

1 JULY 2020 - 30 JUNE 2021

ANNUAL REPORT



SHOALCOAST COMMUNITY
LEGAL CENTRE INCORPORATED



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to the elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal Australia.

VISION

The goal of Shoalcoast is to promote social justice, and provide free and accessible legal services to the residents of the South Coast who experience social and economic disadvantage.

MISSION

Our mission is to provide an accessible professional legal service to the vulnerable and disadvantaged within our communities.

VALUES

Shoalcoast believes that people have a right to legal information that is accessible and relevant to their lives.

It aims to utilise both legal and political processes to promote an agenda of social justice, and to work towards fairer legal and social outcomes for those vulnerable and disadvantaged in our communities.

It is committed to providing the community with a broad range of legal services that are delivered in diverse ways and in co- operation with the communities we work in.





VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

President	Stephanie Young
Vice President	Jack Miller
Secretary	Meredith McLaine
Treasurer	Emily Hoerlien
Committee Members	Kerry Wright Lorraine Hayward Sue Cutmore Sharlene Naismith (until February 2021) Alison Murie (until March 2021)
Staff Representative	Dianne Day
Principal Solicitor	Justine O'Reilly
Centre Manager	Emma Wood

STRATEGIC GOALS

1. Provision of an efficient generalist legal service offering discrete and ongoing legal assistance to disadvantaged members of the local community.
2. Promotion of Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre's services, in line with the Centre's mission and goals.
3. Identify and contribute to law reform issues that promote systemic change to the advantage of Shoalcoast Community Legal centre's clients.
4. Identify and implement strategies to manage the long term sustainability of the service.
5. Ensure that Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre is a culturally safe place for our staff and all communities we work with.
6. Identify and respond to needs in our service delivery area in relation to Family Law/Family Violence/Domestic violence. **(Commonwealth Family Law Family Violence Funding)**
7. To continue to build and maintain our relationships with the Indigenous community through our centre services. **(Aboriginal Legal Access Program ALAP funding)**

SHOALCOAST TEAM

Administration Team

Emma Wood

Centre Manager

Rebecca Butler

Administration Support Worker

Caryn Carpenter

Community Support Worker

Dianne Day

Centre Administration Worker & CLE/Events Coordinator

The Shoalcoast team said farewell to our beloved cleaner, **Vangie Meier** in June 2020. Vangie has been taking care of the Shoalcoast team since January 2000. Thank you to Vangie for all you did for us - we miss you!

Project Team

Liz Dunlop

Cooperative Legal Services Delivery Program

Jane Mussett

Coordinator of the Volunteer Court Support Program
(until August 2020)

Legal Team

Generalist Solicitors

Justine O'Reilly

Principal Solicitor

Abby Bartlett

COVID19 Project Solicitor

Erica Weatherly

Bushfire Project Solicitor

Joanne Pollock

Eurobodalla

Katie Lahodny

Casual Generalist Solicitor

Kathryn Grimshaw

Postcode 2540 & Berry &
Kangaroo Valley

Lisa Woodgate

Queanbeyan/Palerang &
Snowy Monaro

Liz Dunlop

Ulladulla, Milton, Vincentia,
Sussex Inlet & Huskisson

Louisa Stewart

Postcode 2541 & Worrigee & East
Nowra

Lucy Nadj

Paralegal

Marlena Pitrone (until December
2020)

Mike Harding (from March 2021)
Bega Valley



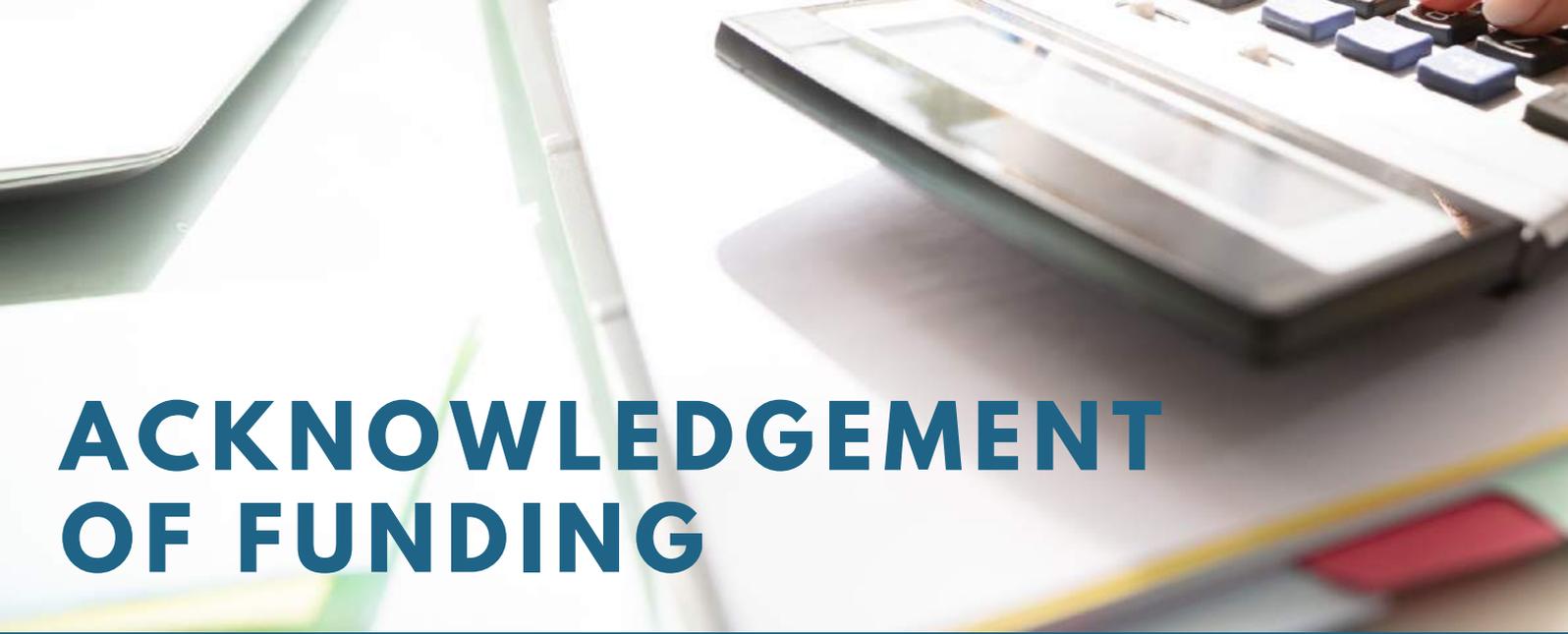
VOLUNTEER TEAM

Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre was pleased to have the following volunteers with us during 2020/21:

University of Wollongong - Legal Internship Program

- **Georgia Campbell**
- **Breanna Hill**

Unfortunately due to COVID-19 restrictions our Volunteer Court Support Program has been on hold since March 2020. We look forward to when we can recommence this great program that assists court users on List Days at Nowra Local Court and Batemans Bay Local Court.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FUNDING

Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre received funding from the following sources in 2020/21:

NLAP Generalist Funding - State and Commonwealth Governments through the Community Legal Centre Program (CLCP) managed by Legal Aid NSW

Bushfire Funding - Legal Aid NSW

COVID-19 Funding - Legal Aid NSW

Co-operative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) Program - Legal Aid NSW

Social Sector Transformation Fund - Department of Communities and Justice

Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre acknowledges the ongoing support provided by the New South Wales State and Commonwealth Government.



PRESIDENTS REPORT

In many ways, the year 2020/21 for Shoalcoast felt very similar to the last reporting year. That is both in terms of the ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as in terms of the ongoing success of the centre and its dedicated staff. Shoalcoast has continued to perform well throughout the year maintaining its transformational service delivery methods to ensure it has remained able to reach residents on the South Coast who are experiencing social and financial disadvantage. Our service has continued to provide a responsive and accessible legal service within our communities and to retain a presence despite being restricted from time to time in terms of our ability to provide a face to face service.

The Centre has successfully serviced its catchment areas, continuing a targeted presence, where as far as possible, staff live and work in the areas to whom they provide service. This is designed to create beneficial and lasting relationships amongst our communities. The centre also continued to provide services related to the ongoing impact of bushfires on the local area as well as COVID-19 specific legal assistance.

I am, as always impressed with our dedicated and capable staff who demonstrate a resilient and adaptable approach to their work in order to ensure that the centre's objectives are consistently met.

This amazing team provided 1,724 legal advices services to our clients in both an in-person capacity and using technology when restrictions precluded a presence in our service areas. Our ability to provide a high level of legal service would of course be impossible without the assistance of our talented support staff who are integral in the overall management and functioning of the centre and its operations.

Our funding has remained stable for the year and we have been successful in obtaining a number of grants to assist in sustaining our services and our ability to plan for future infrastructure needs.

Whilst staff often come and go, with those who have joined and left throughout the year mentioned later in this report, it cannot go unsaid that it is rare that someone stands the test of time and sticks around for the long haul! A special and sincere farewell to our much-loved Dianne Day. With us since the beginning, it is a big loss to bare, but we know she deserves all the joy and relaxation in the world and we thank her for her dedication to Shoalcoast and all it has meant for the many many clients that have been able to access our services over the past 20+ years.

As the year closed out, I sensed an increased sense of vigour and drive amongst our staff who have demonstrated a keen and clear sense of direction and focus including the desire to reach more of the people we need to. I am excited by our increased social media presence, a focus on sustainability and a possible move to paper free case management which can only mean more efficient and effective service delivery.

I thank everyone for the past year and for being prepared to continue the centres great work. I also thank my fellow management committee members who have supported an increased focus on governance over the past year and are an invaluable support to me and to the centre.

I commend to you, the Annual Report of Shoalcoast for 2020-2021.

President

Stephanie Young



TREASURERS REPORT



What a year to come on board as the treasurer for the Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre. The Centre certainly faced its own challenges helping the community, but the support the Centre has received has been invaluable.

The Centre had a financially successful 2021, and we acknowledge that this would not have been possible without the funding received from both the Commonwealth and the NSW Government.

We finish this year with a surplus of \$69,906, which the Committee is committed to contributing towards hiring more solicitors, and improving the quality of the legal services provided to the community. We await approval to keep this surplus for the following year.

Our financial statements have been audited by Booth Partners, and give a fair and true representation of the activities and position for the financial year ended 30 June 2021.

Below is a summary of the activities and position for the year:

Total income	\$1,513,041
Less:	
Depreciation	\$11,980
Employee expenses	\$1,100,712
Rent	\$64,458
Other expenses	\$265,985
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Surplus	\$69,906

Current assets	\$999,781
Property, plant and equipment	\$60,850
Total assets	\$1,060,631
Current liabilities	\$466,455
Non-current liabilities	\$27,901
Total liabilities	\$494,356
Net assets	\$566,275
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Retained earnings	\$566,275

Our comprehensive financial statements are available on request.

While our funding has been reliable, our expenses decreased due to the change in nature of working conditions due to the NSW Government lockdown. Many IT and working-from-home expenses were reimbursed where reasonable, but without the normal activities of our many services and suppliers, we operated under budget this year.

I would like to thank Emma Wood and the rest of the Centre for welcoming me as treasurer, and I look forward to another year at the Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre.

Treasurer

Emily Hoerlein



PRINCIPAL SOLICITORS REPORT

While in 2019/20 we had the shock of the bushfires and the advent of the COVID pandemic, this year was all about learning to live with COVID and delivering the best service possible in the changed circumstances. We were fortunate to receive bushfire and COVID project funding which enabled us to expand our solicitor workforce to 9 lawyers and 1 paralegal. With new people came new energy and our whole team became more dynamic and innovative.

Over the last year we provided 1,724 legal advices to people over the phone and face to face, in the areas of family law, will and estates, credit and debt, consumer law, neighborhood disputes, injuries compensation, housing, employment, domestic violence and care and protection law. We provided about 500 discrete tasks for clients following on from the advices and took on 70 ongoing matters for our clients. We drafted documents for clients and helped them through a court or tribunal process. We helped many people to get wills, enduring powers of attorneys, enduring guardianships, and victims compensation. We also assisted many people to get parenting plans and property settlement consent orders through mediation.

We continued to provide fortnightly face to face outreach to people in East Nowra, Wreck Bay, Ulladulla, Batemans Bay, Moruya, Bega, Eden, Cooma and Queanbeyan. We commenced another outreach at Cooma Courthouse at the request of the Registrar. We continued to provide the duty lawyer service at Milton Court attending court whenever possible and when not possible, worked closely with WDVCAS and the DVLOs to ensure the PINOP was well-serviced.

We conducted 35 Community Legal Education sessions to community members and community services including Planning Ahead, How to make a Victims Compensation Claim, Family Law and Family Violence, Cut it Out, How to Identify Legal Issues, Avoiding Scams. We did these CLEs either via AVL or face-to-face. We created 7 community legal resources, including factsheets and brochures on AVOs, what to do after someone dies, and what to do about dangerous trees, which was particularly relevant to bushfire affected clients.

We were involved in 9 law reform activities including submissions on the bill to criminalise coercive control and several submissions to state and federal inquiries into the national and state responses to the devastating 2019/20 bushfires.

We continued to auspice the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery program and the Shoalhaven Domestic and Family Violence Committee. We participated in our local interagencies as well as participating in bushfire recovery interagencies.

Our partnerships with Baker McKenzie and Hall & Wilcox deepened. Baker Mckenzie helped us to assist many more victims of domestic violence access compensation than we otherwise could have. Our partnership with Hall & Wilcox meant more disadvantaged clients, particularly Aboriginal clients, were able to get wills. We also availed of the Pro Bono Portal which Justice Connect created this year and the Bar Association's Pro Bono Assistance scheme. Through these two schemes we were able to get opinions and assistance for many of our clients in various areas of law in which we did not have the requisite expertise. We are very grateful to our pro bono partners and all the lawyers that have assisted us and our clients.

In terms of how we conducted our work, we became more adept at being mobile and able to give advice and assistance to clients in different ways. We developed more flexible working arrangements to suit our clients and our staff. In January 2021 we also became paperless for the discrete services (advices and tasks) which we provide. We hope to be a fully paperless legal service in the not too distant future.

All the above achievements were made possible by our truly dedicated team of administrative staff and solicitors. I am continually awed by how much time and effort our team puts in to being truly empathetic with our clients and providing them with the best service possible.



While we welcomed many wonderful people this year, we also had some sad farewells: Juliet Dimond returned to work at Welfare Rights, Marlene Pitrone moved to Thursday Island to work for Legal Aid and Dianne Day decided to retire after 22 years of service to Shoalcoast. Dianne's contribution to Shoalcoast cannot be overstated. She was there from almost the day the centre opened in 1999. In her multifaceted role over the years she did client intakes, coordinated CLEs and events, collected and organized resources, paid bills and generally kept the office running. From 2007 – 2017 she was also the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery program (CLSD) Coordinator, encouraging collaboration between the legal services and community services in the South Coast. For 22 years, Dianne's commitment to Shoalcoast's mission never wavered. She always pushed for excellent service to our clients, and inspired the rest of us to do the same. When Dianne won an International Women's Day Award in 2009, she was described as a 'backbone of the community'. At Shoalcoast she was our matriarch and she will be missed. We thank her for all her contributions and we wish her every happiness in retirement.

I would also like to thank our vibrant Management Committee for volunteering their time. They provided us with excellent guidance and support throughout the year.

Through hard work, perseverance and innovation, the Shoalcoast team mastered many challenges in 2020/21 to provide an excellent service for our community. I am truly grateful for all the team's wonderful work and I am confident that we will continue to provide such an effective service in 2021/22 and beyond.

Principal Solicitor

Justine O'Reilly

CENTRE REPORT

July 2020

- We started July still in the midst of the COVID-19 restrictions. Some staff returned to the office and some remained working remotely. Shoalcoast proudly returned to face to face outreach services in a COVID safe manner this month as we found that our clients valued face to face appointments and were pleased to have them back in our local catchment areas.
- We received a grant of \$ 150,000 to provide legal services to those affected by the bushfires in our catchment areas for the next 12 months. We commenced recruitment for a solicitor to work in this project.
- We participated in a virtual Bring your Bills day that was hosted by EWON (Energy and Water Ombudsman) in the Shoalhaven.



August 2020

- The Cooperative Legal Services Delivery (CLSD) launched the Domestic Violence Project, "Cut it Out", with the Attorney General and local hairdresser, Sandra Bayer, of Scruples hairdressing salon.
- Our team have been attending bushfire meetings in their areas and mapping areas of particular need for our work with the Bushfire funding.



September 2020

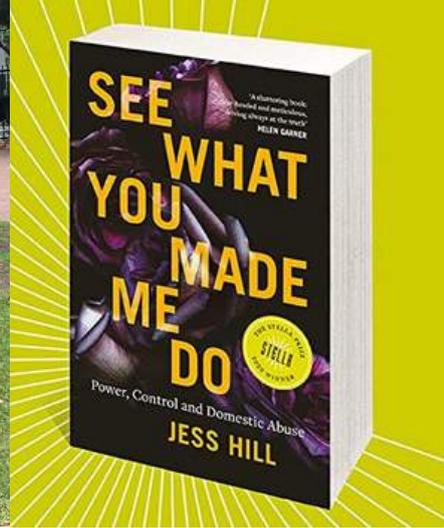
- We began outsourcing our financial functions for payroll and accounts payable to the services of the CLCNSW Financial Services unit.
- We had our regular training days this month and the whole team enjoyed a bush tucker walk with Noel Butler in Narrawallee.
- Emma and Caryn attended Love Bites training in Bomaderry.



October 2020

- We welcomed Erica Weatherly into the role of Bushfire Project Solicitor.
- We said farewell to Juliet Dimond, a Generalist Solicitor, who covered the Queanbeyan/Palerang and Snowy Monaro LGAs.
- We were successful with our application for the COVID funding for legal assistance for the next 12 months.
- We held our first virtual Wills Day on the 8th and 9th October. The Wills day covered Wills, Enduring Powers of Attorney and Enduring Guardianships and was for clients who identified as Aboriginal. We were assisted by our pro-bono partner, Hall & Wilcox, who confirmed the instructions taken by the clients and drafted the documents. Hall & Wilcox were happy with the way it worked out and since then have been assisting our other disadvantaged clients by drafting their wills.
- The first CLE for the Cut It Out project has held. This was held in Nowra and involved our solicitor giving a brief talk on AVOs to hairdressers in Nowra while SAHSSI, Waminda and WDVCS workers gave interactive talks on identifying DV and knowing how to assist and refer victims.





November 2020

- We held our AGM on ZOOM for the first time. The new committee are on board and we said farewell to Jen Callanan, Hugh Norris and Paul Ell. We welcomed Meredith McLaine and Kerry Wright.
- Kathryn, Jo and Justine all completed the College of Law's Legal Practice Management Course.

December 2020

- We said farewell to Marlena Pitrone, a Generalist Solicitor who covered the Bega Valley LGA.
- The Shoalhaven Domestic and Family Violence Committee (which is auspiced by Shoalcoast CLC) and the South Coast Family Family Law Pathways Network (SCFLPN) presented an online webinar with Jess Hill, talking about her book, **See What you Made me Do** and focusing on coercive control.
- We held our Christmas party in the backyard at 80 Bridge Road – a fun game of finske!
- Georgia Campbell started with us for 4 weeks, as an intern from University of Wollongong Law Faculty.

January 2021

- The office opened following a well deserved Christmas break on 6 January. The team recommenced phoned advice on 18 January.
- From 1 January, we achieved our first goal in going paperless. Shoalcoast is now paperless for legal advices and tasks.
- We welcomed Lucy Nadj into the role of Paralegal.
- We welcomed Lisa Woodgate into the role of Generalist Solicitor for the Queanbeyan/Palerang and Snowy Monaro LGAs.
- We welcomed Abby Bartlett into the role of COVID Project Generalist Solicitor for 12 months.

February 2021

- The team returned to outreach this month.
- The team was pleased to have achieved a great outcome in our annual cross check on the legal work of the centre.
- Kathryn wrote a very good submission, with the help of Louisa and Liz on Coercive Control for the NSW Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control. Kathryn also went to Parliament to answer questions at the hearing and gave a radio interview on ABC about the issue.
- Breanna Hill started with us for 4 weeks, as an intern from University of Wollongong Law Faculty.



March 2021

- We welcomed Mike Harding into the role of Generalist Solicitor for the Bega Valley LGA.
- We commenced using Justice Connects' Pro Bono Portal, which is a great tool and we have been successfully referring complex matters to pro bono firms through this portal.
- We hosted a visit by the CLC Program, Legal Aid NSW to see our centre and discuss our services and meet the team.
- Justine attended the inaugural meeting of the UoW Law Advisory Committee meeting to provide the voice of rural community legal centres.

April 2021

- The Registrar of Cooma Court asked Shoalcoast to start a monthly outreach from the courthouse, which commenced on the 4th Thursday of each month.
- Justine was interviewed for an article in the Law Society Journal.
- Shoalcoast attended a Community Matters Fair in Sanctuary Point.



From left: Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre lawyer Justine O'Reilly and administrative support worker Rebecca Butler offering legal outreach services at the Sanctuary Point community fair.

“Funnily enough, it was the most vulnerable who wanted to come back to face-to-face – partly because it was human contact. We would wear gloves and masks, and we had portable glass screens between us – we pop those in the back of the car and bring them with us.”

JUSTINE O'REILLY

May 2021

- CLCNSW held the state conference this month, which some of the team attended in person or remotely. Erica was a panelist at one session – about being disaster resilience and talking about Shoalcoast's experiences with the bushfires and COVID-19.
- Law Week was from 17 – 23 May and Shoalcoast organized and delivered Community Legal Education sessions (CLEs). We partnered with libraries, carer groups, domestic violence groups and other community services to give an assortment of CLEs.
- The CLSD meeting was held in Bega.
- On 13 May we had a visit from the President (Juliana Warner) and the CEO (Sonja Stewart) of the Law Society as part of their tour around the state. Paul Ell (President of the Shoalhaven and Districts Law Society) and Stephanie Young (President – Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre) also attended the meeting.

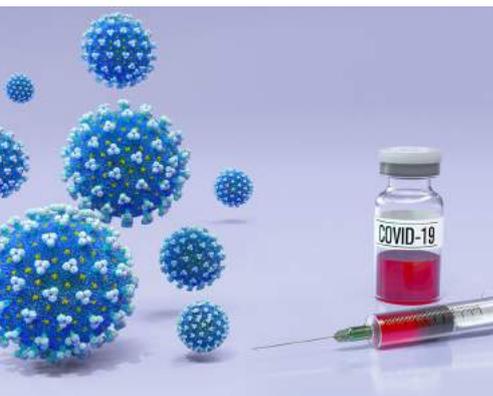


- On 19 May, Senator Jane Hume (Minister for Superannuation, Financial Services, and the Digital Economy as well as Minister for Women's Economic Security) and members of the office of Senator Jim Molan (Deputy Chair of the Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media) visited our office and we spoke about some of the more pressing issues in our catchment areas.
- Shoalcoast acknowledged National Sorry Day.
- In late May, Shoalcoast hosted a Cooperative Legal Services meeting in Nowra. Shoalcoast CLC, ALS and Legal Aid, and Senior Rights met to discuss our outreaches and CLEs and to talk about any systemic issues our clients are experiencing.



June 2021

- COVID-19 began to rear its head again in a big way and staff located in the Greater Sydney area were unable to come to the office, due to the restrictions. This was the beginning of another long phase of all staff working remotely. Proudly, services were still provided to clients throughout anything COVID-19 could throw at us.
- Shoalcoast purchased new office equipment, which included sit/stand desks, to ensure the office was fully ergonomic for all staff.
- We completed an informative and interesting session with Julie Moore of Koorimunicaiton for our regular cultural awareness day.
- We celebrated Harmony Day with a team lunch.
- The team participated in our annual planning day and all contributed to our goals and objectives for the Centre's strategic plan.
- We recommenced our outreach to Jerringa for the Community Support Worker to attend the Jerringa Health Centre on a fortnightly basis to promote the services of Shoalcoast.
- Lisa participated in a Fair Fines Workshop conducted by NSW Revenue as part of the review of the Ministerial Guidelines under the Fines Amendment Act 2019 No 13 (NSW).



2020/21 Summary

2020/21 was yet again another unprecedented year for Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre. The team were strong, resilient and flexible in their ability to adapt to the ever changing conditions and still provide a valuable service to the clients of our catchments. Thank you to all, both staff and volunteers, for making Shoalcoast what it is - a dedicated, committed and professional team that provides free legal advice and information to our clients.

Centre Manager

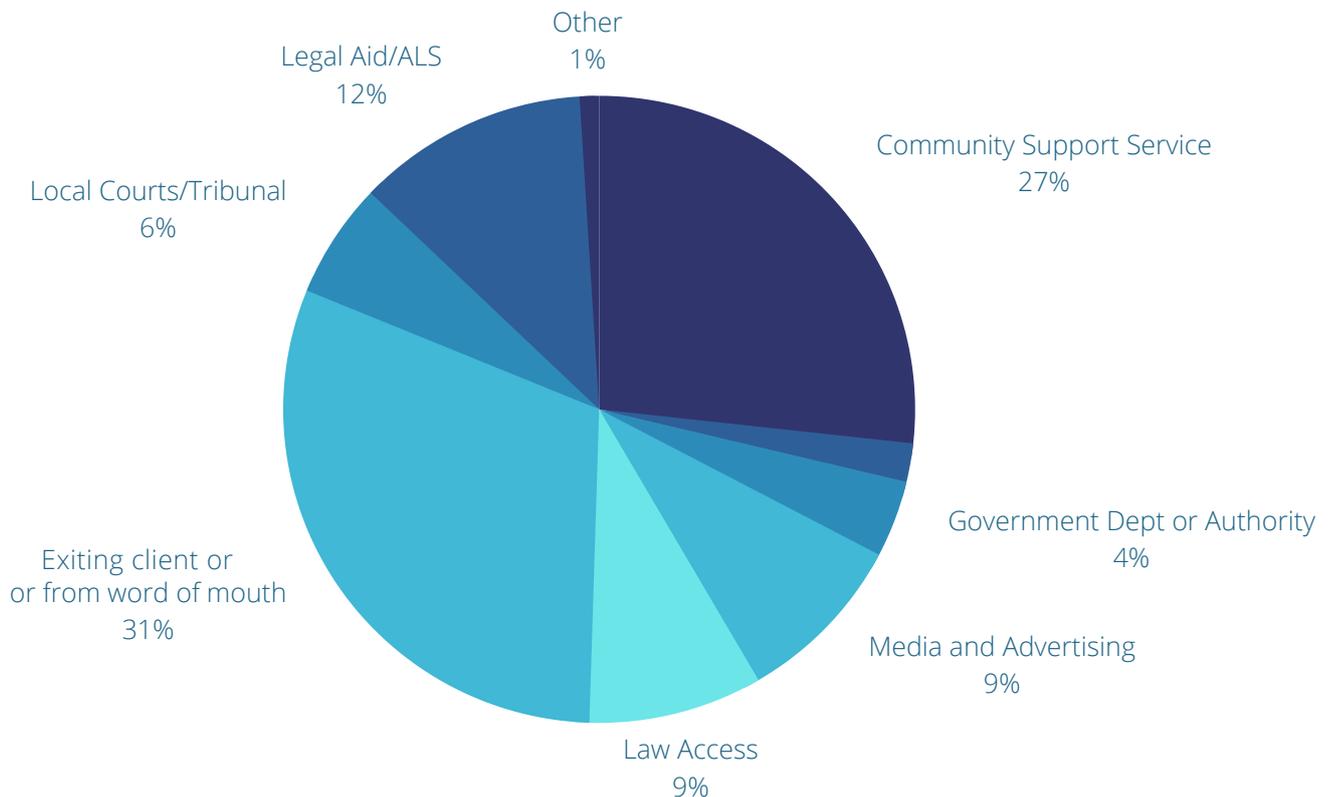
Emma Wood



SNAP SHOT OF LEGAL SERVICES 2020/21

For the year 2020/21 Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre achieved the following key results:

Referrals to Shoalcoast to 2021



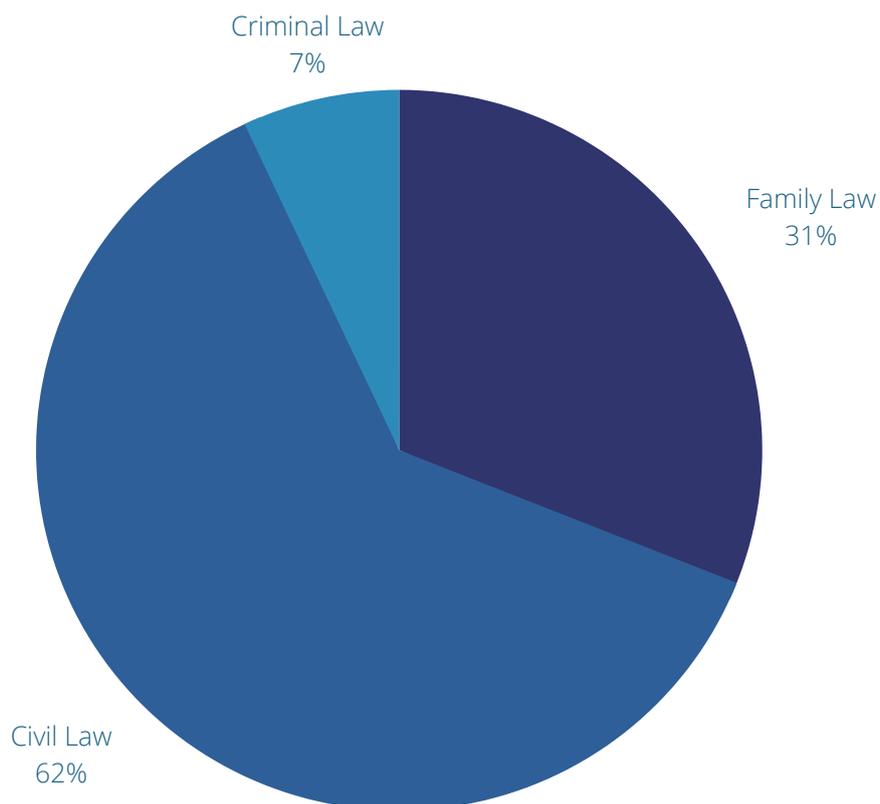
Total services provided for 2020/21

Number of Clients	1,311
Information and Referrals	2,117
Number of Legal Advices	1,724
Number of Legal Tasks	492
Number of Other Representations (closed)	62
Court/Tribunal	2
Dispute Resolution	4
Duty Lawyer Services	15
Community Legal Education Activities	35
Community Legal Education Resources	7
Stakeholder Engagements	242
Law Reform	9

The 2020/21 year saw a busy year with the provision of legal service to clients in our community. The total numbers for the year are as follows:

	Telephone Advice provided	1,262
	Face to Face Advice provided	449
	Advice provided by letter or email or online	13
	Information provided	357
	Referrals provided	2,117

Shoalcoast Clients by Law Type (total 1,311)



CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS FOR 2020/21



68%
Female Clients



31%
Clients who identify as
having a disability



31%
Male Clients



15%
Clients who identify as
Aboriginal or
Torres Strait Islander



36%
Clients experiencing
family violence

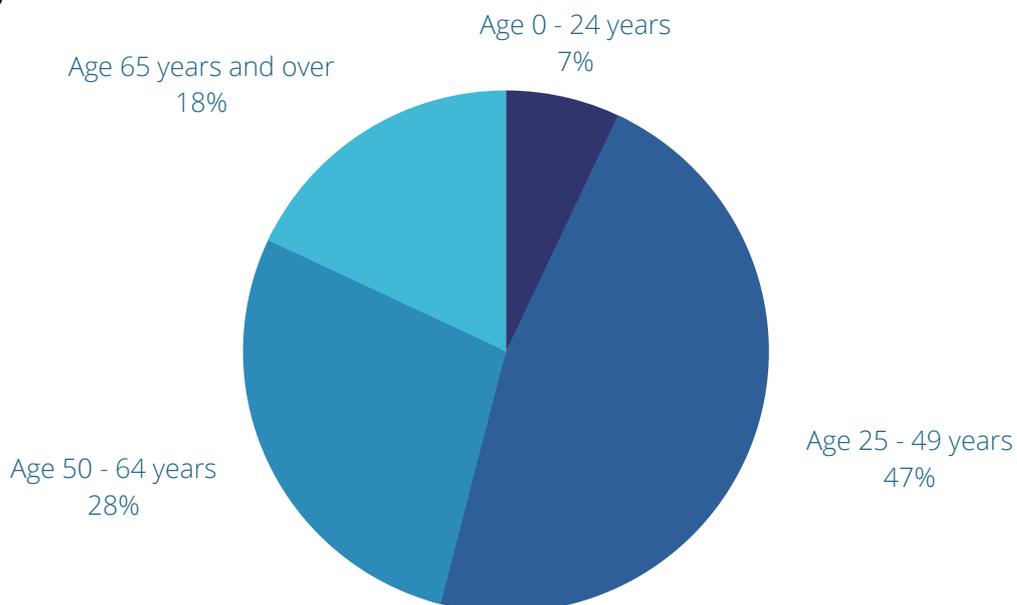


1%
Non-Binary/Other Clients



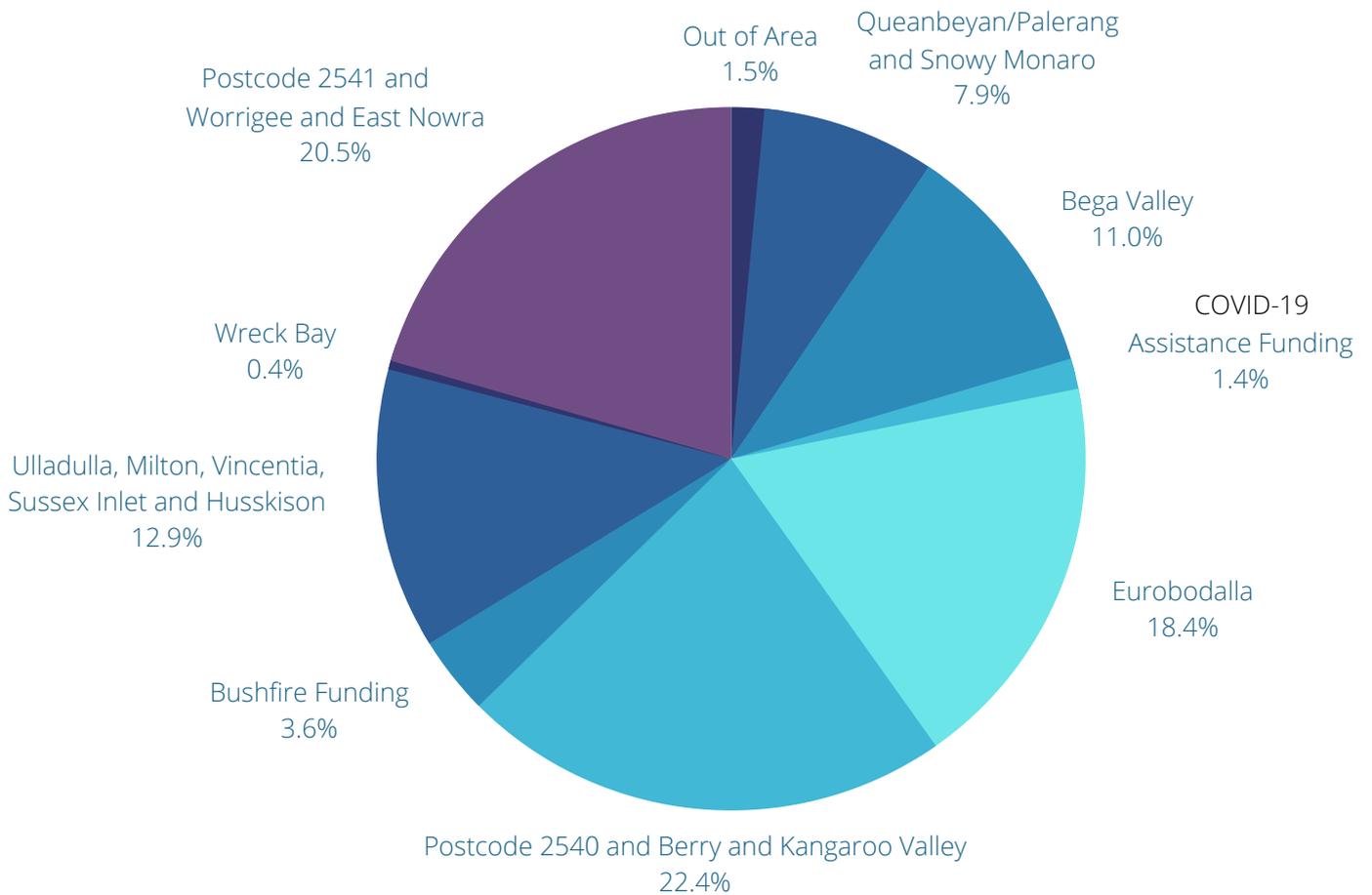
79%
Clients experiencing
financial
disadvantage

Age of Shoalcoast Clients



LEGAL ADVICES SUMMARY FOR 2020/21

Legal Advices for 2020/21 by Catchment Area





POSTCODE 2540 KANGAROO VALLEY, SHOALHAVEN HEADS AND BERRY

The total legal services delivered to this area in 2020/21 was 491 services, split by 69% Civil Law, 28% Family Law and 3% Criminal Law.

The 2020/21 financial year has seen the community continuing to grapple with the legal repercussions of the ongoing COVID pandemic and the earlier bushfires. In the 2540 area, this has manifested as an increased demand for legal services particularly around issues of safe and secure housing, family breakdown, family violence and planning ahead.

Working from home under the COVID-19 Public Health Orders inspired a sea change for many, with housing on the South Coast an attractive option. This has increased demand for properties, in an already tight market, leading to increased rents and lower availability. We have seen a corresponding demand for advice around tenancy terminations and less securing housing options, such as residency in caravan parks as a result. Shoalcoast's attendance of the Shoalhaven's Homelessness Interagency is an integral part of developing networks to support these clients and take steps to address the systemic issue of the housing crisis in the area.

It has been really great this year to continue to build Shoalcoast's presence in the 2540 area. This included attendance at the Sanctuary Points Community Matters Fair and regular meetings with the Bay and Basin Police, and other community services at the Bay and Basin Community Resource Centre (BBCRC). The ongoing relationship between Shoalcoast, the local police, the Domestic Violence Liaison Officers and frontline family violence services is vital for us to support the increasing number of clients requiring legal services for issues pertaining to family violence.

Typically, most advice is delivered by phone to this area, with no regular outreach scheduled. However, client's do have the option for face-to-face appointments in the Nowra office and ad-hoc face-to-face advice appointments in Sanctuary Point have been arranged to meet the needs of our clients on a case-by-case basis at the BBCRC. Lack of public transport is a big issue for clients in this area without access to a private vehicle so it is important Shoalcoast is responsive to the needs of our client base.

Community Legal Education (CLE) has been delivered on a wide range of topics in this area including a presentation for Law Week inspired by the Australian Classic "The Castle", which was delivered at Sanctuary Point and Nowra Libraries covering legal issues such as tenancy ("Your home is your Castle"), consumer matters ("The Trading Post") and where to get legal help ("when you need more than just the vibe").

Other CLE sessions delivered in 2020/21 to this area included the youth presentation "When can I?", scams and Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders as part of the 'Cut it Out' program.



POSTCODE 2541 INCLUDING WORRIGEE AND EAST NOWRA

The area for this region has consistent legal needs given the population size and regional location. 2020/21 year has been another challenging time for the people of Nowra as housing prices and rents have again soared and the gap between the financially advantaged and disadvantaged has again widened making access to free legal services more vital than ever. Total services delivered was 492 for the 2020/21 year. There was again more Civil and Family law enquiries.

This area had one regular outreach for this year at Nowra East Public School's Our Mia Mia Wellbeing Hub – attended fortnightly through each school term. Shoalcoast is now a member of the Governance Committee for Our Mia Mia as a Service Provider Member, attending quarterly meetings to oversee the governance and development of this great service that now extends to 6 schools and preschools in the Shoalhaven.





We also see many clients from the area in person at the Shoalcoast Nowra office (80 Bridge Road, Nowra) as required each week. It can be a great easy place to meet with clients who have additional needs or are elderly as we have the conference room to meet comfortably and confidentially and it is near to many support services.

Shoalcoast continues to lead and collaborate with key stakeholders in the Shoalhaven area including our consistent membership as Executive members of the Shoalhaven Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Committee and the South Coast Family Law Pathways (SCFLPN) Steering Committee. This work allowed us to take an active role engaging others in our profession and community partners which also feeds our Community Legal Education and provides a steady stream of referrals for advice and assistance.

In 2020/21 Shoalcoast's membership of the SCFLPN Steering Committee allowed us to take part in hosting successful events such as the Annual Judicial Dinner in May 2021 with guest speakers academic and author Heather Douglas on her wonderful resource the DFV Benchbook and her honour Judge Monica Neville who spoke about domestic violence in Federal Circuit Court cases she hears in the Wollongong registry. We also held an online event jointly hosted by Shoalhaven DFV Committee and the SCFLPN for the 16 days of Activism against Gender based violence in December 2020 where we hosted Author Jess Hill to speak about Coercive Control and her book See What You Made Me Do. Despite Covid-related challenges we have continued to grow our memberships in both committees and provide opportunities for networking and continuing education.

Community Legal Education for services in the Nowra area has also been a highlight of 2020/21 as we helped workers better understand how to make Victims Support applications for victims of violence as the increasingly difficult process had many clients feeling unable to make their own applications. We continue to support workers so they feel confident to support their clients, training the frontline workers has been an effective strategy in helping address unmet legal needs in Nowra. For complex matters we are then able to assist clients and or provide timely advice to address issues they have. We look forward to continuing this work into 2021/22 year.





WRECK BAY

Shoalcoast's Wreck Bay outreach continued this year every fortnight on a Monday morning. The total legal services delivered in this area in 2020/21 was 19 with the split 37% Civil Law and 63% Family Law.

In early 2021, we were approached by multiple residents who were having issues with their local Telco charging them for services not received. We managed to have these matters resolved by liaising directly with the Telco who fixed the service issues and issued hundreds of dollars in refunds to clients.

Following the High Court judgment of *Williams v Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council* [2019] HCA4, Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council (WBACC) have moved into the first stages of their Home Ownership Implementation Strategy. They recently issued a questionnaire to residents about whether they would like their home repaired, replaced or extended prior to the changeover to Crown Leases. We received calls from residents who had questions about the questionnaire and the changeover to the Crown Lease model generally. We are currently looking into the possibility of producing a plain English guide to the Crown Lease model to distribute in the community.



ULLADULLA, MILTON, HUSKISSON, VINCENTIA AND SUSSEX INLET

Although COVID 19 presented us with challenges, Shoalcoast continued to develop and maintain strong relationships with community organisations and clients in the Ulladulla, Milton, Huskisson, Vincentia and Sussex Inlet catchment area through community legal education, online forums, interagency meetings and traditional/digital marketing mechanisms,

The total legal services delivered in this area in 2020/21 was 343 with the split 71% Civil Law, 4% Criminal Law and 25% Family Law.





Shoalcoast continues to have a regular presence at the Ulladulla and Districts Community Resource Centre (CRC) for outreach appointments, which take place every 2nd and 4th Wednesday. This financial year, we also attended a number of home visits in the lower Shoalhaven, assisting those who were not able to leave their homes or who were health compromised.



As a part of the Domestic Violence Duty Solicitor Program, Shoalcoast continues to attend Milton Court every 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month. We provide advice across a number of subject areas prior to court and on court days, predominately in the area of Family Law and protection orders. We have developed a great relationship with the WDV CAS program, auspiced by the Southern Women's Group, as well as the local Domestic Violence Liaison Officers. A regular meet-up of these three groups has been taking place in the Shoalhaven LGA, which has been productive for discussing service offerings and improvements for clients experiencing domestic violence. We look forward to participating in these meetings in the future.



EUROBODALLA

The Eurobodalla has seen an increase in demand for telephone advice and face-to-face appointments over the last 12 months, with appointments consistently fully booked each week.

The 2019/20 bushfires and subsequent COVID-19 restrictions have greatly impacted the lives of Eurobodalla residents and seen an increase in the need for rental properties, support services and homelessness services.

Shoalcoast has seen an increase in the number of clients requesting assistance with complex legal and non-legal issues. Shoalcoast has worked effectively with a number of local agencies and services providers to assist clients with complex needs.

The total legal services delivered to this area in 2020/21 was 409 services, split by 62% Civil Law, 30% in Family Law and 8% in Criminal Law.

We continued to provide regular fortnightly outreach clinics in Moruya and Batemans Bay.

Shoalcoast continues to participate in valuable stakeholder engagement by attending regular interagency meetings with other services via web-based technology.

Throughout the year we have seen an increase in the number of clients seeking support to apply for assistance from the Victim Support Scheme. Shoalcoast has assisted a number of clients leaving family violence to receive financial support to install security at home or urgently relocate. We have also assisted a number of clients apply for a payment in recognition of the trauma they have suffered as a result of an act/s of violence, this included assisting a young client who was a victim of child sexual assault receive a recognition payment of \$10,000.

We have also worked with support services to assist clients experiencing financial hardship and increasing debt. For example, we assisted a client to make a successful hardship application in relation to a car loan and successfully argued for a reimbursement on a warranty that was illegally sold to the client at the time the loan taken out.



BEGA VALLEY

Bega Valley LGA has some of the highest unmet legal needs in our catchment area with many of the most disadvantaged being quite isolated. This LGA was also severely affected by the bushfires and people are still struggling to get back into homes.

Shoalcoast delivered 242 legal services to the Bega Valley area: 62% in Civil law, 28% in family law and 10% in criminal law (mostly traffic offences). We assisted people with their consumer matters, tenancy issues, debt matters, employment matters, enduring powers of attorney and guardianship, and their traffic offences. We helped clients who were separating and needed to navigate the Family Law system. If we could not represent clients, we worked to find people the best representation possible.



As well as telephone advice, we delivered fortnightly face to face outreaches to Eden Access Centre, Mackillops in Bega and the Women's Resource Centre in Bega. So that she could engage more easily with community services and give our clients better service, we decided to base our solicitor in that LGA. Our Solicitor, Marlana Pitrone, moved down to Bega early in the financial year and did wonderful work engaging with stakeholders. She also made compelling submissions to the bushfire inquiries to ensure that the plight of Bega Valley was heard in Canberra and Sydney. When Marlana moved on to work on Thursday Island, we hired a solicitor, Mike Harding, who had grown up in the Bega Valley. Both Marlana and Mike did great work with stakeholders, attending interagencies and delivering CLEs to client groups and community services.

The community in Bega Valley is very resilient and community services are inspirational in their determination to assist the most disadvantaged. It is wonderful for Shoalcoast to work with such great people.



QUEANBEYAN/PALERANG AND SNOWY MONARO

The Queanbeyan/Palerang and Snowy Monaro catchment area extends from the New South Wales border with Victoria to the Southern Tablelands. During 2020/21 the demand for legal advice remained steady in the Queanbeyan/Palerang and Snowy Monaro local government areas. Shoalcoast provided a total of 186 legal services in the Snowy Monaro – Queanbeyan/Palerang areas, which comprised of 54% Civil law, 41% family law and 5% criminal law.

Throughout the year Shoalcoast assisted clients with family law, minor criminal and civil law problems. Clients were provided with legal assistance on family law issues, such as divorce and separation, parenting, property settlement and family violence. Other common legal problems faced by clients included, AVO's, fines, employment law, motor vehicle regulatory offences, motor vehicle property damage, credit and debt and consumer complaints in relation to goods and services. The high proportion of family law advice reflects the consistent demand for assistance with family law matters in the region, identified earlier through the valuable work of Shoalcoast's Rural Women's Outreach program. Shoalcoast continued to work closely with local service providers to promote an integrated support for vulnerable clients, who are often experiencing domestic violence and the risk of homelessness. During 2020/21, many clients reported that the bushfires and COVID 19 had an on-going adverse impact on their lives.



Shoalcoast maintained an active role engaging with stakeholders to promote the service throughout the catchment area. Interagency meetings continued to be held on-line due to COVID 19 and the pandemic placed some restrictions on expanding service delivery, travel and personal meetings with clients. Shoalcoast continued to experience a steady flow of referrals from local stakeholders.

During the reporting period Shoalcoast provided a fortnightly outreach advice clinic at the Monaro Community Access Service (MCAS) in Cooma. In 2021, Shoalcoast established a monthly Outreach advice clinic at the Local Court in Cooma, after a successful three-month trial Outreach program. This clinic provides a safe and accessible location for the Registry and other service providers to directly refer people who need assistance on family or civil law issues. Due to COVID 19, St Benedicts Community Centre remained closed to the public and Shoalcoast operated the outreach clinic at the nearby Queanbeyan Hive in Crawford Street. The Hive venue provided the scope to hold COVID 19 safe client appointments inside or outside, where appropriate.



During law week, Shoalcoast participated in a series of "Planning Ahead" community legal education talks organised by the Snowy Monaro Regional Council Library, these events were held in Cooma, Jindabyne and Bombala.

On 9 March 2021, Shoalcoast attended the Launch of the Law Council of Australia's, Rural, Regional and Remote National Strategic Plan 2021-2023, by President Dr Jacoba Brasch QC, held on the lawns of the Cooma Court House. The National Strategic Plan highlights "Access to justice is undermined when there is a critical shortage of suitable legal representation in particular regions."



BUSHFIRE FUNDING

In August 2020 Shoalcoast received funding to provide legal services to persons affected by the 2019/20 Black Summer Bushfires.

The total number of legal services delivered to bushfire affected clients in 2020/21 was 54 split by 91% Civil Law, 5% Criminal Law and 4% Family Law.

Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre attended bushfire recovery hubs, community meetings and recovery days across our catchment area. Monthly outreach at the Ulladulla Bushfire Recovery Hub was conducted until the hub was closed due to COVID-19.

The demand for legal services from bushfire affected clients increased as relationships were crystallized with key bushfire recovery stakeholders. Most bushfire affected clients were referred directly from local council bushfire recovery caseworkers, counsellors and other community services. Some of the common legal issues that arose were insurance, credit/debt, home building disputes and disaster recovery grants.





Where legal issues arose that were outside Shoalcoast's normal practice areas, we collaborated with Legal Aid and pro-bono partners through Justice Connect and the NSW Bar Association's Legal Assistance Referral Scheme to meet our client's legal needs.

Shoalcoast worked collaboratively with Legal Aid and other community services to meet the needs of bushfire affected clients in line with their recovery journey. For example, in November 2020 in collaboration with Legal Aid we presented at Lake Conjola bushfire recovery hub on temporary accommodation entitlements under insurance policies. At this stage, this was an area of concern and many people were approaching the 12-month cap on temporary accommodations entitlements provided by their Insurers.

We developed bushfire specific joint flyers with Legal Aid which were distributed at recovery hubs and community events, encouraging people to seek legal assistance. We also conducted 5 bushfire specific law check Up CLE's to community services including local councils, the Salvation Army and Service NSW employees.



Shoalcoast has developed strong relationships with community stakeholders throughout the Bushfire Project which has increased Shoalcoast's profile throughout the catchment area and generated a steady stream of referrals.



COVID-19 FUNDING

Shoalcoast was successful in securing 12 months funding to address legal issues related to the COVID 19 pandemic. With this funding we were able to hire a solicitor and a part – time paralegal who both started in January 2021.

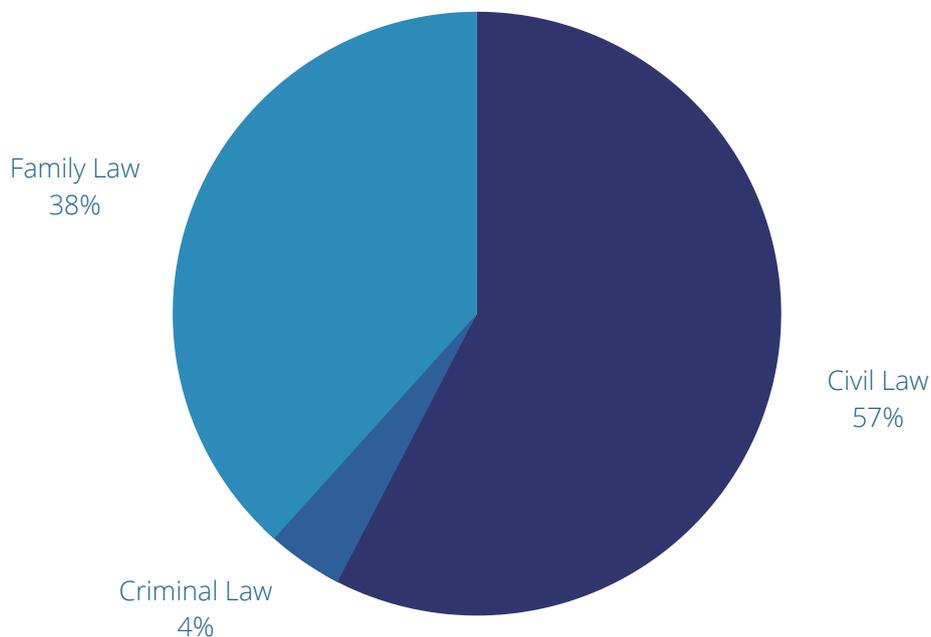
While at the beginning of the Pandemic in March 2020 our solicitors had been fielding quite a lot of legal questions about employment, tenancies, and consumer issues related to COVID, in this financial year we have not had many Covid-specific enquiries. In all we gave 29 legal services, 86% of which were in Civil law and 14% of which were in Family law. The civil law matters generally were concerning tenancy evictions and consumer matters around cancelled holidays due to COVID restrictions. The family law matters concerned parenting matters in which some parents were not wanting to comply with parenting orders or parenting plans because of worries about COVID.

With the end of Job Keeper and the Coronavirus supplement in March 2021 we were concerned that we would see an upsurge in COVID-related enquiries particularly with respect to debt issues but this did not happen immediately. It was not until the Greater Sydney lockdown in June 2021 that we began to see an upsurge in COVID enquiries in regard to debt and complying with public health orders. We do expect to see a large upsurge in COVID related enquiries in FY 2021/22 as a result of the statewide lockdown, its effect on the economy and the advent of mandated vaccinations .

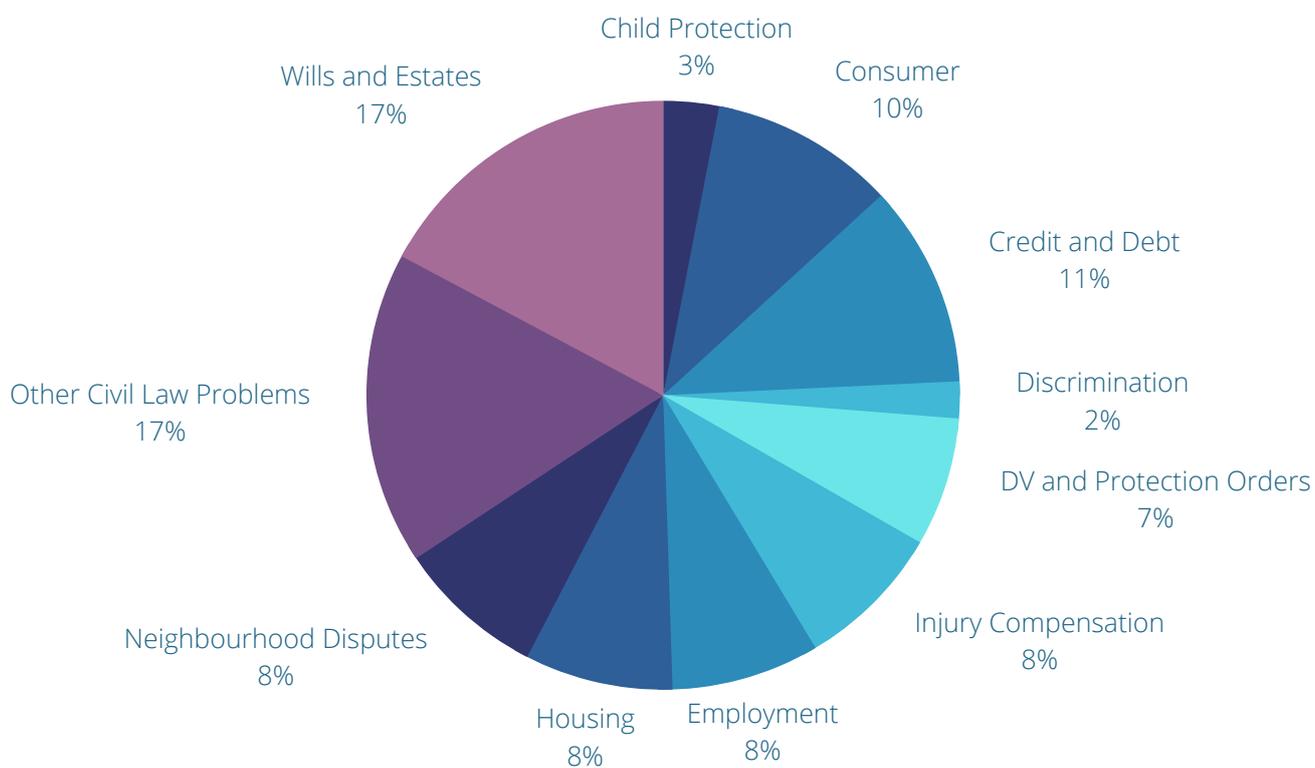


LEGAL ADVICES BY PROBLEM TYPE FOR 2020/21

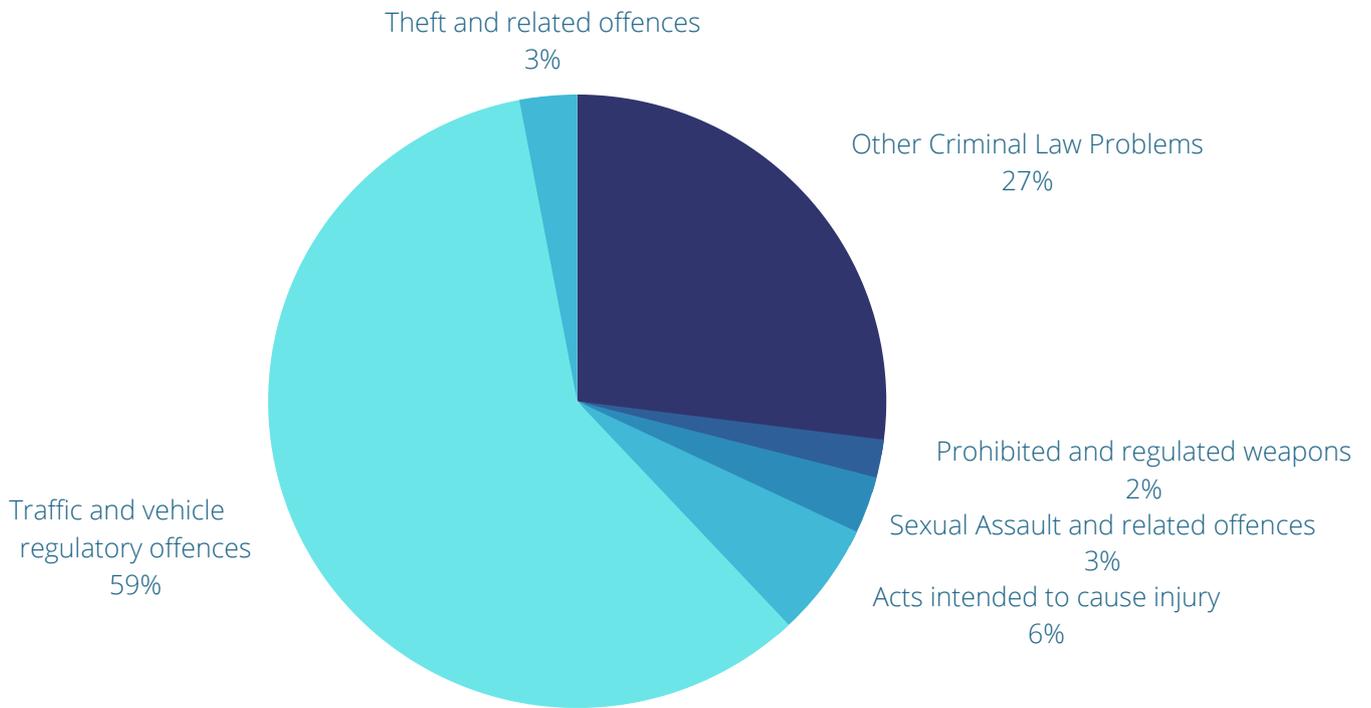
Law types for legal advices



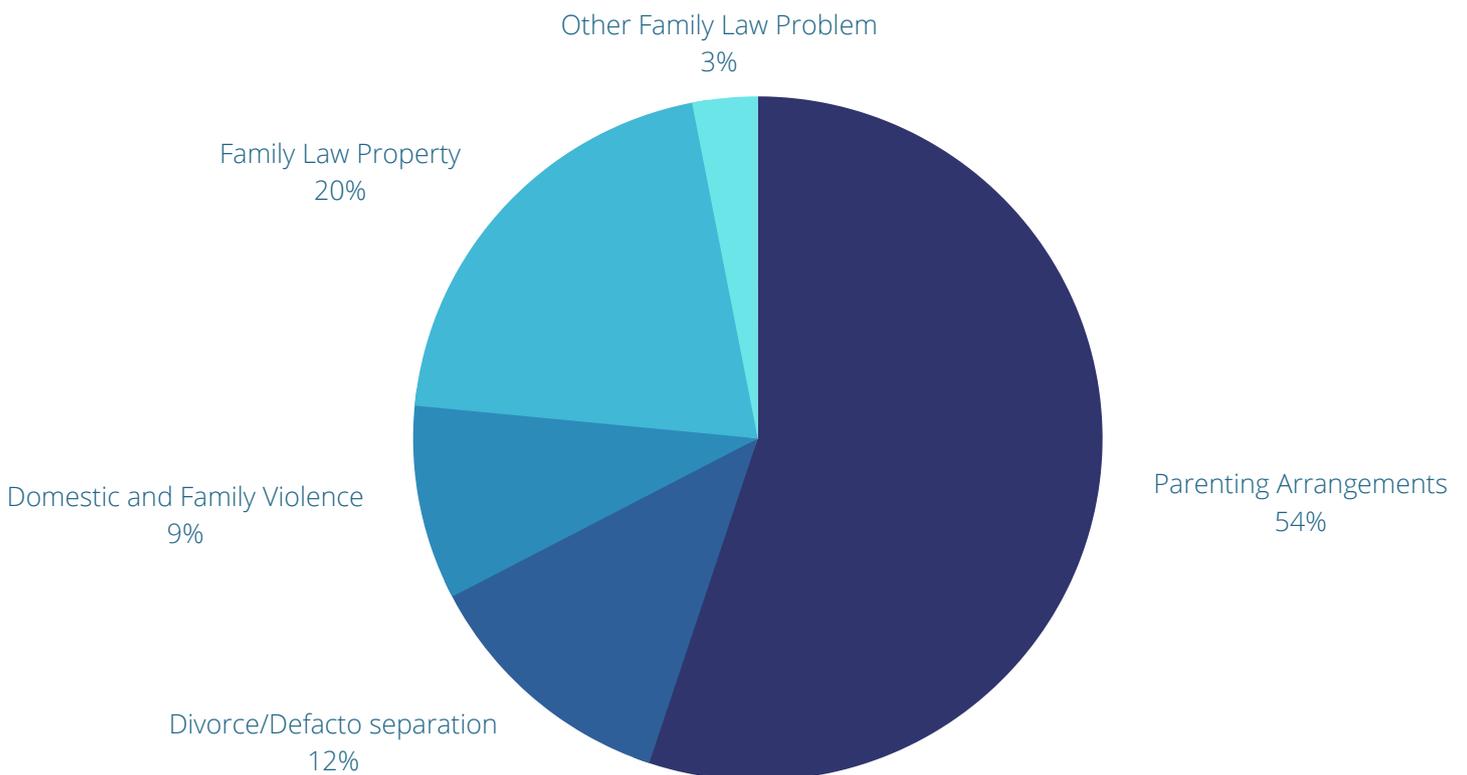
Law types for legal advices for Civil Law



Law types for legal advices for Criminal Law



Law types for legal advices for Family Law



CASE STUDIES

These case studies give examples of the work completed by Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre this year. All names have been changed in these case studies.

Telephone/Internet Provider Contract Issue

In May 2021 we were approached by Sarah who had been in a dispute with her Telco for close to 6 months. Following a storm in her local area, her phone and internet connection had stopped working. This service was particularly important to Sarah as she relied on it to operate a medical alarm system. During the 6 month dispute the Telco had continued to charge Sarah for the phone and internet services she was not receiving.

Shoalcoast became involved and we arranged for the Telco to send out technicians to have the phone and internet service reinstated, and for the money she had paid during the 6-month period to be refunded. We also had the client added to the Telco's priority assist program, so that any disputes in future were to be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

Superannuation Issue

In November 2021 we were approached by Sue who had reached preservation age and qualified to access a small amount of superannuation that she had left behind in an old fund.

Shoalcoast liaised with the superannuation fund on the client's behalf and assisted her to complete all of the necessary paperwork. The clients claim was accepted and her superannuation was paid into her bank account.

Bushfire/Consumer Issue

Sally was referred to Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre by her local council bushfire recovery caseworker. Sally had engaged a start-up company to rebuild her a house after her home was destroyed in 2019/20 bushfires. She had run into disputes with her builder. The builder did not have the correct license to conduct the rebuild of her house, and they were facing substantial delays. Furthermore, the builder had offered her a \$50,000 discount on her rebuild which they were refusing to honor. SCLC prepared a brief and submitted it through the NSW Bar Association's Legal Assistance Referral Scheme. The client received a pro-bono merits assessment from a specialist construction law barrister. The clients decided they did not want to proceed with legal action but said 'we feel strong knowing we have this under our belt... Thank you so much for giving us that power'

Unfair Work Dismissal

Stella was employed as an apprentice with a local business. During her employment Stella was harassed and bullied by her immediate supervisor. After she made a complaint about her supervisor's behavior her employment was terminated. Shoalcoast assisted Stella with her General Protections Involving Dismissal application and represented her at her telephone conference in the Fair Work Commission. A negotiated settlement was reached and Stella was very pleased with the outcome.

Bushfire/Insurance Issue

Sophie was a client from Bega Valley whose farm house was destroyed in the 2019/20 bushfires. She and her husband had five sons, one of whom has a degenerative muscle condition. After the fire, their insurer paid for 12 months temporary accommodation. Six of the family members were renting a 3 bedroom house in Cobargo. Their child was in a wheelchair and required a reclining bed. The only place that it would fit was in the living room. After the fires Sophie's husband found he couldn't cope emotionally and was unable to work. They desperately wanted to return to their farm however, progress on their rebuild was slower than hoped. They didn't have their block cleared until 6 months after the fires. They also needed to rebuild a custom home that would accommodate for their son's accessibility needs, noting that his condition would deteriorate into the future. One year on from the fires, Sophie's husband had only just starting working a few days a week, and they were still a long way off from even having a DA application submitted through Council. They were facing the reality they would have to start paying rent on the Cobargo property out of their insurance property settlement monies, therefore using their rebuild money to meet the cost of living. SCLC wrote to their insurer and requested their temporary accommodation payment be reviewed on the basis that under their insurance policy they were entitled to accommodation of a similar value to that of the destroyed house, and the Cobargo property had been significantly smaller with less rental value. The outcome was that the insurer reviewed the settlement and offered an additional payment equating to approximately 6 months rent.



Vaccination Issue

Jasmina had worked for 10 years as a child care worker. Recently, her employer decided that all staff should receive a flu vaccine even though there were no public health orders which made it mandatory in this industry. Jasmina was summarily dismissed because she did not agree to have a flu vaccine. Jasmina was happy to get the COVID 19 vaccine when it became available for her age group. Jasmina lodged an Unfair Dismissal application in the Fair Work Commission. Shoalcoast represented Jasmina in the Fair Work Commission and after several conciliation conferences a negotiated settlement was finally reached between the parties. Jasmina was very happy with the outcome.

Tenancy Issue

Dudley contacted Shoalcoast for advice when he was struggling to get his landlord to do repairs. There had been a water leak at his rental property and most of the apartment had been affected by mould. Dudley had been asking for the landlord to make the repairs for some time, but the landlord's ultimate response was to issue Dudley with a termination notice.

Dudley was fiercely passionate about his situation and Shoalcoast's assistance empowered Dudley to run his own matter in the NSW Civil and Tribunal. Shoalcoast advised Dudley on several different aspects of the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW), including rights to repair, retaliatory eviction and rent abatement. We also explained what kind of evidence Dudley might need and what to expect in the tribunal to demystify the process.

As Dudley's matter proceeded through the tribunal process, he would return to Shoalcoast for further advice and assistance, including assistance with drafting a witness statement, written submissions and collating his evidence.

Consumer/Health Issue

When Brian* approached Shoalcoast CLC, he had concerns over some dentures that hadn't been fitted properly. Brian was a pensioner, and had received a government voucher to initially pay for the denture installation. A few weeks after the procedure, Brian fell ill and was hospitalised. When in hospital, he couldn't eat solid foods and lost a significant amount of weight as he couldn't use the false teeth to chew. After multiple requests for the clinic to fix Brian's dentures, the clinic requested more money which Brian couldn't afford. The clinic never fixed the faulty dentures, and blamed Brian instead for losing weight.

We assisted Brian in negotiations with the clinic, as well as the Health Care Complaints Commission. Shoalcoast also booked Brian in with the NSW Dental Clinic to be assessed. Since then, Brian has been issued with another government voucher for new dentures to be installed. The clinic's conduct is currently under investigation by the NSW Dental Council, and Brian has not had to pay anything additional to have his new dentures fitted.



Superannuation Underpayments by Employer

Aaesha was referred to us by the Fair Work Commission, after questioning underpayments by her employer. She had queries around annual leave accruals, unpaid meetings, underpayment of superannuation and unusual contractual obligations.

Shoalcoast assisted Aaesha in negotiations with her employer, drafting a letter of demand, drafting a statement of claim and guiding her through the small claims process. Shoalcoast also obtained consent from a number of Aaesha's colleagues, and drafted an investigation request to the Fair Work Ombudsman, urging them to examine the employer and similar workplaces in the South Coast.

Aaesha's matter finally settled before hearing, and she received all superannuation payments to date. Aaesha was so grateful that Shoalcoast supported her through this process, and has told us she will continue to advocate for workplace rights, and encourage others to speak up in her industry.

Debt Issue

Lachie loaned some money to his friend Emma, so she could pay for emergency surgery for her pet dog after it was attacked in the park. As Lachie and Emma were good friends, Lachie didn't think twice about loaning his friend the \$6,000. Lachie and Emma talked about the loan and agreed that Emma would repay the money when she got money back on her tax return.

When Emma appeared to spend her tax return without repaying the money owed to Lachie, Lachie approached Shoalcoast for advice. He was worried that he wouldn't be able to get the money back because nothing was in writing.

Shoalcoast was able to provide advice to Lachie about the enforceability of verbal agreements and his options to get back the money he had loaned Emma. We also talked about mediation through Community Justice Centre's as an option to help get the money back and still keep the friendship. Shoalcoast helped Lachie write a letter of demand and explained the process if Lachie had to make a small claims application in the local court. With Shoalcoast's assistance, Emma repaid the loan within 14 days of receiving the letter of demand.



Family Law/Family Violence Matter

Gretchen contacted Shoalcoast for advice about the family law property process after her 20 year marriage ended. As Shoalcoast spoke with Gretchen and built a rapport, it became apparent that Gretchen had experienced emotional, financial, verbal and physical abuse throughout her relationship.

Shoalcoast assisted Gretchen by initially providing advice on the family law process and the 4-step process the court uses to determine each person's interests in a family law property settlement. We then connected Gretchen with a private solicitor who could be a strong advocate for Gretchen's interests.

Shoalcoast also provided Gretchen with advice on family and domestic violence, and support options available under the Victims Rights and Support Act 2013 (NSW). Another warm referral was made to connect Gretchen with a counsellor and frontline family violence services for ongoing support.

COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION & EVENTS

Another great year for Shoalcoast Community Legal Education and Events. COVID is still in our lives but that did not stop Shoalcoast from providing our services.

Community Legal Education

We organised and facilitated nine online CLE sessions for the period. As with most services online platforms have become the new normal and an effective way to keep in touch with our colleagues. We are all becoming experts in using, Zoom, Teams and Webinars.

While online is not as effective for connecting with our clients and communities we still managed to present to service clubs and community groups. Our topics covered issues such as; Spotting Legal Issues for bushfire affected clients, Supervising a legal practice during COVID, Shoalcoast Services, and Victims Compensation.

As restrictions eased we were able to get back out in our communities again and presented twenty face to face CLE presentations. Topics were varied and included; Spotting legal issues, wills, POA/guardianship, all about scams, and our star program; Cut it Out- program for hairdressers.

Thanks to all our solicitors who have taken up preparing and presenting CLE with enthusiasm. I can collaborate and engage with services and community for suitable topics for CLE however without the support and willingness of our solicitor team to prepare and present the sessions they would not happen.

Events

Sadly, some of the events we regularly attend or organize were cancelled in 2020/21. We missed out on events such as NAIDOC, our Koori touch footy day and the Women's Wellness Festival. We did still manage to attend sixteen in person events and two events online, proving that Shoalcoast and our communities will not be thwarted by this inconvenient viral hiccup.

Resources

In addition to our CLE and events, Shoalcoast staff produced seven CLE resources to enhance our presentations and some will be included for publication on our webpage and social media. Special mention to Lucy Nadj our paralegal who has been instrumental in producing some fabulous resources for our CLE and other Shoalcoast services.

This is my last report, what a privilege it has been working with the great team that are Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre. I look forward to hearing of our continuing CLE and event successes into the future.

Centre Administration Worker & CLE/Events Coordinator

Dianne Day



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

In 2020/21 Shoalcoast attended and were involved in a total of 242 stakeholder engagements, covering all our regions:

Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla, Bega Valley, Queanbeyan/Palerang and Snowy Monaro areas.

Events this year took many differing formats to ensure that COVID-19 did not impact too much on the communities ability to engage. Shoalcoast accepted the new challenges that the COVID-19 restrictions presented. Shoalcoast always aims to attend any event that we can, which will add value to our communities and inform people of the services that we provide.



In 2020/21 Shoalcoast was involved with the following stakeholders in our local community:

- Shoalhaven Domestic and Family Violence Committee
- Keeping them safe - Nowra
- Shoalhaven Anti-Poverty Committee
- Pay Day lending Sub-Committee (sub-committee of Shoalhaven Anti-Poverty Committee)
- South Coast Family Law Pathways Network
- Care and Protection Network - CLCNSW
- DV/Victims Compensation Network - CLCNSW
- CLC Administration and Finance Network - CLCNSW
- Shoalhaven Aboriginal Community Alliance Interagency (SACAI)
- Aboriginal Community Consultative Group Meetings
- Nowra Local Court User Forum Meetings
- Batemans Bay Local Court User Forum Meetings
- Cooperative Legal Services Delivery (CLSD) regional meetings
- Shoalhaven Elder Abuse Prevention and Awareness Network
- Eden Interagency meeting
- Shoalhaven Homelessness Interagency
- Shoalhaven Youth Interagency
- Harmony Day planning group
- Bega Well Being Sub-Committee meeting
- Illawarra LGBTIQ Inclusion Network
- Ulladulla Interagency meeting
- Queanbeyan (QPRC) Agency Network meeting
- Monaro Regional Interagency meeting
- Shoalhaven Multicultural Interagency
- Queanbeyan DV Interagency
- Eurobodalla DV Committee meeting

LAW REFORM

One of the most significant law reform moments for 2020/21 was our submission to the NSW Parliament Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control which culminated in an appearance before the Committee at NSW Parliament House and comment on the matter on local radio. Shoalcoast's submission was cautious of criminalising coercive control without necessary funding and resourcing of preventative measures, as well as concerns regarding the unintended consequences of criminalisation, and the need for greater consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Following Shoalcoast's numerous submissions arising from the horrendous Bushfire season of 2019/20 we were invited to present at the NSW CLC Quarterlies on the topic of law reform as a RRR Centre discussing our experience contributing to individual, as well as sector wide, submissions.

Shoalcoast also engaged directly with government departments, such as Revenue NSW providing feedback on the Fines Amendment Act 2019 (NSW), and the Department of Communities and Justice on potential amendments to Order 6 on Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders.

Shoalcoast has endorsed a number of reports this year including:

- Equality Australia's joint statement opposing One Nation's Religious Discrimination Bill
- CLCNSW Open Letter to the Attorney General and Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence calling for an independent review of the changes to Victims Support implemented from 01 July 2020
- CLCNSW letter to the Attorney General and Shadow Attorney General calling on them not to support One Nation's Education Legislation (Parental Rights) Amendment Bill 2020.
- The Grata Funds 'Respect@work' recommendation letter.

Shoalcoast also made informal contributions to law reform include the identification of systemic issues from our advice and casework. In 2021 this included a complaint to the Fair Work Ombudsman regarding industry practice resulting in underpayment of employee wages. Participation across multiple interagency and network meetings further contributes to our understanding of systemic issues affecting our community.

Shoalcoast looks forward to advocating for reform of systemic issues affecting our community in 2021/22.



ANNUAL CLIENT SURVEY

Shoalcoast completed our annual survey in March 2021. The survey was based on legal services provided in the period 1 March to 26 March 2021. During this time, 173 legal advices were provided to clients. A total of 133 surveys were completed, which is a response rate of 77%.

#	Question	Responses				Did not Answer	Total
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>		
Q1	It was easy to contact the legal service when you first needed help.	92%	8%	0%	0%	1%	100%
Q2	The service provider listened to your legal problem.	95%	5%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Q3	The service provider helped you understand how to deal with your legal problem.	92%	5%	0%	0%	2%	99%
Q4	You know where to get help if you have another legal problem in the future.	90%	8%	2%	0%	2%	100%
Q5	Did you have any personal or cultural needs that the service provider needed to consider?	Yes 35%		No 61%		4%	100%
Q6	Yes to Q5, Did the service provider meet those needs?	94%	6%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Q7	You would recommend this legal service to other people.	92%	6%	1%	0%	1%	100%

COOPERATIVE LEGAL SERVICES DELIVERY PROGRAM



The CLSD partnerships continued to meet quarterly, continuing on with online/virtual meetings and slowly progressing back to face-to-face. Despite the South Coast being impacted by COVID-19, meetings were still well attended during the 2020/21 year by key legal services, community and government partners. The action plan is set to be developed in August 2021, designed to continually monitor progress and change as it occurs in the legal sector and in South Coast communities.

Partnerships consist of legal and non-legal services including Legal Aid NSW, the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT, family violence prevention legal services, local court services and staff, women's domestic violence court advocacy services and a range of related community and human services. CLSD's purpose is to work collaboratively with legal and non-legal service providers to identify and address unmet legal and non-legal needs of our disadvantaged clients. We do this by making better referrals, devising new services and coordinating our efforts to meet the needs of our communities.

GUEST SPEAKERS AND PRESENTATIONS

Over the last financial year, we have invited a number of guest speakers to deliver community legal education and information around legal issues, how to identify legal problems and more generally guiding services/clients through the referral pathways. These included:

Brett Cunningham from Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) in August 2020: Developing a community engagement strategy, which involves connecting with CLSD Program partners and promotion of fee-waivers for birth certificates/legal issues faced by applicants when approaching BDM.

Kerry Wright from Legal Aid NSW & Bud Lawrence from Revenue NSW in November 2020: Advocacy around the 'Fairer Fines Scheme' pilot, with changes to licence sanctions in place from 2020. A pilot program already underway, targeting areas with high Indigenous populations and low socio-economic areas. Areas of hardship are determined by Bureau of Statistics data, with Nowra being included in the pilot. Revenue NSW to hold a series of community meetings, seeking input from relevant stakeholders around the fairer fines scheme in 2021. Community stakeholders are to hear back from Bud/Legal Aid in relation to times and dates of these meetings.

Alexis Goodstone from Redfern Legal Centre (RLC) in November 2020: Referrals to Redfern Legal Centre to participate in law reform around strip searches for young people. Statistically, youth and aboriginal people have been targeted for strip searches, and RLC have made submissions to change police policy so they are not able to strip search specific groups unfairly/unlawfully. Referrals targeted through Legal Aid, Community Legal Centres, community organisations and client self-referrals.



Sally Cameron from Welfare Rights in November 2020: Information around service offerings from Welfare Rights; a specialist community legal centre providing specialist advice around social security issues. Provided an in-depth discussion around Robodebts and JobKeeper/JobSeeker, which was particularly topical given the ongoing COVID19 pandemic. Information around referral pathways, and current wait times for clients with enquires (at the time was 2-3 working days).

Erica Weatherly from Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre and Sharlene Naismith from Legal Aid in February 2021: Addressing legal issues around natural disasters (in response to the 2019/2020 Bushfires). Run through of a law-check up activity and problem scenario to test participant knowledge around legal issues and referral options. Also provided responses to enquiries around the Bushfire Legal Aid Scheme, and other legal problems arising such as:

- Insurance
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood disputes
- Credit, debt and financial hardship
- Dispute resolution
- Employment

In addition to all the guest speakers, each meeting had time allocated for facilitated discussions around the legal services available in the area, available referral pathways, networking opportunities and the dissemination of information inside/outside of the meeting. Although the facilitation of meetings via ZOOM created some technical issues for some, it was a great opportunity for regional/remote services and state-wide organisations to participate and have input in the meetings. For example, we had participants from Revenue NSW, Australian Centre for Disability Law, Justice Advocacy Centre, ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service, Welfare Rights, Redfern Community Legal Centre and the Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW to name a few.

CLSD - KEY PROJECTS

Throughout 2020/21, the CLSD program rolled out the 'Cut It Out' project, after the Nowra launch (attended by the NSW Attorney General) in August 2020. The "Cut it Out" education presentation is an international evidence informed training program on learning how to recognise signs of family violence and how to respond and refer to the appropriate support services.

In the South Coast, there were 5 training sessions taking place from Nowra all the way down to the Far South Coast. These were held in salons, TAFE's and public venues, and presented by Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre along with many of the local domestic violence services. With an allocated budget of \$4,860, we managed only to spend \$1802.35 (see detailed report for this project for further details).

Most of the presenters (from WDVCS, SAHSSI, Waminda and SEWACS) were already partners of the CLSD program, and assisted with creating resources and the content for the project. The majority of the administration work was run by Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre (solicitors/CLSD Coordinator and administration staff). There were other interested partners who wanted to be kept up to date with the project however they did not wish to participate or have input into planning/implementing the program. Updates were given at each CLSD meeting throughout the year.





The future of the project looks bright, with a keen interest from local TAFE's and salons for ongoing training. We have recently been approached to tailor our presentation to target some of the trade students at TAFE, with more of a 'call it out' approach targeted towards male students. Our local WDVCS (through the Southern Women's Group) were keen to take over the project and are interested to apply for funding should there be any available in the future.

Other projects stemming from the CLSD group included:

- Creation and implementation of a monthly e-newsletter with updates for meetings, service updates, projects, new services in the area and a service spotlight for organisations who want to promote new offerings/events etc.
- Development of joint legal service posters for the below areas in June/July 2020:
 - Batemans Bay, Mogo and surrounds
 - Milton, Ulladulla and surrounds
 - Nowra and surrounds
 - Eden, Bega and surrounds
 - Moruya, Bodalla, Wallaga Lake and surrounds, and
 - Snowy Monaro, Queanbeyan/Palerang

CLSD KEY ISSUES

The legal needs (ie: advice and representation) of vulnerable people living in the Far South Coast (FSC): Over the last year, services on the FSC have reported it being particularly difficult to obtain representation and expert advice in the areas of Family Law and Care and Protection. In a meeting on 31 March 2021, Shoalcoast CLC members spoke about the legal need around the Eurobodalla/FSC in these areas, wishing for more Legal Aid panel solicitors who could assist disadvantaged clients in family law matters.

Concerns have been raised around private solicitors in the area, being inappropriate referrals for vulnerable individuals. In some cases, there were reports of these solicitors being impatient and insulting towards our client base. Kate Halliday suggested increasing some of the ROCP lawyers' funding for an extra day in the Batemans Bay area. ROCP lawyers have not been attending CLSD meetings so has been difficult to obtain further information about the program and capacity to increase funding and workloads. To follow up in 2021/22.





Issues relating to COVID-19: Based on a Survey taken in 2020, the CLSD network reported the following from the responders:

- 100% of the services were still operating during COVID-19.
- 82% saw access to technology as a critical issue their clients were struggling with during the COVID-19 pandemic. Followed by understanding new technologies (60%), no mobile reception (52%), closure of outreaches and F2F clinics (52%).
- The need for an outreach service established, one that provided support to hospital inpatients.
- A large majority expressing their concern for increasing domestic violence rates, and mental health issues emerging in the community.

As a result of COVID-19, there were reports of the following:

- Clients not feeling comfortable using virtual technology, therefore were disengaging with services.
- Lack of reliable technology, particularly in rural and remote areas.
- Clients who usually walked into services, weren't able to if doors were closed or they felt health compromised.
- Community transport ceased, or was disjointed therefore clients weren't easily able to access services.
- Services weren't as easily able to attend home visits, due to their company policies and procedures.
- Face to face meeting and group conferences were put on hold.
- Face to face education programs were put on hold.

Room capacity for a lot of services presented as an issue, therefore F2F appointments were cancelled.

Through the survey, CLSD partners requested the following:

- “Increased and better coordinated counselling services for perpetrators of domestic and post separation violence. Also, relationships and legal education in schools to improve life skills of young people moving into adulthood”
- “An outreach service established, perhaps one that provided support to hospital inpatients”
- “Groups/ sessions for parents dealing with custody issues. particularly with violence being an issue in relationship”.

Throughout the meetings, appropriate referrals were able to be made, particularly to the Cancer Council pro-bono scheme for Wills/EPOA's/EG's for cancer patients. Shoalcoast CLC opened up to outreach earlier on, and offered to provide hospital visits for terminally ill patients. They also assisted with CLE's to health providers around 'planning ahead' in the Bega area.

The Legal Aid 'Law For Community Workers' podcast and webinars were of great assistance to our community, as many services could access them online or listen to them from remote locations. Many other legal services utilised online webinars to disseminate information as well.

As things began to open back up and the restrictions eased, the CLSD partners still requested our meetings to be held online. As previously stated, this allowed for a greater number of participants to attend from a variety of knowledge backgrounds. Towards the beginning of 2021, we saw our first F2F meetings take place in Bega. This was followed by a hybrid meeting in Nowra for the legal services. In a survey taken towards the start of the year, the majority of partners wanted the meetings to be held F2F with an online option. This will be discussed further in the August 2021 Action Plan.

Homelessness: Particularly since COVID-19 and the South Coast Bushfires, majority of the CLSD partners have been discussing a variety of housing issues our area is facing. Problems include:

- A growth of social housing providers classifying clients as 'unsatisfactory tenants' so they can reduce housing lists.
- A general decrease of social housing options as we see an increase of property values in the South Coast.
- Private rental prices soaring.
- Refuges full to capacity, with long waiting lists.
- Reporting of higher domestic violence rates, therefore an increase of women and children fleeing from violence who require emergency accommodation.
- Bushfire victims still living in temporary accommodation, as new house builds taking longer than anticipated and insurance waiting times increase.
- Procedural fairness not being considered throughout NCAT hearings, with vulnerable tenants not being given 14 days' notice to respond.
- Lack of transparency of policy for clients in the areas of social housing management transfer.
- TAAS seeing lots of people who thought that they had negotiated a rent reduction, but the landlord had only deferred payment, therefore are being lumped with large debts and forced to vacate.
- People being exploited by landlords with extortionist bonds being demanded and difficulty meeting financial terms for temporary accommodation.
- Insecure tenancies in caravan parks

The CLSD coordinator has reached out to Bega SEWACS to assist with the 'Sleep on it' awareness fundraising event which was due to take place in August, now moved to October. SEWACS have asked the CLSD group to assist in rallying private solicitors to take part in a 'friendly competition' to fundraise, and ask their managing partners to participate in the sleep out. CLSD has also made enquiries in the Shoalhaven area to see if this is something we can also roll out in the LGA.



Actions relating to the South Coast Bushfires: Since the promotion of the disaster recovery hotline, and the establishment of bushfire funded positions, there have been a number of actions resulting from the disaster:

- Regular disaster recovery hubs set up to provide information sharing and networking for services and victims of the 2019/20 bushfire.
- Free webinars and information sessions around bushfire recovery.
- Resources available through the Legal Aid website, local council areas and Service NSW to assist bushfire clients navigate their way through the recovery process.

Service members and partners still demonstrated how difficult the process was, despite the grants and services available to assist. In 2021, there was a request from multiple services for an information brochure about how legal services can assist.

The CLSD network has provided referral pathways, the opportunity for group members to ask questions about disaster recovery from legal professionals working in this field and advocacy for the pop-up recovery hubs.

Overall in this year CLSD has strived to keep the conversation going between legal and non-legal services about issues that effect our clients and how we can address our clients' legal and non-legal needs.



THANK YOU

Thank you for reading our annual report. Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre looks forward to the 2021/22 year and continuing our services to the Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla, Bega Valley, Snowy Monaro and Queanbeyan/Palerang Local Government Areas.
