

Strategic. Targeted. Responsive.
A celebration and reflection

UMFC Board

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Director of Operations
Melinda Carlyle,
Director of Care and Legal Services
Kath Karin,
Director of Child and Family Services

HRCLS is a service of Upper
Murray Family Care (UMFC).
UMFC is our community's
leading place-based community
service organisation for children,
young people and families.



'Bunmabunmarra' 2018 by artist Dan
Bundadhaany Clegg of the Wiradhuri Nation

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



Acknowledgement of Country

Hume Riverina Community Legal Service (HRCLS) acknowledges the traditional custodians and Elders past and present, who have raised children, taught them about the world around them and gave them the gift of culture and language. We recognise our part in bringing fairness to our Indigenous brothers and sisters and creating a community where all children, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, can 'grow up strong'.

Statement of Reconciliation

HRCLS acknowledges:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first owners of this land. Their cultures and human rights suffered after colonisation.
- The important connection to the land that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples feel and how it flows with deep respect through their distinct cultures, languages, customs, arts and laws, as part of Australia's heritage and identity.
- The right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination, to fair participation in the community and just access to resources and services.
- The positive and unique contributions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that have been made to Australia and its communities.
- The role our service will play in reconciliation and commitment to engage with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Acknowledgements

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photographed by Edwina Wyatt
Back cover: Flowering wattle on Lake Hume
photographed by Edwina Wyatt

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HRCLS Leadership Team, Ashlie Barclay, Sarah Rodgers, Felicity Williams, Debi Fisher and Alison Maher



Felicity Williams, Sarah Rodgers, Gaye Pattison ABC Goulburn Murray, and Victorian Chief Magistrate Justice Lisa Hannan at the annual Law Week Breakfast



Felicity Williams hosting UMFC 2023 AGM

CEO Report: Felicity Williams, UMFC

In 2023-24 Hume Riverina Community Legal Service (HRCLS) **worked with intention to create lasting change** for communities across North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW.

The strengthening of strategic health justice partnerships enabled targeted legal assistance to reach people in our region who are most in need to address health harming legal problems that can cluster for people experiencing disadvantage, with a particular focus on people experiencing family violence and poor mental health.

HRCLS provided legal assistance, community education, and advocacy to disrupt the cycle of disadvantage and improve access to justice across our region. Critical services for communities experiencing:

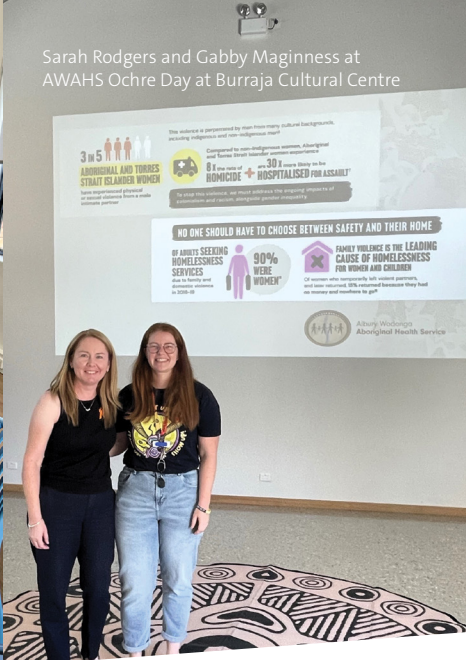
- greater frequency and severity of natural disasters
- high rates of family violence
- a higher incidence of mental health conditions than the Victorian and New South Wales state averages
- growing rates of homelessness

The work undertaken by HRCLS in 2023-24 to assist, support and amplify the voices of people who have experienced barriers to justice, within the communities of our region, and beyond, is something to celebrate. My highlights during this time have included:

- attending the Health Justice Australia conference with representatives from HRCLS and Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service

- hearing Chief Magistrate of Victoria, Justice Lisa Hannan, encouraging us to think bigger when it comes to the democratic right of access to justice by setting excellence as a goal
- listening to the lived experience of a client who faced ongoing family violence, and the impact access to holistic legal assistance from HRCLS, through the partnership with Centre Against Violence, made to her life, and that of her children

I acknowledge and celebrate the continued strength and support HRCLS provides, and I support the ongoing advocacy and campaigns for improving fairness in our communities so that people experiencing vulnerability before the law can have access to justice. HRCLS is embedded within our communities and place and contributes to ensuring social justice for all.



Manager & Principal Lawyer Report: Sarah Rodgers, HRCLS

In 2023-24 Hume Riverina Community Legal Service (HRCLS) was **strategic**, **targeted**, and **responsive** to community. In line with [Our Strategy 2020-2025](#), HRCLS continued to provide services to those most in need.

We have invested in legal services for children and young people, and their families through the dedicated youth and family violence program, Invisible Hurdles, to reach young people experiencing disadvantage and legal problems. We expanded our health justice partnership with Gateway Health to include headspace. And we extended community legal education to a larger network of young people including those connected with Borinya Wangaratta Community Partnership, Junction Support Services, and young people in Bright, Myrtleford, and Rutherglen.

We have advanced a comprehensive response to family violence by providing legal assistance to victim survivors and people at risk of family violence during a time where family

violence has been identified as a “national crisis”. This has been done through partnerships with Centre Against Violence and Gateway Health in Victoria, Women’s Centre for Health and Wellbeing and Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service in New South Wales, as well as through the Invisible Hurdles Program for young people.

We have grown our service capacity in key areas of legal need experienced in our region by further developing our community development and partnership approach. Our commitment to working collaboratively in partnership was taken to the next level this year with a whole of service partnership development program with Health Justice Australia and the implementation of a partnership champions group and a partnership leadership group to ensure that the principles of collaboration are deeply embedded within our organisation. It is seen in the further deepening of the health justice partnerships with Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service and Gateway Health addressing the complex legal needs

of those with poor mental health. It is also seen in the way we were able to extend the Bushfire Recovery Project to be more broadly disaster focused following the 2022-23 flood event affecting our region. We were able to build our own capacity to assist in specialised areas of law by continuing to work with specialist community legal centres and to support their law reform activities with statistics and client stories from our region.

I thank UMFC for their ongoing, unwavering support of HRCLS as one of their service arms, and I thank the HRCLS Team. It is the care and dedication of the operations staff, community engagement workers, and lawyers, that creates change for people, their families, and communities, across our region.

The role of community legal centres in regional communities has never been more important. Legal need is growing and exceeding capacity, and it is with clear strategic objectives that the HRCLS Team will continue to create lasting change.

Debi Fisher, Ashlie Barclay,
Sarah Rodgers, Felicity Williams,
Catherine Coish and Alison Maher



Donuts with Lawyers
Event with Karlee Hirt



Centre Against Violence Fun Run Team,
Felicity, Kristi, Jodie, Ali, Meaghan

Vision

A society where all people enjoy equality of opportunity and have equal access to the law.

Purpose

We help people:

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

Values

As a service of UMFC we uphold and share their values.

Unwavering integrity

- Through our commitment to ensuring the child's voice is paramount, we ignite self-worth. We do the right thing, not just the easy thing.

Passionately optimistic

- Ever evolving within our communities, we are visionary, inspiring and future focused, and we support hope and cultural safety.

Considered empathy

- Recognising the importance of the individual and that they are the experts in their own lives, we are honest, compassionate, kind and caring as we listen, and strive to understand.

Bravely collaborative

- We are genuinely engaged and bring our whole self to 'the table', engaging with communities and stakeholders as well as individuals through connected and courageous leadership.

Determined advocacy

- We advocate every day for our children, young people, individuals and families within our communities. To do this, we ensure dignity, deeply listen, and seek to provide individualised, culturally appropriate and adaptive responses.



Partnerships

In 2023-24 HRCLS has provided holistic assistance to people in our communities who are most in need in partnerships with:

- Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS)
- Centre Against Violence (CAV)
- Gateway Health
- North East Support and Action for Youth (NESAY)
- Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre
- Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Centre (WDVCAS)
- Women's Centre for Health and Wellbeing
- YES Unlimited

HRCLS acknowledges the support of:

- Federation of Community Legal Centres
- Community Legal Centres New South Wales
- Community Legal Centres Australia
- Greater Albury Cooperative Legal Service Delivery Partnership
- Health Justice Australia

HRCLS thanks local lawyers in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of New South Wales, the North East Law Association and the Albury and District Law Society. We also thank pro bono partner Clayton Utz, as well as Justice Connect, Hall & Wilcox, Maddocks, Minter Ellison, Gilbert + Tobin, and Berill & Watson for their pro bono support.

HRCLS Team

Sarah Rodgers, Manager
and Principal Lawyer

Ashlie Barclay, Manager Operations

Debi Fisher, Managing
Lawyer – Generalist Law

Alison Maher, Managing
Lawyer – Family Law

Sara Reid, Senior Lawyer

Jodie Wells, Senior Lawyer

Tracey Walker, Senior
Administration Assistant

Raissa Butkowski, Lawyer

Liz Collins, Lawyer

Emilia Darougheh, Lawyer

Meaghan Frazer,
Administration Officer

Felicity Hartridge, Law Reform
and Communications Coordinator

Karlee Hirt, Lawyer

Debbie Ireland, Lawyer

Asha Jones, Legal
Administration Trainee

Rachel Judd, Lawyer

Sarah Lefevre, Lawyer

Gabby Maginness, Lawyer

Tessa Mead, Lawyer

Amanda Meagher, Lawyer

Shyleen Mkhwananzi, Lawyer

Anthony Nguyen, Community
Engagement Worker

Kristi Pemmelaar, Lawyer

Erin Quilliam, Lawyer

Colette Quin, Community
Development and CLSD
Coordinator

Becky Smith, Lawyer

Taylor Smith-Stephens, Lawyer

Mike Tran, Lawyer

Amy Warner, Paralegal

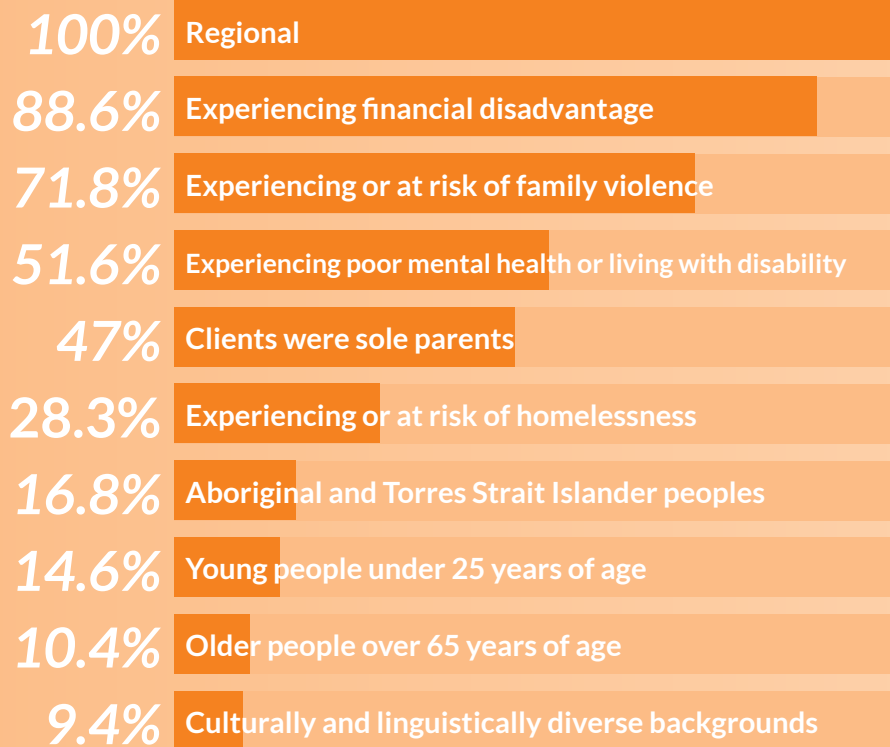
Arlinda Wentworth,
Administration Officer

David Whitehouse, Lawyer

Edwina Wyatt, Community
Engagement Worker

2023-24 Impact Report

1338 clients received legal assistance

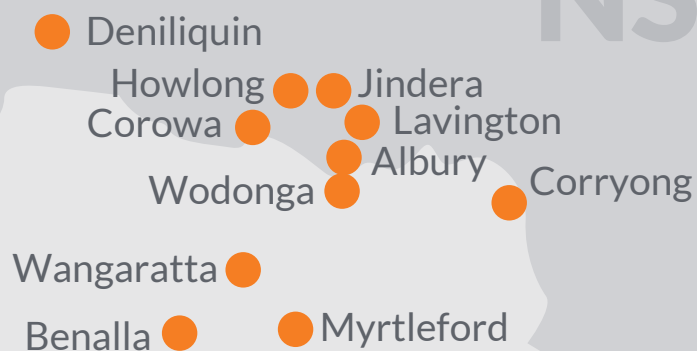


1795 people were turned away due to service capacity and eligibility, and assisted with referrals

46.8% of all legal assistance was for **family violence**

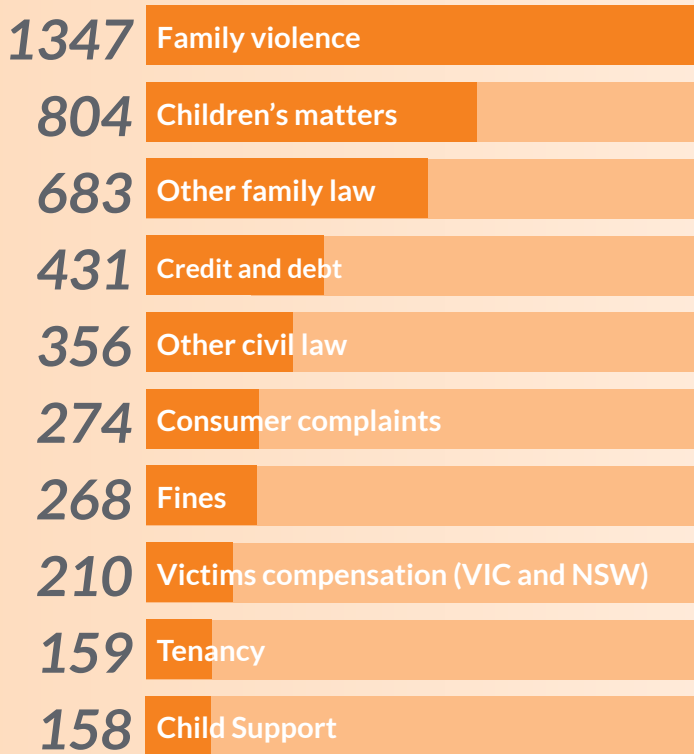
Most common client locations:

26,500 kilometres travelled providing assistance in a cross-border region spanning 8.2 million hectares



Strategic. Targeted. Responsive.

Most common problem types:



HRCLS delivers legal assistance through **7 integrated practice models and health justice partnerships** providing effective, holistic, and timely support.

59 community legal education sessions held

\$25,311

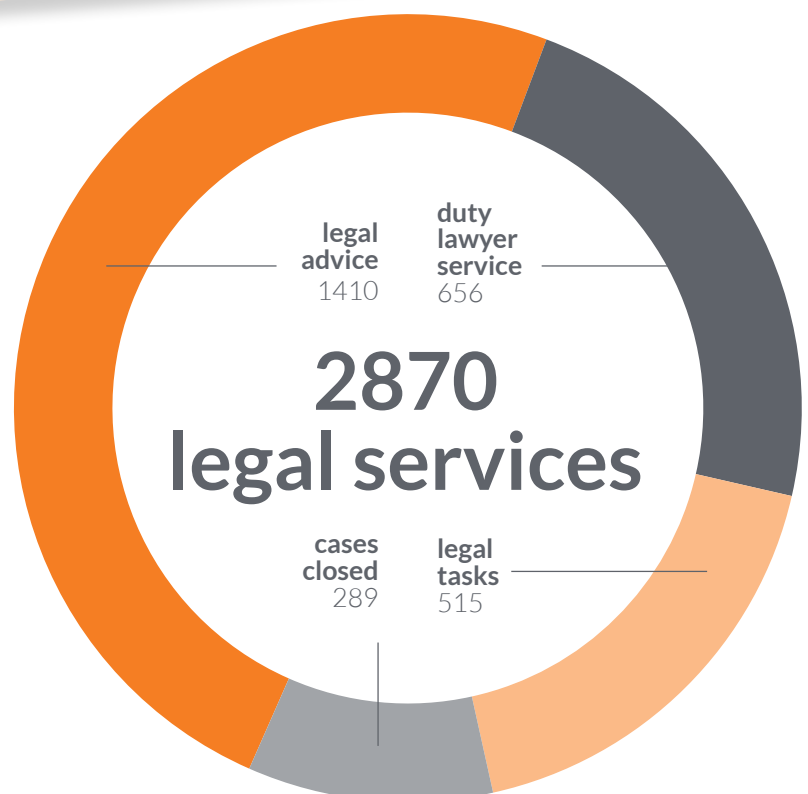
Compensation gained for clients, including consumer compensation and insurance

\$75,387.90 Fines

withdrawn, for reasons such as family violence, mental health/disability, and incorrect nomination

\$513,768.67 Debts

reviewed, waived, withdrawn due to family violence, irresponsible lending and financial hardship



NSW Service Delivery

"The HRCLS team is so friendly, it was easy to listen to the presentation and we felt very welcome. Information helps bridge the gap between Vic/NSW processes." HRCLS partner following a community legal education session on child protection.

Responsive to community need, HRCLS has continued to develop the NSW Service Delivery Program providing generalist legal services, and family law services to people experiencing, and at risk of, family violence across the Southern Riverina.

In Deniliquin and Corowa we have continued to work with Intereach to provide face-to-face generalist legal services to reach people most in need and we have developed and strengthened relationships with Yes Unlimited in Albury.

Family law and family violence services were provided at Albury, Corowa, Finley and Deniliquin through strategic health

justice partnerships with Women's Centre for Health and Wellbeing and Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCAS).

The community development approach, walking alongside victim survivors of family violence in these regional towns has strengthened the embedded legal assistance provided in HRCLS' partnerships with Women's and WDVCAS.

The provision of bespoke place-based community legal education to service partners building capability within communities to identify legal problems and pathways to justice has been a key part of the NSW Service Delivery Program.

"I believe it's important to always think about how difficult it would be to disclose such personal and intimate details about your life to a strange lawyer, more often than not, on the first meeting. It must take a lot of trust for people to do this! I know I probably speak for all of us, but what we do is an honour and I'm very grateful for the opportunity that HRCLS gives me every day to make a difference in people's lives."
HRCLS lawyer

Family Violence Partnership

"I just wanted to say thank you so much for everything that you have done for me. Your efforts...have provided me with a sense of relief and the belief that I will eventually be able to overcome my mental health issues. I have thought for a long time that I would never be able to be a productive member of society again. I now believe that perhaps that is a possibility."

HRCLS client who received assistance for family violence and family law.

Identified as the number one justice issue in Victoria today, family violence is a **strategic** focus area of HRCLS.

Beginning as a pilot project in 2016, an integrated family violence health justice partnership with Centre Against Violence (CAV) was developed to address the crisis in family violence impacting our region.

In 2023-24 an [independent evaluation and review](#) celebrated the success of this partnership

and found that it provides people experiencing family violence greater access to justice enabling health harming legal problems to be addressed and resolved.


Through this partnership HRCLS provides legal assistance to victim survivors and people at risk of family violence in trusted surrounds, as well as capacity building secondary consultations and legal education in 'bite sized law' presentations to CAV family violence practitioners. Additionally, and critical to making

lasting change, HRCLS and CAV have together advocated for the reform of systemic issues affecting victim survivors in our region. This advocacy has led to Victoria Legal Aid planning to establish a presence in North East Victoria.

Legal assistance changes outcomes for victim survivors and plays a crucial role in ending family violence in our communities.

"Thank you so, so, much for all your help and support throughout this long process. I'm so relieved it's finally all over and I can focus on building a healthier, happy future for my babies and myself without fear."

HRCLS client who received assistance for family violence and family law.



"My daughter is no longer living in a state of fear and the nightmares have stopped."

HRCLS client, Renata*

Renata and her daughter migrated to Australia in 2015 to live permanently with Renata's partner, the father of her daughter.

Within a short period of time Renata and her daughter began to experience significant family violence perpetrated by Renata's partner. Renata was regularly physically assaulted, threatened with murder, and was not allowed to leave the house. Her daughter also experienced this violence.

Renata felt trapped in Australia, English is her second language, and she was reliant on a partner visa.

In late 2020, Renata reached out to a friend and told her of the violence. Her friend contacted Police, and this led to a referral to the Centre Against Violence (CAV). Renata's CAV case manager subsequently referred Renata to HRCLS for legal assistance.

Over four years HRCLS provided legal assistance to Renata including:

- consultation with CAV staff in relation to safety and other relevant matters
- duty lawyer appearances at the Magistrates' Court in intervention order proceedings where Renata and her daughter were the affected family members
- referral to Victims Assistance Program
- applications for victims of crime compensation for an award to assist Renata and her daughter in their recovery
- divorce application and appearance
- Family Law Parenting Orders for sole parental responsibility and relocation to safety. Renata's ex-partner applied to the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia for parenting orders to spend time with daughter. HRCLS represented Renata in response and she was granted sole parental responsibility

- reporting breaches of the IVO and parenting orders to NSW Police
- referral to Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service upon relocation to NSW

The court process for parenting orders was particularly difficult for Renata, she was unable to move or travel until her ex-partner consented or Orders were made. In the meantime, she was monitored by her ex-partner and lived in fear. HRCLS were able to listen to her fears and work with CAV to make sure that the risks were managed.

Being unique in providing cross-border services and having cross-border partnerships, HRCLS was able to support Renata and ensure the continuation of wrap around services upon her relocation.

*Not her real name

Invisible Hurdles

Overcoming Invisible Hurdles for Justice for Young People has been removing barriers for young people affected by family violence for almost ten years.

Creating better outcomes for young people has been a strategic focus area of HRCLS and this four-way integrated partnership with Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS), North East Support and Action for Youth (NESAY), and Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre has been central to achieving this. The embedded evaluation and reflective practice of this program ensures that there is continual refinement and

adaptation to increase reach, build capacity, engagement, empowerment and to give young people from our region a voice.

Early intervention is known to be critical in addressing the legal problems experienced by young people. Invisible Hurdles does this by being accessible where young people are, by the provision of innovative, engaging and co-designed legal education, and by supporting young people to advocate for themselves.

In 2023-24 Invisible Hurdles lawyers have assisted young people obtain personal identification documents, obtain IVOs, deal with fines and debts, and make regulatory complaints. The young people have also undertaken family violence/IVO,

consent, housing, employment and consumer law workshops, visited local courts as well as HRCLS offices, and engaged with local lawyers, police and property managers.

"The education program... has made a significant impact at improving the lives of our students. We can see real, tangible benefits for the vulnerable students they work with here at Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre. Our students understanding their rights and how to access legal help is greatly beneficial."

HRCLS partner organisation

Bagaraybang Bagaraybang Mayinygalang (BBM)

To target services to those most in need HRCLS partners with AWAHS offering legal support to Aboriginal peoples in North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of NSW. The focus of this health justice partnership is to empower community and alleviate the stresses of legal problems to improve social and emotional wellbeing.

BBM assists Aboriginal peoples in our region to overcome barriers to justice with a focus on improving their mental health and wellbeing in a culturally safe manner. It targets services to disrupt the clustering

"Thank you for all your help with everything, you have no idea how good it felt to have someone trying to help me and fight on my behalf for something which I believe should be a right and not a luxury..... that is the right to live safely and peacefully in stable affordable accommodation." HRCLS client

of everyday legal problems that are disproportionately experienced by people vulnerable to disadvantage including poor mental health.

This program uses the same evaluation methodology as Invisible Hurdles and the [second research and impact evaluation report](#) of BBM undertaken this year found the partnership is making inroads in

addressing entrenched inequalities facing Aboriginal peoples of this region. The report found the legal support offered in the partnership has created a ripple effect of knowledge sharing and increasing empowerment.

Report author Dr Liz Curran credited BBM as "an inspiring model of service delivery".

Disaster Recovery Program

In the aftermath of the 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires that directly impacted the Towong and Alpine Shires, HRCLS established a responsive, community development project to provide free legal information, advice, and assistance to affected people and communities.

This project became a broader disaster program following the flood events of 2022-23.

"Legal issues after a disaster play out over a long time, long after most services have left. People in the communities want to turn to a service with local knowledge and relationships. It takes time to build trust with communities. HRCLS' relationships with local service providers and local knowledge was key to making the bushfire recovery work successful."

HRCLS client

An [independent evaluation](#) of this program this year found that this program has been innovative in establishing tiered partnerships to provide wrap-around support to disaster affected communities. The first with local community organisations including Neighbourhood Houses, enabling HRCLS to build trust in communities. The second with service agencies Gateway Health, CAV, and UMFC Financial Counselling, to reach people most in need and provide holistic support.

And the third tier with specialist community legal centres including Consumer Action Law Centre, Social Security Rights Victoria and Tenants Victoria, as well as Disaster Legal Help and Justice Connect, to ensure the best possible legal assistance was provided to each client.

This work has shone a light on the importance of local community connections, presence, and trusted relationships in disaster response and recovery.

"I truly appreciate all your time, effort and legal expertise. I've been blessed to have you by my side during a very challenging time."

HRCLS client, Joan*



Joan is an Aboriginal woman living in an isolated regional community that has been impacted by natural disaster. She is dependent on social security payments and has found the increasing cost of living pressures difficult.

Joan was referred to HRCLS by a community partner of our Disaster Recovery Program. She initially sought advice for a consumer complaint and a Centrelink issue, and in working on these problems Joan shared she was a victim survivor of family violence.

HRCLS supported Joan through the intervention order process and in an application for victims of crime compensation.

A short time later Joan contacted HRCLS about bills she was receiving from a credit company she had no knowledge of. Joan had been sold solar panels by a door-to-door salesperson who signed her up to a buy-now-pay-later loan, without her consent.

HRCLS raised a complaint about breaches of Australian consumer law by the solar company and negotiated a debt waiver with the buy-now-pay-later company on the basis she had

not consented to the loan. The loan amount was over \$10,000.

The sale of solar panels with buy-now-pay-later loans to vulnerable people has been identified as a systemic issue and HRCLS is continuing to work with Consumer Action Law Centre on further regulatory action against the solar company.

It is now widely acknowledged that legal problems can cluster for people experiencing multiple and intersecting disadvantage. For Joan, connecting with HRCLS enabled these problems to be uncovered and resolved.

*Not her real name

Holistic Assistance and Legal Outreach (HALO)

HRCLS' Holistic Assistance and Legal Outreach (HALO) health justice partnership with Gateway Health has continued to reach and support people experiencing poor mental health in North East Victoria.

Enabling **targeted, holistic care**, this program directly addresses data showing that people with poor mental health are twice as likely to experience legal problems, and more likely to experience multiple problems.

HRCLS lawyers attend Gateway Health in Wodonga, Wangaratta

and Myrtleford, headspace, and the Wangaratta Therapeutic Community residential rehabilitation program. Lawyers work collaboratively with doctors, counsellors, family violence workers, disaster recovery case managers and other health staff to provide targeted assistance. Lawyers deal with a broad range of legal problems, alongside the health/social issues faced, whether by addressing the burden of financial abuse for victim survivors or assisting clients in the Alcohol and Other Drug Programs to complete the program debt and fine free. HALO is a client centred program

providing wrap around support to people at their most vulnerable to make lasting change.

"You guys are amazing, it's nice to have this kind of support. As I'm sure it is for hundreds who don't know till they need it. Truly grateful."

HRCLS client who received advice and assistance on intervention orders, parenting, fines, debts and tenancy.

"This is such an amazing weight off my shoulders I appreciate the work and effort you have put into this thank you so much. It truly is so great to have this happen for me to move forward... during a very challenging time." HRCLS client Alyx*



Alyx had faced significant challenges with family violence, poor mental health, and alcohol and other drug dependence. She reached out to Gateway Health for help and entered Wangaratta Therapeutic Community (WTC). With her case worker Alyx completed a legal health check and was referred to HRCLS.

HRCLS provided Alyx with legal assistance for a number of everyday legal problems including debts related to two consumer leases. HRCLS referred Alyx to UMFC Financial Counselling who were able to support her over a three-year period. They

assisted Alyx with access to utility grants to manage outstanding debts, skills to help her better understand her financial standing, and information about programs that could assist her such as the No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS). While working with UMFC Financial Counselling to resolve debt issues she received further legal advice from HRCLS on child protection, parenting, and tenancy repairs.

HRCLS had worked with Gateway Health to advocate for their registration as a Work and Development Permit Sponsor, this meant that Alyx could 'work off' her fines through her treatment program at WTC.

Upon completion of her program Alyx left WTC but still had some fines outstanding. UMFC Financial Counselling referred her back to HRCLS for further legal advice. HRCLS applied for a write-off of these fines due to the successful completion of her treatment program. A family violence application was also lodged for several fines she had incurred while experiencing family violence. In total, Alyx was able to resolve over \$25,000 of debts and fines because of her commitment to recovery and the ongoing wrap around support provided by WTC, UMFC Financial Counselling and HRCLS. Alyx was able to move forward with improved mental health and wellbeing, financial empowerment, and the fresh start she needed.



HRCLS Duty Lawyers with Justice Lisa Hannan and Magistrate Peter Dunn

"Thanks so much... It is honestly so amazing to have someone understand the complexity of this situation. Thanks again for your time and support today at Court. I really appreciate it."

Victim survivor affected family member at Wangaratta Magistrates' Court.

Duty Lawyer Service

HRCLS provides **trauma informed** duty lawyer services in Victorian Magistrates' Courts at Wangaratta, Myrtleford and Wodonga. A majority of these services are provided to victim survivors as applicants and affected family members.

In 2023-24 HRCLS lawyers appeared 656 times as duty lawyers.

Attending Court on what for many clients may be their first interaction with the legal system, overlayed with the experience or risk of family violence, can be the most overwhelming day in a client's

life. HRCLS duty lawyers use legal knowledge and skill, with a collegial approach to the Courts and Police, and a trauma informed lens to provide legal support at this critical time.

Clients in North East Victoria do not have access to a Specialist Family Violence Court, nor do they receive the resources available in the Specialist Courts. Our clients do not receive the support of applicant and respondent workers, nor funded pre-court engagement services. HRCLS is continuing to campaign for better support services for clients experiencing family violence in North East Victoria.

Intake and Operations

Continued **intentional** development and refinement of intake processes and operations is enhancing HRCLS capacity to respond to client need and meet **strategic priorities**.

In 2023-24 HRCLS migrated to a new client management system Actionstep, supporting client management and critical data capture for ongoing evaluation and development of the service.

The Operations Team expanded to support greater efficiency in legal

services and a Trainee position was successfully introduced. Similarly, the team of Community Engagement Workers increased through broad recognition of the benefit of non-legal roles in effective and efficient service delivery and stakeholder management.

In an environment of ever-changing resourcing levels, delivery models, and community need, HRCLS intake and operations adapt to enable the delivery of legal assistance to people in our community most in need.



"Building trust and being present in community are key strengths of community engagement workers that are vital to breaking down barriers."

HRCLS lawyer



Law Reform and Advocacy

HRCLS is part of a movement for change. We advocate for children, young people, individuals, and families to remove barriers to justice. We actively listen to our communities, particularly our local Aboriginal communities, we work with them and our partners to advocate for change.

It is our aim to remove systemic barriers to justice and improve fairness in our legal system for cross-border communities in our region.

In 2023 HRCLS made a submission to the Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership agreement, commissioned by the Federal Government highlighting the benefit of health justice partnerships, and the barriers to justice experienced by regional communities with particular focus on cross-border complexity. Independent Reviewer Dr Warren Mundy referred to HRCLS' Invisible Hurdles program in his final report, using this program to reference the impact fragmented and time-limited funding can have on effective service delivery.

HRCLS also contributed to the submissions of community legal centre peak bodies to this review on climate justice and disaster recovery and the unique challenges of regional communities.

More broadly, in 2023-24 HRCLS has:

- supported Consumer Action Law Centre's efforts to strengthen protections in the Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code Review and Australian Banking Association's Banking Code and worked with them on their Lemon Car campaign
- contributed to Federation of Community Legal Centres (FCLC) submissions to the Victorian Government's work in developing a strategy to end family violence
- participated in Tenants' Union of New South Wales campaign to end 'no grounds' evictions
- provided direct information to Victoria's Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission special report into Police perpetrated family violence
- contributed to FCLC and Law and Justice Foundation of NSW research on climate justice and disaster response
- advocated for change to the New South Wales Work and Development Order system
- Worked with Economic Abuse Reference Group and Revenue New South Wales to improve the fines system for victim survivors of family violence



"I really hope it helps everyone :)"

HRCLS client who provided her story to an advocacy submission to make change to end 'no grounds' evictions in New South Wales

- raised systemic issues with the Victorian Ombudsman regarding nomination issues for fines
- provided information to the Magistrates' Court of Victoria on ways to improve accessibility



Family Law Team at Insight Therapies

R U OK Day Mungabareena event



Tenants Vic

Reflections for the Future

“At the community level, people prefer to speak to a lawyer face to face, and they want to speak to a local. HRCLS is one of our best outreach services. They know the community, they are flexible, extremely responsive and connected with our community and other services.”

HRCLS partner organisation

HRCLS is committed to working collaboratively to achieve impact and creating change for communities experiencing barriers to justice in our region.

Having worked strategically to achieve the focus areas set out in Our Strategy 2020-2025, we are now focused on the future.

Place-based community legal centres are critical in providing both responsive and strategic services to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for people experiencing disadvantage in accessing justice.

Building trust in communities through a community development, partnership approach and amplifying the voices of lived experience has never been more important as our region grapples with the increasing frequency of natural disasters, growing rates of family violence, mental health conditions and homelessness.

Access to critical, early, and targeted legal assistance can provide solutions to the everyday legal problems that compound for people experiencing disadvantage and contribute to poor health and wellbeing outcomes.

HRCLS looks forward to receiving adequate and secure funding to continue providing strategic, targeted, and responsive legal assistance to people most in need in communities across North East Victoria and the Southern Riverina of New South Wales as we move into our 25th year of service.

Financial Statement

HRCLS acknowledges funding from the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety, Victoria Legal Aid, the New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice, Legal Aid New South Wales, and the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.

This funding has provided people with access to justice.

Administrator	Purpose	Breakdown	Total
Victoria Legal Aid	Attorney-General's Department (Commonwealth)	Generalist	\$473,553
		Family Law and/or Family Violence	\$185,809
		NLAP Mental Health	\$234,521
	Victorian State Government	Generalist	\$237,020
		Family Violence	\$ 70,461
		Community Legal Centres Family Violence & Assistance	\$155,616
		SACS ERO - State	\$150,000
		Flood Support	\$79,832
		Family Lawyer	\$112,351
Legal Aid NSW	Attorney-General's Department (Commonwealth)	Family Law/Family Violence (NSW)	\$198,904
		NLAP Women's	\$315,000
		NLAP Mental Health	\$319,777
	NSW State Government	Cooperative Legal Service Delivery	\$36,190
	NSW State Government & Public Purpose Fund (PPF)	NSW Outreach (Pool 1)	\$205,546
Department of Justice & Community Safety	ISF/HJP – Invisible Hurdles	\$307,750	\$305,125
Black Summer Bushfire Recovery (Cth – Dept of Industry, Science, Energy & Resources)	Bushfire Support	\$149,118	\$ 149,118
TOTAL FUNDING			\$3,457,261

This financial statement is a summary statement of income consistent with externally audited financial statements that are available by contacting UMFC on 02 6055 8000

'Oh my god, you have no idea how good the timing is, you're exactly who I need!'

Victim survivor of family violence in Finley speaking to HRCLS lawyer

'I truly appreciate all your time, effort and legal expertise. I've been blessed to have you by my side during a very challenging time.'

HRCLS victim survivor client

"...my family and I will always be very much thanking you and the team at Hume Riverina Community Legal for being there every month at a court appearance, talking to me on the phone when I felt lost or upset, standing at my side meeting with the police but always just asking how I'm doing or feeling making sure I am okay and showing genuine feeling like it was their own life they were fighting for. Thank you!"

HRCLS client who received assistance for victims of crime compensation, intervention orders and tenancy matters

"I have had so many staff come and tell me how wonderful and insightful your info session was that you provided today around IVO's... it is rare that several staff will come and proactively seek me out to tell me how amazing a session was. Great work to you and all your team."

Partner organisation

'HRCLS has restored my faith in local services. I've wondered for so long if there was anyone who could help me. I hope other people don't give up because this help can change a person's entire life.'

HRCLS client in Deniliquin

'Non-legal staff such as Community Engagement Workers provide the support that enables holistic legal assistance.'

HRCLS lawyer

'If it had not been for your help my life would very, very different today... To have this service available to the community is vital...'

HRCLS CAV partnership client

'The team at HRCLS is exceptional at relationship building.' ... 'People don't need hundreds of organisations. They need the locally led approach of CLCs on the ground. They need to be the first point of contact. The CLCs in rural areas are on the ground and responding to the long tail of disasters. They are also the coordinators and facilitators of access to specialist advice.'

HRCLS Disaster Recovery Program partner



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