure they can address any protective concerns in a timely manner. In the School Lawyer Program, Our Youth Law Clinics and Out of Home Care Legal Clinic Program we see young people in the child protection system seeking advice about their rights and legal options but have no way to access that help.

\*The Productivity Commission (2025) [Report on Government Services, Section 16 Child Protection Services](#).

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**For inquiries, contact us.**

**Westjustice**

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