ANNUAL REPORT

2021-2022

WESTERN NSW
COMMUNITY
LEGAL CENTRE INC.

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Visionary Accounting

Western NSW Community Legal Centre Inc., and Western Women's Legal Support acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which our work premises is located, the Tubba-Gah people of the Wiradjuri Nation, and pay our respect to their elders past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge the traditional custodians of different country across which we travel to conduct our outreach services and also pay our respect to their elders past, present and emerging.

This 2021-22 Annual Report details the work undertaken during the past financial year. It measures progress against our Strategic Plan and illustrates the positive impact our activities have on the people we serve.

Western NSW Community Legal Centre Inc., was launched in 1996. The centre offers free legal advice and support services to people experiencing disadvantage. Help is provided in a user friendly, confidential and safe environment.

By resolving legal problems the centre is contributing to the health and wellbeing of local people as well as their ability to manage other life challenges as they arise. In this way expert legal help provides direct benefits to both individuals and communities in the western region.

In addition to a specialist domestic violence unit - Western Women's Legal Support - the centre provides community legal education and researches and prepares submissions to assist in the process of law reform.

INTRODUCTION

PHOTO: Fair, Easy and Free: Recognising International Day of People with Disability by lauching our second Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

ABOVE: Celebrating 25 years of service to the western region of NSW.

CHAIRPERSON

On behalf of the Western NSW Community Legal Centre Management Committee, I am delighted to present the 2021-22 Annual Report. This report outlines our achievements, reviews our progress against our annual goals and highlights our service's impact in the region.

The past year was not without challenges and, again, funding uncertainty contributed to staff turnover. Given the difficulties in recruiting to rural areas it is especially unfortunate to lose staff under these circumstances.

Despite these challenges we delivered a range of high quality services during the year. I am pleased that we received new funding that will allow us to expand our catchment area, reaching more people experiencing complex legal issues.

Community engagement is an important aspect of our service and the year saw us host a special event for International Women's Day. The Frocked event engaged community members in a film night celebrating women's achievements and acknowledging their struggles. The event encouraged dialog around important issues in a fun and engaging way.

I would also like to thank our local and regional partners as well as the law firms who contribute their time and resources to the centre. This collaborative approach allows us to maximise our assistance to the community.

I am proud to note that our centre celebrated its 25th anniversary in September. As I reflect on this I am mindful of how our centre has grown and the numerous staff contributions over the years. I am also thankful to the many clients who have trusted us to assist them through difficult situations.

It has again been my pleasure to work with my fellow Management Committee members. I am grateful for their support and continued commitment to providing quality governance in reaching our strategic goals.

The Management Committee is also thankful to our leadership team and staff who, in an ongoing environment of change, have continued to provide high quality legal and non-legal services, community legal education and law reform activities.

LORIS HUTCHINS

VISION

Western NSW Community Legal Centre has a vision for a fair society which:

- Values people's full participation in the community;
- Promotes the individual's right to make informed decisions about their own lives and their community;
- Involves all people as equals regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual preference, age or religious beliefs;
- Supports quality of life; and
- Ensures that every person has access to, and a fair share of the economic, social and cultural resources of the community.

ABOVE: The new offices arrive at Bultje Street.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Continued challenges associated with COVID-19, funding uncertainty and labour market issues hampered our work during the past year. Despite this, our service continued to assist many individuals to navigate the difficulties of the legal system.

We are grateful for additional funding from the Commonwealth Government which will allow us to expand our reach to areas of the state that are currently underserviced. The engagement of an outreach solicitor and additional mental health supports will ensure we can respond to more women experiencing domestic violence in a holistic manner. This additional funding recognises the excellent work our domestic violence unit is doing and emphasises the need for domestic and family violence assistance in our regional areas.

One-off Social Sector Transformation funding allowed us to implement business improvements by adapting current work practices to be more effective, upgrading our IT and improving our capacity to work remotely.

Our long awaited office expansion was completed with extra space provided at our Bultje Street premises. I am grateful to our program manager for enabling this development as well as staff who were relentless in making it happen.

The Centre has again appreciated the support of the many partners that assist us to reach the most vulnerable people in our communities. Providing face-to-face assistance in remote communities would be very difficult without the help of our strategic partnerships.

Our thanks go to our outreach supports, community legal education partners, and a range of government funding and peak bodies. Thank you for the work you do and the support you provide.

I would like to acknowledge the passion, resilience and dedication of the staff this year. Staff commitment to the work of our centre, and to our community members, has been inspiring and steadfast. It has been my pleasure to work within the senior management team, leading our organisation to develop, grow and plan for the future. I thank them for their dedication and commitment.

I look forward to continuing our work in developing a strong, innovative and resourceful organisation. I thank our Management Committee for providing quality governance and support to achieve this goal. Without the collective efforts of staff, management and our many stakeholders we would not be able to provide the assistance to people in our communities who most need help.

LIANNE DAVIDS

ABOVE: Tori (left) and Frankie on outreach in Coonabarabran.

SERVICES

The long term goal of the Centre is to ensure that people of western regions of NSW have a clearer understanding of the legal system and are better able to access it to resolve their legal problems.

The service offers free legal information, advice assistance and advocacy. The most common areas of law in which the service assists are family law, domestic violence, child support, child protection, traffic offences, credit and debt, discrimination, victims compensation, AVOs, social security and employment.

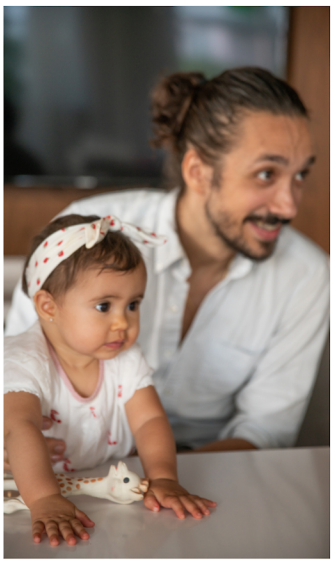
Services are provided in a variety of ways, including phone advice, outreach legal clinics, face-to-face appointments, online and community legal education workshops. We also participate in our local Coordinated Legal Service Delivery group and other networks when undertaking community development and law reform activities.

In addition to the Centre's generalist legal service, Western Women's Legal Support provides a holistic specialist service to women experiencing, or at risk of, domestic violence. Together, solicitors and caseworkers assist women to address legal and non-legal issues impacting on their wellbeing and safety.

TOP ISSUES

Some of the most common legal problems dealt with by the Centre in 2021/22:

- **Injuries compensation** (domestic violence and assault)
- **Road traffic and motor vehicle regulatory offences**
- **Child contacts or contact orders**
- **Credit and debt** (owed to/by client)
- **Family Law**
- **Employment conditions and entitlements**
- **Wills/probate and power of attorney**
- **Employment unfair dismissal**



PRINCIPAL SOLICITOR

The Centre continued to battle restrictions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Outreach services were hampered during 2021 and lockdown forced staff to work from home.

In the face of these obstacles our team showed great resilience and a 'can do' attitude. Determined to press forward, we continued helping our clients and community to address their legal and social problems.

Fortunately, things improved in 2022 and we were able to recommence our outreach services across the region where the need for our assistance remains high.

We have continued to maintain our valued pro bono relationship with Ashurst and thank them for all of the complex and detailed work they do in assisting us to help clients and progress our law reform work. We could not undertake the breadth and scope of this work without their support.

I would also like to thank Gilbert & Tobin for the pro bono help they have given us towards specific law reform work relating to AVO issues. The quality of research undertaken, and advice given, has been crucial to framing the landscape for how we move forward.

Our funding for a two-year traffic law program, whereby we ran a duty lawyer scheme at local courts for traffic matters, ended on June 30, 2022. It was extremely successful and highlighted the ongoing need for access to free legal help in matters of this nature. We thank the courts, Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS), private firms and Legal Aid for embracing this service and facilitating referrals to us.

We continued to deliver a large number of community legal education presentations to the towns we service, on a wide variety of topics such as workplace and consumer rights, wills, powers of attorney, enduring guardianship and traffic matters. It is important that we continue to strive to

Improve issues negatively affecting people experiencing disadvantage and the adverse impacts these have on their human and legal rights; whether it be their right to feel safe in their personal identity, or exercising a workplace right. We are committed to supporting, standing next to, and working with our clients so they can live their best possible life.

Finally, I want to thank everyone else who contributes to making the centre a valuable and productive organisation: our Management Committee, our incredibly supportive Executive Officer Lianne Davids, my partner in crime and co-Principal Solicitor, Rachael Robertson, our fantastic team of dedicated solicitors and support staff, community organisations who offer so much assistance; and most importantly our clients who continue to place their faith and trust in our team.

PATRICK O'CALLAGHAN

OUR REGION

Towards the end of the year, the footprint of Western NSW Community Legal Centre was increased to include the towns of Parkes, Forbes, West Wyalong, Condobolin and Lake Cargelligo. Up until then these towns had no dedicated community legal service.

As a result, the centre now reaches into 13 local government areas which cover a combined area of about 201,400km^2, and a population of about 150,500.

Compared to state-wide averages, the catchment region has a relatively higher proportion of people aged over 15 who are likely to need assistance from a community legal centre if they experienced a legal problem. The area also has a higher population of children and young people aged up to 24 years, disengaged youth, people with a lower level of educational attainment and single parents.

Conversely, this catchment region has a relatively lower proportion of culturally and linguistically diverse people, people with poor English proficiency and people experiencing homelessness (Law and Justice Foundation of NSW "Evidence of Legal Need in NSW" September 2018).

Our services reach into 13 local government areas:

- **Dubbo**
- **Bland**
- **Bogan**
- **Bourke**
- **Cobar**
- **Coonamble**
- **Forbes**
- **Gilgandra**
- **Lachlan**
- **Mid-Western**
- **Parkes**
- **Walgett**
- **Warrumbungle**

SENIOR WWLS SOLICITOR

The last 12 months have once again proven extremely busy for the team at Western Women's Legal Support (WWLS) as we respond to the needs of women and children victim-survivors in a holistic and trauma-informed manner. The collaboration and integration of our Aboriginal Support Worker, caseworkers and solicitors continues to be an effective service model.

Early in the financial year we saw Principal Solicitor, Rachael Robertson, go on maternity leave to welcome her beautiful new baby girl. Rachael was greatly missed by the entire team during this period.

2021-2022 saw the persistent impacts of COVID-19 on our service with early year lockdowns followed by an increase in disclosures and client-engagement months after the lockdowns were lifted. We have continuing to respond to the needs of women who faced domestic violence in the context of COVID-19 restrictions.

As in previous years, we have developed and maintained positive and beneficial working relationships with stakeholders, recognising the benefit of collaboration in meeting the complex and varied needs of victim-survivors. We are acutely aware that our work cannot be achieved effectively in isolation, and it is only through strong referral pathways with other local services that a victim can be empowered and strengthened.

Our main referral pathways are facilitated by Western Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (WDVCAS). The service is a first point of call for female victim-survivors following a report to police so a close-working relationship with the service is imperative.

We have also continued our active membership on both the Dubbo and Wellington

"Its a privilege working with women and children"

Domestic Violence Prevention Collectives whereby staff attend monthly meetings, and support and participate in events targeted at local needs.

This year saw the recruitment of an Intake Caseworker. This role has been invaluable in ensuring victim-survivors have timely engagement with WWLS, as well as support that is tailored to their specific circumstances. Increasing demand for assistance, exacerbated by COVID-19, resulted in significant delays for women trying to access support. This triage work has quickly evolved to bridge that gap and has become an integral role within the team.

I would like to thank the local domestic violence services who we work with on a day to day basis. Specifically, WDVCAS, Dubbo Neighbourhood Centre domestic violence counsellors, Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV), financial counsellors, housing providers and other non-government organisations who provide exceptional services and support to our mutual clients, while supporting us throughout.

Thank you to the WWLS team – a group of extremely hardworking, dedicated, compassionate women who work tirelessly to shape a safer future for women and children. A genuine thank you to other WNSWCLC staff, the senior management team and the Management Committee who value and stand beside us in the work we do.

Finally, I want to thank the many women and children who have allowed us the privilege of walking alongside them through their journey. The courage, determination and strength we see daily is indescribable. We see you, we hear you and we believe you.

TORI MINES

WESTERN WOMEN'S LEGAL SUPPORT

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ABOVE: Management Committee, members cut the cake during the Centre's 25th Anniversary celebrations on November 5, 2021
BELOW (from left): Committee Members Elsie Gordon, Louise Norton and Lyn Penson.

Members of our Management Committee are passionate about justice issues and the welfare of people experiencing disadvantage. The committee's role is to oversee the planning, policy-making, reporting and accountability of the centre.

Management Committee members contribute a diverse range of skills and experience to the governance of the centre. These include financial management, law, community services, education, human resources management, research and marketing.

PIONEER REMEMBERED

Western NSW Community Legal Centre paid tribute to Helen Pigram, a pioneer in the field of community legal and domestic violence support.

Mrs Pigram, who passed away in January 2022 after a long health battle, leaves a lasting legacy for people in the western region experiencing disadvantage.

Her role in developing the Centre from humble beginnings is described as "invaluable" by former co-workers and management committee members.

"The dedication shown by Helen was nothing short of outstanding," Principal Solicitor Patrick O'Callaghan said.

"When I first started at the Centre it was a small office employing a financial counsellor and a couple of solicitors. It was through Helen's hard work and commitment that the Centre grew to an organisation that now employs eight solicitors and other non-legal staff, which greatly benefits our vast region."

Mrs Pigram worked as a bookkeeper then coordinator of the Centre from 2004 to 2017. Despite her deteriorating health she continued to actively support the work as a member of the Management Committee through 2018.

Mr O'Callaghan added: "Helen was passionate about us getting out into remote communities to provide free help that people would not have otherwise received. She was particularly passionate about helping domestic violence survivors, and was instrumental in securing funding for our domestic violence unit. Helen has the enduring gratitude and respect of staff and the management committee for her guidance, support and vision."

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

ABOVE (from left): Loris Hutchins, Chairperson; Brian Goodlet, Treasurer; Lyn Penson, Secretary. BELOW (from left): Elsie Gordon, Vice Chairperson; Eric Wilson and Louise Norton.

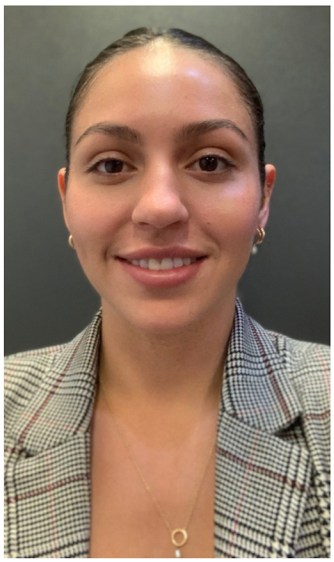
OUR TEAM

PHOTOS

Clockwise from top left: Lianne Davids, Executive Officer; Patrick O'Callaghan, Principal Solicitor; Rachael Robertson, DV Principal Solicitor; Tori Mines, DV Senior Solicitor; Larissa Connolly, Generalist Solicitor; Francesca Cutri, DV Solicitor; Hannah Higgins, DV Solicitor; Paul O'Keefe, Senior Solicitor Family Law/Family Violence.

Thanks for your contribution

The following staff members left in 2021/22:
Mellissa Shennan (pictured left) and Natalie Tomlins.



OUR TEAM

PHOTOS

Clockwise from top left: Sue Turner, DV Caseworker; Nicole Furnell, DV Caseworker; Megan Buttsworth, DV Intake Caseworker, Tahlia Hunter, Receptionist; Kate Jackson, receptionist (maternity leave): Kathy Stone, CLE Coordinator; Jacqui Yeo, Bookkeeper.

Thanks for your contribution

The following staff members left in 2021/22 to embark on new career challenges (above from left): D'arcy Pierce, Julie Vass, Hannah Robinson and volunteer solicitor Stuart McKinnon (not pictured).

ABOVE: Francesca leads a CLE at Gilgandra Library.

COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

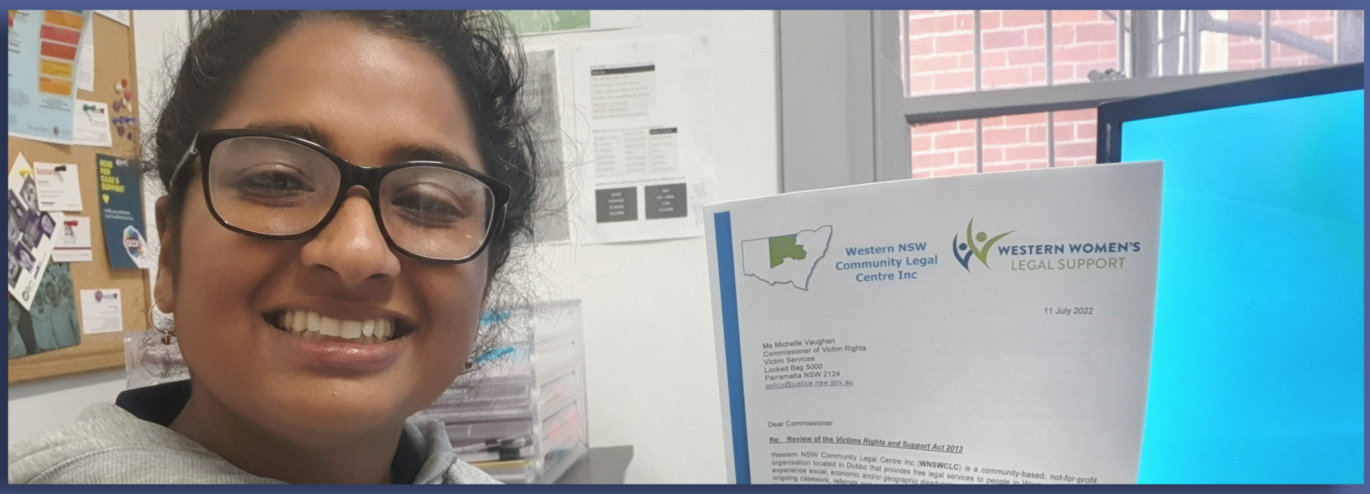
Community Legal Education (CLE) is a vital part of the Centre's strategy to build awareness and resilience among vulnerable people.

Preparing for end of life decisions, being alert to consumer scams, identifying and responding to elder abuse and domestic violence are among the top issues occupying participants. For others, an introduction to the centre's services is the first step towards a practical legal education on their rights and responsibilities.

While Covid-19 saw a marked dip in school talks, partnerships with local libraries, neighbourhood centres and community groups took up the slack, with 45 presentations delivered throughout the catchment during 2021/22 (four online).

Among the participants were View Club members, service providers, corrective services staff and interagencies. Talks were delivered in Bourke, Coonabarabran, Dubbo, Gilgandra, Narromine Warren and Wellington, as well as online.

Where possible, CLE presentations were tied to community events to maximize reach. For example, wills, guardianships and power of attorney remain popular topics during Seniors Week and a handy reminder to revisit wills that might have been drafted years beforehand.



LAW REFORM

It is extremely important that people from rural, regional and remote areas have their experiences documented and communicated to political parties and leaders.

For this reason, we continue to prioritise our law reform work and invest an extensive amount of time and resources into producing high quality work.

Our attention is focused on two primary areas: family and domestic violence; and systemic issues affecting First Nations peoples.

During this period we have been working on, or contributed to, submissions, policy work and legislative frameworks centred on the following issues:
Police responses to family and domestic violence;

- Family is Culture review;
- Community resources during Covid-19 lockdown;
- The statutory review of the Victims Services scheme;
- The Draft legislation centred around coercive control and its criminalisation;
- The Office of the Children's Guardian statutory review into out of home care; and
- Endorsed a letter from Community Legal Centres Australia to various ministers ahead of the Jobs and Skills Summit.

ABOVE: Larissa contributes to her first law reform submission for the centre.

We have also been working with our legal assistance partners, Legal Aid and Aboriginal Legal Service, to explore the rights of protected persons to be heard by the court in relation to ADVO matters; as well as the police culture around dealing with, listening to and making protected persons feel heard.

While undertaking individual client work is crucial, it is through law reform that systemic change can occur, which ultimately benefits the many, through changes to laws and policies. We remain committed to undertaking the important work in this field.

The past year was an opportunity for the Aboriginal Support Worker to strengthen connections with the Nyngan Community.

ABORIGINAL SUPPORT

This involved, among other things, attending monthly interagency meetings and the NAIDOC opening ceremony. The Centre was also represented at Nyngan's community connections workshop where services participated in multiple activities including language workshops, bead making, family trees and understanding the kinship structure. We also learnt about cultural protocols within the Nyngan community.

Another highlight of the year was the Centre's painting station for kids at the Wellington Family Fun Day in the lead up to Easter.

The role of the Aboriginal Support Worker remains integral to breaking down cultural barriers which prevent First Nations people accessing our legal help and support services. Having someone sit beside them during what can be a difficult time often has a hugely positive impact on the client. Walking in and seeing a staff member who 'is like them' and might 'just get it' is a stress-free introduction to the centre, and often encourages clients to speak frankly about their experiences. This rapport with the centre, once developed, ensures clients feel comfortable returning for follow-up appointments if needed.

JANAYA CARNEY
Aboriginal Support Worker

CASE STUDY

Identifying Domestic Violence

Lydia approached Western Women's Legal Support following the breakdown of her relationship.

She had endured years of verbal, mental, emotional and physical abuse. To Lydia home life was unpredictable and traumatic but she never thought of it in terms of "domestic violence".

Following their separation, Lydia's ex-partner made exorbitant financial demands. He threatened to sell the family home where she and the children lived. It was during her appointments with our domestic violence unit that Lydia came to realise the enormous toll years of abuse had taken. She was advised that her ex-partner's financial threats were not supported by law and she was referred to a private solicitor to handle the property settlement. In the face of his baseless accusations that he was prevented from seeing his children, Lydia was encouraged to negotiate a formal parenting plan.

Abusers often rely on threats to control others. Helping Lydia understand her rights, during her ex-partner's ongoing harassment was empowering, and an important step towards breaking free.

HANNAH HIGGINS

Names of clients changed

Names of clients changed

CASE STUDY

Now we're cooking

It was the worst possible timing. In the busy lead up to Christmas the oven roasted its last chicken.

Disability pensioner, Toby, hit the local retail outlets hunting for a replacement. His first choice was a bust. Despite Toby providing accurate measurements, and assurances from a salesperson, the new oven didn't fit. The retailer provided a suitable but cheaper replacement, and a store credit for the balance which had to be used within 12 months.

For Toby it was a dud deal. For starters, the salesperson failed to advise him his first purchase had to be flush-fitted in the oven cavity. Second, it was unlikely he would need to make another purchase from the retailer within the year. Toby wanted a full refund of the balance and, given his financial circumstances, it seemed a fair solution.

After Toby provided the centre with a crash course in oven installation, and received some advice on his consumer rights, a way forward was agreed. We sent a letter to the store manager, outlining the particulars of the case and including the salesperson's failure to disclose the first oven's installation limitations. Shortly after Toby received the good news – a full refund of the balance.

LARISSA CONNOLLY

CASE STUDY

What does it mean to be safe?

Donna is debt free and living safely with her baby in secure housing. But it wasn't very long ago that life was entirely different.

After ending a year-long relationship with a financially controlling partner, Donna hit rock-bottom. She was evicted from her home and left with several thousands of dollars in rental debt. Soon after she was misidentified as the perpetrator in a criminal act. Within a month of reaching out to our domestic violence unit she gave birth to her first child.

At the time Donna was living with a relative of her ex-partner. Her rent arrears put her on the TICA blacklist (a rental database) and made her ineligible for rental accommodation. Given her situation, the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) took an interest in her baby's welfare. Donna needed multi-service support.

Our domestic violence unit was able to activate a network of organisations to get Donna back on track. She received an Escaping Violence Payment, had her debt wiped, and was able to move into a new home. She registered her daughter and had her Centrelink payments adjusted accordingly. Donna was also encouraged to enroll in a parenting course and DCJ is happy with her progress. With the help of a lawyer Donna says she is confident the criminal charges will be dismissed.

NICOLE FURNELL

Names of clients changed

Names of clients changed

CASE STUDY

Support for the walk

Emma was sexually assaulted by a family member from an early age until her mid-teens. As a youngster her acting out behaviour was noticed but never investigated for an underlying cause.

By the time she reached adulthood Emma found it all too emotionally difficult to confront alone. A counsellor recommended she apply for Victims Services funding.

It turned out that Emma's good friend Liz had previously used the services of Western Women's Legal Support and suggested she make an appointment to see a caseworker. Liz sat with Emma as she was taken through the Sexual Assault Reporting Option (SARO) – an online form people can complete if they decide not to make a formal report to police.

Completing the questionnaire was not nearly as bad as Emma expected and from there she felt confident to speak with a solicitor about making a compensation submission. The support of a friend who has walked the same difficult journey can never be underestimated. For Emma there was another positive. Having taken the step to seek the help of a solicitor, Emma felt comfortable to raise other legal matters such as a recent tenancy problem.

SUE TURNER

CASE STUDY

Parenting when separated

When Jen came to see us she had already separated from her abusive partner with whom she shared a much-loved toddler. Despite taking the big step to end the relationship, the violence continued.

We advised Jen about her options: various parenting arrangements, ADVOs, Victims Services compensation. Armed with this information, and supported by the centre, Jen eventually felt empowered to contact police.

A few days later we received an anxious call. Jen's ex-partner had withdrawn their daughter from day care and she feared he might abscond with the youngster. An expensive battle loomed and, according to a private solicitor, one that would cost more than $30,000.

Instead, Jen trusted the centre to help her navigate the situation with her ex-partner's lawyer, resulting in the child's safe return.

We helped Jen liaise with police to vary the conditions of the ADVO and assisted her, through Victims Services, to upgrade her home security. Finally, both parties attended mediation to nut out a parenting plan for the long-term care of their daughter.

Names of clients changed

Jen was emboldened by the outcome. She expressed pride in her newfound courage and ability to make tough but necessary decisions for the safety of her small family.

FRANCESCA CUTRI

CASE STUDY

Getting out from under

Sometimes clients just need to speak to the right people.

When Barnardos approached the centre on Amber's behalf it was clear the mother of three was in a world of pain. Her partner had abused her daughter and, now that he was in jail, she was facing mounting debts. Among them, repayments on a joint home mortgage and joint loans on two cars – all without her partner's income.

Ultimately the bank agreed to refinance the joint mortgage so the young family could stay in their home. The cars were a different story. However, because she was able to describe the physical and financial abuse perpetrated by her partner, Amber was eligible for assistance from the Financial Abuse Legal Service in Sydney.

The Centre spoke with solicitors and caseworkers from the service, who in turn negotiated with the loan providers so Amber could keep the cars. She was also referred to Legal Aid to begin family law property proceedings and spoke with our domestic violence unit regarding victim's compensation. The Centre continued to support Amber through the process and for the first time in months she expressed confidence to face the future.

PAUL O'KEEFFE

Names of clients changed

Why does this keep happening to me? It's a common question asked by women subjected to abuse.

But what if we re-imagined abusers as sharks, who are responsible for their aggressive behaviour? What if we reminded women that everyone is vulnerable to sharks invading their space?

Welcome to the shark cage.

In July 2021, our domestic violence caseworkers – Sue Turner and Nicole Furnell – qualified to deliver this transformative program to groups and individual clients of Western Women's Legal Support. Developed by Ursula Benstead, a psychologist with extensive experience in the area of complex trauma - particularly in family and domestic violence and sexual assault - this framework helps women step outside the self-blame cycle.

A shark cage and early alarm system provide protection, but earlier life experiences may have weakened or left gaps in these. Shark cage bars can be developed, strengthened and repaired by reconnecting with personal human rights and boundaries. Strong alarm systems require tuning into feelings and body sensations. Activities and handouts are used to understand and reduce re-victimisation in an empowering way.

Assertiveness (when this is safe to do) is practiced, with an emphasis on boundary setting to respond to shark cage breaches. Healthy coping strategies, resources and self-care are explored to develop a treasure chest of personal strengths to be drawn upon when needed.

AT THE MOVIES

The Centre went full-on cinematic for International Women's Day (IWD) 2022. FROCKED – a night of Australian short films celebrating women – created a huge buzz in the community and the 150 free tickets were snapped up quickly. It was a great team effort.

The event began with a Welcome to Country and concluded with a brief wrap-up from Management Committee chairperson Loris Hutchins. Centre resources were displayed on tables for guests to browse and a photo space staged for group shots.

Adjoining the RSL Theatrette, on the rooftop terrace, guests were treated to trays of chocolates, glasses of bubbly and canapes. A soundtrack of liberation anthems and songs of empowerment hit just the right note for an evening dedicated to the diversity and resilience of women.

Thanks to the Dubbo IWD group for donating decorations, to volunteer projectionist Lee Hilder, and of course the generous creatives who allowed their films to be screened free of charge. Their delightful snapshots of life, some no longer than three minutes, traversed diverse emotional, historical and cultural landscapes.

A feature of FROCKED was the Centre's own production, *This Little Birdie* – a poetic storytelling of domestic violence survival – written by our own Kate Jackson, with behind-the-camera input from staff (below), under the mentorship and visual expertise of Dubbo Filmmakers Inc.

ACTION!

GETTING REEL AT TROY GULLY: Production newbie Hannah (immediate right) keeps track of the scene sequences.

SOCIAL MEDIA

This was the year WNSWCLC got serious about social media.

Three training sessions with marketing guru Tracy Sheen took selected staff on a journey from the basics of digital planning to the ins and outs of Facebook and Instagram. As a result, the centre: runs regular posts on outreach visits and community legal education; provides links to law reform submissions, job vacancies and website entries; and is more strategic in its scheduling. For example, a post on parenting plans goes live several weeks before the school holidays.

This consistent, less ad hoc, presence on our social media platforms led to a big jump in our digital outreach to communities.

Our Facebook reach climbed to 13,610 (up 44%), Facebook visits rose to 993 (up 70%) and likes increased by almost 60%. A breakdown of the audience revealed a gender profile of 81% women and 19% men, with the majority falling within the 25-54 age group (women) and 25-64 (men).

People living in the Centre's catchment accounted for most visits with Dubbo, Narromine, Coonabarabran and Wellington among the top five.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Operational Summary

This operational summary provides an overview of our strategic goals followed by our 2021-22 achievements.

OUR STRATEGIC GOAL – provide a high quality legal service that facilitates access to the legal system for those experiencing the most need.

ABOVE (from left): Sue, Larissa and Janaya get arty with the kids at the Wellington Family Fun Day.

Our 2021-22 annual goals focussed on strategies to reach people who experience the most disadvantage in our communities; collaborating to maximise our work; addressing systemic issues and providing an effective environment and support for our staff.

ACHIEVEMENTS

We continued to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by:

- Remaining connected with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations through membership of key working groups;
- Employing two Aboriginal Support Workers to provide non-legal assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- Continuing focus of domestic violence services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

32%

CLC services are delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

45%

DVU services are delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

ACHIEVEMENTS

We remained committed to helping people experiencing, or at risk of, family/domestic violence, by:

- Providing a specialist domestic violence unit with domestic and family violence solicitors;
- Assisting 121 additional women compared with last year through our Domestic Violence Unit;
- Employing caseworkers in our domestic violence unit to assist women with non-legal issues;
- Undertaking community legal education on domestic violence;
- Maintaining membership of domestic violence prevention committees and collaborating with community groups to facilitate educational events;
- Engaging in law reform work focussed on domestic violence issues.

27%

Generalist services delivered to clients experiencing family violence

482

Women assisted through our domestic violence unit

ACHIEVEMENTS

We helped people in remote community locations by:

- Delivering face to face community legal education in outreach towns and expanding the program to include virtual delivery;
- Maintaining, where possible, face-to-face appointments in locations throughout the western region of NSW;
- Assisting people experiencing disadvantage to acquire their birth certificate; and
- Providing legal advice to people incarcerated at Wellington and Macquarie correctional centres.

52%

Generalist clients come from outreach areas

41%

DV clients come from outreach areas

PHOTO: Bourke silo art.

ACHIEVEMENTS

We provided legal services to people experiencing financial disadvantage by:

- Providing a domestic violence duty service at Dubbo Court; and
- Ensuring that representation services were delivered to people experiencing financial disadvantage.

1270

Referrals made

1387

Legal tasks carries out

2867

Legal advices provided

We continued to remove barriers for people with disability by:

- Ensuring our physical office spaces incorporate trauma-informed principles; and
- Launching our second Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

18.5%

Services provided to people with an acknowledged disability

ACHIEVEMENTS

OUR STRATEGIC GOAL – Work collaboratively with stakeholders to promote awareness of legal issues and legal rights in local communities.

We connected with community members by:

- Participating in local events to link with hard to reach community members;
- Utilising Law Week activities to communicate to people who would not otherwise contact our service; and
- Facilitating grassroots community awareness raising activities.

74

Number of stakeholder activities in which staff engaged

BELOW: Patrick (back centre) joined representatives from other agencies in Bourke for a Law Week event organised by the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery Program.

ACHIEVEMENTS

We worked with our partners by:

- Regularly networking, and maintaining memberships of key community working groups, to reach people experiencing the most disadvantage in our communities;
- Continuing to work for improved access to the justice system for community members via membership of the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery group;
- Helping to organise activities addressing domestic violence through our membership of the Dubbo and Wellington Domestic Violence Prevention Committees;
- Consulting with our partners in remote towns to identify areas of unmet legal need and law reform issues; and
- Collaborating with libraries, neighbourhood centres and community groups to deliver Community Legal Education.

41

Community Legal Education sessions provided

ACHIEVEMENTS

OUR STRATEGIC GOAL – Participate in law reform to improve the wellbeing of people experiencing disadvantage.

We focussed our law reform work by:

- Consulting closely with local First Nations Peoples, ensuring their voices were heard;
- Making submissions to government inquiries regarding out of home care rates of First Nations Peoples, changes to the Victims Services scheme and coercive control;
- Providing evidence at hearings in response to our submissions; and
- Increasing media engagement to raise awareness of issues.

18

Law reform activities undertaken

ACHIEVEMENTS

OUR STRATEGIC GOAL – Maintain a capable workforce to support excellent service delivery.

We supported our staff by:

- Maintaining work from home flexibility with a focus on positive mental health;
- Providing mental health first aid training;
- Continuing our partnership with the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, and recruiting through that service where possible;
- Continuing our staff wellbeing program and self-care days; and
- Providing trauma-informed practical training for staff.

Staff training opportunities provided **69**

PHOTO: Jacqui (left) at fire warden training in 2021.

FEEDBACK

PHOTOS: Guests celebrate FROCKED

COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

The talks went very well. It was great information and everyone was engaged and contributing. It was a lovely afternoon. Thank you so much for making it happen - **Liz McCutcheon**, Gilgandra Librarian

A big thank you to Francesca for travelling out to our VIEW Club. A wonderful presentation. The ladies were most interested - **Lorraine Falkiner Smith**, President Warren VIEW Club.

The five people who attended had not been to this type of session before and provided positive feedback including:

- The session was very thought provoking;
- Content was very interesting; and
- I learnt new things like the way scammers take small amounts so I should always check before I agree to pay any amount.

- **Melissa Tong**, Acting Manager Macquarie Regional Library.

PRAISE FOR FROCKED

Thank you to the wonderful team at WNSWCLC who put together the Frocked evening! The night was amazing from start to finish. Everyone I've spoken to said they had a great night networking with women and doing something a little different for themselves. Congratulations on an awesome IWD event!
- KERRY

Very easy to book the tickets. Venue and nibbles were fantastic. I enjoyed the movies...based on the theme for this year 'Break the Bias'.
- MARIA

Absolutely loved it. Wouldn't change a thing. Everything was amazing **- HELEN**

It was a fabulous night arranged really well. I loved watching the short films. Just one thing I thought for next time might be to have tea & coffee **- MAREE**

The whole event was wonderful. People who attended were made feel special. Films were superb. Loved 'em! Liked that the "speeches" were short and appropriate...Only improvement I can suggest is that you run it again. Very impressed that you sponsored a local film too **- PETER**

Mental health problems can have a significant impact in all areas of life, so it is not surprising that work plays a huge role in a staff member's wellbeing.

Supporting good mental health at work is important to our organisation and critical for staff to be able to flourish in other areas of their life.

STAFF WELLBEING

ABOVE and LEFT: Getting our art on at Geurie Memorial Hall

During the year we focussed on education and promoting good practice to create a culture of care and openness around mental health.

Raising mental health awareness in the workplace has allowed us to reduce stigma and help people to recognise early warning signs and know how to respond to mental ill health.

Mental Health First Aid training provided staff with a toolbox of new skills to assist themselves, each other and our clients. The training involved practical skills for staff to initiate a supportive conversation with someone they are concerned about.

Mindfulness training during September allowed staff to consider techniques for reducing stress and anxiety. The session guided staff through activities aimed to build resilience and increase a sense of well-being.

An art therapy self-care session provided an opportunity for staff to reflect on their practise, connect with each other and contribute to our framework of good mental health and wellbeing.

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Thank you to our clients who placed their trust in us to help them through the tough times.