

HUME RIVERINA  
COMMUNITY  
LEGAL SERVICE  
ANNUAL REPORT

2015-16



**hume riverina**  
community legal service

auspiced by

**umfc**  
Upper Murray Family Care

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, smiling warmly and hugging a young child with light brown hair. The child is resting their head against the woman's face. The scene is bathed in soft, warm light, likely from a window, creating a tender and intimate atmosphere.

## CASE STUDIES

Sue is a low income earner who resides in a small regional town in Victoria. She is a single mum and suffers from anxiety. Sue was referred to us by Victoria Legal Aid Helpline requiring urgent assistance.

Sue's son Alistair had been taken away to Sydney by his father when Alistair was visiting his paternal aunt in a town in New South Wales. Sue was particularly concerned about Alistair's safety as his father is a drug addict and a perpetrator of family violence.

***Due to the urgent circumstances, our Family Lawyer was able to talk to Sue immediately and advise her of her legal options.***

***We were then able to assist her in drafting her court documents, filing her application and appearing for her on the same day at the Federal Circuit Court of Australia. An urgent recovery order was made by the Judge and Alistair was recovered by the Australian Federal Police and returned to Sue on the next day.***

**“they helped  
return my son ”**

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## Who we are

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service (HRCLS) has been the principal provider of free legal services in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW for over 16 years. We deliver legal services from multiple locations over a catchment of 17 local government areas, including Wodonga, Wangaratta and Benalla in Victoria, and Albury, Corowa and Deniliquin in NSW.

HRCLS is a vital part of a broader service network providing integrated support to regional and remote communities. HRCLS works alongside social service partners and private legal practitioners to enhance community access to legal, social, financial and health support. We recognise the strengths and expertise of our numerous partners, and we inform and are informed by the work that they do.

HRCLS is one of the only cross-border community legal services in Australia. People in our region often work, have children in school, or visit family and friends on one side of the border, whilst residing on the other. This can make legal issues even more complicated. We have a unique understanding of and experience in navigating diverse areas of law and legal practice within and across Victorian, NSW and Federal jurisdictions.

HRCLS is auspiced by UMFC. From the end of 2016 we will be co-located with UMFC, facilitating easier access to a range of services for communities in Wodonga and the surrounding region.

## Why we exist

We value a society where all people enjoy equality of opportunity and have equal access to the law, wherever they live in Australia.

HRCLS provides a legal safety net for people in regional Victoria and NSW. We help people:

- realise their legal rights and responsibilities
- consider their options for resolving disputes
- navigate legal processes and systems
- achieve fair outcomes.

Some of the long-term benefits we want to see for the communities we serve include:

- equitable resourcing of support services across regional areas
- legal problems managed before they reach crisis point
- people experiencing greater agency over their lives

## What we do

HRCLS provides legal information and advice in family, civil and criminal law to members of the community who cannot otherwise access legal help. People in regional and remote areas, people with a disability or mental illness, Indigenous Australians, older people, children and young people, and people experiencing family violence are key client groups accessing our services. The vast majority of our clients experience long-term financial disadvantage.

HRCLS also represents clients in legally assisted dispute resolution, and provides advocacy services in several local Magistrates courts and at the Federal Circuit Court. We are passionate about community legal education. We enhance community awareness of legal rights and responsibilities, helping community members avoid or appropriately manage legal problems.

HRCLS contributes evidence and expertise developed through our work to inform fairer and more effective law and policy that supports community wellbeing and mitigates costly litigation.

## Our funding

HRCLS receives funding from the Commonwealth Attorney-General, Victoria Legal Aid, Legal Aid NSW, Department of Justice (Victoria), the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner.

*We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we work and pay our respects to their elders, past & present.*

# Our organisational culture

## We are responsive and innovative

Our services are evidence-based and targeted to community need. We undertake regular legal need analyses to identify and address unmet legal need. We evaluate our programs to check that they are delivering the necessary benefits to our community and to inform improvements where required. We are open to piloting new approaches to legal service delivery.

## We care for our community

As well as empowering and working alongside our clients to address legal problems and remedy injustices, we advocate for the interests and wellbeing of regional and remote communities.

## We are resourceful

We make smart use of limited funds, including sharing administrative resources with our auspice organisation to minimise our overheads and nurturing a dedicated volunteer workforce.

## We support our staff and volunteers

HRCLS recognises that our staff and volunteers are our greatest asset. We value their experience and ideas, and we are committed to further developing their legal, community engagement and leadership skills.

Our Strategy includes a greater focus on working with young clients and clients with complex needs. This will require us to review our professional development programs and to actively manage the impacts of this work in support of staff and volunteer wellbeing.

## We share our skills

HRCLS is proud of being a teaching practice by hosting law student volunteers, training new lawyers and nurturing their passion for social justice

## We communicate with our stakeholders

To ensure the greatest benefits for our clients and community, and to avoid duplicating resources, we consult regularly with our stakeholders about client care, emerging issues, new initiatives and opportunities for shared ventures.

# Our team

## Staff

**Sarah Rodgers**

Principal Lawyer/Manager

**Ashlie Barclay**

Operations Manager

**Sarah Caplice**

VLA Lawyer

**Gary Lung**

VLA Lawyer

(from May 2016)

**Alison Maher**

Lawyer

**Karen Bowley**

NSW Outreach lawyer

**Janet Osborne**

NSW Outreach lawyer

(from November 2015)

**Beth Kennedy**

Lawyer

(to February 2016)

**Francesca Ciantar**

Invisible Hurdles Project Lawyer

(from November 2015 to April 2016)

**Andrea Georgiou**

Victorian Outreach lawyer

(maternity leave to January 2016)

**Deborah Fisher**

Lawyer/Communications Officer

(from September 2015)

**Sarah Noble**

Lawyer

(casual until May 2016)

**Beth Simpson**

Lawyer

(casual since April 2016)

**Rebecca Deverell**

Community Development Coordinator

(from March 2016)

**Tracey Walker**

Legal Assistant

**Meaghan Frazer**

Reception /Administration Officer

**Rhyian Anderson-Morley**

Administration Assistant

(casual until August 2015)

**Hannah Carter**

Administration Assistant

(casual until September 2015)

**Deanne Sweetland**

Legal Assistant

(casual until May 2016)



## Volunteers

### WODONGA

Allison Bruce  
Eugene Butkowski  
Tristan Ferris  
Dione Garwell  
Sharyn Gist  
Hannah Gostelow  
Lauren Howlett  
Sushama Johnson  
Dusan Jovetic  
Michele Kampen  
Ross Kearney  
Karen Keegan  
Adam Koster  
Sascha McCorriston  
Derek Norquay  
Paige Rolfe  
Beth Simpson  
Peter Uniacke  
Dirk de Zwart  
Carlene Lamanna  
Joe Blackshield  
Jason Disher  
Yelly Evenhuis  
Helen McGowan

### WANGARATTA

Vic Campagna  
Wendy Couzens  
Jye Cunneen  
Tom de Zwart  
Danny Frigerio  
Jonathan Green  
Tim Jackson  
David Joseph  
Sarah Noble

### LAW STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

Jiming Xi  
Gerard Hynes  
Mathew Read  
Rhyian Anderson-Morley  
Sarah Pearce  
Katherine Burrows  
Benjamin Goodlet  
Tessa Mead  
Rose Storey  
Yanina Wojcik

### VOLUNTEER LAWYERS (daytime)

Janet Osborne  
Sharyn Gist  
Deborah Fisher



A close-up photograph of a man and a young boy. The man, in the background, is smiling broadly. The boy, in the foreground, is looking off to the side with a slight smile. They are both wearing light-colored shirts.

## CASE STUDY

Adam's son used his car and was caught speeding more than 35km over the limit. Adam had 28 days to nominate his son, otherwise he would incur a hefty fine, be hit with demerit points and lose his licence. Unfortunately, during this time, Adam's health seriously deteriorated which resulted him being hospitalised and then transferred between multiple hospitals. Adam eventually sent in the paperwork to nominate his son, but was told he was out of time and nothing could be done. Adam was referred to HRCLS from another community legal centre.

*Our lawyer spoke to an Infringements Court Registrar who referred us to the Traffic Camera Office. We provided a detailed letter of Adam's extenuating circumstances and the Traffic Camera Office agreed to withdraw the fine, restore Adam's licence and transfer the fine to Adam's son on the basis of not wanting to penalise the wrong person. Without our involvement, Adam would have been left in financial difficulty, with little way of getting around, leading to increased isolation and lack of support, on top of his already precarious health situation.*

**“They helped me negotiate with the Traffic Camera Office and keep my license ”**



## Message from the Chairperson and CEO, UMFC

UMFC is proud to have auspiced HRCLS for the past 16 years. Our services for vulnerable children, young people and families in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW, including disability and aged care support, post separation parenting and mediation, foster care, kinship care, early childhood support for children with special needs, financial counselling and family services for children at risk are complemented by the legal services provided by HRCLS.

2015/16 has seen us working even more closely together and Luke was proud to attend the launch of the Holistic Assistance and Legal Outreach (HALO) project at Gateway Health in Wangaratta, and to formally thank the Wangaratta Volunteers for their invaluable contribution to providing free legal advice in our region, during National Volunteers Week. Luke also joined HRCLS Principal Lawyer Sarah Rodgers in conducting an interview on local radio in response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the impact that those recommendations will have on both our services and our community. We look forward to the implementation of those recommendations and in working together in this area.

The well-deserved reputation enjoyed by HRCLS, as a progressive and dynamic service, has been evidenced again this year. It is a measure of the service's standing that a growth in funding has occurred in a context of restraint for the sector. Typically, staff have not been content to continue business as usual, but have on their own initiative undertaken a review of the image and structure of the service, to ensure both represent accurately how the service should be. We look forward with anticipation to future changes on both fronts.

It will also be exciting to see the new look when the service moves into renovated premises in Stanley St, Wodonga. This change will bring HRCLS staff onto the same site as UMFC services, with all the potential gains of closer collaboration and consultation with associated benefits for service users. We expect the new location to offer improved conditions for staff and clients in keeping with the standard of professional services provided.

**Greg Pearl, Chairperson  
and Dr Luke Rumbold, CEO, UMFC**

“I've been able to start seeing a counsellor and to take steps towards recovery”

#### CASE STUDY

Annie is a young, single mum who has suffered serious family violence in the past.

*Our Invisible Hurdles lawyer has been able to take on Annie's case, talking to her about her legal options, working with her health professionals and helping her to apply for Victims of Crime compensation. Since our involvement, Annie has been able to start seeing a counsellor and to take steps towards recovery.*





## Message from Principal Lawyer/Manager

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service exists to ensure that disadvantaged and vulnerable people are able to access justice, wherever they live. The Service continues to play a critical role in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW, where HRCLS has been the only free legal assistance provider based within the majority of the region for many years.

This year HRCLS launched a new strategic plan, and has made a number of achievements which are reported in this year's report as a result of additional funding from various sources, including:

- Continuing to build further services to target young people in relation to family violence through the establishment of several new partnerships
- Commencing new family violence duty services at the Wangaratta and Myrtleford Magistrates Courts (alongside private practitioners)
- Continuing its partnership with Benalla Health (together with Goulburn Valley CLC) and expanding its health justice partnership with Gateway Health into Wangaratta to target services in these communities to those who are particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged and would not otherwise access a lawyer
- Increasing our outreach services within a number of towns with high legal need in New South Wales as a result of additional funding from the Attorney-General's Department administered by Legal Aid NSW
- Continuing to assist clients in relation to their cross border experience of the legal system
- Participating in Government inquiries including the Access to Justice Review in Victoria and
- Continuing to work with service providers in relation to family violence to ensure that the family violence service system is as strong in our regions as it can be.

This work has helped us to expand our reach, but there is still much unmet need. HRCLS gave 2,119 instances of legal advice but turned away 897 people during the last year; 30% of those people could otherwise have become clients if HRCLS had additional resources. Yet we note that funding cuts from the Commonwealth Government are expected to take effect for Community Legal

Centres from 1 July 2017. These funding cuts will have particularly adverse impacts in regional communities such as ours where there is already a shortage of free legal services available for people to access, and we urge the Commonwealth Government to reverse these cuts.

HRCLS is continuing to closely monitor the Victorian Government's plans in relation to implementing the recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Family Violence and will continue to urge Governments to adequately fund legal services for both victims and alleged perpetrators so that safe and fair outcomes can be achieved.

We are looking forward to continuing to build on our work in the year ahead. Many thanks to the service providers who host our outreach services and partner with us in our service delivery, as well as to our funders including the Commonwealth Attorney-General, Victoria Legal Aid, Legal Aid NSW, the Department of Justice (Victoria) and the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner.

We welcome the establishment of a new satellite office of Legal Aid NSW in Albury at the end of this year, and look forward to working together to address unmet legal need in NSW in the year ahead.

We thank our peak bodies for their continuing work in this area, including the Federation of CLCs, CLCs NSW and the National Association of Community Legal Centres.

Lastly we acknowledge and thank UMFC, our auspicing agency, who provide wonderful support to our Community Legal Centre.

**Sarah Rodgers, Principal Lawyer/Manager**



## 2015/16 At A Glance

### What did we do?



**828** information activities

**51** Community Legal Education sessions

**413** cases opened

**463** cases closed

### Where did we go?

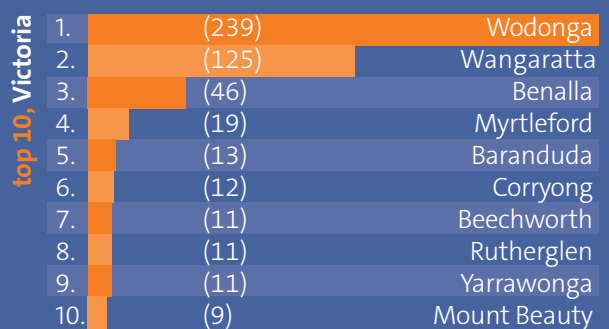
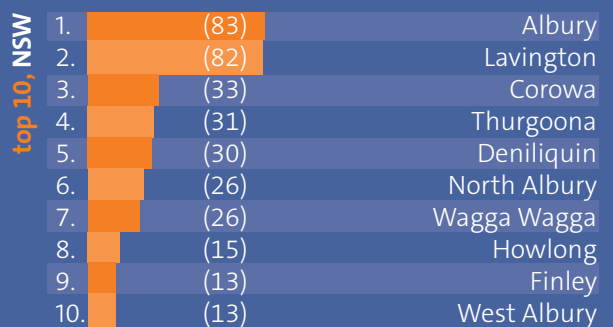
**34%** of total advices provided by outreach

**35%** of outreach to New South Wales

**65%** of outreach to Victoria

Over **18,000kms** travelled to provide advice

### Where did our clients come from?



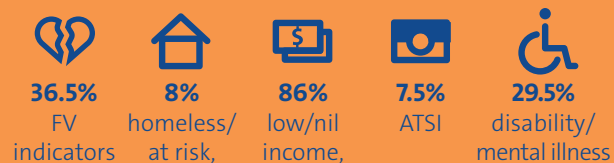
## Areas of law

### Advice top 10

1. Children's Issues
2. Family Violence/Personal Safety
3. Property in Marriage/de facto
4. Elder law
5. Divorce/Separation
6. Employment
7. Roads & Traffic offence
8. Consumer disputes
9. Fines/Credit & Debt
10. Child Protection

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

### Who did we help?



63% female

37% male

2015/16

### Casework top 10

1. Family Violence/Family Violence Intervention Orders
2. Children's issues
3. Personal Safety
4. Child protection
5. Property Settlement (marriage & de facto)
6. Elder Law/Subsidised Wills
7. Fines, Credit/debt owed
8. Motor Vehicle accident/property damage
9. Civil dispute/contract etc
10. Family Law other

▲ ▼ = increase or decrease on 2014-15 figures

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

### Who helped?

Approx.

**2500** volunteer hours

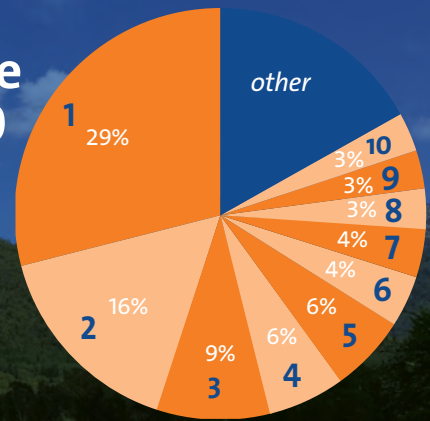
**21** Wodonga Evening Clinic lawyer volunteers

**9** Wangaratta Evening Clinic lawyer volunteers

**3** Daytime lawyer volunteers

**10** law students

## Advice top 10



1. Children's Issues
2. Family Violence/Personal Safety
3. Property in Marriage/de facto
4. Elder law
5. Divorce/Separation
6. Employment
7. Roads & Traffic offence
8. Consumer disputes
9. Fines/Credit & Debt
10. Child Protection

## We advise & refer

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service continues to provide face-to-face appointments in numerous locations across the 17 local government areas on both sides of the Victorian/NSW border. This past year saw our lawyers travelling over 18,000kms to provide free legal advice across our large catchment. 34% of all advice was provided by outreach, with 35% being in NSW and 65% in Victoria.

### 2119 advices an increase of 10%

"Law by Telephone" continues to help provide access to legal services with 34% of the 2,119

advices being given over the phone and 65% in person. There was an increase in the number of advices given compared to 2014/15 of 10%.

We continue to have to turn people away from our service. This is a significant problem in our area, where up until the opening of the satellite Legal Aid office in Albury, there has been no other legal aid office or community legal service on either side of the border in our catchment area. People who are turned away have to rely on phone services, usually out of Sydney or Melbourne.

Over one third of our clients had multiple legal issues and 2,861 problem types were addressed over the year. This once again confirms that legal problems tend to "cluster"

### over 1/3 have multiple issues We've addressed 2861 problem types

and are experienced with greater impact by the most vulnerable.

This past year saw us **turn away** nearly **900 people**, with a third being turned away due to insufficient resources.

**Family Violence  
and Personal Safety  
related advice**

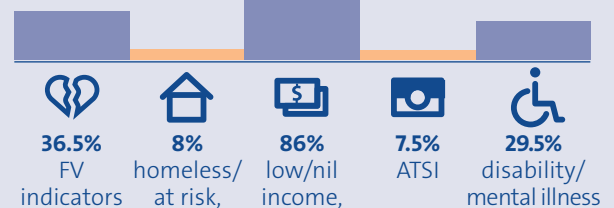
**297**  
2014/15

**445**  
2015/16

**10 %** of advice is to  
those under **25 years**

**10 %** of advice is to  
those over **65 years**

#### Advice



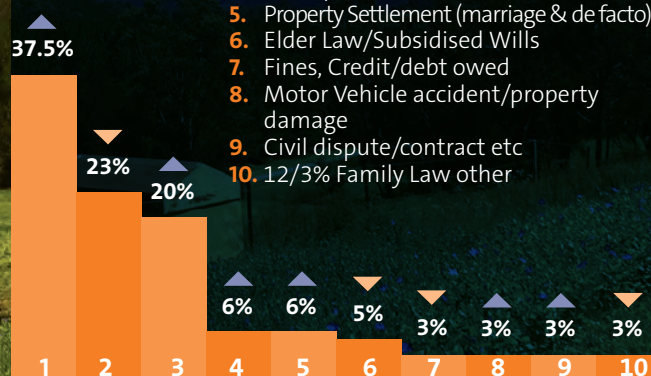
**Over 18,000kms**  
travelled to provide advice

There has been a significant increase in the number of advices given in relation to family violence and personal safety and also in relation to Child Protection (which has made it onto the top 10 list).



## Casework top 10

1. Family Violence/Family Violence Intervention Orders
2. Children's issues
3. Personal Safety
4. Child protection
5. Property Settlement (marriage & de facto)
6. Elder Law/Subsidised Wills
7. Fines, Credit/debt owed
8. Motor Vehicle accident/property damage
9. Civil dispute/contract etc
10. 12/3% Family Law other



## We help with Casework

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service continues to provide casework and ongoing assistance to people who need it the most. Family Law and Family Violence

### Family Violence matters accounting for 38% of files

continue to top the list, with Family Violence matters accounting for 38% of files. This is in part due to the extra funding received

to expand the duty lawyer service to both Wangaratta and Mrytleford courts (as well as Wodonga), with vast numbers of clients having multiple vulnerabilities.

66% of files were family law, 32% civil & 12% criminal. The criminal files were primarily motor vehicle and other regulatory offences.

Consistent with the advices, there has been a significant increase in Family Violence matters as well as Child Protection.

### 464 files closed with 551 problem types

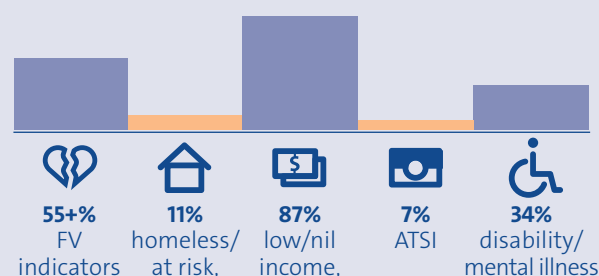
Over the year there was 464 files closed with 551 problem types. These clients are very vulnerable and often have significant legal issues and complex matters.

These figures show that the clients who are receiving ongoing assistance have both multiple legal issues and multiple vulnerabilities. As the only free legal advice service for the majority of the 17 local government area catchment, many of these people would not otherwise have been able to access legal assistance.

#### Files



Over **55%** of all files had Family Violence indicators



**16%** clients who were provided with ongoing casework were under **25 years**

**8%** clients who were provided with ongoing casework were over **65 years**



Meeting with NSW Legal Aid CEO, Bill Grant.



HRCLS NSW outreach lawyers with our partners in Corowa

## We work together

In June 2015, Hume Riverina Community Legal Service prepared a Strategic Plan which was released in October 2015. This strategic plan will help guide the direction of the service into the future. Four areas of focus were identified for the coming 3 years.

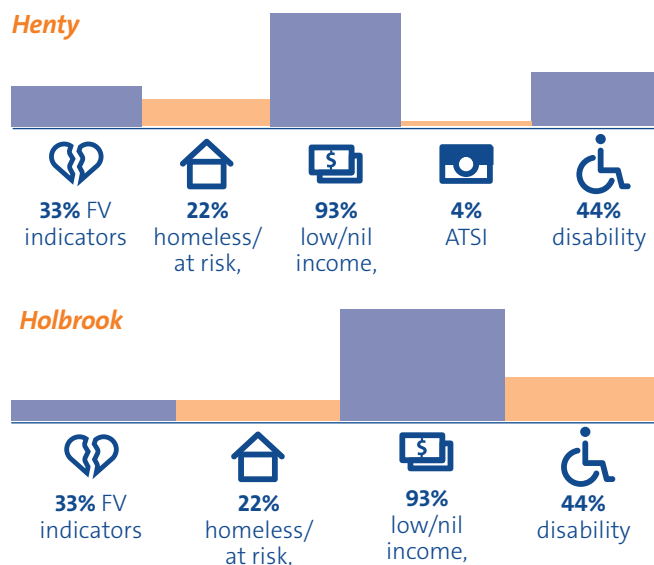
### a: We improve access to legal services & strengthen service delivery planning in the region

A challenge that communities in regional areas are more likely to face, and that HRCLS and our stakeholders have observed intensifying in recent years is the limited options available to secure legal advice and representation. We are committed to ensuring that our focus goes beyond just reacting to demand for services and considers smarter ways to address legal need in our catchment.

#### Regional Service Delivery Planning

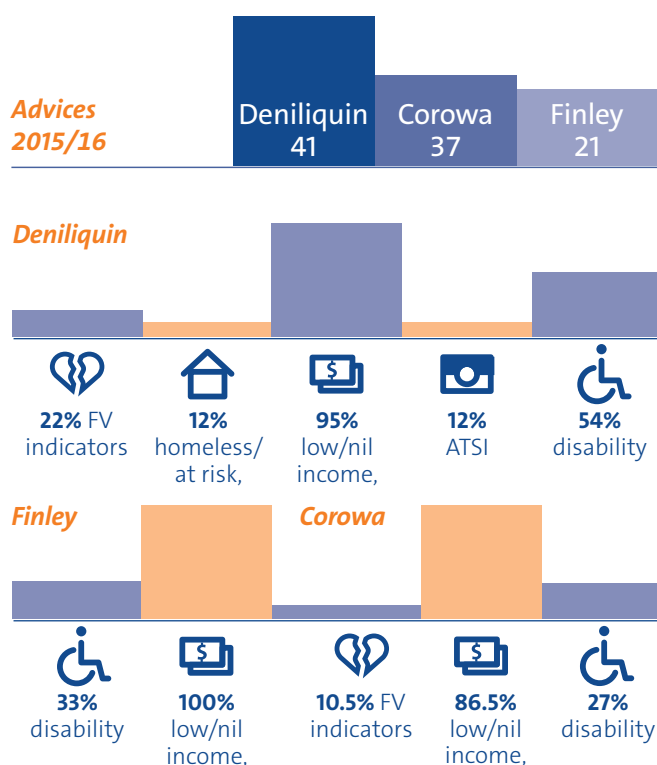
**NSW:** In the past year we have continued to work together with our legal and non-legal partners and stakeholders and to think and plan strategically. We have been pleased to welcome the satellite office of Legal Aid NSW to Albury and have already shared data and information in order to best target services. We look forward to working with them into the coming year to help meet the significant legal need in our area. We continue to provide monthly advice appointments in Albury (Intereach) and Lavington (Lavington library). Clients in these areas face significant disadvantage (52% of Albury clients had a disability/mental illness) and often have the challenge of cross-border issues.

Thanks to Commonwealth funding directed to our Service by Legal Aid NSW, we have been able to expand our NSW Outreach services this year. The data regarding unmet legal need within the NSW catchment area was reviewed (both our own and that provided by our Cooperative Legal Services Delivery (CLSD) partners) and we liaised with Legal Aid NSW to determine the best way to expand our services. We increased our existing services at locations with high need including Deniliquin, Finley and Corowa. Two new locations, Henty and Holbrook in the Greater Hume Shire, were identified as potential hot spots currently unreachable by any free legal advice service. We were able to employ another lawyer to assist in providing these services which started in late February. While the numbers (from late February to end of June) at Henty and Holbrook are relatively small due to the new outreach service being in its establishment phase, the demographics of the clients are significant.



Our commitment to assisting people who are disadvantaged by not only income, but by their distance from major centres and services has continued and improved in 2016. With ongoing support from Intereach, services to Corowa, Finley and Deniliquin were doubled this year, with a growing demand in all locations. The range of issues is diverse and can be anything from traffic fines, family law, motor vehicle accidents and neighbour disputes, workplace issues and police matters related to AVOs.

Intereach are active in referring clients and promoting our service. Our participation in the Corowa Network meetings and the Care Provider Network meetings at Intereach Deniliquin assists in letting service providers know about the service and current capacity, enables distribution of brochures and posters and contributes feedback on the future of the service.




A wonderful success story which illustrates the power of networks within communities was experienced by the lawyers who visit Deniliquin, Finley and Corowa each month. When lawyer, Karen Bowley was contacted by a local social worker from one of our locations about a client requiring assistance, Karen was able to consult with the client and ascertain exactly what the social issue was – our client was without a home. But exactly what the legal issue (or solution) was remained unclear. After consulting with the other lawyers in our service, we gave consideration about how to frame the legal issue and

what solutions might be available to this vulnerable and aged client. Eventually, with some teamwork from our Pro Bono partner, Clayton Utz, the social worker, the other outreach lawyer, the local police and a friendly private law firm, we are close to reaching a solution for our client which had not been possible only a few weeks before when the client attempted to tackle the issue alone. Our reward will be seeing this client successfully rehoused and secure. Not all of our clients have such spectacular solutions, but many are able, with our assistance, to declutter the problems, identify their legal issue, and resolve it which enables them to move forward with confidence.

**Victoria:** Wangaratta was identified as a town of significant disadvantage, with little access to free legal advice services. Being geographically a distance of 70 km from Wodonga, limited public transport options make it difficult for people without a car to easily travel to services in Wodonga. Due to several different projects (Gateway, NESAY & the duty lawyer service at the Court) HRCLS has had a presence in Wangaratta this year over 3-4 days per week, and has had one of our lawyers based at UMFC's Wangaratta office. Demand in Wangaratta has continued to increase over the past few years and this past year saw the number of advices increase from 96 in 2014/15 to 262 in this past year. It has been a great opportunity to work with several different partners to provide more regular access to legal services in this town (and the surrounding district). This has also led to more community engagement (e.g. Community Legal Law Talks, local radio spots, community events and local networks). We look forward to continuing to expand our services in the coming year.







“they helped me  
understand the advice  
I was being given”

#### CASE STUDY

Jill had mental health issues and had not seen her children for 2 years due to child protection orders.

Jill was referred to us by Partners in Recovery, a local service provider. We were able to work with Jill’s mental health workers to make sure that she understood the advice that she was given and that her mental health condition did not deteriorate due to the advice.

*Without the involvement of all the different services, it is likely that Jill would not have sought legal advice in the first instance, and if she had, would not have been able to process it in a way that was helpful to her or her children.*



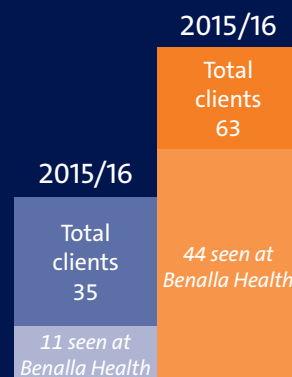


Launch of our Health Justice Partnership with Goulburn Valley CLC and Benalla Health.

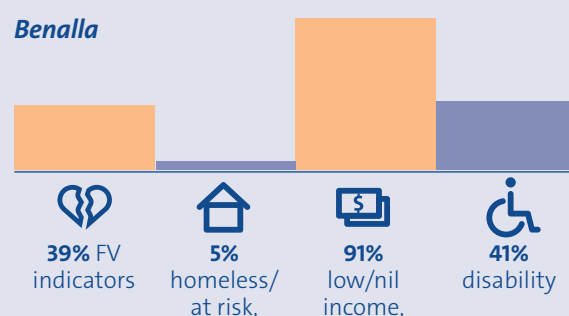
Since the inception of a legal outreach in Benalla in 2014, the number of people who have sought assistance from our service has steadily increased, resulting in a decision to increase the outreach service from monthly to fortnightly. In addition to the ongoing and valued support from Benalla Health, the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service warmly welcomed its sister CLC, Goulburn Valley Community Legal Service (GVCLS), to help provide legal services to Benalla residents. GVCLS have commenced providing assistance at Benalla Court for Intervention Orders and also provides weekly legal outreach at Benalla Health. Collaboration and service planning by both CLCs and Benalla Health has enhanced access to justice opportunities for many disadvantaged residents who otherwise cannot afford them. This partnership was officially launched in Benalla on 2 March 2016 (see photo above) with Neil Stott, Director Community Health stating that *"We have been working hard to develop a 'one stop shop' approach to health and community based services. Now clients in need can contact the [one service] and be actively supported to obtain the help that they need."*

— FROM MEDIA RELEASE

## Clients seen at Benalla



### Benalla



**"Now clients in need can contact the [one service] and be actively supported to obtain the help that they need."**



Launch of the Holistic And Legal Outreach Health Justice Partnership at Gateway Health in Wangaratta, with Tim McCurdy MP, Leonard Peady Gateway Health CEO, & UMFC CEO Luke Rumbold.

### Improving access to legal services

Over 50% of all advice work is conducted in partnership with others, ranging from pro bono partners of Clayton

**Over 50% of all advice work is conducted in partnership with others**

Utz, Ashurst and Gilbert & Tobin, local volunteer lawyers to health-justice partnerships with Gateway Health, Benalla Health, Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service and community partnerships with

UMFC, NESAY, The Hub, and Intereach. Without the support of these organisations HRCLS would not be able to reach as many communities and provide accessible legal services over such a large area. Previous legal needs analysis (2014/15) confirmed the nationwide LAW (Legal Australia Wide) study showing that the majority of people disclose legal problems most frequently to non-legal service providers. Effective partnerships help bridge this gap.

### Our Health Justice Partnership with Gateway Health:

The HALO (Holistic Assistance and Legal Outreach) project is a health- justice partnership between HRCLS and Gateway Health which began as a pilot in early 2015. It became apparent that this was an effective model for providing access to justice and that the program was tapping into the previously unmet legal need.

In July 2015, HRCLS applied for funding through the Victorian Government Community Legal Centre Assistance Fund Grant round, and successfully obtained a grant to continue and extend the Gateway Health partnership. As a result of this funding, HRCLS has been able to:

- Fund a lawyer for 2 days per week over 12 months to service the Gateway Health partnership
- Continue delivering legal advice appointments to clients at the Wodonga site
- Extend the services to Wangaratta, and increase HRCLS's capacity to assist clients regionally in both locations
- Provide ongoing casework assistance to clients who are particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged
- Provide information and education to Gateway Health staff about the law and legal referral options available.

The partnership supports people to get timely help with their legal issues. The presence of a lawyer within the health setting encourages doctors and other staff at Gateway Health (such as mental health, family violence and youth workers) to identify when a client or patient is experiencing legal problems, and provides an easy referral pathway to the lawyer on-site to ensure those problems are able to be resolved as soon as possible. Several Gateway Health team and staff meetings have been attended and staff are becoming more aware of potential legal problems experienced by their clients. This has led to increased referrals to the project lawyers to assist clients to address these problems at the earliest available opportunity. Gateway staff are also taking advantage of secondary consultations.



**“All clients have been really happy with your service. You especially get back to clients efficiently and very quick after a referral and have fantastic knowledge of local services.” (Gateway staff member)**

The project was launched at a morning tea at Gateway Health Wangaratta, attended by local Member of Parliament, Mr Tim McCurdy, Gateway Health CEO Leonard Peady, UMFC CEO Luke Rumbold as well as staff from Gateway Health and HRCLS.

**74 clients were seen over both sites with 130 problem types**

Between July 2015 and June 2016 74 clients were seen over both sites with 130 problem types.

#### Our role in the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery Program:

The Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) Program is an initiative of Legal Aid NSW which aims to improve outcomes for economically and socially disadvantaged people by building cooperative and strategic networks of key legal services and community organisations. HRCLS is responsible for facilitating local coordination of services within the Albury region.

Meetings are held quarterly to allow partners to exchange information about their services, identify any gaps or areas of legal need and develop projects to address those needs. This year, the Albury CLSD undertook several projects such as:

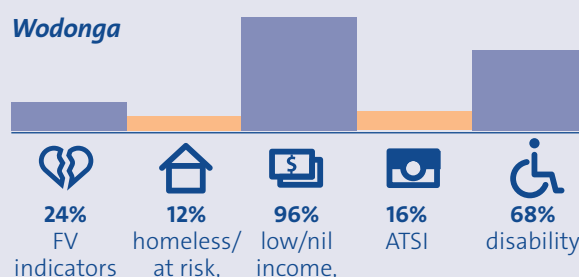
- Wills, Powers of Attorney and Enduring Guardianship Workshop for Aboriginal people
- CALD Community Information Seminar
- The continuation of the Deniliquin, Finley and Corowa Coordinated Outreach Clinics (as outlined previously)
- Investigating the possibility of providing legal advice by Skype to Holbrook

What makes all of these projects a success, is that they often involve many CLSD partners working and collaborating together to address, respond and improve the community's access to legal services.

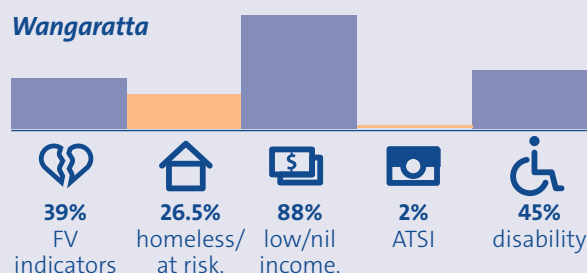
This year also marked a transition in the co-ordinator role from Karen Bowley to Andrea Georgiou. HRCLS thanks Karen



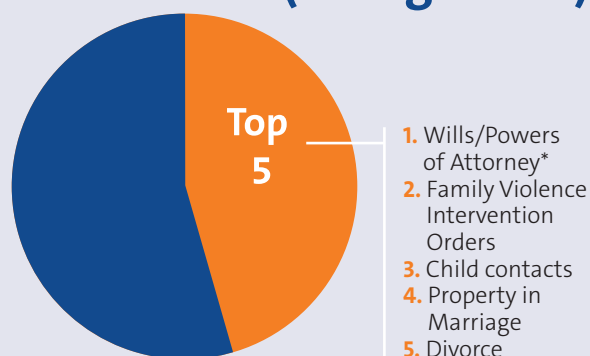
#### Wodonga



#### Wangaratta



## Advice Categories (Wangaratta)



The top 5 categories accounting for 45% of total advices.

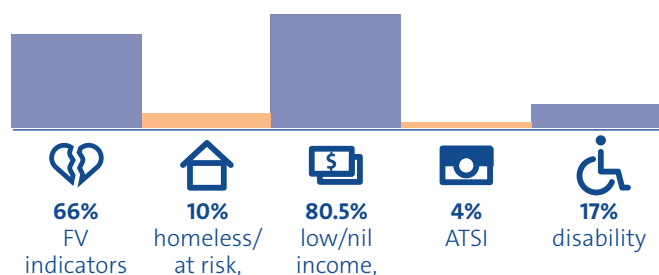
\*75% of clients who received advice regarding Wills/Powers of Attorney also had other legal issues about which they also received advice.



for her passion, commitment and dedication to her role as Albury CLSD coordinator. She has shown great drive and initiative in establishing the coordinated outreach clinics firstly in Deniliquin, and more recently in Finley and Corowa.

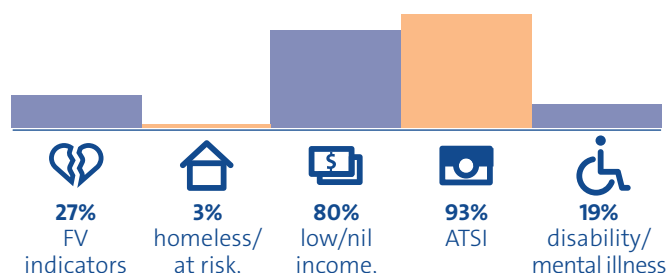
#### Our partnership with UMFC Family Relationship Services (including the Family Relationship Centre):

Providing access to legal services where people need it the most is part of the rationale for the ongoing partnership with Family Relationship Services. 82 clients were seen in the year 2015/16, making it the second largest outreach for HRCLS (not including the duty lawyer outreaches). We believe that it is imperative for legal and non-legal family services to work well together to assist separated families and we look forward to continuing to maximise outcomes for these clients, many of whom are impacted by family violence.



#### Our partnership with the Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS):

Outreach to AWAHS continued this year. A change of clinic times has enabled greater consistency of attendance both for the HRCLS lawyer and clients. This has resulted in a significant increase of clients requesting and receiving legal advice.



The occasional attendance at AWAHS staff meetings has meant staff have become more familiar with our lawyer and Law CheckUp training has increased the staff awareness of the variety of legal issues. Staff not only refer their patients, but also organise the client appointments, as well as their travel and an interview room for the lawyer's use.

With CLSD funding a wills workshop was organised at AWAHS at the end of 2015. Gilbert & Tobin came to give an information session, and then take instructions to draft wills, powers of attorney and enduring guardianships for NSW clients. AWAHS took an active role in organising registrations, room availability, and ensuring that clients were reminded of the session.

**Improving access to legal aid services:** A family lawyer employed by Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) continues to be seconded to HRCLS providing family violence and family law services to priority clients in the region who are eligible for a grant of legal aid. This collaboration between VLA and HRCLS was formed in 2006 as there is no VLA office in the area and not many private practitioners that are able to take on legal aid matters. Access to justice and services has always been an issue for people living in regional Victoria. This partnership improves access to legal assistance for people who meet the VLA funding guidelines in North-East Victoria.

The VLA secondee provides family violence duty lawyer services, ongoing family law casework including lawyer-assisted family dispute resolution service and legal representation at the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, as well as a telephone and face-to-face advice clinic on family law and family violence.

133 cases were closed this year, with a high proportion being of long standing. 74 were intervention order matters as part of the duty lawyer service.

10 VLA grants of aid and 17 NSW Legal Aid grants of aid were obtained. The closest Federal Circuit Court to Wodonga is in Albury (NSW), hence more grants of aid were obtained through Legal Aid NSW rather than VLA.

## **b. We invest in legal services for children, young people and their families.**

Children and young people who experience socio-economic disadvantage have a greater likelihood of coming into contact with the legal system. Many frequent users of legal services experience their first contact with the legal system before the age of 16 years. Our legal needs analysis showed that there is significant unmet legal need amongst children and young people in our region.

**Our 'Invisible Hurdles' Project:** In 2015, Hume Riverina Community Legal Service secured a 2 year grant from the Victorian Legal Services Board for the Invisible Hurdles project, designed to support young people in North East

**young people  
are more likely  
to experience  
legal problems  
yet are less likely  
to seek legal  
advice**

Victoria who are at risk of family violence to engage with and access legal services to achieve positive outcomes. Data shows that young people are more likely to experience legal problems than older groups, yet are less likely to seek legal advice. Young

people in regional communities are particularly vulnerable when family violence occurs due to their isolation and lack of access to specialist support services.

Following the recruitment of a specialist youth and family violence lawyer HRCLS set up health justice partnerships with the Flexible Learning Centre in Wodonga, the Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS), and North East Support and Action for Youth (NESAY) in Wangaratta. The Invisible Hurdles lawyer visits each of these partners each week, providing legal advice and assistance to young people, and providing information and secondary consults to staff, on range of legal issues, with a focus on people experiencing family violence.

The principal of the Flexible Learning Centre in Wodonga has made a video about the project which can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybdhoZR4fQM>

In it he states: *"We've had a number of young parents lose their child through a child protection process, so to have a lawyer that can help them .... understand what has happened .... has been a real dampener for their anxiety, and it has helped them maintain a more reasoned approach, and they are then more likely to listen to staff, and to listen to what they need to do next."*

It is envisaged that this project will help overcome the barriers that young people in North East Victoria face in engaging with family violence support services and will help reduce occurrences of family violence and associated legal problems through early intervention and integrated service delivery.



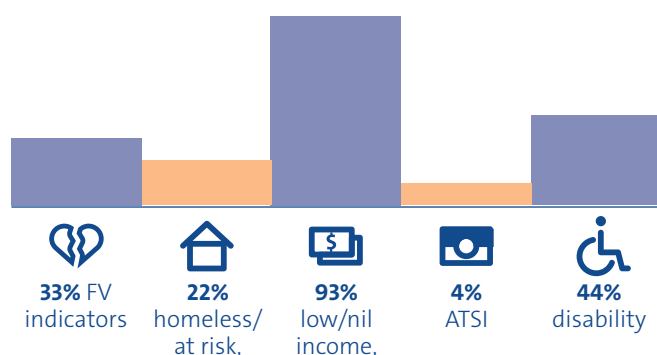
The Invisible Hurdles project is being evaluated by Dr Liz Curran from the Australian National University, who is conducting research on a number of integrated service delivery programs happening both within Australia and overseas. It is hoped that the findings from this project will contribute to the growing body of evidence showing the advantages of health-justice partnerships in legal service delivery.

The project has also been supported by YouthLaw, who have partnered with HRCLS to receive client referrals from HRCLS in cases where HRCLS has a conflict of interest or is otherwise unable to assist. We thank Youth Law for their support and look forward to continuing to work with their service more closely in the future.

#### Our partnership with YES Youth & Family Services:

This year also saw HRCLS commence a new outreach partnering with YES Youth & Family Services at the Hub in Albury in order to target its services to young people and people experiencing family violence in NSW.

Since early February appointments have been available each fortnight, with the clinic being routinely booked out on every visit and 27 clients seen to the end of June. These have included clients experiencing homelessness or other tenancy issues, youth looking for assistance with counselling or health care or short term financial issues. The clinic has enabled us to reach a wide diversity of clients, some of whom can be referred back to The Hub. The relationship has been extremely fruitful and has enabled us to further our reach into these important areas of special need and disadvantage. Our aim is to empower people to understand the legal issues they are experiencing and to take control and resolve issues, with support, compassion and understanding.



**We are Care Partners:** Hume Riverina Community Legal Service continues to receive funding through Legal Aid NSW to undertake early intervention care and protection work in NSW. HRCLS is one of 22 care partners allocated funding through this model, which was introduced following amendments to the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998. Our lawyer works with parents or primary care givers who require legal assistance when responding to early intervention approaches from the Department of Family and Community Services ('FACS') and in arranging and participating in alternative dispute resolution about contact arrangements after final orders have been made.

The scope for this program includes the following types of work:

- Parental Responsibility Contracts
- Preliminary advice and negotiation about Parental Capacity Orders
- Variations to contact orders
- Post final order contact disputes

It is important for us to be part of the early intervention model which attempts to keep families out of the courts, and to work with clients, assisting them to navigate the child protection system and to understand how their family will be impacted. It is envisaged that there will be a growth in the amount of early intervention work undertaken as the legislative reforms take effect.

*An example of the work done as part of this role is when a mother was given a document by Family and Community Services which was difficult for her to understand. She asked our lawyer to explain the document to her. Our lawyer was able to break the information down and explain to the client what was expected of her, as well as the consequences for non-compliance. Our lawyer was able to write to Family and Community Services and suggest changes to that document which would enable the mother to meet reasonable expectations, and potentially avoid an application being made in the Children's Court.*

**We educate and inform young people:** In May 2016, HRCLS facilitated Community Legal Education sessions one evening at the Wodonga Midnight Basketball to approximately 60 young people, aged between 14-20 years from disadvantaged backgrounds. The topic was 'Sexting' and the sessions were delivered in an interactive format that engaged the students and

**“... young people were educated on the basics of sexting ... Some young people had a lot of questions that were good.”**

enabled them to gain better understanding of exactly how the laws, particularly the cross border differences in the laws, affected them. The feedback on the sessions was encouraging, with

a workshop supervisor commenting: *“I felt the young people were educated on the basics of sexting ... overall appeared interested to learn. Some young people had a lot of questions that were good. (The presenter) did a great job of involving everyone – even the coaches”*. Positive engagement with youth targets the HRCLS strategy of timely and early intervention with legal problems that can affect young people and minimise the risk of them coming into contact with the law as adults.

### **c. We advance a comprehensive response to Family Violence**

Family violence incidents are up to two and a half times higher in regional North East Victoria and the Upper Murray than in Victoria overall. Towns such as Albury, Corowa and Deniliquin in NSW also have higher rates of domestic violence incidents than the state average.

**Barriers to obtaining assistance for family violence can be heightened in regional and rural areas**

In addition to the acute and ongoing trauma of violence experienced by the individuals involved, family violence often exists

within, or creates a cluster of other legal and social problems. Barriers to obtaining assistance for family violence can be heightened in regional and rural areas due to geographic and social isolation. This is further

exacerbated in cross-border regions where different laws, process, services and systems exist in each State.

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service welcomed delivery of the report handed down by the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the Victorian Government's commitment to the implementation of all the recommendations. We have had several opportunities to discuss these issues and the implications for our region in the media and in networks such as the Ovens Murray Family Violence Regional Integration Committee (in which we continue to be actively involved). We look forward to working with our local partners and Victorian Government as a new approach is developed in Victoria, to ensure that new models of service delivery are designed to effectively meet the need in the North East region.

HRCLS also participates in the Albury Wodonga Domestic Violence Committee and has forged a partnership with the Women's Centre, Albury and with YES Youth and Family Services, two key family violence service providers in the Albury area to increase opportunities for legal assistance and better target services to victims of family violence in NSW.


HRCLS will continue to highlight the cross border issues being experienced by people in relation to family violence and to work with service providers on the border to seek better outcomes in key areas. HRCLS has also identified areas internally that will be strengthened in the next year to assist clients more effectively who have family violence issues that cross the border. We welcome the introduction of legislation in both Victoria and New South Wales that will allow for cross border recognition of family violence orders in the future.

In this past year 55% of cases had family violence indicators and nearly a quarter of all cases were specifically

family violence matters. This shows that HRCLS is well recognised as a key service

**55%** have family violence indicators  
**25%** were specifically family violence matters

provider in relation to family violence. All of HRCLS's generalist services (including outreach services and family law services) are being regularly accessed by people experiencing family violence issues.



“they helped  
me prepare for  
the future”

#### **CASE STUDY**

Joan was seeing a family violence counsellor and was referred to us for legal advice. Joan was an elderly woman, seeking to leave a long and abusive relationship. Whilst there were no children involved, our lawyer was able to provide Joan with property law advice to enable her to start planning for her new life as a single person.

***We were also able to provide her with advice about the role of family violence intervention orders. At the conclusion of our advice, we were also able to link Joan with other organisations to assist with housing and financial matters. Joan left, feeling empowered about her own knowledge of the law and the options available to her. She understood what the next steps were and knew where to access further help and support.***



## Duty Lawyer Service

**Family Violence  
Intervention Order**  
184 clients

5 Myrtleford  
51 Wangaratta  
128 Wodonga

**Personal Safety  
Intervention Order**  
99 clients

5 Myrtleford  
27 Wangaratta  
67 Wodonga

FVIO  
184  
Clients

PSIO  
99  
Clients

**We provide a duty lawyer service:** This year the Family Violence Intervention Order and Personal Safety Intervention Order duty lawyer service (previously provided only in Wodonga) was expanded to include Wangaratta and Myrtleford Magistrates' Courts.

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service lawyers provided advice to, and represented, clients in mentions and directions hearings, and sought orders for legal aid funded representation for any clients going through to a contested hearing. While focusing on providing assistance to applicants and victims of family violence, HRCLS lawyers also assisted respondents, normally in cases where there was a conflict of interest or where the applicant was represented by the police. Our presence in these Courts increases access to justice and ensures that more people receive legal assistance. HRCLS lawyers have established working relationships with court staff, police, service providers (such as Family Violence services) and other private / duty lawyers. It is important to be able to assist clients in a holistic manner, which is often achieved through collaboration with others.

This duty lawyer service helped with developing a comprehensive response to Family Violence, with many clients represented at court on a duty basis referred to other programs within HRCLS for ongoing legal assistance or legal advice on other issues.

32 other advices were also provided at the same time ranging from contact & residency to weapons offences and injuries compensation.

### **Our partnership with the Centre Against Violence (CAV):**

HRCLS has trialled a service that involves attending at CAV in Wangaratta on a fortnightly basis, as well as occasionally responding to referrals where possible from the Wodonga office. Our relationship with CAV extends to providing general information and assistance to CAV staff, either at Court or over the telephone. This enables a seamless stream of assistance to be given to clients, particularly women, who are facing extremely stressful situations.

Our lawyers often identify clusters of legal problems, in addition to the intervention order issue. For instance, many of our clients have family law matters which may include children, property, spousal maintenance, child support and divorce. They often also have legal issues concerning tenancy, debts and infringement issues. It is important for funders to recognise the need for all legal issues to be addressed, rather than allowing them to go unattended, which often results in poorer outcomes.

### **d. We match services to the capacity of our clients and coordinate case management for clients with complex needs**

HRCLS recognises that demand for legal services often exceeds capacity and that offering a standard level of service to everyone who accesses HRCLS is not viable. We are continuing to embed processes and systems which build client capacity and community resilience by helping people to help themselves and provide more intensive legal assistance to clients with less capacity and more complex needs. Our extensive network of service partners and our health-justice partnerships facilitate direct referrals for clients and to provide a more holistic support for acutely disadvantaged clients. Our data across all services this past year shows that we are reaching clients with complex needs and multiple vulnerabilities (eg: nearly 90% with low/nil income and 34% with disability/mental illness).

***we are reaching  
clients with  
complex needs  
and multiple  
vulnerabilities***



**44** volunteers  
**2500** hours

Thanking our Wangaratta Volunteers with North East Law Association President Danny Frigerio and UMFC CEO Luke Rumbold.

## We are connected

**Our Networks:** Hume Riverina Community Legal Service encourages and facilitates stakeholder engagement in the Service. We participate in local network and interagency meetings to build strong partnerships and referral pathways with other local service providers including:

- Albury Cooperative Legal Service Delivery Network
- Hume Region Homelessness Networks - Wodonga, Benalla & Wangaratta
- Berrigan Jerilderie Community Network
- Deniliquin Community Network
- Yarrawonga-Mulwala Service Providers Network
- Multicultural Interagency Network
- Koori Interagency Network
- Corowa Interagency Network
- Albury Wodonga Family and Domestic Violence Committee / network.
- Albury Wodonga Disability Network
- Wodonga Youth Area Meeting
- North East Law Association
- Albury Wodonga Family Law Pathways Network
- Ovens & Murray Family Violence Operations Group
- Goulburn Ovens & Murray Integrated Family Violence Network
- Albury & District Law Society
- Victorian Health Justice Partnership Learning Network

We also participate in a number of networks through the Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) and Community Legal Centres NSW (CLC NSW) to collaborate with other community legal centres and continue to develop strength in various areas of service delivery and strategic advocacy.

**Our Pro-bono partners:** Pro bono partnerships continue to be of enormous benefit for professional development and, in selected cases, for clients who are able to access legal help and expertise that would otherwise be out of reach.

In particular, our relationship with Clayton Utz continues to provide our lawyers with generous and prompt assistance on complex legal problems. Their vast expertise in areas such as administrative and employment law enables us to provide clients with high level advice that would otherwise be unattainable. In this past year Clayton Utz have provided over 320 hours of pro bono assistance with a value of \$112,000.

***In this past year  
Clayton Utz have  
provided over 320  
hours of pro bono  
assistance with a  
value of \$112,000***

We also value our pro bono relationship with our local private practitioners who are part of the Subsidised Wills Scheme and those who volunteer at our night clinics in both Wodonga

and Wangaratta. Without this assistance we would not be able to offer 380 appointments in Wodonga and over 50 appointments in Wangaratta each year.



Thanking our Wodonga Volunteers



Sarah Rodgers,  
Principal Lawyer,  
awarding Peter  
Uniacke the  
Betty McLean  
Award.

Gilbert & Tobin and Ashurst have assisted us in running Wills Workshops for Aboriginal clients on a pro bono basis, with the lawyers' travel and accommodation and food for the day being paid for by a grant from CLSD. These firms have also offered their services in other matters where Clayton Utz has a conflict of interest.

**Our Volunteers:** Volunteers serve an important function in assisting HRCLS in being able to meet needs and provide services in the region. We are proud of our volunteer contingent, which comprises law students, Practical Legal Training (PLT) students, and qualified lawyers who provide services pro bono and assist in our evening clinics. In celebration of Volunteers Week in May 2016 HRCLS hosted a drinks and nibbles to thank our wonderful volunteers.

We were especially thrilled to celebrate Peter Uniacke, one of our private lawyer volunteers, as the winner of the UMFC Betty McLean Award for Volunteers. This award was granted to Peter in recognition of his 15 years of volunteering for HRCLS at the UMFC AGM in October. Congratulations Peter!

**Our Subsidised Wills Scheme:** The Seniors Clinic which is offered once a month gives clients information and advice about wills, powers of attorney and enduring guardianship. We try to determine whether there are any issues of elder abuse and also if a client is eligible for our Subsidised Wills Scheme. This scheme can only operate with the goodwill of those private practitioners who are willing to be part of the scheme and who have given our clients 35 documents at the subsidised rate over the past year. We thank those practitioners for their commitment to the disadvantaged. We have recently added four more practitioners to our participating firms list.



“...Being able to explain the law and the procedures to a client is quite different from reading a textbook”.

“The lawyers at the HRCLS have shown great empathy, diligence, responsibility, care, knowledge and skills as well as ethics. Their contribution to the community will not go unnoticed”.

PLT student Jiming Xi on the banks of the Murray River.

## We share & we train

### Our Teaching Practice

In the 2015-16 period Hume Riverina Community Legal Service hosted:

- a) 4 practical legal training (PLT) students – totalling approximately 125 days;
- b) 6 law students – including 2 students attending the service for 1 day per week on an ongoing basis and 1 student undertaking a 20 day placement.

The external evaluation of the Clinical Legal Education Program which was commenced in June 2015, was concluded this financial year with a report being issued in January 2016. The noted achievements of the program were:

- 1. Approximately 184 family law clinic appointments were offered to the community per year, directly as a result of the program
- 2. Law students are encouraged to consider a career in the country and encouraged to consider a career in family law
- 3. Students' awareness of access to justice issues is raised through their placement experience
- 4. The program results in terms of gaining clinical legal education experience are outstanding. Students were articulate and enthusiastic about their experience and adamant that the experience met and exceeded their expectations, by giving them an experience which bridges their theoretical knowledge with practical application and involvement in genuine 'real world' legal tasks
- 5. Students reported that their experience of the program was likely to encourage them to offer pro bono assistance in their future legal careers.

The evaluation report also stated that the program achieved a number of unintended, but related positive objectives. These include stronger relationships between legal services and family/parenting services and a more holistic service available to clients as a result. “From the perspective of the Federal Circuit Court, the program directly contributes to the efficient function of the court, as self-represented clients supported by the students are well prepared for their appearance and attend with the correct documentation. The significance of this finding should not be under-estimated, and clearly provides benefits to the court and the community” (*Evaluation of the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service Family Law Focused Clinical Legal Education Program*, Prepared by Effective Change Pty Ltd for Hume Riverina Community Legal Service July 2015, p3).

With changes in funding, HRCLS determined to target practical legal training students or final year law students, as opposed to students in the early stages of their law degrees. These more experienced students are able to undertake complex work and their assistance to the lawyers and clients is of immense benefit. Students are also encouraged to take on longer placements, as opposed to short terms. This has resulted in a win/win situation for both the service and the student.

HRCLS is proud to be a teaching practice. Our lawyers are always keen to share their knowledge and experience with students. Our student volunteers allow us to undertake more work, or work which we would not be able to take due to the lack of resources.

The type of work undertaken by students includes taking instructions, assisting with forms and process, research, drafting letters and documents, assisting solicitors at Court, and in some cases appearances in Court.



Women in Law Breakfast



Community Law Talk at North East Multicultural Association.

## We are involved in our community

National Law Week took place between 16 to 22 May 2016. A number of activities and events were hosted and/or coordinated by Hume Riverina Community Legal Service during this week, including:

- Women in Law Breakfast with 3 panel speakers talking about “Why Justice Matters”;
- Information stalls
- Albury Court and Police complex tour for CALD community members
- Seminar and Q&A session “Family Life and the Law” - in conjunction with Legal Aid NSW
- Open court and tour – Wangaratta Court with North East Multi Cultural Association (NEMA), followed by Law Check-Up training
- Legal Health Check Ups in conjunction with Legal Aid NSW
- Training for community workers on identifying legal issues

The Women in Law Breakfast, hosted by HRLCS in conjunction with North East Law Association, was an outstanding success, with 49 attendees who enjoyed a delicious breakfast at CANVAS Eatery in Albury. Three inspirational panel members including Principal Practice Doctor, Dr Alfeen Varghese, Barrister Christine Mendes and Regional Youth representative Megan Pearce each spoke about “Why Justice Matters”, covering what they viewed as justice, what barriers to justice they perceived and the complexity of cross border issues. The breakfast discussion was facilitated by Gaye Pattison of ABC Goulburn Murray who also conducted radio interviews with the panel members on the following day, bringing further attention to Law Week and the issue of “Why Justice Matters”.



Youth Week with our friends from UMFC.

The Stall in Wangaratta provided information to the public on issues including Family Law, Wills, Personal Injury, Workplace Discrimination, Theft, Funeral Plans, VCAT processes and consumer disputes, as well as raising awareness of the free legal advice available.

The Legal Aid NSW event in Albury imparted important information to 8 attendees, who were appreciative of the opportunity to speak with a legal specialist about their matters.

The Albury Court and Police complex tour provided valuable information to 44 people from various cultural backgrounds including Bhutan and the Congo. The aim of the event was to break down some of the fear and insecurity felt by the attendees in having to conduct dealings with the Court and/or the Police.

During the year we were also involved in Seniors Week, International Day for People with a Disability, and National Youth Week. These all raise awareness in the community of our service and the law.





Community Law Talk at Holbrook, NSW



Meeting with Sue Cowan (Older Persons Mental Health Service) & Helen McGowan (Hallidays Solicitors)

## We educate

Community development and legal education is a fundamental aspect of the work done by Hume Riverina Community Legal Service. In March 2016, a dedicated Community Development Coordinator was appointed to review, update and oversee the service's Community Legal Education (CLE) programs and provide continuity of service with regard to community development and promotion of the service in the public arena.

HRCLS delivers community legal law talks, disseminating complex legal topics in layman's terms to a variety of audiences, throughout the catchment, including outreach locations such as Benalla, Deniliquin, Holbrook and Henty, on topics including:

- Family violence
- Family law
- Life planning – including Elder Abuse, Wills and Power of Attorney
- Sex, Young People and the Law
- Law Health Check Up; and
- Police Powers

Differences in laws and practice due to cross border issues continue to be an ever-present concern in this region. Accordingly, an important aspect of the CLE sessions relates to the need to highlight the different laws that apply in New South Wales and Victoria, for example in relation to sexting, Police Powers and Powers of Attorney. A talk on Wills and Life Planning was given to the Hostel Residents of the UPA facility in Holbrook in March, and then to a large gathering in Holbrook in September, where the local Anglican Church ran a health and well-being day for the older members of that community. The event was an amazing feat of community mindedness and was attended by around 80 people from all over the Shire.

In partnership with the Older Persons Mental Health Service, Wangaratta and with reference to the strategic plan to raise awareness within the community about Elder Abuse, HRCLS participated in the Healthy & Wise seminars in 2016 in a variety of locations such as Bright, Beechworth, Myrtleford, Wodonga and Yarrawonga. These are aimed at the over 55's, addressing a variety of mental and health issues as well as "legal health" which includes Wills, Powers of Attorney & associated issues. We are grateful for the continued support of Sue Cowan (Older Persons Mental Health Service) and Helen McGowan of Hallidays Solicitors who also volunteers her time to present these seminars.



In 2015/16 HRCLS delivered  
**51 Community  
 Law Talks** to approximately  
**815 participants**

## We communicate

After the development of our Communications Strategy last year, Hume Riverina Community Legal Service continues to implement and oversee this strategy through a Communications Officer. We believe that it is an important part of our role, both individually and collectively, to effectively communicate with clients, stakeholders and the general public in order to meet our objectives, promote our services and to inform, educate and empower.

**Media:** Traditional methods of communications have particular significance in regional and rural settings. HRCLS has featured in numerous newspaper articles across our region and been interviewed on radio on several occasions in this past year.

The Border Mail wrote articles on cross-border issues regarding interlock devices, the impact of Commonwealth funding cuts, support for Legal Aid office, and our celebration of Volunteer week.

The Wangaratta Chronicle featured the launch of our Health Justice Partnership with Gateway Health, and wrote articles of the impact of funding cuts on Wangaratta, and the Celebration of our Volunteers.



The Deniliquin Pastoral Times wrote about Commonwealth funding cuts, the potential loss of free legal advice services in the region, and the particular impact on family law & family violence clients.

Local radio 2AY interviewed UMFC CEO Luke Rumbold & HRCLS' Principal Lawyer, Sarah Rodgers, on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. OAK FM, STAR FM and 2AY interviewed us about Law Week (with the latter also talking about the impact of funding cuts).

We also thank all our local media outlets who continue to support us and inform the community about our advice outreaches.

**Social Media:** The power and reach of social media continues to have a huge impact. The ability to instantly convey information and opinion has enhanced our reach and standing in the community and sector.

A lot of traction was gained over the *#fundequaljustice* campaign launched by National Community Legal Centres (NACLC) and supported by HRCLS, highlighting the future impact of Commonwealth funding cuts on the community legal sector. The launches of our Health Justice Partnerships with Gateway Health & Benalla Health/Goulburn Valley Community Legal Service were also well received.

*Twitter has led the way with approximately*  
**355 followers** *(as of 30/6/16),*  
**146,366 impressions,**  
**5,038 profile visits &**  
**409 mentions,** *with an*  
*estimated media* **value of**  
**over \$36,500.00.**

**Top media Tweet** earned 558 impressions

Our Principal Lawyer Sarah & @umfc CEO Luke on @2AY1494 this am talking #RCFV #ChildFIRST #FundEqualJustice  
[pic.twitter.com/w5HQwx9SEz](http://pic.twitter.com/w5HQwx9SEz)



4 3

**Top Tweet** earned 2,003 impressions

#fundequaljustice No funding = no staff = no justice #Albury #Wodonga #Wangaratta #Benalla #Corowa #Finley #Deni [pic.twitter.com/pcsWwQ2Tmj](http://pic.twitter.com/pcsWwQ2Tmj)



1 17 6

**Top mention** earned 21 engagements



**Amanda Alford**

@A\_Alford\_ · Apr 20

Great example of vital work CLCs do in rural and regional areas! @HumRivLegal [bordermail.com.au/story/3857373/...](http://bordermail.com.au/story/3857373/) @Indigocathy #fundequaljustice

1 7 2



Facebook had  
**262 “likes”**  
 at end of June 2016  
 with a media value  
 of approx. \$9,000.

The following are highlights from the year:

- 1. Women in Law breakfast**  
 - 1,200 reached, 69 reactions, 386 clicks
- 2. Malcolm Turnbull announces family Violence funding** - 1,000 reached, 25 reactions
- 3. Sarah Rodgers and Luke Rumbold on 2AY Radio on the Royal Commission into family Violence** - 841 reached, 56 reactions
- 4. Ukelegals** - 756 reached, 39 reactions
- 5. E-news & Annual Report 2015** - 600 reached
- 6. Pro bono partner visiting Deniliquin & Finley with NSW Outreach lawyer** - 584 reached, 13 reactions
- 7. Meeting the Cross border Commissioner in Corowa**  
 - 506 reached, 29 reactions
- 8. Legal Aid NSW coming to Albury**  
 - 484 reached, 21 reactions
- 9. Piecing together the Puzzle report**  
 - 402 reached
- 10. Gateway launch** (Wangaratta Chronicle article)  
 - 371 reached, 47 reactions







Meeting with James McTavish, Cross-Border Commissioner



Meeting with NSW Legal Aid and NSW Attorney-General Gabrielle Upton.

## We are a voice for change

**Royal Commission into Family Violence:** In 2014, Hume Riverina Community Legal Service participated in the Royal Commission into Family Violence by lodging a submission which highlighted regional and cross border issues being experienced by people with family violence issues. HRCLS welcomed the release of the Royal Commission's Report in March this year, and will continue to monitor the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Report and participate in any further consultations about how improvements can be made regionally.

**Access to Justice Review Victoria:** HRCLS made a submission to the Access to Justice Review undertaken by the Victorian Department of Justice and Regulation. The Review was commissioned to identify improvements to access to justice that could be made in Victoria and ensure that adequate support is given to those who are disadvantaged in their engagement with the law and justice system. HRCLS made submissions particularly highlighting issues impacting on people regionally, such as conflicts of interest, cross border issues, gaps in services regionally and the need to adequately fund local, place-based services to effectively provide assistance to people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged.

**Delays in Family Law Proceedings:** HRCLS, together with the North East Law Association and UMFC, endorsed a letter sent to the Commonwealth Attorney General regarding delays in family law proceedings and the resulting impacts on families and their children accessing the Albury Federal Circuit Court. HRCLS is

calling for additional funding to address the under-resourcing. This issue has been raised by others including the Law Society of NSW, the NSW Law Society Regional Law Societies, NSW Bar Association and in the media.

**Cross-examination in Family Court:** HRCLS has supported calls by the Women's Legal Service, Victoria Legal Aid and by Federal Member for Indi, Cathy McGowan, to protect victims of family violence from being cross-examined by their former partner in family law proceedings. HRCLS liaised with Cathy McGowan's office regarding this issue.

### Meetings held with local Members of Parliament:

We attended the office of Sussan Ley, Federal Member for Farrer and met with a member of her office in August 2015. We also met with Victorian Members of Parliament including Member for Benambra, Bill Tilley and Member for Ovens Valley, Tim McCurdy in July 2015. Together with Leonard Peady, Gateway Health CEO these meetings were held to discuss the benefits of health justice partnerships in our region, particularly demonstrated in our partnership with Gateway Health, in ensuring that vulnerable and disadvantaged people access legal services. Discussions were also held about potential opportunities for future funding and the likelihood of a funding cut to HRCLS from July 2017.

Cathy McGowan attended our office in June 2016 to discuss the likely impact of the funding cuts due to take effect to HRCLS in 2017, and what this would mean for disadvantaged people within our community who would otherwise be unable to access free legal help.





“... they helped me get the divorce I needed.”

#### CASE STUDY

Maria and her daughter were victims of long-standing family violence, perpetrated by Maria's husband and carer. Due to her disability and the fact that her husband was also her carer, they continued to reside under one roof for periods of time after the relationship had broken down and they had separated.

At first glance, it appeared that Maria would need to wait a further 8 months before she could commence divorce proceedings. One of our PLT students took instructions from Maria and prepared the Application and Affidavits in support to enable the matter to proceed in Court. A Victorian Family Violence Order was in place, but as the Federal Circuit Court was in Albury in NSW, Maria also had to be advised about the cross-border issues and how to register her IVO in NSW so that she would be protected when she went to Court.

*Being able to get a divorce without any further delays was hugely important to Maria and, but for the student, may not have been able to have been taken on due to resourcing.*



# Financial Statements

## Funding Received for 2015-16

The Hume Riverina Community Legal Service is very grateful for the funding received for 2015-16 from the sources outlined below. Without their valuable contributions Hume Riverina Community Legal Service would not be able to provide the much needed services to residents of North East Victoria or the Riverina of NSW.

The table below outlines the sources, purpose and funding received for 2015-16.

Source	Purpose	Breakdown	TOTAL
Attorney General's Department (Commonwealth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generalist - Cth</li> <li>• NSW Outreach services</li> <li>• SACS ERO - Cth</li> </ul>	\$474,118.00 \$75,000.00 \$31,654.00	\$580,772.00
Victorian State Government (Victoria Legal Aid)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generalist – State</li> <li>• Family Violence - State</li> <li>• SACS ERO – State</li> <li>• SACS ERO – Extra State</li> </ul>	\$206,340.00 \$62,262.00 \$41,317.00 \$17,734.00	\$327,653.00
NSW State Government (Legal Aid NSW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative Legal Service Delivery</li> <li>• Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (one-off)</li> <li>• NSW Care Partner</li> </ul>	\$21,229.00 \$8,000.00 \$19,000.00	\$48,229.00
NSW Public Purpose Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generalist</li> </ul>	\$69,077.00	\$69,077.00
Victorian Legal Services Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better outcomes for young people experiencing family violence in North East Victoria</li> </ul>	\$110,000.00	\$110,000.00
Department of Justice & Regulation Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLC Assistance Fund</li> <li>• Family Violence Duty Lawyer Fund</li> </ul>	\$44,961.00 \$52,174.00	\$97,135.00
<b>TOTAL FUNDING RECEIVED</b>			<b>\$1,232,866.00</b>

This is a summarised statement of income which is consistent with externally audited financial statements that are available (along with UMFC's Annual Report) by contacting UMFC on 02 6055 8000.



## **Thank you to our volunteers, donors, supporters, partners & funders**

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service extends a warm thank you and heartfelt appreciation to all who have supported us in the community over the past year.

We are continually astounded by the strength of support, time, skills and finances given to help make a difference for our clients and the community we serve.

We look forward to the year ahead as we continue to partner together to help and empower those who are disadvantaged to obtain access to justice.



**hume riverina**  
community legal service

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