



Journey to Justice: Walking with our community



Above Left: Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS) CEO David Noonan, North East Support and Action for Youth Inc. (NESAY) CEO Leah Waring, Dr Liz Curran and Acting Principal Lawyer Deborah Fisher.

Above: Law Week 2022 – Women in Law Breakfast – Acting Principal Lawyer Deborah Fisher, guest speaker Barrister Amanda Storey, North East Law Association President Amanda Toner and Acting Principal Lawyer Alison Maher.

Left: Federation of CLCs Senior Legal Policy Adviser, Climate Justice and Disaster Lead Dr Bronwyn Lay with HRCLS Lawyer Kristi Pemmelaar on the way to Corryong for bushfire legal recovery work.

Our Vision & Mission

Who we are

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service (HRCLS) has been providing free legal services in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW for more than 20 years. We deliver legal services from multiple locations over a catchment of 17 local government areas, including Wodonga and Wangaratta in Victoria, and Albury, Corowa and Deniliquin in New South Wales.

HRCLS is an integral part of a community service network committed to 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 strength and expertise of our numerous partners, and we inform and are informed by the work that they do.

HRCLS is one of the few cross border community legal centres (CLC) in Australia. Cross border legal issues present a challenge for people living in our region who often work, have children in school, access services or visit family and friends on one side of the border, whilst residing on the other. 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 Upper Murray Family Care (UMFC). Our co-location and professional integration ensures that we are able to provide strong joint services to our local community.

What we do

HRCLS provides legal information, advice and casework with a focus on family and civil law to people who cannot otherwise access legal help. Our key priority clients are those who need help the most, including people in regional and remote areas, people with a disability or mental illness, youth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, older people and people experiencing family violence. The people we help also struggle financially, making our service crucial for them achieving fair and just outcomes. HRCLS represents clients in Intervention Order matters in the Magistrates' Courts in Wodonga, Wangaratta and Myrtleford. Community legal education and community development are key aspects of our work. We enhance community awareness of legal rights and responsibilities, helping people avoid or appropriately manage legal problems.

The experience of our clients informs our understanding of systemic issues. We contribute evidence and expertise developed through our work to inform more fair and effective law and policy that supports community wellbeing and mitigates costly litigation.

Why we exist

We value a society where all people enjoy equality of opportunity and equal access to the law, regardless of where they live in Australia. HRCLS provides a legal safety net for people in regional Victoria and NSW.

We help people:

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

We want to create long-term benefits for our communities, including:

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



Contents

UMFC Board

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

Members

Paul Robb
Liz Heta
Sunita Rama
Thomas Crumpton
Kirsten Genter



HRCLS is auspiced by UMFC.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we work and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging – for they hold the memories, traditions and hopes for future generations.

We support diversity and inclusivity and welcome all people to our service, regardless of race, religion, gender or sexuality.

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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 image: Tracey Walker, HRCLS
Back cover image: Erin Quilliam, HRCLS
Above: Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre students visit HRCLS for a tour of the service.



Our UMFC CEO & Manager

This is my first report for HRCLS. Having joined Upper Murray Family Care in April 2022, I was aware of the community legal service from my previous role and know it is highly respected and valued for the free legal assistance it provides people in our community who are vulnerable and most in need.

We know our families are coming to us with increasingly complex needs. UMFC is building collaborative practice between all service delivery areas to support better pathways for families to not only receive empathetic and effective legal support, but also wraparound support to resolve and heal other issues that set up barriers to wellbeing. I am looking forward to seeing the benefits of this increased collaboration, building on the connections that are already established.

HRCLS is to be congratulated on the successful funding submissions achieved in 2021-22 and I am excited about the growth this will create within the service. This funding for new positions was the culmination of hard work put in to ensure the legal service continues to meet the needs of our communities. As a result, we are establishing a new purpose-fitted office to accommodate the growing team, and to sensitively and confidentially support our clients.

Another area I am interested to see work continue is the harmonisation of cross border issues. The problems arising out of COVID have demonstrated quite starkly how complex it can be to live in our region. The impact of cross border anomalies hits hardest when people are in the midst of highly stressful legal situations. The cross border advocacy is an important space and I look forward to

seeing this work progress with workable solutions put in place between the NSW and Victorian Governments to make life less complicated for people on the border.

I would like to thank the staff for their passion and commitment to the work they do at a very high level. This has been a standout feature to me in my short time with UMFC.

I would also like to acknowledge Acting Operations Manager Ashlie Barclay for her oversight of the service and the lawyers, while Principal Lawyer Sarah Rodgers was on maternity leave, and the support of senior lawyers Alison Maher and Deborah Fisher.

Felicity Williams, UMFC CEO

In this past year we had a few leadership changes with Manager & Principal Lawyer Sarah Rodgers taking maternity leave, with myself moving into the Manager's role and Alison Maher and Deborah Fisher sharing the Principal Lawyer role. We also saw a change in CEO of our auspice agency UMFC. After 38 years working with and leading UMFC, Dr Luke Rumbold retired in April and Felicity Williams was welcomed.

Highlights for our year include:

- continuing to support communities affected by the 2019/20 bushfires, working in partnership with Gateway Health and UMFC to reach those still recovering from the impacts of the disaster
- gaining successful funding applications to:
 - continue providing services to bushfire-affected communities
 - expand family violence services within our NSW catchment in partnership

with the Murray Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (WDVCAS);

- provide integrated and holistic services for First Nations people affected by ill mental health in partnership with Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS);
- continue and enhance our Health Justice Partnership with Gateway Health
- providing strong support for family violence victim survivors and their families, via our partnerships with Centre Against Violence, Yes Unlimited, WDVCAS and the Women's Centre for Health & Wellbeing, and collaborating with the Magistrates' Courts and private legal practitioners in North East Victoria
- continuing to advocate for changes to laws and systems to create improved outcomes for people living in our rural and regional communities
- being formally granted Accreditation and Certification for a further three-year period
- receiving another strong endorsement through an evaluation conducted by Associate Professor Dr Liz Curran on the successful Invisible Hurdles Project, run in partnership with AWAHS, Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre and NESAY.

The impact COVID and the bushfire disasters had on the lives of our clients was evident, with the average client now experiencing an average of 4.6 vulnerabilities, with noted increases in mental health, family violence, disability and homelessness.

We are also appreciative of our many partners, funders and peak bodies who support this work. Lastly, we remain grateful to be co-located and embedded as a program of UMFC, and acknowledge the work of the UMFC Board and Senior Management Group, which has supported our service in going from strength to strength.

Ashlie Barclay, Acting Manager



Our Operations team of Ashlie Barclay, Tracey Walker, Meaghan Frazer and Lyn Welsh is the backbone of the administration support for the service. With the community legal service in the rare space of covering two jurisdictions, NSW and Victoria, their job is onerous and requires a significant commitment of effort and expertise, balancing all the responsibilities. The whole team is deeply appreciative of the work they do on a daily basis. This work has become more complex and in-depth over the years, and staying informed about the reporting requirements on both sides of the border is a continual challenge.

Our Team

Sarah Rodgers (*Maternity Leave*)
Manager & Principal Lawyer

Ashlie Barclay
Operations Manager/
Acting Manager

Alison Maher
Senior Lawyer/Acting Principal
Lawyer

Deborah Fisher
Senior Lawyer/Acting Principal
Lawyer

Sarah Caplice
VLA Secondee Lawyer

Jodie Wells
Lawyer - Family Law/Family Violence

Andrea Georgiou
Lawyer - Invisible Hurdles

Erin Quilliam
Lawyer - NSW Family
Law/Family Violence

Tessa Mead
Lawyer

Becky Smith (*Maternity Leave*)
Lawyer - Invisible Hurdles

Raissa Butkowski
Lawyer - NSW Outreach

Taylor Smith-Stephens
Lawyer - COVID (NSW)/
Invisible Hurdles

Helen Tselios (11/1/21-24/8/21)
Lawyer - COVID (Vic)

Harley Dannatt (7/9/20-14/1/22)
Lawyer - Victorian Bushfire

Shelley Alvarez (7/2/22-20/4/22)
Lawyer - Victorian Bushfire

Rachel Judd
Lawyer - Victorian Bushfire

Kristi Pemmelaar
Lawyer - Victorian Bushfire
Family Violence

Lauren Lorenzo
Lawyer - Victorian Bushfire

Tracey Walker
Senior Admin Assistant

Meaghan Frazer
Legal Assistant/Admin Officer

Lyn Welsh
Reception/Admin Officer

Simon Crase
Community Development Manager
Greater Albury CLSD
Regional Coordinator

Picture above: For the first gathering in person for months, our team dressed in orange to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the start of the 16 Days of Activism 2021.

Our gratitude goes out to our pro bono partners, including Clayton Utz and specialist CLCs, for their assistance, research and legal support. We appreciate how this support extends our capacity to help people with complex legal issues.

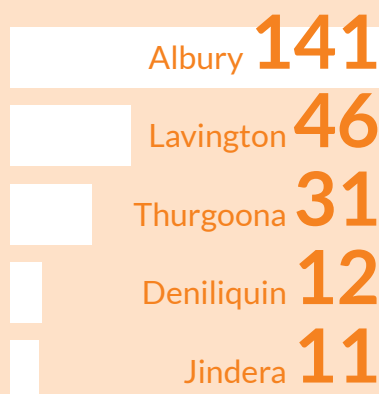
Journey to Justice: Walking with our community

These statistics tell the story of the past year: increases in legal advice being provided in relation to family violence matters, victims of crime, consumer/credit & debt, as well as housing, and increases in clients who are from a non-English speaking background, have poor mental health or disability and are affected by family violence and those whose legal problems have arisen or been made worse by COVID. There was a 10% increase in family violence duty lawyer services provided and for the first time, we turned away 1471 clients which was more than we assisted. For almost 50% of our clients, we provided ongoing assistance at various levels. Our lawyers continued to provide high-quality, trauma-informed and client-centred services, working collaboratively with both legal and non-legal partners as demonstrated within our case studies. We applaud the efforts, outcomes and attitude that our team bring to their work, which continues to increase in complexity and demand.

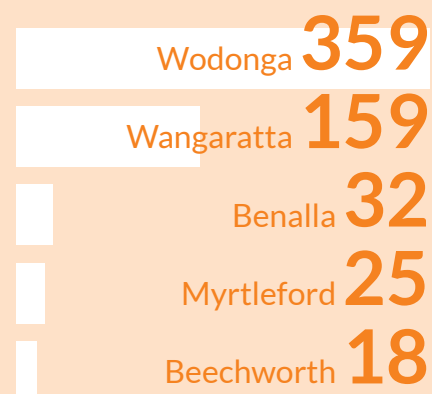
Acting Principal Lawyers,
Deborah Fisher
& Alison Maher

Top 5 locations

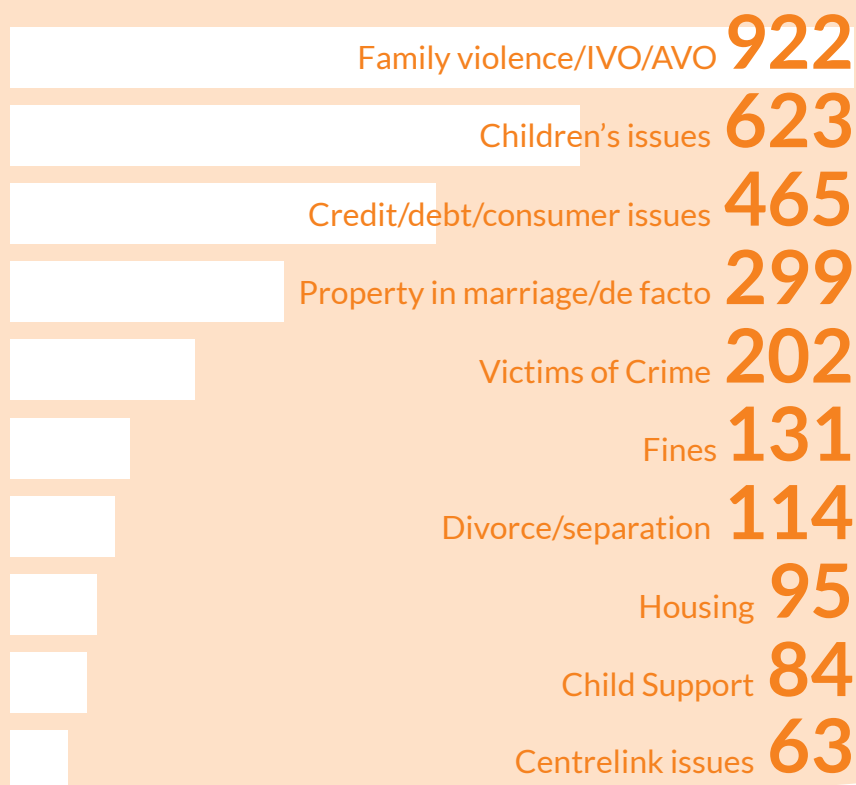
New South Wales



Victoria



Top 10 problem types



64 Community Legal
Education activities

309 Stakeholder
Engagement activities

317 participants

12 resources
developed

8 Law Reform
activities

Who we help

76%
Female

24%
Male

7%
People from
non-English speaking
backgrounds

10%
Homeless
(or at risk of)

84%
Financial
disadvantage
– advice

99%
Financial
disadvantage
– casework

9%
Elderly 65
& over

10%
Children
& youth (0-25)

82%
People experiencing
family violence

66.5%
People
experiencing family violence
– cases closed

57%
People with a
disability or mental illness

12%
Aboriginal &
Torres Strait Islander
peoples

43%
COVID affected

\$210,412 fines/debts
waived for
clients through our legal assistance

\$83,415
compensation
& refunds obtained for clients

2308 services

439
duty lawyer
services

222
cases closed

371
legal tasks

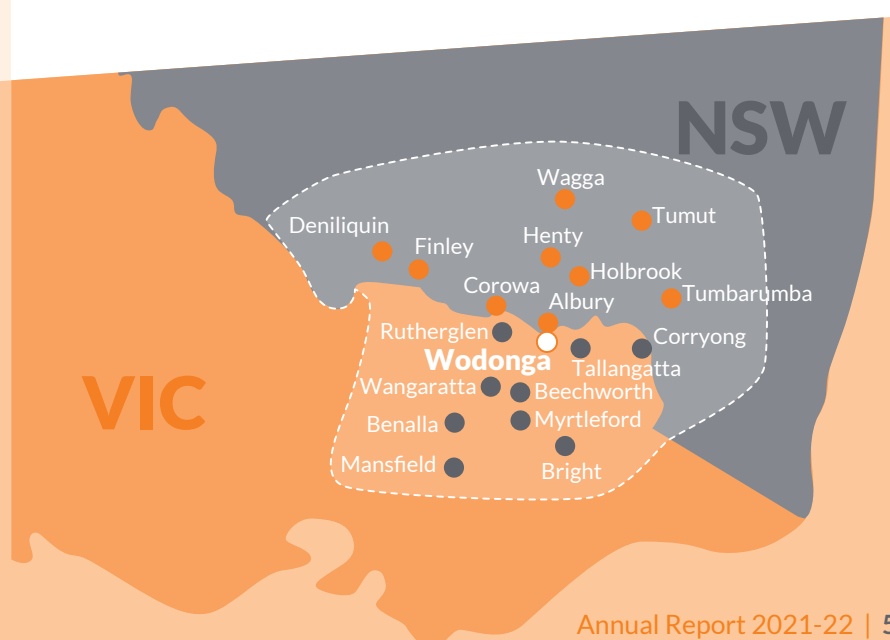
1198
clients

1274
advices

192
cases opened

2658
information
& referrals

Our catchment





Emma experienced a lifetime of family violence and abuse from family members and two husbands. Eventually her life fell apart when her second abusive husband left her, and she was forced to clean up the mess in this wake.*

As a Gateway Health client, Emma was easily referred to the Holistic and Legal Outreach (HALO) program partnered with the community health service. This firmly established Health Justice Partnership was created to help people in Emma's circumstances - multiple legal problems and other significant vulnerabilities that impact health.

Having gone from a stable life, raising her children in their home, and working, to being homeless, unable to work because of mental and physical health issues, Emma needed the support our legal service provides. *"I had 10 years of so much stress and neglect (in the marriage) and ended up having three strokes. But I look at it as though I could have died, so I'm very lucky."*

Our lawyer Rachel Judd worked with Emma on the legal issues that had mounted up as a result of the family violence her husband perpetrated.

Divorce a relief

Separating from her husband was an important step, and Rachel helped her through the process.

In continuing his 'gaslighting' behaviour, her ex-husband pretended to not know who Emma was in their correspondence. This became too stressful and Emma asked Rachel to

speak to him from then on. *"She took such a load off me, making phone calls, and sorting things out...it was like a breath of fresh air. I don't get many easy things in my life, but she made it easy."*

Husband's violence behind speeding

A speeding fine for \$350 occurred while her husband was screaming and yelling at her. Emma admits she may have been over the speed limit, but she couldn't focus while her husband hurled abuse at her. Rachel assured Emma she could apply to have her circumstances taken into account. When Emma got the waiver news, it was a huge relief. ***"You have no idea the pressure that took off my shoulders. Rachel will never know how much of a burden she has taken off my life."***

Fines and accident another stress

Adding to Emma's worry were two fines valued at \$460 for not voting in council elections. Rachel was able to get both waived, one under the Fines Victoria Family Violence Scheme and the other under exceptional circumstances. Rachel advocated to an insurance company chasing Emma for money after a car crash on the border. The insurance company agreed not to pursue Emma for the \$3300 owing because of the financial hardship she was experiencing.

Homelessness hits hard

Emma was forced to sell everything she owned to pay her ex-husband's debt. As

a result she became homeless and couch surfing between her adult children's homes was her only accommodation option. *"That made me feel less than the dirt that you walk on. I walked away with my grandfather's desk and my dog, a few clothes and bits and pieces."*

Accepting domestic violence and coercion

Like many women report, Emma couldn't see the constant control and psychological abuse her husband was subjecting her to. Although her children tried to convince her of what was happening, it wasn't until they told her to watch a TV series that she fully comprehended what had occurred. *"I watched the show and saw my life unfold before my eyes. Everything the kids in the show said to their mother, my kids said to me. The excuses the woman made, I made them."*

Community legal service vital for women

Emma has no idea how women would deal with legal problems if the free legal service wasn't available, particularly as they try to deal with trauma, stress and other issues affecting their lives.

"If they weren't there, I don't know what I would do. They are an integral part of our community and they need to always be there. There's a lot of women in my situation."

Gateway Health (HALO)

	Clients	Financial disadvantage	Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander	FV indicator/ At Risk	Homeless/ At risk	Disability
Total	106	99	5	55	24	76
%		93	5	52	23	72

Debt relief a life changing outcome for Annie



It wasn't only the financial stress hanging over Annie that created a huge burden, but the emotional attachment to the things behind the debt causing her grief. "It was a constant reminder of those times and the stuff I had been through."

Our legal service helped get \$18,830 of debt waived, and \$12,300 paid in compensation to Annie, who said the payout was incredibly timely. *"When I got told the news, I just cried...I didn't believe it. I had just finished my university study, so it couldn't have come at a better time."*

Debt tips Annie over the edge

After her ex-partner perpetrated violence against her, and her mental health deteriorated, Annie reached a tipping point when a \$3000 telco debt appeared in 2020. After putting it off, she made the call to see a HRCLS lawyer through the Invisible Hurdles (IH) program. Annie had a number of other debts and loans, but the telco bill rocked her. *"It hit me really hard...I hadn't received any letters and I had no idea it existed."*

Legal advice a saviour

The first appointment with a lawyer was the path to getting Annie back on track. *"As we talked, the lawyer asked me what else was going on. I told her I had fines on both sides of*

the border, there was credit card debt and a car loan for a crashed car...but my only goal was to get rid of the telco debt." Annie felt responsible for the other debts, however she was really confused about the telco contract from several years back.

Intimate partner violence leads to more debt

During an incident involving her ex, the phone was smashed. Annie was in hospital at the time and had assumed her family and social worker had taken care of all her bills, including the phone. Annie explained her situation to the lawyer, who was confident the debt could be disputed. *"This made me feel like I had a good leg to stand on."* The lawyer told Annie the debts with three lending agencies could be dealt with. For one, Annie thought she was signing up for an interest-free plan only, but was given a card with an excess amount. Annie's ex-partner accessed this without her consent and spent more than \$2000 on himself.

Safe environment appreciated

As an Indigenous woman, Annie appreciated the effort the services went to in making her welcome. *"I always felt safe in every way, including culturally. I noticed the artwork when I visited the services and that helped. It makes a difference."*

Annie's life has improved in many aspects, thanks to the legal help that resulted in almost \$20,000 of debt being wiped clean, and a large compensation payment being made. "It has given me a fresh start, I feel so empowered and it has changed my life. I am now employed and it has helped a lot with my mental health."*

Understanding helps Annie heal

Annie said the lawyer was "amazing" and always explained the options, but it was Annie's decision on how to proceed. *"I felt so comfortable and never felt embarrassed or judged, although it was hard to talk about. She also held space for me, gently and respectfully, to make the reports to police about the domestic violence and the abuse."*

Collaborative approach increases support

The IH lawyer also connected Annie with the UMFC financial counsellor, who was extremely accommodating with their assistance. *"They went above and beyond and helped with my budget."*

Invisible Hurdles - Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre, NESAY and AWAHS

	Clients	Financial disadvantage	Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander	FV indicator/ At Risk	Homeless/ At risk	Disability
Total	88	85	61	52	38	62
%		97	69	59	43	70

*not real name
Image: iStock/Getty Images

Tina's* experience is all too familiar: living with the trauma from severe domestic violence, homelessness as a result of the violence, financial hardship, fines piled up in her name, all while raising young children. And like many people living on the Border, Tina's life spreads across two states.



Through our cross border legal expertise - understanding NSW and Victorian systems and laws - our NSW family lawyer Erin Quilliam and generalist lawyer Raissa Butkowski unravelled the complexities Tina was facing. This helped Tina deal with some of the urgent issues, not the least, the loss of licence through offences her ex-partner committed.

After the terrifying experience, and with close to \$30,000 of debt hanging over her head, Tina is grateful for the legal help she received. **"I probably would've given up. I've copped everything else in my life, so I would've copped this on the chin. But I didn't have to do anything, they [lawyers] did everything for me."**

Partner link a quick path

Through our partnership with the WDVCS, Tina, an Indigenous woman, was linked with Erin in late 2021 for help with her legal problems. This partnership ensures victim survivors have easy access to free legal assistance when they need it.

Advice for domestic violence crucial

During the appointment with Erin, Tina outlined the physical assaults her ex-partner committed. After the latest serious assault, police had applied for an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO). After six months evading arrest, Tina's ex-partner ended up in custody to face criminal charges. Along with the advice on family law, Victims Services and the ADVO, Tina was

seeking to have her children full-time because she feared for their safety.

Fleeing home to family

On the night her ex-partner committed the serious assault, Tina escaped the house with her kids. She can't remember fleeing but made it to her mother's house. **"I left without my shoes on and never looked back."** Tina moved in with her mother, with her kids sharing rooms and sleeping on a mattress in the lounge room. But even if she could get her own place, which is extremely difficult in a competitive rental market, she still has multiple factors holding her back.

Fines a burden lifted

Tina returned for more legal advice in 2022. In talking to Erin, it became clear other legal problems needed fixing. These included traffic fines in Victoria totalling \$22,000. The sheer weight of the fines was something Tina didn't want to think about. **"I didn't even know where to start, so I wasn't going to worry about it and just cop it."** Tina had no energy to deal with the process but after speaking with Erin and our generalist lawyer, Raissa, she understood the legal options open to her. Raissa told Tina she could apply for the fines to be waived under the Victorian

Family Violence Scheme. Tina couldn't believe it. **"When she rang me I thought, 'My God is, that real?'"**

Licence loss hurts living on the Border

Tina's licence was suspended twice due to two high-range speeding fines her ex-partner committed. Without a licence, this loss of independence had a huge impact. **"I have a lot of things I need to do for my children in Victoria and I couldn't do them. Relying on other people like my mum to help, that's just not me."** Swift intervention from Raissa saw her licence fully restored within days, after the domestic violence situation was explained. Tina could hardly believe it happened, expecting a delay. **"They lifted it straight away, it all happened really quickly."**

Tolls lifted, electricity debt gone

After Raissa's advocacy to two toll companies, one waived \$2,583 and another nominated Tina's ex-partner for the toll fines, taking Tina's name off all toll fines accrued through their system. An unpaid electricity debt of almost \$5000 had progressed to a debt collector. Raissa wrote a letter requesting it be fully waived, confident it could be after speaking with the debt collector. The debt collector agreed and cleared the amount.

NSW Family Law and Family Violence – WDVCS and Women's Centre

	Clients	Financial disadvantage	Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander	FV indicator/ At Risk	Homeless/ At risk	Disability
Total	170	153	20	154	32	71
%		90	12	91	19	42

*not real name

Image: iStock/Getty Images

Our Services

NSW Family Law/ Family Violence Service

Partnering with the Women's Centre for Health & Wellbeing and the Womens Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Scheme (WDVCAS) allows domestic violence victim-survivors timely access to free legal assistance. Erin Quilliam stepped into the role to provide the critical comprehensive assistance victim-survivors need for a range of legal issues affecting their lives.

Victorian Family Violence Program

Since 2016 this partnership with the Centre Against Violence (CAV) has provided a pathway to legal assistance and ongoing casework for victim-survivors or women at-risk of experiencing family violence. The client-centred approach includes lawyers Jodie Wells and Kristi Pemmelaar working closely with CAV workers to ensure the best outcomes for our mutual clients. The early access to speak with a lawyer happens due to the close relationship between lawyers and CAV staff and the understanding of legal problems, and the family violence legal system and how it works.

Duty Lawyer Intervention Order Services

Our lawyers appear weekly in the Wodonga Magistrates' Court, fortnightly in the Wangaratta Magistrates' Court and on rotation in the Myrtleford Magistrates' Court. One of the family violence team's strengths is identifying multiple complex legal issues quickly. This expertise helps people appearing at court who are often dealing with many problems. The strong working relationship between HRCLS, the Courts, other legal practitioners and connected services helps clients get positive outcomes and help for other legal issues.

Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) Family Lawyer Service

For 15 years, the VLA-funded secondee lawyer role has been crucial for providing expert family law advice locally. This includes free legal advice for children's/property matters, and intervention orders. Lawyer Sarah Caplice returned to the role and picked up where she left off, with her strength in advocating for her clients in complex court matters pivotal in getting clients the outcomes they deserve.

Bushfire legal assistance

Across the year, lawyers Harley Dannatt, Shelley Alvarez and Lauren Lorenzo took on the bushfire legal recovery role to support people affected by the 2019-2020 bushfires. Regular visitors to Corryong in the Towong Shire and other bushfire-affected areas, the trio provided vital free legal assistance and support. Staying connected to disaster coordination and community response and recovery groups make them a strong part of the recovery effort. Lawyer Kristi Pemmelaar provides legal advice to victim-survivors arising from the bushfires.

Invisible Hurdles Program

Released in June 2022, the 'Going Deeper' - The Invisible Hurdles Stage III Research Evaluation Final Report highlighted how the innovative program has made impressive inroads since 2015. The partnership with Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre, AWAHS and NESAY was crucial in reaching the aims of the program, as it evolved from a project. IH team of Andrea Georgiou and Becky Smith built on their schedule of delivering community legal education and activities for staff, students and young people, and giving legal assistance across the three services. Taylor Stephens-Smith joined the Invisible Hurdles team when Becky went on maternity leave in late 2021. The Invisible Hurdles Program was made possible through funding from the

Victorian Legal Services Board Grant Program, Victorian State Government and the Commonwealth of Australia Attorney-General's Department.

NSW outreach

Despite interruptions due to COVID, NSW outreach lawyer Raissa Butkowski continued giving free legal advice at Intereach offices in Deniliquin and Corowa, Lavington Library and The Hub (Yes Unlimited) in Albury. Providing this face-to-face service for people who may be feeling vulnerable is an important part of helping them solve their legal problems.

Gateway Health Partnership

Health & Legal Outreach (HALO) remains an evolving Health Justice Partnership with Gateway Health. Additional support from Health Justice Australia was welcomed through its expertise, particularly around outcome measurement and evaluation, as the partnership entered its seventh year. With lawyers Deborah Fisher and Rachel Judd, while Tessa Mead was on maternity leave, connected to Gateway Health in Wodonga and Wangaratta, clients have an easy time being referred from the health service to the legal service when legal problems have been identified. Gateway Health and HRCLS were also invited to present to interested audiences about the success of HALO, and how the collaboration delivers positive outcomes in a safe, trusted environment where people also get comprehensive help for their health and social issues.

COVID legal assistance

With COVID lingering, lawyers Taylor Smith-Stephens and Helen Tselios continued to help people with legal problems in NSW and Victoria until funding for their clinics ceased. These positions were important for communities on the border as the ongoing impacts of lockdowns continued to affect people's lives.



Our voice for change

Advocacy to reform the laws, legal system and associated institutions our clients depend on for access to justice will always be an important aspect of our work. This also extends to education for our stakeholders when it becomes apparent this will help improve outcomes for our clients and we have achieved this through:

Family Violence Information Sessions

Our partners who work with victim-survivors were keen to better understand how police operate and respond to family violence incidents. With the opening of The Orange Door in Wangaratta in 2021, this was an ideal opportunity to hold information sessions with Victoria Police and local stakeholders. In November 2021 and April 2022, a session was held in Wangaratta and then Wodonga, where HRCLS was joined by local police and Centre Against Violence for a panel discussion around the role of police when called to a family violence incident, how a Family Violence Liaison Officer can apply for a family violence order, and how breaches of family violence orders are dealt with by police. A case study was also used to highlight the various actions and responses of the agencies.

Meetings with MPs

In June 2022, Acting Principal Lawyer Deborah Fisher and VIC Family Law & Family Violence Lawyer Jodie Wells met with Member for Northern Victoria Tania Maxwell to discuss issues the legal service had identified focusing on the continued growing demand to help victim-survivors, with the legal service being forced to turnaway potential local clients.

In November 2022 local Member for Indi Helen Haines visited HRCLS to

talk about the ongoing success of the Invisible Hurdles Program and the service in general.

Visit with Victorian Attorney General Jaclyn Symes

We had the most amazing opportunity to speak with the Attorney General about our work including disaster relief, integrated partnerships and family violence issues. We shared examples of the great work that has recently been undertaken. We also had the opportunity to discuss the lack of resources we experience, particularly in the regional family violence sector. In particular Jaclyn wanted HRCLS staff to know that she appreciated the work that was being done, and was sympathetic to the feeling that we had been left behind in certain areas e.g. not having a specialist FV court, early resolution services, FASS, Lighthouse projects etc. This was a lovely acknowledgement and one we wanted to share with you all. She was also impressed by the level of passion that we all bring to our work and to the outcomes being achieved.

Advocacy

- Signed statement – Everybody's Home – Housing for Women's Safety
- Joint call for NSW Government to adopt nationally consistent definition of domestic abuse that includes coercive and controlling behaviour – Member for Albury Justin Clancy
- NSW Government responded positively to calls from the sector for the Stolen Generations Reparations Scheme to be extended. HRCLS and Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS) wrote a joint letter to the NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Benjamin Franklin, calling for a 12-month extension.

- 
- Healthy Homes for Renters campaign – Better Renting

Open letters signed

- Call for NSW Government to revoke incorrectly issued COVID-19 penalty notices
- Call for action from Federal Treasurer re Aboriginal Community Benefit Fund collapse
- Call to Federal Treasurer for increased investment in affordable housing
- Call for stronger consumer protections for BNPL products
- Call for NSW Attorney General to address additional barriers for victim-survivors to access counselling and lack of transparency and accountability of Victims Services

Advocacy for youth

- Youth Voice in Parliament – topics sent to Member for Indi Dr Helen Haines

Submissions

- National Plan to end violence against women and children
- Housing issues, complexities of renting public housing on the border – Victorian Ombudsman
- Social Housing Regulation Review (Victoria)
- Joint submission to Australian Banking Association Code Review
- Joint submission – Federation of CLCs Victims experience of criminal summary proceedings
- Joint submission - ACMA consultation draft 'Consumer vulnerability: expectations for the telecommunications industry'

Above: Wangaratta Police joined HRCLS for the Wangaratta Police Information Session in November 2021 at the Wangaratta Performing Arts Centre.
Above Right: Left to right: Acting Manager Ashlie Barclay, Attorney General Jaclyn Symes and Acting Principal Lawyers Deborah Fisher and Alison Maher.

Financial Statement

HRCLS is grateful for the significant funding received in 2021-22 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 2021-22 financial year.

Source	Purpose	Breakdown	Total
Victoria Legal Aid	Attorney-General's Department (Commonwealth)	Generalist	\$537,742
		Family Law and/or Family Violence	\$102,255
		NLAP Mental Health	\$227,690
	Victorian State Government	Generalist	\$232,372
		Family Violence	\$69,079
		Community Legal Centres Family Violence & Assistance	\$155,616
		Bushfire Recovery Victoria	\$600,000
		SACS ERO - State	\$78,267
Legal Aid NSW	Attorney-General's Department (Commonwealth)	Family Law/Family Violence (NSW)	\$189,613
		NLAP Women's	\$307,367
		NLAP Mental Health	\$308,791
	NSW State Government	Cooperative Legal Service Delivery	\$28,770
	NSW State Government & Public Purpose Fund (PPF)	NSW Outreach (Pool 1)	\$187,576
Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner	Invisible Hurdles	\$100,000	\$100,000
Department of Justice & Community Safety	ISF/HJP – Invisible Hurdles	\$102,500	\$102,500
Helen Macpherson Smith Trust	Amplify project	\$30,000	\$30,000
Black Summer Bushfire Recovery (Cth – Dept of Industry, Science, Energy & Resources)	Bushfire Support	\$298,236	\$298,236
TOTAL FUNDING			\$3,555,874

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 2021-22 received funding from the Australian Government, VIC Government, Department of Justice & Community Safety through the Community Legal Centres Program administered by Victoria Legal Aid, Victorian Legal Services Board, NSW Government and the Public Purpose Fund through the Community Legal Centres Program administered by Legal Aid NSW, & Helen Macpherson Smith Trust. ABN 99 081 624 768 Reg No: A5357 ARBN 081 624 768