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### Successful grant will propel effective legal project for young people experiencing family violence

A \$100,000 grant from the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner will help an innovative legal project helping young people on the Border continue for another 12 months.

This announcement follows the recent release of the *Pathways to empowerment and justice* The Invisible Hurdles Stage II Research and Evaluation Final Report. Among the positive findings, the Report found Stage II had made inroads in responding to the family violence occurring in young people's lives, and was an efficient and effective way to reach those who would otherwise not have access to a lawyer.

Victorian Legal Services Commissioner and Board CEO Fiona McLeay said the funding would enable the service to carry on with its work, which is needed now more than ever in our community.

"Like many organisations, the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service has experienced an increase in demand for their services due to life stressors made worse during the pandemic," Ms McLeay said. "I am very pleased to extend funding to the Invisible Hurdles project, which has already made such a positive impact on people's lives and access to justice."

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service Acting Principal Lawyer Debi Fisher said the latest grant will enable the project to keep going until August 2022.

"Young people who are vulnerable do not just decide to visit a lawyer," she said. "This project has proven that to break down these barriers we need to be available where young people are comfortable and safe, and working with staff at services they trust gives us the best opportunity of helping them solve their legal problems."

The Stage II Report concluded how vital the connections are between the Overcoming the Invisible Hurdles to Justice for Young People Project (Invisible Hurdles; the Project) and the partner organisations, NESAY, Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre and AWAHS, who have been involved since the project started in 2016.

Ms Fisher said it was essential for the local community to keep capacity building, providing legal education, and legal assistance to young people linked to the services, especially after the added stresses of COVID-19 since March 2020.

It also presents an opportunity to continue showcasing a program that is a model that holds "great power" for other groups who struggle to identify that they need help, or who are invisible or who face barriers leading to exclusion, according to Project



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evaluators, Hon. Associate Professor Dr Liz Curran and Hon. Lecturer Pamela Taylor-Barnett from the Australian National University.

“The work of the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service and its approach to service delivery has the potential if done mindfully, carefully and genuinely to be replicated elsewhere,” Dr Curran said. “It cannot only benefit marginalised communities in Australia, but also in other countries, including developing countries.”