

# *Collaborations: Changing Lives*





AWAHS CEO David Noonan, Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre Leading Teacher Kristy Shaddock, Gateway Health CEO Leigh Rhode, HRCLS Principal Lawyer Sarah Rodgers, Invisible Hurdles Legal Project Worker Becky Smith and HRCLS Senior Lawyer Deb Fisher



UMFC Financial Counsellor Heather Cassidy, HRCLS Community Development Manager Simon Crase, HRCLS NSW Outreach Lawyer Giselle Hutchins and UMFC Financial Counsellor Claire Harris at the Intereach Deniliquin Hub



VLA CLC program manager Amy Schwebel, HRCLS Operations Manager Ashlie Barclay, HRCLS Principal Lawyer Sarah Rodgers, Legal Aid NSW Lila Sullivan and Meagan Lee

# Our organisational culture

## Our Culture and Values

As a community legal centre, HRCLS shares the universal values that drive the work done by the community legal sector, while maintaining its own identity and unique character. To ensure our sustainability and success, we will adhere to the following values and approaches.

### We support our team

Our staff and volunteers are our greatest asset. We value their expertise, ideas and commitment to helping people get access to justice. We are committed to creating the best environment in which they can thrive and further developing their knowledge and skills. As we continue to focus on working with clients with multiple and complex needs, we will actively manage the impact of this work through professional development programs and wellbeing frameworks which support the wellbeing of staff and volunteers.

### We share our skills

We pride ourselves on being a teaching practice and regularly host placements for law students, which nurtures their passion for social justice in their future careers.

### We care for our community

Everyone deserves access to legal assistance, regardless of their life's circumstances. We empower and walk alongside our clients to address legal problems and remedy injustices. We advocate for the interests and wellbeing of rural, regional and remote communities.

### We value our partners and stakeholders

We consult regularly with our partners about client care, emerging issues, new learning, and opportunities for shared ventures and new initiatives. Our strong links with service providers, partners and stakeholders are vital for us to deliver the greatest benefits for our clients and community.

### 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 explore new approaches to legal service delivery and are open to piloting new approaches to legal service delivery. We can act quickly and efficiently to address emerging needs and solve problems.

### We are resourceful

We make efficient and wise use of limited funds, including through sharing administrative resources with UMFC, our auspice organization, and nurturing a dedicated volunteer workforce.

HRCLS Manager & Principal Lawyer Sarah Rodgers, former HRCLS coordinator Allison Bruce, former principal lawyers Karen Bowley and Karen Keegan, and UMFC CEO Luke Rumbold celebrate the 20th birthday of HRCLS



# Contents

## UMFC Board

President – Dean Bocquet  
Vice President – Robyn Gillis  
Treasurer – Jacqui Vaughan

## Members

Paul Robb  
Liz Heta  
Sunita Rama  
Thomas Crompton  
Kirsten Genter



HRCLS is auspiced by UMFC.

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

Disclaimer: client stories are a 'snapshot' of a legal issue and do not contain the complete details nor full circumstances. Client stories in this annual report must not be relied upon as legal advice. People should always seek their own legal advice. Names\* used in client stories in this report have been changed to protect identities. Cover pic: Mitta Mitta River 2020. Picture: Tracey Walker





Bushfire meeting in Bright, 27 February 2020  
- Helen Collins (NLG Solicitors), Tim May (Toner and May Legal), Sarah Rodgers (HRCLS), Alicia Semple (VLSB), Susan Ougham (Skinner & Associates), Pippa Weeks (Toner and May Legal), Sam Pandya (LIV President), Cam Coates (NELA President Amanda Toner's partner), Fiona McLeay (VLSB Commissioner), and Sarah Notarianni (Maurice Blackburn)

# Our UMFC CEO and Principal Lawyer message

For more than 20 years, HRCLS has played a significant role providing free legal service to people in need. While we have valued the contribution over the decades, the crucial nature of their work has never been more apparent than now.

The severe 2020 bushfires in our region were closely followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, delivering sustained blows to our communities not seen in recent memory.

We recognise these disasters have not only impacted our communities, but also our services across the agency, and HRCLS is no exception. However the enormous flexibility the team has shown in still working to meet their demand, during times of great community stress, needs to be applauded. Under the most trying of circumstances, they delivered with a great professionalism and commitment we have come to expect over the years.

Helping people with information about their legal issues including insurance needs and specialist referral options came at a very critical time, post-bushfires, and their engagement and work with other agencies leading the bushfire response and recovery was most important.

The service prides itself on its cross border expertise. In a very confused environment for people grappling with the many border issues due to the pandemic, they have proven to be a point of clarity and reference for the community and services wanting reliable guidance and answers.

The absolute value of the community legal centre to solve legal issues through high-quality information and advice has only been reinforced in 2019-20. This will not diminish as the challenges ahead appear, and they will remain a reputable and knowledgeable service vital for the wellbeing of people in our area.

## **Luke Rumbold, UMFC CEO**

After an encouraging start to the 2019-20 year, the second half presented challenges unlike never before, with significant bushfires affecting numerous communities and the COVID-19 pandemic causing major disruption.

This created the situation where people already vulnerable to legal problems and facing disadvantage were even more exposed to experiencing issues. Our work has never been more important to ensure these people don't fall through the gaps.

The clients we helped had multiple legal problems and many faced extra complexity due to cross border issues and regional isolation. We are well placed as a generalist community legal centre (CLC) to ensure these clients get assistance to resolve these problems and get back on track, through our understanding of laws on both sides of the border.

Staff have risen to these new and unexpected challenges, and their resilience and commitment to serving our community and clients are commendable.

As always, UMFC was vital for our service's achievements, and we appreciated their support as we embraced our challenges.

We are pleased to be a part of a wonderful CLC sector, and acknowledge the work of the Federation of CLCs, Community Legal Centres NSW, and CLCs Australia. We also benefit from the work of others and collaborating to address issues.

Our work to reach those who are most in need could not be done without working in partnership. Thanks to our funders, volunteers, and services who partner with us to ensure our work is effective in making a difference for the people we serve.

**Sarah Rodgers,  
Manager & Principal Lawyer  
Hume Riverina Community  
Legal Service**

# Our Services

## NSW Family Law/Family Violence service

Our attendance at The Women's Centre in Albury creates direct access for women who have experienced family violence to get free legal help. The close working relationship ensures women have direct access to free legal help from lawyer Diana Bruce, without the need to find a lawyer on their own. The collaborative work done at the Women's Centre allows women to get comprehensive help with a range of issues, including legal assistance.

*"The partnership we have with Hume Riverina Community Legal Service has always been important in ensuring women who come in contact with the Women's Centre are able to be referred to a legal service that can help them in a timely manner, and whose service is sensitive to people experiencing domestic and family violence."* TERESA LAW, CEO THE WOMEN'S CENTRE

## Victorian Family Violence Project

The partnership with the Centre Against Violence (CAV) is a client focused service providing legal advice and casework to women with increased vulnerability, experiencing or at risk of family violence. Lawyer Jodie Wells works closely with the CAV workers to ensure the best outcomes and services for our mutual clients.

*"Jodie's support is incredibly important for our clients particularly in regards to advice regarding VOCAT and family law court matters...the relationship between CAV and Jodie reduces anxiety and shame for clients who are seeking support. The referral pathways for consults with Jodie are simple and easily accessible."* PAIGE WARNER, COUNSELLOR ADVOCATE, SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAM, CENTRE AGAINST VIOLENCE

## Duty lawyer and Intervention Order Services

Our lawyers appear weekly and fortnightly in the Magistrates Court in Wodonga, Wangaratta and Myrtleford. The family law/family violence team have great expertise in working with clients who have multiple complexities. Early intervention is often key to avoiding protracted litigation. When this is not possible, our lawyers take on litigation in the Federal Circuit Court. HRCLS values the working relationships it has with the Courts, other legal practitioners, and services.

## Victoria Legal Aid Family Lawyer Service

In March 2020 we welcomed a new supporting secondee lawyer, Erin Quillian, whilst our mainstay lawyer Sarah Caplice took maternity leave. This service has been running for the past 13 years and main areas of practice are children's matters, property matters, and intervention orders.

## Invisible Hurdles project

Successfully run from December 2015, the project has connected young people experiencing family violence with legal assistance. Three local organisations, the Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre, Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service and North East Support and Action for Youth Inc., joined HRCLS as partners in the Invisible Hurdles project. In stage 2 of the project, a project worker delivered community legal education and community development activities for staff, students and young people. The Invisible Hurdles project is made possible through funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board Grant Program.

*"More young people are being reached and being assisted in this phase of the Invisible Hurdles Project. The interaction between the four partner agencies continues to grow and is becoming even more seamless."*

DR LIZ CURRAN, HONORARY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, AND PAMELA TAYLOR-BARNETT HONORARY LECTURER, THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY. EXCERPT FROM THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - INVISIBLE HURDLES PROJECT STAGE II

## NSW outreach

The program maintained strong links with the partners involved in the important outreach service, including Intereach hubs in Deniliquin, Corowa and Finley, The Hub (Yes Unlimited) in Albury and the Lavington Library. Providing face-to-face advice, although this was curtailed by COVID-19, remains critical for people experiencing disadvantage and needing free legal advice on a range of issues.

## HALO project

Five years in, the Holistic Assistance & Legal Outreach (HALO) is thriving, with relationships at Gateway Health Wodonga and Wangaratta ensuring people using the health service are connected with HRCLS when legal problems are identified. This Health Justice Partnership proved invaluable in the recovery phase from the January 2020 Bushfires, due to the strong connection between HRCLS and Gateway Health, with the latter becoming the lead agency for the local response.

*"Our HJP is the true example of how transdisciplinary care can impact social determinants of health, by supporting clients with legal support, assists with elevating clients of social burdens so they can focus on their health and wellbeing."* JONELLE HILL-UEBERGANG, SERVICE MANAGER, PRIMARY CARE, GATEWAY HEALTH





Local Elder Uncle Tunny with son Rob visit HRCLS in 2019 as part of local cultural awareness training

# Our Team

A huge thanks to our 2019-20 Operations team, Ashlie Barclay, Tracey Walker, Meaghan Frazer and Hannah Niethe for their fantastic contribution. The administration of a community legal service under two jurisdictions requires a major effort on behalf of the small, but committed team overseeing many crucial tasks and responsibilities. We are proud of the professionalism and dedication you bring to our service daily.

**Sarah Rodgers**  
Manager & Principal Lawyer

**Ashlie Barclay**  
Operations Manager

**Alison Maher**  
Senior Lawyer

**Deborah Fisher**  
Senior Lawyer

**Karen Keegan**  
Lawyer

**Janet Osborne**  
Lawyer

**Sarah Caplice & Erin Quilliam**  
VLA Seconded Lawyer

**Andrea Georgiou**  
Lawyer

**Beth Simpson**  
Lawyer

**Diana Bruce**  
Lawyer

**Jodie Wells**  
Lawyer

**Tessa Mead**  
Lawyer

**Becky Smith**  
Lawyer

**Giselle Hutchins**  
Lawyer

**Tracey Walker**  
Legal assistant

**Meaghan Frazer**  
Reception/Administration Officer

**Hannah Niethe**  
Reception

**Simon Crase**  
Community Development Manager  
Albury CLSD Regional Coordinator

*"Despite the challenges of COVID-19, the team's approach during this time was amazing. Staff quickly adapted to 'working from home' and continued to deliver a high level of legal assistance to people needing their problems fixed. The strong support for each other was evident from the start, and the willingness to use new platforms to communicate had a positive impact on everybody's health, wellbeing and importantly, feeling connected as a group."*

Sarah Rodgers,  
Manager & Principal Lawyer

In over 20 years, we have welcomed more than **140 volunteers** who gave almost **6000 advices** as part of our service and evening clinic. **What an amazing contribution!**



HRCLS lawyers Jodie Wells and Deb Fisher with volunteer Debbie LePoidevin in the Wangaratta office.

# Our Volunteers

**345** Volunteer clinic 2019-20 **advices**

*"Volunteering for the HRCLS has highlighted to me how much the team really cares for and supports people in our community seeking advice with a wide range of complex and emotionally-challenging legal issues. It was a pleasure to be involved with service, and I look forward to working with the team in the future."*

*Volunteer, Debbie LePoidevin*

## 2019-20 Volunteers

### Lawyers

Karen Bowley  
Eugene Butkowski  
Raissa Butkowski  
Chelsea Campagna  
Wendy Couzens  
Jye Cunneen  
Hayley Graham  
Jonathan Green  
Lauren Henderson  
Grahame Ingleton  
Dusan Jovetic  
Michele Kampen  
Ross Kearney  
Carlene Lamanna  
Debbie LePoidevin  
Michelle Matthews  
John McDonald  
Helen McGowan  
Jessica McKenzie  
Hannah Niethe  
Sarah Noble  
Sarah Notarianni  
Wei Li Oon  
Sarah Pearce  
Mathew Read  
Ellie Richardson  
Narelle Sherwill  
Becky Smith  
Jillian Smith  
Peter Uniacke

### Law Students

Daniel Rafferty  
Emily Bales

### Practical Legal Training Student

Taylor Smith-Stephens

**600**  **hours**

Linking the community with the law is our motto, and a perfect example is the volunteer program we run to help people have access to justice. Every Tuesday in Wodonga and every second Tuesday in Wangaratta, our volunteer lawyers give free advice on a vast range of legal issues. Having local lawyers give their expertise and time for free expands our capacity to assist more people than possible through our regular programs and clinics.

**568**  **hours**

# Collaborations: Changing Lives

## Top 5 NSW Locations

**180** Albury  
**97** Lavington  
Thurgoona **38**  
**25** Deniliquin  
**23** Corowa

## Top 5 Victoria Locations

**499** Wodonga  
**213** Wangaratta  
Benalla **64**  
**31** Myrtleford  
**26** Beechworth

## Top 10 Problem Types

**756** Children's  
Issues  
Family Violence/ IVO/AVO **726**  
**421** Property in  
marriage/de facto  
Credit/Debt/  
Consumer issues **326**  
**202** Divorce/  
separation  
Fines **133**  
**132** Child  
protection  
Personal safety **96**  
**96** Child Support  
**94** Victims  
of Crime

Debts waived for  
clients through our legal assistance **\$311,266**

**68**  
Stakeholder  
Engagement  
activities

**22**  
Law Reform  
activities

**53**  
Community  
Legal Education  
sessions  
participants **400**



# Who we help

**69%** female  
male **31%**

**4%** People from non-English speaking backgrounds

Homeless **8%** indicator  
**81%** financial disadvantage - advices

financial disadvantage - case work **99%**

Elderly **7%** 65 & over  
**14%** Children & youth (0-25)

People **68%** experiencing family violence

**43%** People with a disability or mental illness

Aboriginal **12%** & Torres Strait Islander peoples

**311** legal tasks

**1770**

advices

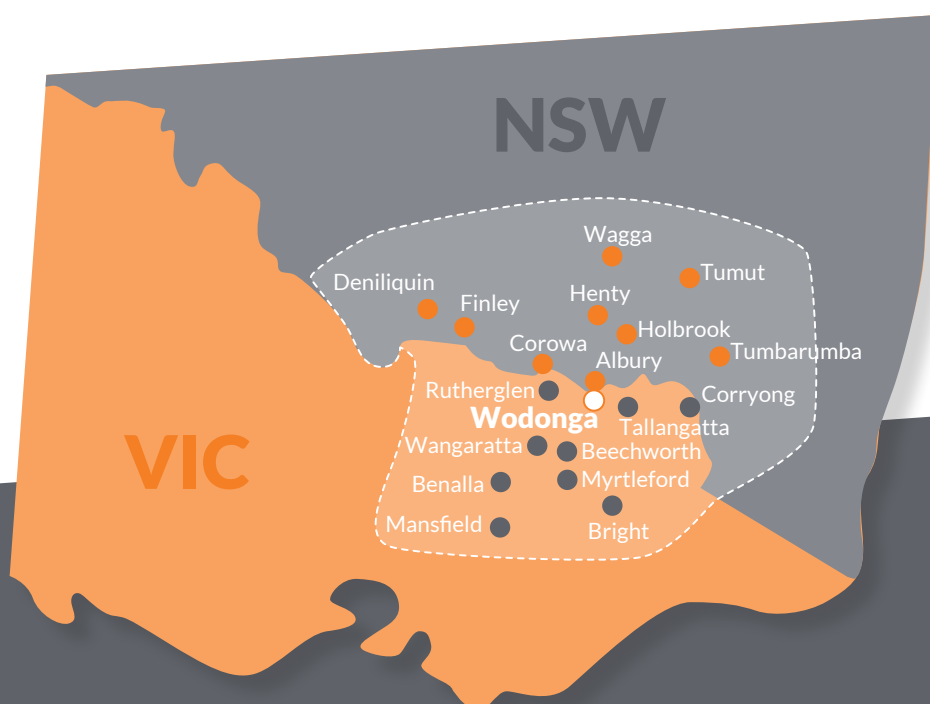
**1568** clients

**241** cases opened

**268** cases closed

**403** duty lawyer services

# Where we go



# Health Justice Partnership delivers positive outcomes

Sometimes your problems can seem so insurmountable, it's impossible to see the end of the tunnel, let alone any flicker of light. Rose\* was entangled in debt, struggling to get her life in order, and had no idea how to get out of the mess she found herself in.

It's people like Rose the Holistic and Legal Assistance Outreach (HALO) project aims to find and assist. HALO links Gateway Health clients with HRCLS through a close relationship built over a number of years. Through a combined effort, Gateway Health AOD Care & Recovery Reunification Worker Kathrin Baer and HALO lawyer Debi Fisher gave Rose the support she needed to get back on her feet.

## Debt lifted, life changed

Through Rose talking with her Gateway worker, Kathrin, and then with Debi, numerous legal problems came to the surface, including questions about an interstate tenancy matter. When these questions were answered, Rose was able to start talking about the stress she was under as a result of her fines and debts. She had begun to take control of her life, dealing with her substance abuse, family violence and homelessness but the ability to pay her debts was impossible. "Debi was confident she could help me, and just that lifted a weight from me."

## More issues surface

As Debi and Rose continued to talk about her problems, Rose revealed she also had a debt from a childcare centre. Rose was annoyed with how she'd been treated by DHHS and the childcare centre, as neither had informed her the debt had ballooned beyond \$9000. She only learned this when she contacted the child care centre to ask when she needed to start paying it back. Rose was told she would have to cut back on the number of days her daughter could attend the centre. It was impossible for her to pay for the ongoing days of care and pay off the debt as well.

## Joyful outcome

Reducing the time her daughter spent at the centre would have had a major impact. Through Debi's help, the childcare debt was waived. "It was terrifying because that was the only good situation my daughter had, playing with friends when she went to the centre," Rose said. The good news was met with joy. "I think I looked at Mum and started hysterically laughing, 'I have no debt, I have no debt'. I can't even explain the feeling I had in words, how I felt to have that particular debt gone. But a great weight had lifted from my shoulders."

*"I'm so grateful the services that I needed were in the one place. They were easy to get to, easy to contact and people would always get back to me. If they didn't have these services, I don't know what state I'd be in."*

## Looking for light at the end of the tunnel

Kathrin believes having access to HALO had a distinctly positive impact on Rose's recovery. "By discussing the program with Rose, we identified a number of historical legal issues." They needed urgent attention, otherwise they would have progressed and potentially had significant impacts in Rose's life and future career plans. "Once the need for legal advice was identified, a simple referral process allowed action to be taken."

## Easing the burden

Rose had taken out a loan to purchase a car, and was struggling to make the payments. Debi looked at the contract to see if there had been any consumer law breaches. After lodging a successful complaint, the car repayments were lowered, the loan restructured, and capped with no additional fees or charges. Rose now had more in her budget each week, minus the stress.

Working with Gateway and Centre Against Violence, Debi provided evidence to Fines Victoria to show fines Rose had incurred should be withdrawn under the Family Violence scheme.

## Pulling the plug on electricity debt

Rose was being constantly contacted by an electricity company chasing a huge debt. Debi's intervention led to the debt being waived, after four months of negotiation and explanation of Rose's financial hardship and family violence. Once Debi became involved, the phone calls dwindled and Rose realised it was more effective to cease communication with the company. "The last time they called, I said, 'I'm not talking to you further about this. You can speak with my solicitor.'"

## Spending priorities improve

Rose's budget could now be focused on keeping her head above water. And getting out of the cycle of chasing her tail using payday loans to repeatedly make up a shortfall for essentials was another blessing with her improved financial state. "I could buy things for the kids, and I was able to get on top of my bills," she said.

To read Rose's full story visit our [website](#).



# Collaborative care leads to a better place

Putting trust in strangers to help you in the midst of chaos takes courage, particularly when life has taken a turn you never expected and left you struggling to fully function.

A client who linked with the Centre Against Violence (CAV) to get support in leaving a relationship made the difficult journey to leave an abusive partner and get her family away from an unsafe environment. CAV Family Violence Crisis Care Advocate Maddi Tobias and HRCLS lawyer Jodie Wells helped her put a plan in place and encouraged her every step on the road to recovery.

Looking back, Polly\* believes her life could have been vastly worse, even fatally so, without the intervention of a combined legal and family violence support approach.

## Stepping through to reality

When Polly connected with CAV, the first step was to complete a risk assessment. "This is done to give us an idea of the situation, and guides the advice and support we give people going forward." Maddi said Polly's circumstances were quite significant. "She wanted to leave the relationship, and this first step showed she was ready to do this."

Polly was in such a surreal space. "I was traumatised and very scared. It was really difficult to take that first step because it made it very real."

*"But Jodie seemed so confident in knowing how my partner would react, and she came across as very experienced in dealing with this. So I took a leap of faith and decided to do everything she said."*

## Light at the end of the tunnel

CAV's referral to HRCLS helped Polly start putting things in place to leave the relationship. "I couldn't have done it by myself and had no idea where to start," she said. "Jodie gave me a clear, definitive plan. She broke it down into really little steps of what I needed to do before I ended the relationship." The plan, which included having important documents kept in a safe place, gave her direction at a time when Polly felt incapable of making decisions.

## Right move

Maddi went with Polly to court for an interim Intervention Order (IVO) application. Maddi said it was important Polly could convey her experience to the court. "I helped her complete the IVO in her words, and with the assistance of our family violence knowledge, this would help the court be responsive to her application." Breaches soon occurred after the interim IVO was made. "My approach then was to always be available for Polly when she needed me, and help her identify if a breach had occurred," Maddi said. The lack of consequences for the breaches left Polly deflated and questioning if she had done the right thing.

## Faith in IVO process questioned

After the IVO was made, local police made a mistake that left Polly upset with their conduct. It made her feel unsafe, undermined and more uncertain she had made the right call on heeding the advice to get an IVO. Jodie contacted police to explain what had occurred and get an assurance the situation would be addressed. This helped to return power to Polly at a time when she honestly felt she had no chance of succeeding against her ex-partner and that he even had the police on his side.

## Reconnecting for support

When needed, Polly returned to CAV as she struggled with the ongoing behaviour from her ex-partner after the relationship ended. As time progressed Maddi provided emotional support. "I needed to be inquisitive and ask the right questions, and tell her she was on the right path. Although it had been challenging and was over 12 months since the separation, she was making the right decisions."

Maddi identified Polly could also benefit from the CAV recovery counselling, and linked her in with a colleague.

## In a better place

Without the legal intervention and perspective Jodie brought to the situation, Polly wonders what would have occurred if she had returned to the relationship. "I was in such a bad place. I probably would have ended up going back if it wasn't for the combined support of Jodie and Maddi. It felt so scary standing up to my ex-partner. At the time I thought disobeying him would make us less safe and potentially get us killed. I was so lucky to have Jodie and Maddi leading me to freedom and safety."

To read Polly's full story visit our [website](#).

# Working together helps victim on road to recovery

An ad on Facebook prompted Jane\* to contact the Women's Centre to start the process of getting her life back on track, after two decades of family violence and abuse. The social media prompt came at the right time. Jane knew she had to put her trust in the Women's Centre to help her, and help her sort out the issues weighing her down.

The Women's Centre, led by CEO Teresa Law, and HRCLS lawyer Diana Bruce, started working together to help Jane move on from a life of utter control and abuse over 20 years.

Jane is still fearful of her ex-husband, but has found the courage to put the 21-year marriage far enough behind her to focus on the future, not the past. The relationship is over but the impact lingers, financially and psychologically. With the combined support, Jane feels as though she has a chance to make a new start and is grateful for the care and assistance.

## Putting everything behind her

Several years before separating, Jane had reached out to The Women's Centre for advice about ending the relationship, but the circumstances were such she didn't go ahead with it.

Jane eventually took the bold step of leaving and went to the police. It was a massive step after being controlled for so long. "When you're in a domestic violence relationship for so long and afraid to go to the police, you're petrified of getting help," she said.

*"I can't praise them enough, I feel like I'm in the right place now to deal with things, and am starting to get my life back."*

## Life changes

"I had no idea the house payments were six months behind. Two months later the house was gone." Her house had been repossessed, only months after Jane discovered through a financial counsellor that her ex-husband had drawn down superannuation and put it into her bank account without her knowledge. Only her ex-husband had access to the account. It was another instance of Jane having little or no say over how the finances were managed, despite being the main income provider.

## Clearing debt

A huge debt incurred by her ex-husband during the relationship has her name attached to it, however she had no idea it had been racked up in her name. "He was a control freak. I wasn't allowed to have my own debit cards, couldn't get mail from the letterbox, and couldn't see my family," Jane said.

As part of their support, the Women's Centre referred Jane to Diana, concerned Jane would need advice about declaring bankruptcy. Diana spoke to Jane about the debt, and identified other legal problems. Diana contacted the companies holding the debt, and began sorting out the problems.

## Getting her share

Now she has her economic independence, Jane wants to get what she deserves. She had received a letter from a lawyer acting for her former husband about a property settlement and asking for details of her superannuation. Diana is helping Jane respond to her ex-husband's call for a property settlement. All the advice from Diana has been reassuring for Jane. "I feel very comfortable talking about my life to Diana. Her approach has helped me with everything. There is no stress or strain when I talk to her."

## Fear is constant

Jane still lives in fear for her and her children's safety. Just the everyday task of picking her child up after school causes Jane's stress to heighten. "My eyes are peeled at school, waiting for the bell to go, just in case." As for the legal system, Jane has little faith in it, after her ex-husband broke the terms of the ADVO with no consequences. Despite the deep concerns she has with her safety, and that of her children, Jane is adamant she's staying in the area. "All my family are here, so I'm not going anywhere."

To read Jane's full story visit our [website](#).



# Helping young people over the Invisible Hurdles

Turning your life around takes a real commitment. But often this commitment needs clear air to allow you to focus on what you need to do. When you are trying to get on top of many issues, that air is hard to find.

Lucy\* is now in a strong place through the help NESAY case manager Ruth Nugent and HRCLS lawyer Andrea (Ang) Georgiou gave her to get rid of multiple problems. NESAY referred Lucy for legal help to sort out some issues. It was daunting for Lucy but she took the advice and sought out the lawyer based at NESAY.

"I was freaking out before I saw her. It was a really big deal to take the first step in getting some help. But Ang was absolutely fabulous. She was calm and lovely to talk to. It came across like it was more than just a job to help me, she genuinely cared. I know Ang is there in the background, just in case and ready to support me if I need it."

## Fine sorted

Lucy had a fine but was not sure how she got it or what she could do to get rid of it. Ang tried to source a local sponsor so Lucy could 'work off' the fine through the Work and Development Permit Scheme. When this avenue stalled, Ang asked for the fine to be put on hold until Lucy got her Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) Award and then helped her contact Fines Victoria to pay out the fine.

"When they were gone, it felt like I finally had this weight lifted from my shoulders."

## Connection with community

Her NESAY case manager, Ruth, organising a stint at the local Carevan proved just the recipe for improving Lucy's self-esteem, health and confidence in interacting with others. Despite having a real fear of talking to people, the experience was a blessing in numerous ways. "Ruth motivated me to get out and have a go. I'd never done anything like that before. But it showed me that volunteering is not a dangerous thing to do, and to get close to other people. I also found out doing something nice for someone else could make me happy."

## Debt cancelled

A significant phone bill was causing a huge amount of stress for Lucy. It wasn't her fault, but she didn't know where to start because the account was in her name. Ang worked out what had been going on, explained everything in a way Lucy could understand, and was able to fix it. Lucy felt like Ang had her back "110%".

With this one issue resolved, Lucy finally felt free from the relationship she had ended, and was really able to start getting control of her life. It was a major turning point.

## Finding a home

Just getting a place of her own was a massive outcome for Lucy. Ruth supported Lucy in getting public housing, and gave her the skills she needs to do it all again if needed. But the biggest impact was the lifting of anxiety of what could be around the corner.

"It's taken away the fear of being homeless. Once I was in my place, I could start doing positive things in my life and actually work towards stuff. Not having an end date to get out of somewhere is a great feeling."

## Help to recover

HRCLS assisted Lucy with a successful Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal application, which allowed Lucy to get a few things that helped her move forward.

Lucy is unsure what state her mental health would have been in during the COVID lockdown without the Award compensation. It was because of this, Lucy could find "the right counsellor to click with", and help her make positive strides. "There is no way I could have afforded the counselling I needed without that compensation."

## Better health, bigger smile

As Lucy's self-belief grew, getting back on her feet also meant getting fit. That involved doing something that Lucy often dreaded, because of her anxiety: getting out of the house. She decided to start walking, and with the desire to now connect with people, she took to the streets with a specific goal in mind. "One of my targets was to smile at as many people as I could, even if they didn't smile back."

To read Lucy's full story visit our [website](#).

Member for Indi Dr Helen Haines with Ali Maher, Sarah Rodgers and Deb Fisher meet about local issues impacting our community



# Our voice for change



Our law reform and advocacy work never ceases. Our cross border situation still creates complexities for people living and working on either side of the Murray River, and COVID-19 focused a much brighter spotlight on them. Our advocacy to Government about the impact of driving lessons being cancelled in Victoria was driven by Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre students who felt disadvantaged due to others in a similar situation just over the border. We will be closely watching the impact of COVID-19 on our border communities, and advocating to government and the authorities where necessary to highlight problems and recommend solutions.

We look forward to the findings from the Cross Border Family Violence Forum held on the border in November 2019 and welcome effective solutions to help people in what can be a complex environment. Participation in the Border Domestic Violence Network is an opportunity for us to share our experiences and identify gaps to address. Our voice and views were heard as part of Federal Government inquiries, including the Family Law Review.

The effects of the January 2020 bushfires will become more apparent as months pass. We will keep reporting to government and our peak bodies what we learn, as we interact with those affected to help them solve their legal problems, arising or amplified due to the fires.

## Submissions 2019-20

Inquiry into Australia's Family Law System

National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment (Small Amount Credit Contract and Consumer Lease Reforms) Bill 2019 (No. 2)

## Advocacy

Victims Service NSW changes

Feedback on local bushfire needs

Federal Government COVID-19 Inquiry

Driving lessons during COVID-19

Family Court of Australia and Federal Circuit Court merger



Local services, led by Northeast Health Wangaratta, release a joint statement about working together to keep our communities safe from violence during COVID-19





# Financial Statement

HRCLS is grateful for the significant funding received in 2019-20 and thanks all funders. These vital contributions allow HRCLS to give much-needed legal assistance to vulnerable and disadvantaged people in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW. The table below details the sources, purpose and funding for the 2019-20 financial year.

Source	Source	Purpose	Breakdown	Total
Victoria Legal Aid	Attorney-General's Department (Commonwealth)	Generalist Commonwealth	\$ 540,313	\$ 824,088
		COVID-19	\$ 146,450	
		Bushfire Support	\$ 65,000	
		SACS ERO – Cth	\$ 72,325	
	Victorian State Government	Generalist State	\$ 223,349	\$ 444,286
		Family Violence - State	\$ 66,397	
		Community Legal Centres Family Violence & Assistance	\$ 77,808	
		SACS ERO - State	\$ 76,732	
Legal Aid NSW	Attorney-General's Department (Commonwealth)	Family Law/Family Violence (NSW)	\$ 185,797	\$ 421,770
	NSW State Government	Cooperative Legal Service Delivery	\$ 28,000	
		NSW Care Partner	\$ 19,950	
	NSW State Government & Public Purpose Fund (PPF)	NSW Outreach (Pool 1)	\$ 188,023	
Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner		Invisible Hurdles	\$ 170,000	\$ 170,000
Department of Justice & Community Safety	Legal Assistance Funding – Invisible Hurdles		\$ 100,000	\$ 192,251
	CLC Assistance Fund		\$ 28,188	
	Family Violence Duty Lawyer Fund		\$ 35,875	
	Family Violence Fund		\$ 28,188	
TOTAL FUNDING				\$2,052,445

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.



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Monday – Friday: 9am-5pm (closed between 1pm-1:45pm daily)

We provide free legal advice to people living in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW over a catchment of 17 local government areas. We aim to help the people who are disadvantaged or vulnerable and would not otherwise be able to get legal help.



This service is auspiced by UMFC and in 2019-20 received funding from the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Victoria Legal Aid, Legal Aid NSW, Department of Justice (Victoria) and the Victorian Legal Services Board Grants Program.  
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