

Western NSW Community Legal Centre



2018-19 ANNUAL REPORT

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Western NSW Community
Legal Centre Inc.
1800 655 927



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Western NSW Community Legal Centre Inc and Western Women's Legal Support acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which our work premises is based, the Tubba-Gah people of the Wiradjuri Nation, and pay our respect to their elders past and present. We also acknowledge the traditional owners of different country across which we travel to conduct our outreach services and also pay our respect to their elders past and present.

Western NSW Community Legal Centre is funded by the Federal Attorney General's Department, NSW State Government, Legal Aid NSW and NSW Public Purpose Funds.

INTRODUCTION

Access to expert assistance with legal problems has direct benefits for both individuals and communities. Support to resolve legal problems contributes positively to a person's health and wellbeing, and their ability to manage other challenges in their lives.

The Western NSW Community Legal Centre Inc., (WNSWCLC) provides legal advice, referral and representation for the people of the western region of New South Wales in a confidential, accessible and safe environment.

WNSWCLC's primary objective is to promote access to legal services for the community in general and, in particular, to members of society experiencing disadvantage.

The centre also carries out research and prepares reports and submissions to assist the process of law reform. In addition, the centre strives to develop and provide legal education to all communities, both pro-actively and re-actively.

The 2018-19 Annual Report outlines the activity undertaken during the past year. The report provides operational summaries and progress in terms of our Annual Plan. Staff case studies illustrate the variety of activity undertaken during the year and outline the impact our work has had on the people we serve.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Management Committee of Western NSW Community Legal Centre Inc. comprises members who are interested in justice issues and the welfare of people experiencing disadvantage. The committee's role is to oversee the planning, policy-making, reporting and accountability of the centre.

Members of the Management Committee contribute a diverse range of skills and experience to the governance of the centre. These include financial management, law, community services, education, human resources management, research and marketing.



Lyn Penson
SECRETARY



Loris Hutchins
CHAIRPERSON



Brian Goodlet
TREASURER



Eric Wilson
ORDINARY MEMBER



Louise Norton
ORDINARY MEMBER



Helen Pigram
ORDINARY MEMBER

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

On behalf of the Western NSW Community Legal Centre Management Committee I am delighted to present the 2018-19 Annual Report. The report highlights our achievements and reviews our progress against our annual goals.

We have now been operating out of two venues for a full 12 months. Our generalist centre has been operating for many years and continues to provide an important service to the communities of western NSW. Western Women's Legal Support has built on the success of the previous year and continues to receive consistently high referral numbers. We were pleased to learn that this pilot program will be funded on a continued basis. The high demand for this service evidences the need for assistance to women, and their children, experiencing domestic violence.

The past year was not without challenges with funding uncertainty contributing to staff turnover. It is sad to lose staff under these circumstances, especially given the difficulties recruiting to rural areas. We can only hope that the new Commonwealth National Partnership Agreement will bring an environment of funding stability.

Despite the challenges we delivered a range of high quality services during the year. New non legal roles enabled us to forge even stronger relationships in the remote communities we serve. These support roles expanded our ability to provide community legal education and develop strong and safe referral pathways for the people in our vast catchment area.

We maintained our focus on continual improvement with outstanding progress towards completing our Accreditation Improvement Plan. Efficiencies have been



gained in terms of system improvements and ensuring structures are in place to support staff in the important work that they do.

The Management Committee's aim is to provide the best possible governance to the organisation and I thank my fellow committee members for their commitment to this purpose.

I would also like to thank our local and regional partners as well as the law firms who contribute their time and resources to the centre. We are particularly grateful to Ashurst Solicitors and Gilbert and Tobin, who support our generalist team and domestic violence unit. These partnerships provide critical support to our teams enabling us to maximise the assistance we can provide to the community.

The Management Committee is also thankful to our staff who, in an environment of change, have continued to provide high quality legal and non-legal services, community legal education and law reform activities.

OUR VISION

The Western NSW Community Legal Centre Inc. has a vision for a fair society based on equality and justice. A society based on these principles:

- Values people's full participation in a community that promotes the individual's right to make informed decisions about their own lives and their community;
- Involves all people as equals without discrimination due to gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual preference, age or religious beliefs;
- Guarantees quality of life and ensures that every person has access to, and a fair share of the economic, social and cultural resources of the community.

**“To provide an
accessible
professional legal
service, responsive
to the needs of
those experiencing
the most
disadvantage.”**

- Our Mission -

OUR REGION

Western NSW Community Legal Centre Inc. services the local government areas of Dubbo Regional Council, Gilgandra Shire, Warrumbungle Shire, Mid-Western Shire, Coonamble Shire, Walgett Shire, Bogan Shire and Bourke Shire.

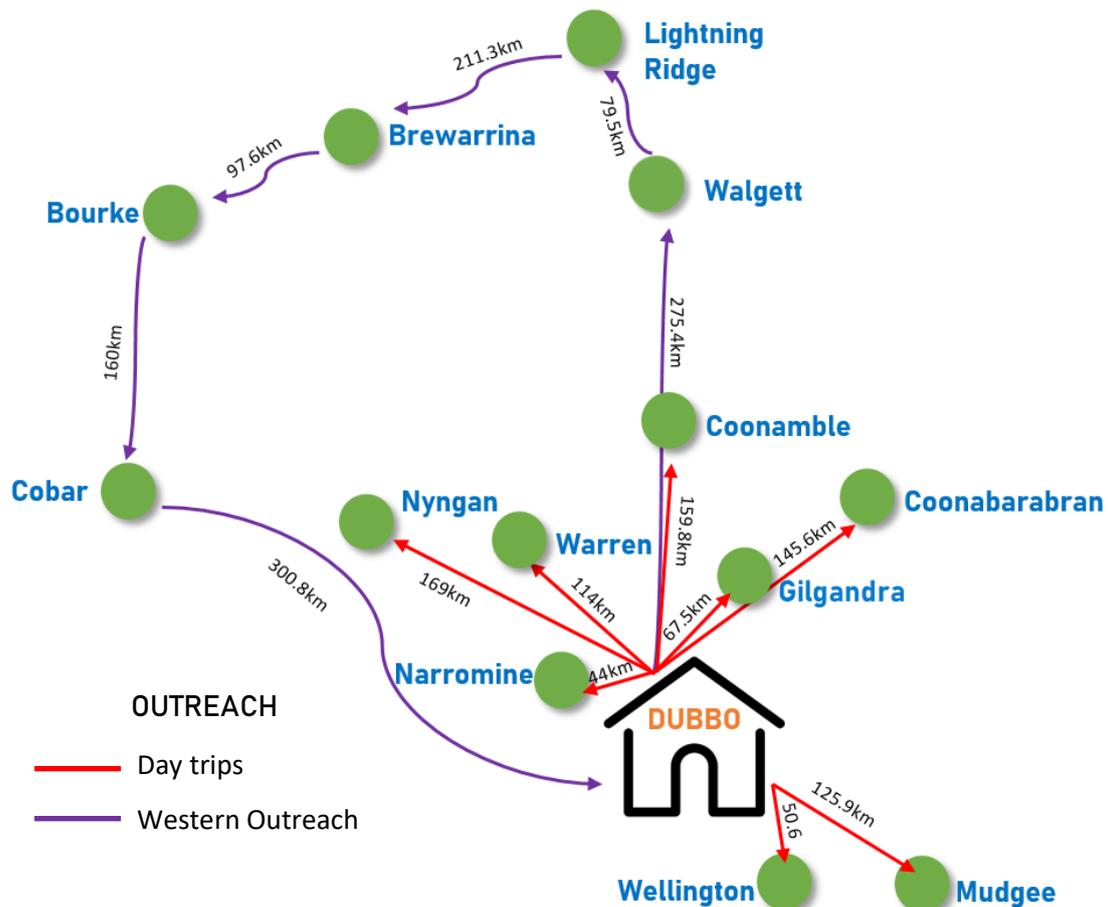
According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the catchment area has a population of 138,470.

Compared to NSW, this catchment region has a relatively higher proportion of people aged over 15 who are likely to need assistance from a community legal

centre if they experienced a legal problem.

The area also has a higher population of children and young people aged up to 24 years, disengaged youth, people with a lower level of educational attainment and single parents.

Conversely, compared to NSW, this catchment region has a relatively lower proportion of culturally and linguistically diverse people, people with poor English proficiency and people experiencing homelessness (Law and Justice Foundation of NSW "Evidence of Legal Need in NSW" September 2018).



OUR SERVICES

The Western NSW Community Legal Centre Inc. commenced operations in September 1996. The long-term goal of the Centre is to ensure that people of the Orana and western regions of NSW have a clearer understanding of the legal system and are better able to access it to resolve their legal problems.

The service offers free legal information, advice, assistance and advocacy. The most common areas of law in which the service assists are Family Law, Domestic Violence, Child Support, Child Protection, Credit and Debt, Discrimination, Victim Compensation, AVO's, Social Security and Employment.

Services are provided through a range of mediums including phone advice

appointments, outreach legal advice clinics, face-to-face appointments and community legal education workshops.

Our service also participates in our local Coordinated Legal Service Delivery group and networks to undertake community development and law reform activities.

In addition to the centre's generalist legal service, Western Women's Legal Support provides a holistic specialist domestic violence service to women experiencing, or at risk of, domestic violence. Together, solicitors and caseworkers assist women to address legal and non-legal issues impacting on their wellbeing and safety.

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2018–2019 STAFF

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Lianne Davids

GENERALIST SOLICITOR

Emma Johnson

CARE PARTNER SOLICITOR

Lucy Armstrong

VOLUNTEER SOLICITOR

Stuart McKinnon

BOOKKEEPER

Tina Wheatley/ Jacqui Yeo

RECEPTIONIST

Janaya Carney

PRINCIPAL SOLICITOR

Patrick O’Callaghan

GENERALIST SOLICITOR

Tara-Jane Torrisi

FAMILY LAW/FAMILY VIOLENCE SOLICITOR

Julia Adamski

COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION WORKER

Tayla Gillespie

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Kathy Stone

Western Women’s Legal Support

SENIOR SOLICITOR

Rachael Robertson

SOLICITOR

Amy Schneider

CASEWORKER

Sue Turner

CASEWORKER

Mary Davenport/ Wanita Gibbs

ABORIGINAL SUPPORT WORKER

Mellissa Shennan

RECEPTIONIST

Kate Jackson



Mellissa, Janaya, Wanita & Tayla

EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

The past year brought significant challenges for our organisation. As a result of the Cameron Review of Community Legal Centres we were involved in a tender process that ultimately saw a reduction of funding for our service. In addition, our Care Partner Program funding ceased. The tender process required significant time and resources with funding uncertainty impacting on staff efficiencies.

Despite this, I am pleased that our service met its operational goals for the year, continued to build stakeholder relationships and provided quality service to our clients.

In collaboration with stakeholders, we continued to work with, and for, client groups and communities most in need. Working strategically with other organisations assisted us to help as many people experiencing disadvantage as we could.

Creating and maintaining partnerships with local organisations is an important part of promoting the centre's service. We continued to enjoy strong relationships with other services both locally and in our outreach locations. I am thankful to the stakeholders that host our outreach clinics and partner with us in projects and events.

During the year, our service focused on improving links with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and groups. With the creation of two new roles we were able to spend time



developing relationships in Dubbo and throughout the region.

Staff attended various network meetings, promoted our service and maintained referral pathways. Our centre was represented at various events, providing information to communities and creating networks and relationships with other organisations. Our attendance at these, and other events throughout the year, provided opportunities for staff to engage with people, and discuss how we can best meet the legal needs of our community.

The devastating effects of drought on the community can't be ignored. Social and economic impacts have a trickledown effect on mental health and wellbeing for some of our staff, clients and stakeholders.

Staff support and wellbeing is important to the centre. During the year an enhanced staff supervision program continued with a focus on staff

wellbeing and maintaining a positive workplace culture.

Western Women's Legal Support increased its presence during the year. The service continued to receive a high number of referrals and worked with stakeholders to ensure the delivery of high quality, wrap-around service to the community. I am delighted that the service's hard work has been rewarded with the program's funding extended for another three years.

Our service continued working within a continuous quality framework, nearing completion of our Accreditation Improvement Plan. Administrative changes, as a result of the National Accreditation scheme, have provided support for staff to carry out the important work that they do. The year also included much needed equipment replacement and a long overdue website upgrade.

I wish to thank staff for the work that they continue to carry out. Their work is demanding and, without their commitment and compassion, the centre would not be able to deliver its services to the people in our communities who are in the greatest need.

I look forward to continuing the work we are doing to develop a strong, innovative and resourceful organisation. I thank our Management Committee for providing quality governance and support to achieve this goal.

Without the combined efforts of staff, management and our many stakeholders we would not be able to provide the high quality assistance to people in our communities who most need our help.

LIANNE DAVIDS

PRINCIPAL SOLICITOR'S REPORT

It was as disappointing to lose funding from the state government during the year given the high levels of outreach support that we provide across our region to people experiencing very high levels of isolation, disadvantage and vulnerability. We will continue to advocate to have funding levels increased for the crucial work that we do for our clients.

Our domestic violence unit, Western Women's Legal Support, has been extremely busy assisting women across the region. We have seen the need for the service to continue rising throughout the year and we expect it to get even busier in the year ahead.

Striving for social justice and advocating for change to laws and government policies that have greatest adverse impact on those experiencing disadvantage continue to be at the heart of what we do. A simple, yet critical concept when working in rural, regional and remote areas, is to be accessible via face to face contact.

It is difficult, and unfair, to expect people to share sensitive personal information (often of a traumatic nature) if you do not make the effort to meet with them in person and in their community.

Accordingly, the legal practice conducts monthly outreach trips across the central west and north-west regions of the state. In doing this we have been providing advices and casework



assistance to individuals, conducting Community Legal Education (CLE) to community groups and identifying systemic issues that help inform law reform projects.

I thank Ashurst for their ongoing pro bono legal support for the centre and our clients. We continue to foster and develop a great working partnership.

Finally, thank you to everyone who contributes to making the centre a valuable and productive organisation: our Management Committee, staff, volunteers, community organisations who offer so much support; and most importantly our clients, who place their faith and trust in our fantastic staff to join them in the fight for justice.

I look forward to working together in the year ahead with everyone across our vast region.

PATRICK O'CALLAGHAN

Across the year the centre has conducted:

2,924

advices

3,659

legal tasks

85

casework services

30

community legal education events

28

law reform submissions

227

stakeholder engagement activities

SENIOR SOLICITOR'S REPORT

Over the last 12 months, Western Women's Legal Support continued to respond to the legal and support needs of women experiencing or at risk of family violence. From the women supported, it is evident that the integration of caseworkers in the legal service makes us not only a unique service, but provides us with the opportunity to engage with women to achieve outcomes that would otherwise be unattainable.

Clients are provided with support through legal advice, risk assessment, safety planning, information, referrals, advocacy, case work services and outreach support. Our "one stop shop" approach and use of soft referrals to other local support services, minimises the need for clients to have to re-tell their stories multiple times, reducing the likelihood of re-traumatisation.

Our team has developed strong working relationships with government and non-government services. We support and encourage the ideal of working collaboratively to achieve better outcomes for our clients and continue to develop improved referral pathways with local services to ensure a seamless service is provided to victims of domestic and family violence.

Our strong working relationships are evidenced by the large number of referrals received each month. Our main referral source continues to be



WDVCAS. WDVCAS is the first service to establish contact with all female victims of domestic violence after incidents are reported to Police and therefore essential we maintain and continue our closing working relationship.

We continued our presence and membership on both the Dubbo and Wellington Domestic Violence Prevention Collectives. Staff attend monthly meetings and continue to support and participate in local events.

Our Aboriginal Support Worker and DV Caseworker are on the executive of the Dubbo Koori Interagency Network and were heavily involved in coordinating local NAIDOC day events.

The Aboriginal Support Worker role has evolved this year into being a much more hands on position allowing us to provide a safe and culturally appropriate service through face to face and telephone support to Aboriginal victims of domestic and family violence.

One of our major challenges this year has been the large number of referrals we receive and finding ways to ensure everyone receives a service in a timely fashion. This continues to highlight the importance of working with other services to ensure women and children effected by domestic violence receive appropriate, specialised and timely support.

I would like to say a special thank you to the local DV services with whom we have a close working relationship. We cannot do our work effectively in isolation. The other DV services, specifically WDVCAS and Dubbo Neighbourhood Centre DV counsellors are integral in supporting us to provide an excellent service to clients. A sincere thank you to all the local services who worked with us throughout this year, whose cooperation and support is greatly appreciated.

I sincerely wish to thank the WWLS team who work tirelessly to improve the lives of women and children impacted by domestic and family violence. The extraordinary work highlighted in this report is a tribute to the outstanding efforts of the team who work tirelessly to provide clients with support while they access the justice system to seek protection. Their ongoing commitment to both the organisation and our clients ensures we are able to continue provide an excellent and much needed service.

I would like to extend a genuine thank you to the rest of the WNSWCLC staff

and the Management Committee for their continued commitment in supporting the work we do. Furthermore, I acknowledge all the women and children who have allowed us to be part of their journey. I continue to be amazed by their courage and determination in often very difficult circumstances.

RACHAEL ROBERTSON

CASE STUDY, July 2018

Temporary visa adds to family's hardship

Life Down Under has finally turned the corner for Cora who has lived in Australia on a temporary visa since 2012. After a military coup in her homeland, Cora's family were taken in by Sydney-based in-laws where she endured abuse from her increasingly possessive and controlling husband. He spent money recklessly but restricted her access to finances. He was often angry and emotionally abusive which spilled into physical violence. Seven years ago her two teenaged children travelled to the US with their grandparents and she has not seen them since.*

Cora and her four-year-old Australian-born son moved to Dubbo in 2017 to live with her aunt and uncle. But despite a land management degree and fluent English skills, Cora could only find insecure casual and part-time cleaning work. At the time of our first interview, Cora had just moved into a rented home with her son. They had little furniture and no local contacts. Her family's application for a protection visa was refused only a month earlier and her current visa was close to expiring. On top of that, past mistreatment by her husband's family, and fear of the cultural "grapevine," left Cora wary of connecting with others from her home country. She was ineligible for Centrelink assistance because of her visa status and her unpredictable work schedule made it difficult to develop social contacts and keep appointments.

Her case underscores the vulnerability of people on temporary visas and the need for service flexibility when dealing with casual workers at the mercy of last minute roster



Sue Turner, Caseworker WWLS

changes. Western Women's Legal Support immediately put Cora in contact with an immigration legal service in Sydney and local support networks.

OUTCOME: *Vinnies fixed Cora up with white goods, furniture items, clothing and food. Other charities provided help with medical costs and utility bills. Cora was overwhelmed by the friendliness of locals and seems determined to make Dubbo her forever home.*

* Not her real name

CASE STUDY, January 2019

Thinking outside the box

Regular exercise is a vital component of good mental health. That certainly proved the case for one client.

Roslyn lived most of her life on the coast before relocating to the region last year with her new husband. She soon found herself living out of town on a property, adrift from her usual supports. Her husband worked long hours and she was left to clean the house, feed the animals, run errands and care for a large family, including two children with disabilities. Her partner's own teenaged children were disrespectful, refusing to help around the house. When her husband was home he rarely involved himself with parenting.*

Before long Roslyn felt overwhelmed. She was struggling with the day-to-day demands and suffered bouts of stress-induced hospitalisation. She wanted to rent out her coastal home for personal income but at the time of her appointment with WWLS she was completely dependent on her husband for money. A victim of physical violence in her previous relationship, she didn't equate her current circumstances with abuse.

WWLS helped her apply for Centrelink and connect with domestic violence counselling through the Dubbo Neighbourhood Centre.



Wanita Gibbs, Caseworker WWLS

OUTCOME: *Exercise was a big stress reliever for Roslyn in the past but as a low income earner she found it near impossible to access gyms or fitness classes. The breakthrough arrived in the form of donated memberships and vouchers to local gyms. With this help, Roslyn was able to participate in physical exercise, reconnect with the world outside her home, reduce her stress levels and better manage her mental health.*

* Not her real name

2018-19 ACHIEVEMENTS

Operational summary

During 2018-19 our centre delivered quality legal services for individuals and communities in western NSW. The centre worked towards the goals of its Community Legal Services Program (CLSP) and the Western Women’s Legal Support Plan.

Our strategic goals included strengthening our work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, increasing our work in the family/domestic violence area and reaching people who are geographically isolated.

The following pages provide a holistic overview of strategic goals followed by our achievements against our 2018-19 Annual Plan.

Strengthen our work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Our goal: Increase (generalist services) legal advices and legal tasks provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from 35% (2017-18) to 40% during 2018-19.

Our 2018-19 strategies: Creation of an Aboriginal Support Worker role, developing connections with Indigenous community organisations, enhancing referrals from Indigenous services and further promotion of our centre as a culturally safe service.

How did we go?	
Target	Achieved
40%	37%

Increase networks and develop referral pathways with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in our remote outreach areas.

Our goal: Increase our connections by establishing a regular community development activity in at least one location.

Our 2018-19 strategies:

How did we go?	
Target	Achieved
Establish a community development activity in an identified location	Apollo House activity attend on a fortnightly basis

2018-19 ACHIEVEMENTS

Assist people experiencing, or at risk of, family/ domestic violence

Our goal: Increase the number of advices provided by our generalist service to people experiencing, or at risk of, family and domestic violence from 20% to 25%.

Our 2018-19 strategies: We have strengthened connections with family violence organisations, increasing referrals from existing relationships.

Staff attended events, maintained membership of domestic violence prevention committees and conducted targeted community legal education.

We employed an Aboriginal Support Worker to provide non-legal assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

How did we go?	
Target	Achieved
25%	28%

Provide community legal education sessions specifically aimed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Our goal: Develop and deliver two community legal education sessions in our outreach towns.

Our 2018-19 strategies: We employed a Community Legal Education worker to develop relationships, gather information on legal needs and deliver community legal education.

How did we go?	
Target	Achieved
2	2

Provide assistance to communities in remote locations

Our goal: Increase frequency of visits to our outreach locations.

Our 2018-19 strategies: During 2018-19 our generalist centre joined forces with Western Women’s Legal Support, increasing the frequency of our outreach visits to Cobar, Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett, Lightning Ridge and Coonamble.

How did we go?	
Target	Achieved
20 visits	24 visits

CASE STUDY, December 2018

DV clients suffer housing insecurity

Chantelle was withdrawn and anxious when first referred to our domestic violence service by the Western Aboriginal Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service (WATAAS). Over an informal chat and coffee, a rapport was built and she felt comfortable sharing her plight.*

Chantelle was burdened by rental arrears in excess of \$5,000 which were accrued during periods of domestic violence when she and her six children were forced to flee their home to escape an abusive partner. They often found haven in motels and stayed there until it was safe to return home.

The matter went before the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal and orders were made to pay the outstanding debt in six weeks or face eviction, and the risk of homelessness. There was also increasing fears for the family's safety over Christmas and urgent assistance was organised to install security cameras, window locks, electricity meter locks and sensor lights.

As feared, Chantelle's partner breached the ADVO during the holiday period. Despite this, the housing provider would not relocate the family until the arrears were paid. Our client's problems didn't end there. She had an electricity bill in excess of \$4,500 and an urgent suspension notice of her car licence for an unpaid fine. We assisted in lifting the suspension, waiving the unpaid fine and freezing the electricity account payments in order to prioritise the rental arrears crisis.



Mellissa Shennan, Aboriginal Support Worker

In addition, Chantelle was assisted in accessing her superannuation and obtaining a NAB DV Assistance Grant.

Supporting letters were sent to WATAAS to advocate for financial assistance from local and surrounding services. Working with our client and WATAAS the rental arrears were paid off and the family achieved some semblance of housing security.

OUTCOME: *Chantelle still has pending legal issues and continues to work with our service. She is actively seeking work and is engaged in pre-employment programs. Her dream is to provide support and guidance to other women and families experiencing domestic violence.*

* Not her real name

2018-19 ACHIEVEMENTS

Provide an effective legal advice, referral and casework service which alleviates the effects of isolation in accessing the legal system.

Our service addressed physical isolation by providing outreach to a vast area of western NSW. We increased our visits to communities that are physically isolated as well as transport disadvantaged. Face to face appointments were conducted at locations convenient to the community.

The centre also undertook a community engagement strategy with the aim of strengthening relationships in our outreach towns to create safe referral pathways to our service.

Seven solicitors, two non-legal caseworkers, an Aboriginal Support worker and a

Community Legal Education worker provided services across the region.

Community legal education is an important strategy for alleviating the effects of isolation in accessing the legal system. This includes assisting people to understand their rights and navigate the justice system.

The Centre provided a range of community legal education sessions including Clontarf Academy, Dubbo Delroy College and Wellington supported playgroup. Family Law sessions were also presented in conjunction with Interrelate.

The centre built on the established outreach relationships, servicing the following locations:

Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar, Walgett, Lightning Ridge, Mudgee, Wellington, Coonabarabran, Gilgandra, Warren, Nyngan, Coonamble and Wellington, Macquarie and Yetta Dhinnakkal Correctional Centres.

2924

legal advices were provided

190

referrals were made

3659

legal tasks were carried out

451

clients were assisted via outreach appointments

30

community legal education sessions were provided

CASE STUDY, June 2019

Legal hurdles facing IT-challenged clients

Law type: Divorce

Jean is an elderly woman with deep religious convictions. Breaking free from an abusive marriage proved difficult due in large part to a new rule by the Federal Circuit Court (FCC) which required divorce applications to be filed online. This condition assumed everyone was able to access a computer and the internet, and had the skills to file documents online.*

Jean did not.

She resided with her husband in a small town outside Dubbo with limited opportunities to consult the FCC. A serious hip injury left her immobile and virtually housebound. She did not own, nor know how to operate a computer.

WNSWCLC originally tried to file Jean's divorce application in February 2018, however she was persuaded by her church to give the marriage another chance. With no letup in the physical and emotional violence, however, she returned to our office for help. This was a huge step for Jean and without the assistance of the centre she might not have proceeded.

The divorce was more complicated than most because the husband refused to leave the marital home and Jean didn't have enough money to find a rental. Additional affidavits were drafted to reflect that they were separated but living under the same roof.



Julia Adamski, Family Law Solicitor

This case raises important issues about the lack of support for clients who are isolated due to age, location, illness and, increasingly, IT challenges.

OUTCOME: *Since filing for divorce Jean has moved into a separate house and relinquished all responsibility over her abusive husband. Her divorce was finalised in July, 2019.*

*Not her real name

Julia was employed by WNSWCLC in February 2018. In November 2019 she took a position with Hunter Community Legal Centre.

2018-19 ACHIEVEMENTS

Facilitate access to the legal system for the most disadvantaged groups

The centre's service delivery ensured that priority groups were assisted. A high proportion of our service was provided to women and an increase of services were provided to Indigenous people throughout the year. Regular engagement with community groups assisted us to access hard to reach members of the community.

Women, and their children, experiencing domestic violence were assisted through our specialist service; Western Women's Legal Support. Our generalist service also provided family law/family violence assistance to people needing assistance with a range of issues.

The employment of an Aboriginal Support Worker and a Community Legal Education Worker enabled us to spend time developing quality relationships with the natural leaders in the communities we visit. These newly established roles provided practical support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access our service.

Our Aboriginal Community Legal Education Worker also facilitated a program that assisted people experiencing disadvantage to obtain free birth certificates.

Many of our clients have experienced Traumatic events with profound effects.

In order to build our clients' sense of safety, control and empowerment all staff participated in Trauma Informed Practice training during the year.

62%

services delivered to women

37%

services delivered to Indigenous people

37%

Generalist and 100% of specialist services delivered to people experiencing family violence

97%

clients were experiencing financial disadvantage

26%

services provided to people with a disability

28%

generalist and 4% of specialist services were provided to clients aged 65 & over

37

birth certificate applications made

CASE STUDY, May 2019

Unfair dismissal case

Law type: Employment

Meredith was employed as a nursing assistant at an aged care facility for three years. After working in the industry for seven years she had an unblemished employment record. That all changed one morning in the dementia wing. The facility was seriously under-staffed. One enrolled nurse and one registered nurse were required to cover the 80-bed facility. The kitchenhand was also unavailable, leaving Meredith and a colleague to feed residents in addition to their usual workload.*

The following shift made a range of allegations against Meredith including that one resident's pad was soaked, the bed was wet and there was urine on the floor. It was alleged that basic care was not provided and documentation not completed. The facility terminated Meredith's employment. It is important to note, accreditors had already placed sanctions on the facility due to the unacceptable staff to resident ratio. As a consequence the facility was unable to take in new residents for the next six months. The facility's operators were also mentioned in a media report on the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

We assisted our client to file a claim with the Fair Work Commission for unfair dismissal on the basis that the employer failed to provide Meredith with procedural fairness. She was given only a few hours' notice to attend the meeting, was unaware of the nature of the allegations prior to the meeting and was not given time to arrange a support person of her choice. The employer offered neither counselling nor training and Meredith was



Tara-Jane Torrisi, Generalist Solicitor

not afforded the opportunity to rectify her behaviour. At conciliation the facility was adamant they would not pay compensation due to the seriousness of the matter. The Conciliator also warned that Meredith may be subject to the Royal Commission inquiry which would tarnish her reputation. We pointed to the current sanctions in place at the facility due to understaffing and warned that further investigations were possible. We relied on case law regarding ambushing an employee and not providing an opportunity to respond to allegations.

OUTCOME: *The facility offered two weeks compensation. We proposed six, which was eventually accepted. In all, Meredith was out of work for seven weeks. After beginning the process fearful she would not get "one cent" this was a significant win. The financial stress and associated pressures were alleviated and Meredith could now focus on job seeking and her new employment path.*

* Not her real name

2018-19 ACHIEVEMENTS

Working collaboratively with stakeholders to promote awareness of legal issues and legal rights in the local community.

The centre enjoys strong relationships with other organisations. Regular networking ensures that we are able to reach people experiencing the most disadvantage in our communities. During 2018-19 our centre developed a streamlined communication strategy with organisations that generously host our outreach clinics.

Staff participated in interagencies and forums to promote the centre, identify areas of unmet legal need and law reform issues. We are active participants of the Dubbo, Narromine, Gilgandra and Wellington Interagency, Dubbo Koori Interagency Network and Domestic Violence Prevention committees.

We continued to deliver family law community legal education in collaboration with Interrelate. We also provided community legal education to organisations in order to develop their capacity to promote awareness of legal issues to their clients. The centre contributed to law and legal services reform. A number of submissions were made, in conjunction with stakeholders, during the year.

An important part of reaching people who are experiencing disadvantage is making contact with them 'in-place'. This is especially true for hard to reach clients. The centre participates in community

events to ensure direct communication with people who would not otherwise contact our service. This includes people who may need direct assistance as well as people who form part of our potential clients' network.

During 2018-19 we collaborated with stakeholders to host and attend NAIDOC, White Ribbon events, community fun days, Seniors Week events and a community drought event. Our collaborative work with other legal service providers included membership of the Collaborative Legal Service Delivery group and involvement in the Western Legal Road Show. Work commenced with local stakeholders in relation to making submissions on the impact of the drought on our clients. We also began conversations with local community groups and peak bodies to understand how we can make our community and services safer for LGBTIQ people.

227

Stakeholder engagement activities including:

Interagency meetings, agency information sessions, domestic violence prevention committees

Information stalls and community events:

Law Week, NAIDOC Narromine, NAIDOC Dubbo, Senior's Week, Fair Trade Community Day, Coonabarabran Community Day, White Ribbon Events

THE FRONTLINE



Janaya Carney, Receptionist

Going paperless

A minor revolution took place in the front office as bookings went paperless. The electronic-only calendar has led to greater efficiency and accuracy – a big plus for reception, the legal team and clients.

The old double system meant bookings were recorded on paper schedules and then highlighted online in the Outlook calendar. In addition to time-wasting efforts of typing up monthly schedules, running both booking systems side by side presented significant problems. Double bookings was one. Mix-ups with cancellations another. Coordinating outreach appointments between the CLC and DVU office was inefficient and often required calls back and forth to ascertain available spots.

The new CLC calendar went live mid-year, which proved a big success during a time of staff upheaval. A few weeks later a separate Outlook calendar was launched for WWLS. In both, available slots and bookings were clearly shown and colour-coded to indicate the staff member. The separate calendars can be viewed simultaneously maximising coordination between the two offices. All staff members across the organisation can view available appointments, bookings, outreach schedules and upcoming events. The electronic calendar also enables solicitors and caseworkers to take greater control of their appointments, check their availability and make their own bookings.

Intake is not entirely paperless. File numbers, advice sheets and CLASS numbers are still recorded on hard copy, but it's certainly a positive step forward.

Electronic Booking Verdict: It's a winner and so much easier.



Kate Jackson, Receptionist WWLS

2018-19 ACHIEVEMENTS

Provide quality management so as to support staff and ensure effective service delivery

Our Accreditation Improvement Plan was progressed during the year with numerous policies and procedures reviewed, updated and endorsed. Compliance with the national accreditation requirements has strengthened our service delivery by providing a continuous quality improvement framework.

During the year a staff learning and development strategy was commenced. This strategy will focus resources and respond to the individual professional development needs of staff in order to enhance service delivery.

Ensuring staff have the knowledge, skills and tools to recognise the early impacts of vicarious trauma is important to the centre. In order to support and promote wellbeing all staff participated in Managing Vicarious Trauma in the Legal and Justice Sector training.

The year also saw an equipment and technology upgrade with replacement of outdated computers and acquisition of audio visual conferencing equipment. The replacement of furniture and minor equipment has also improved office amenity.

In partnership with the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, our centre engaged a school based trainee. This

has provided staff with administrative support and contributes to the centre's succession plan.

We were also pleased to host the Rural Regional Remote (RRR) Roadshow. This event brought together RRR community legal centres to share and learn from each other. The Roadshow provided opportunities for staff to develop their sector skill and knowledge as well as focus on their personal wellbeing. As host of the event, our staff facilitated sessions, sharing their experiences and practice insights and celebrating their achievements.

97%

clients agreed that we listened to their legal problem

96%

clients agreed that our service helped them to understand how to deal with their legal problem

100%

clients agreed that they know where to get help if they have another legal problem in the future

ADMINISTRATION

Taming the G: Drive

The G: Drive is a shared drive that contains documents related to the day-to-day functioning and long-term planning of Western NSW Community Legal Centre Inc.

A shared drive should enable easy access to digitally stored information which is regularly backed up and recoverable in the event of a system failure. A properly formed G Drive assists existing and new staff easily navigate and locate files for a more productive workplace.

Over the years, however, the organisation's go-to-place for shared electronic files had become cumbersome and unmanageable. The maze of documents included duplicates in multiple locations and superseded files. Reining in the unwieldy drive was a major project on the administrative front in 2018/19.

Jelly beans were co-opted in the battle and proved a valuable unifier (and motivational tool) in an all-staff all-out assault on the bloated drive. Instead of being hit with a long list of documents when opening the G: Drive, users are



Kathy Stone, Admin Assistant

now directed along one of five paths: Administration, Executive, Finance, Governance, Services and Team. The system is designed to be intuitive and follows a three-tier folder system.

A directory was also created which, in addition to mapping the drive (where to find things), it sets out management of the G: Drive going forward to ensure it remains streamlined and easy to use.

TIMEBOOKS

Historically, staff have kept individual paper timebooks that are completed and submitted to the bookkeeper each pay period. During the year we developed a new electronic system that assists to streamline the process for staff.

With many of our staff working part time hours the manual system caused inconvenience for some staff. Changes in days or hours resulted in manual changes that allowed errors to be easily made. All of this impacted on the efficiency of the payroll process to pay staff correctly and on time.

After custom building the timesheet a trial period took place where bugs were ironed out. At the commencement of the new financial year, all staff moved to electronic recording and the manual time books are no longer being used.

Now located on the shared drive, staff have a central access point for their timesheets. This means they can complete their timesheets from anywhere and the potential for lost paperwork is eliminated.

Benefits of the new system include being able to make instant corrections, reducing payroll errors.



Jacqui Yeo, Bookkeeper

The new timesheets do the maths for staff, reducing calculation errors. Having a central access point increases data collection efficiency with records always available for payroll processing.

All agree that going electronic has been a positive move with the new system embraced by management and staff.

FOCUS ON RRR

RRR Roadshow does Dubbo

When the RRR Roadshow rolled into Dubbo for the first time in May (2019) it was all about making 'Connections'.

For an annual event that brings together Community Legal Centres from Rural, Regional and Remote communities the theme was apt. More than a dozen organisations took part in the two-day roadshow hosted by Western NSW Community Legal Centre (WNSWCLC)

Family Law specialist and co-MC, Julia Adamski, said it was an opportunity to relate on a number of levels, and not just professionally.

"It was inspiring to hear how others are connecting with their clients and the different ways they create meaningful and authentic relationships within their communities," Adamski said.

"Specialist organisations such as *knowmore* were able to share their experiences of clients with complex trauma, how that bleeds out into communities and how they're addressing that."

An out of town bushwalk and a cup of billy-boiled tea on a brisk country morning kicked off proceedings as participants connected with 'place' and the enduring legacy of the first Australians.

Creative strategies for self-care, trauma-informed practice, victims' services, welfare rights, new sentencing laws and the latest plans from Community Legal Centres NSW filled a diverse agenda.

WNSWCLC showcased the work being done in the State's west where incidents of family and domestic violence remain well above the average. Executive Officer Lianne Davids said the expansion of the Western Women's Legal



Connecting with 'place' at Terramungamine Reserve



Enjoying downtime at the Old Bank

Support service was a critical response to the region's need.

"I can give a snapshot of what's happening, but for people to see it for themselves and for the staff to bring their own passion to it was really important," Davids said.

Feedback over the two days was positive with an opportunity for participants to debrief over dinner at the Old Bank in Macquarie Street.

Davids added: "It's really nice for people to unwind and get to know each other in a social space. It makes it easier to pick up the phone and ask for help, ask a question."

Written for Verbals, Legal Aid News

CASE STUDY, March 2019

Safety risks underscore need for prompt action

Law type: ADVO

Alice, a young single mother from a small town, had an infant and was pregnant with another when she was violently attacked by her partner. The red marks on her neck were clearly visible when she arrived at the police station to report the incident.*

Police initially took out an ADVO for her protection but soon after the officer in charge urged Alice to withdraw the order, saying it would be unsuccessful. As part of his unsolicited family law advice, he advised Alice to drop her son off to her ex-partner and coerced her into signing a pre-prepared statement that she was no longer fearful of her partner and wanted the ADVO withdrawn.

Alice had never been involved with legal matters before. She relied on the officer's advice and signed the statement. Later she told the WWLS she remained extremely fearful of her partner. A local caseworker confirmed Alice's version of events and said she was with our client on occasions when the police officer called.

Before considering a formal complaint, the Law Enforcement Complaints Commission suggested I speak with the Station Inspector. Following negotiations it was agreed the female Domestic Violence Liaison Officer would take a fresh statement from Alice detailing the coercion. The Station Inspector reassured our office that the statement would be filed in court on the next occasion.

WWLS is mindful we have to work quickly. Had we seen this client a week later the results could have been devastating. The



Rachael Robertson, Senior Solicitor WWLS

case demonstrates the need for outreach services to these small towns and is a timely reminder we cannot always expect police to go into bat for our clients.

OUTCOME: *The matter proceeded to court and a final ADVO was made for two years protecting Alice and her son. We assisted Alice with making an application for Victims Support and with the financial support she was able to purchase new household items – such as a fridge, bedding and a washing machine and move out of her parents' house and into her own property. We also applied for rent assistance to cover her first 6 weeks rent.*

Since then Alice has had a baby boy (and called me to tell me two hours after his birth). She was reassured by the fact the ADVO was in place and that her violent partner was not able to be present at the birth or have access to the new baby without initiating Family Court proceedings.

* Not her real name

FOCUS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Across the year the DV unit conducted:

252

external referrals
(up from 178*)

1,089

legal tasks for clients
(up from 366*)

229

clients provided services
'discrete' & 'ongoing'
casework (up from 178*)

121

women received
assistance
(up from 102*)

751

legal advices
(up from 134)

* 2017-18 figures

testimonials

"Thank you sweetheart. You have been a rock for me. I have been to hell and back in the last 4 years and when I was with you everything was calm. You're a credit to your company and deserve credit where credit is due."

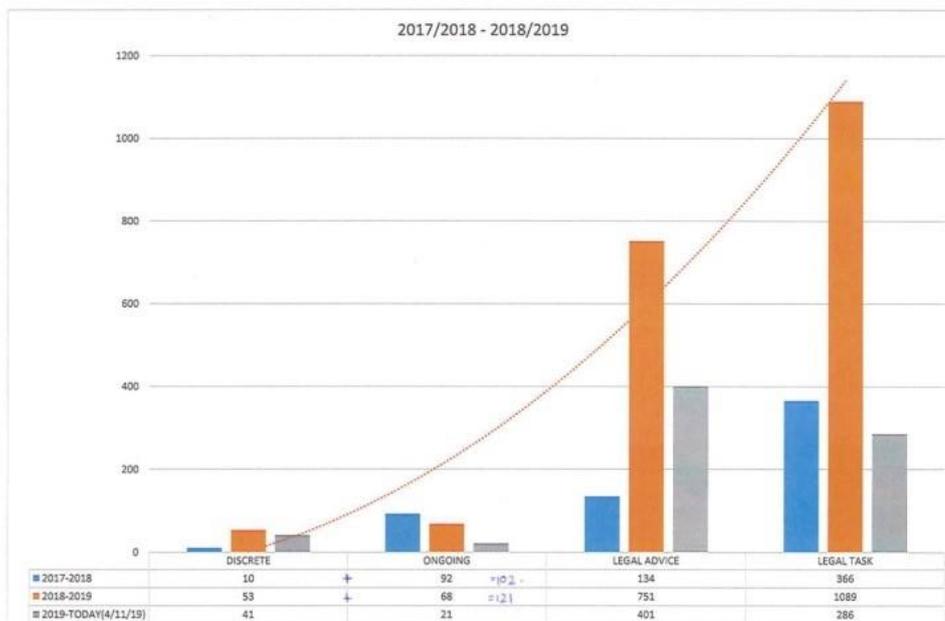
- CLIENT

"I want to take this opportunity to thank you all for the support you have shown. WWLS is a wonderful service with amazing staff providing awesome results. I think you guys are Brilliant!!!"

- WDV CAS (service provider)

"Thank you girls. A token of our appreciation to Western Women's Legal Support for the work you have done in supporting our clients."

- WATAAS (service provider)



FOCUS ON OUTREACH

2018-19 saw another year of very successful collaboration with the services who generously host our various outreach clinics. These partnerships allow us to continue to provide a service over a large geographical area.

Our 'road trips' included overnight and day visits to:

- Nyngan, Cobar, Bourke, Brewarrina, Lightning Ridge, Walgett, Coonamble.
- Yetta Dhinnakkal Correctional Centre
- Macquarie and Wellington Correctional Centres
- Wellington
- Gilgandra
- Warren
- Mudgee
- Coonabarabran

By travelling into these transport disadvantaged and geographically isolated areas we are reaching people who might not otherwise seek assistance.

During outreach visits we provided legal and non-legal assistance to clients and maintained relationships with organisations and other stakeholders.

We placed a high priority on strengthening community connection during our outreach visits.

Our newly developed outreach communication strategy streamlines the flow of information with our existing stakeholders. This has allowed space to further develop relationships with grass roots community groups.

57%

clients residing in outreach areas

118

clients assisted at Macquarie and Wellington Correctional centres

16

clients assisted at Brewarrina Yetta Dhinnakkal Correctional Centre

CASE STUDY, November 2018

Sexual assault reveals system's shortcomings

Law type: Victim's Compensation

The following case highlights systemic failures that women in remote communities routinely confront when attempting to access services and escape violence. In this instance not only did our client endure a traumatic event, she was also forced to leave her traditional country and family in order to flee the perpetrator.

Carly, a young Aboriginal woman, was sexually assaulted by a relative in one of our remote outreach communities. The matter went to court and the perpetrator was found not guilty. At times, Carly felt like she was on trial as she was said to be drunk at the time of the incident and therefore her evidence unreliable.*

It was only part of the ordeal for our client who found the post-assault medical care almost as traumatic as the attack. The rape kit was conducted by a male doctor, there was no referral to counselling and Carly did not get her clothes returned after they were seized as evidence. The difficulty in accessing appropriate services was matched by the terrible phone reception in the area making it near impossible to arrange face-to-face appointments with Carly and keep her informed of progress.



Amy Schneider, Domestic Violence Solicitor WWLS

On a positive note, the matter highlighted the importance of having our Aboriginal Support Worker attend outreach trips to assist in contacting clients and ensure the service is always culturally sensitive.

OUTCOME: *WWLS helped Carly lodge a complaint with the Hospital and Health Care Complaints Commission. She was assisted in completing a Victim's Compensation application and received a recognition payment. This proved an important step in her emotional healing. Following the ordeal of the court case this was at last acknowledgement of the abuse Carly had endured.*

* Not her real name

Amy was employed by WNSWCLC from April 2018 to June 2019. She now works at Legal Aid, Orange

FOCUS ON COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

Community Legal Education (CLE) is the provision of information and education concerning law and legal processes for members of the community, on an individual or group basis.

Our CLE raise community awareness of the law and legal processes. In doing so, we aim to improve the community's ability to deal with and use the law and the legal system.

During the year we presented CLE on the following topics:

- Family law – children's rights, divorce, property disputes and child support
- Succession planning – Wills, Powers of Attorney, Enduring Guardianship, Advanced Care Directives.
- Care and protection – removal of children by FaCS and contact.
- Traffic
- Domestic Violence

Interrelate Building Connections program

80%

clients agreed that their understanding of their children's rights in relation to family law had improved

85%

clients agreed that they had a better understanding of their obligations in relation to family law

92%

clients agreed that they had an improved knowledge about where to go for more help in relation to family law

CLE DESK

A key focus of 2018-19 was the launch of our centre's birth certificate project. An estimated 300,000 Australians have not had their births registered and 500,000 do not have a birth certificate. Without it, a person's participation in society is severely curtailed.

Enrolling in schools, opening bank accounts, joining some sporting clubs, applying for a driver's licence or getting a passport all require a birth certificate.

We continue to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait families to help them financially and practically in this area and the project has been well received in outreach areas.

To date we have assisted 14 adults and 23 children acquire their birth certificates. Three births have also been registered through the project. Often the results of this assistance is life-changing. In one instance we helped a woman experiencing a complicated pregnancy. With her birth certificate in hand she was able to obtain a driver's licence and get to and from medical appointments, ensuring a healthy pregnancy and birth.



Tayla Gillespie, Aboriginal CLE Worker

This project is a practical support with long-term outcomes for financially-disadvantaged families and those who have difficulty accessing or using a computer.

Tayla is relocating to Queensland in December 2019 after more than five years with the centre.

FOCUS ON LAW REFORM

Our centre conducts research, advocacy and law reform activities as one of our core functions.

We are committed to law reform activities that achieve equality and social justice within the legal system for members of the community experiencing disadvantage.

Our centre is committed to conducting well researched and effective law reform within its areas of expertise. Wherever appropriate, law reform activities are undertaken collaboratively, in partnership with other relevant organisations or groups.

Our law reform work:

- Is designed within a community development framework;
- Is relevant to the community and responds to an identified need;
- Has its priorities and objectives set according to assessed community needs and available resources;
- Is informed by a strategic linking of casework with community legal education and law and policy reform work; AND
- Engages with the community, drawing on community and stakeholder input and feedback.

2018-19 law reform activity

Lobbied government in relation to amendments to the Children and Young Person's (Care and Protection) Amendment Bill 2018



Lobbied the government to support new laws to decriminalise abortion



Made a submission on consent in relation to sexual offences



Made a submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission- 'Free and Equal: An Australia Conversation on Human Rights' project



Made a submissions on the Social Services Legalisation Amendment (Drug Testing Trial) Bill 2019

CASE STUDY, July 2018

Pensioner fears for assets

Law type: Debt

Wendy attended our office after the Sheriff arrived at her property and identified items to be seized. She had a default judgment against her for a large sum of money, but had not been aware of any court proceedings before the Sheriff's visit. Wendy's only income was an aged pension and she feared her assets would be sold.*

The first step was negotiating with the Sheriff's office to hold off temporarily on enforcing the order. Next, was drafting court documents to get the default judgement set aside. None of this was straightforward, however, because of Wendy's poor health. She was elderly, stressed and unwell. Before the court documents could be filed she was admitted to hospital. We were able to negotiate more time with the Sheriff's office.

Furthermore, the court case was heard at a small regional courthouse which is not open every day, making it difficult to obtain documents and information. The court process can be bewildering for clients and even practitioners, and this can be further complicated by a person's age, health or remote location.



Lucy Armstrong, Generalist Solicitor

OUTCOME: *We were able to get the court order set aside and Wendy was able to keep her possessions.*

* Not her real name

Lucy was employed by WNSWCLC from April 2018 to July 2019. She now works at the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, Alice Springs.

CASE STUDY, March 2019

Collision causes grief**Law type: Negligence**

Sol made an appointment with our office in late 2018 after a road accident left his car a write-off. At the time his wife was due to have a baby and Sol was the only income provider for the family. Without a car things looked bleak. The roundabout prang meant he and his wife now relied on friends for transportation.*

After failing to reach a settlement for damages with the other driver, our centre helped Sol file a Statement of Claim with the Local Court. The other driver failed to lodge a defence within the required 28 days so Default Judgement was obtained. The other driver then filed a Notice of Motion (NOM) to have this set aside. The matter was listed for hearing before the magistrate.

The case raised a number of interesting issues for our service. English was a second language for Sol and self-representation in court would have put him at a distinct disadvantage. Civil matters are complicated enough without overcoming language barriers. Furthermore, Sol felt the solicitors for the other party placed a lot of pressure on him to sign consent orders allowing the judgment to be set aside. Without advice from our centre it is likely he would have signed to the detriment of his case.



Emma Johnson, Generalist Solicitor

In the end, the other side elected for the matter to be heard before a magistrate rather than a registrar which resulted in a better outcome for our client. This option is worth keeping in mind for future NOM matters before the Local Court.

OUTCOME: *Sol was ultimately successful and received full payment of the debt owing. He was able to continue work without the anxiety of transport issues. His family also welcomed their new addition minus the added stress of how they would get to and from the hospital.*

* Not his real name

Emma was employed by WNSWCLC from June 2015 to June 2019. She now works at the Working Women's Centre, South Australia.