

1 JULY 2022 - 30 JUNE 2023

# ANNUAL REPORT



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SHOALCOAST COMMUNITY  
LEGAL CENTRE INCORPORATED

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre would like to Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work. We pay our respects to the Ancestors, Elders past and present, the future generations, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. We Acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People will always hold a spiritual belonging and connection with this country, and remain the Traditional Owners and First Peoples of this land.

## MISSION

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To provide free, easily accessible and professional legal services that support vulnerable members of our communities when they need it most.

## VISION

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To live in an inclusive and equitable society that embraces social justice, where professional legal services and support are available to all, regardless of social or economic status.

## VALUES

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### **One for all.**

We offer respect and support, not judgement or bias. Our professional legal services are genuinely inclusive and available to all. We truly care.

### **Community to the core.**

We are about fostering a more informed, empowered and stronger community where everyone is respected, supported and heard.

### **Time worth taking.**

We provide high levels of professional legal services, delivered with empathy, patience and compassion. We take the time to truly understand our clients and their unique situations, before explaining the best ways forward using plain English.

### **Big picture focus.**

Every client's legal situation is unique. We go further to see the complete picture, so we can offer the right combination of options, information and support. We provide a holistic service and link to other experts when required.

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# **VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

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<b>President</b>	Stephanie Young
<b>Vice President</b>	Jack Miller
<b>Secretary</b>	Meredith McLaine
<b>Treasurer</b>	Emily Hoerlein
<b>Committee Members</b>	Jane Mussett Kerry Wright Megan Pikett Luke Elliot (from January 2023) Lorraine Hayward (until July 2022)
<b>Staff Representatives</b>	Caryn Carpenter Erin Mulally
<b>Principal Solicitor</b>	Justine O'Reilly (until September 2022) Louisa Stewart (from October 2022)
<b>Centre Manager</b>	Emma Wood

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

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1. Provision of an efficient generalist legal service offering discrete legal assistance to members of the community. Provision of ongoing legal assistance to those who are disadvantaged.
2. Promotion of Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre's services to our communities.
3. Identify and contribute to law reform issues that promote systemic change to the advantage of our communities.
4. Identify and implement strategy 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 communities.
6. Identify and respond to the needs in our catchment areas in relation to Family Law/Family Violence.
7. To continue to build and maintain our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities through our services.
8. To auspice and run the Cooperative Services Legal Delivery (CLSD) program for the South Coast.

# SHOALCOAST TEAM

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## ADMINISTRATION TEAM

Emma Wood	Centre Manager
Rebecca Butler	Administration Support Worker
Caryn Carpenter	Community Support Worker
Jasmine Huang	Administration and Events Planner
Shiree Gehlhaar	Administration Officer

## LEGAL AND NON-LEGAL SERVICE TEAM

Louisa Stewart	Principal Solicitor (from September 2022) Generalist Solicitor for Nowra and Surrounds (until October 2022)
Justine O'Reilly	Principal Solicitor (until September 2022)
Erin Mulally	Generalist Solicitor for the Southern Shoalhaven Cooperative Legal Service Delivery Program Coordinator
Lisa Woodgate	Generalist Solicitor for Queanbeyan-Palerang and Snowy Monaro
Joanne Pollock	Generalist Solicitor for Eurobodalla (until March 2023)
Angela Boyland	Generalist Solicitor for Eurobodalla (from March 2023)
Geoff Cornwall	Financial Counsellor (from May 2023)
Grant Hodgson	Locum Generalist Solicitor (from November 2022 until February 2023) Generalist Solicitor for Nowra and Surrounds (from February 2023)
Len Brown	Generalist Solicitor for the project – Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Funding (from August 2022)
Josephine Wittman	Generalist Solicitor for Northern Shoalhaven (from August 2022)
Linda Tucker	Casual Generalist Solicitor covering Bega Valley outreaches (from November 2022)
Ruth Ferguson	Generalist Solicitor for Bega Valley (until November 2022)
Brad Rusak	Paralegal (until January 2023)
Lachlan White	Paralegal (until September 2022)
Ashwyn Sormus	Paralegal (until October 2022)
Katie Lahodny	Casual Generalist Solicitor (until September 2022)

## VOLUNTEER TEAM

Nicola Bottarlini	Social Work Volunteer
Caitlin Maringer	Legal Intern
Eleanor Drury	Legal Intern
Bella McCrudden	Year 10 Work Experience Student from Novo Education Space Vincentia
Harrison Wood	Year 10 Work Experience Student from Nowra Anglican College

## OFFICE JUNIORS (School Holidays)

Harrison Wood	Social Media and Office Junior
Evie Stewart	Office Junior



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FUNDING

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Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre received funding from the following sources in 2022/23:

**NLAP Generalist Funding** – State and Commonwealth Governments through the Community Legal Centre Program (CLC Program Unit) managed by Legal Aid NSW

**Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Funding** – Department of Communities and Justice

**Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) Program** – Legal Aid NSW.

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

## RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

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Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre has had two Innovate Reconciliation Action Plans (2016 to 2018) and (2020 to 2022) and in 2023 commenced work on creating and implementing a Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan.

Through the implementation of this new Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre reaffirms its commitment to growing and maintaining strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in our region, and to continuously developing partnerships that strengthen and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

A working party was formed to create this new RAP. We thank the following for coming together to formulate our new RAP, which is currently with Reconciliation Australia for review.

Emma Wood	RAP Champion
Caryn Carpenter	Staff
Jo Wittman	Staff
Rebecca Butler	Staff
Megan Pikett	Management Committee Member
Meredith McLaine	Management Committee Secretary

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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Over the last twelve months, the professional and energetic team at the Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre have continued to provide some of the most vulnerable members of our communities, with a high level of legal support, advice, and advocacy. It won't surprise anyone to hear that for another year, our team has been highly productive achieving great results via exceptional service delivery methods.

Whilst maintaining a flexible workplace for staff, the Centre has continued to meet the needs of clients offering in person and outreach services, as well as remote advice services. This Annual Report will reflect upon many of the achievements of the past year and the work undertaken across the Centre's focus areas. Though it might capture well the statistical analysis of the work undertaken, it can never truly capture all the hard work that occurs behind the scenes to ensure we meet the needs of those who require this service and the equitable access to justice. I acknowledge the ongoing efforts of everyone who has contributed to the Centre across the past year, and I know that each of you has gone above and beyond in your day-to-day delivery of services and your personal contributions are to be acknowledged.

All staff are integral to the Centre's work, whether in management, legal, intake, or in administration and support. Every person at the Centre should feel extremely proud of their achievements within and outside of this report.

During the reporting year, we saw some familiar faces change around the Centre. In particular we saw a significant change to the leadership team this year, with Principal Solicitor Justine O'Reilly pursuing new and exciting opportunities. All that know Justine, know that she is a passionate advocate for vulnerable people with an appetite for seeking change. Justine was an asset to the Centre and we know that she will carry those skills to her new role and continue to help shape policies of importance.



We welcomed to the leadership team our new Principal Solicitor, Louisa Stewart. With an absolute wealth of knowledge and experience, and an obvious and unyielding commitment to Community Legal Centres, the transition was seamless, and the Centre has continued to thrive.

The Management Committee continues to increase its focus on the great achievements of the Centre and its staff and particularly enjoys the participation and input of the staff representatives. The Management Committee will continue to monitor the implementation of strategic plans across the Centre's operations to assist in meeting its goals. This year, I thank my fellow members Jack Miller, Meredith McLaine, Kerry Wright, Luke Elliott, Emily Hoerlein, Megan Pikett and Jane Mussett. I am very thankful for their work and assistance throughout the year and their willingness to volunteer their time and expertise in this way. Recently, Jack had to unfortunately leave his position and I extend a very big thank you for all his time and assistance.

On the back of several natural disasters and the pandemic over recent years, we all move towards creating more resilient people and services for the years ahead. I think that there is a great opportunity available to us now, to reflect on what has passed, identify gaps in delivery during times of urgent need and to advocate for increased attention to these deficiencies. Shoalcoast is well placed to undertake this task and to ensure that the people within our catchment areas are informed and able to access the advice and follow up they need.

I commend this report to you and encourage you to take the time to reflect on the year that has passed, and the results achieved both individually and as a team.

**Stephanie Young,**  
President



# TREASURER'S REPORT

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Greetings all,

Our Centre's purpose is to help our communities when they need it. And every year, I have the privilege to assist our Centre as treasurer. Some may consider working with numbers a dry task, but I am just glad to help where I can.

A summary of our financial statements are as follows:

<b>Revenue</b>		<b>Assets</b>	
Government funds	\$1,728,008	Cash on hand	\$867,713
Interest received	\$6,807	other current assets	\$18,737
All other revenue	\$15,781	Property, plant and equipment	\$51,207
Less:		Liabilities	
Depreciation	(\$17,081)	Accounts payable	\$98,996
Employee expenses	(\$1,195,303)	All other liabilities	\$179,264
Rent	(\$68,683)	Equity	
All other expenses	(\$215,730)	Opening balance	\$405,598
Surplus	\$253,799	This year's surplus	\$253,799

Our more comprehensive financial report can be available on request.

I would like to comment on our unusually large surplus. It has always been our goal to use all of our funds, and end the year in neither a surplus nor a deficit. At the end of the financial year, we graciously received Flood and Disaster Relief funding; this will be rolled over and used to help our communities in 2024.

I would like to give special thanks to Emma Wood, Louisa Stewart, Shiree Gehlhaar, and Jasmine Huang for another year of amazing work in assisting me as treasurer for the Centre. These lovely people do their communities proud.

I am available if there are any questions regarding my report.

**Emily Hoerlein,**

Treasurer

# PRINCIPAL SOLICITOR'S REPORT

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It is a great time to reflect on a year of change in the life of our Community Legal Centre. The population of the South Coast and Southern Tablelands has been growing and with it the legal needs that evolve and change each year. With it we change and grow for the better.

It was the first year leading the legal practice for me and my seventh year in the life of the Centre. After many staff leaving in the past few years it can be tiring at times to keep moving forward but our current team are so resilient and committed and I am constantly reminded of our core values when I see them at work.

## **Thanks to you all!**

I would like to start my report with some gratitude:

Thank you to Emma Wood – Centre Manager and support expert to all of us. We are so lucky to have your experience and guidance as a Centre. Thank you for supporting me in this first year as Principal.

Thanks to our wonderful administrative and intake team who are the voice on the phone and the face at the front counter for many clients who find themselves in need of legal help.

Thanks to our amazing and committed legal team (including our financial counsellor too now!) for being the voice of reason and truth for our clients in their difficult circumstances.



We must also acknowledge and thank the previous Principal, Justine O'Reilly, who resigned on 30 September 2022. Justine saw the Centre through a number of momentous times including the devastating bushfires and floods of 2019/20 and then through COVID and all the challenges that brought.

I also want to acknowledge our Management Committee members that oversees finances and governance of SCLC for their patience and generosity with their time. They volunteer hours at the end of very busy days, giving up time with your families to help us run this place and we are so grateful for the help you give. Thank you.

We are also thankful for our wonderful continued support of pro bono volunteers at Baker Mackenzie who have contributed pro bono hours to work on case files for our Victims Support Domestic Violence project over the last few years. This amazing help gives our legal team the chance to take on even more work for the clients of our Catchment and allows our clients to experience the great skills from Lynn McMahon and Kate Gillingham and their legal team.

We have also continued our partnership with pro bono Hall & Wilcox lawyers preparing Wills for free to disadvantaged clients. Without the help of these and other pro bono lawyers around Australia, from including Holding Redlich and Clayton Utz and others we would not be able to offer the comprehensive and high-quality legal assistance to our clients with diverse legal needs.

### **2022/23 Legal Practice Summary:**

In the past year we have delivered 2,134 legal advices, tasks and ongoing direct services to clients. The majority of these remain on the same problem types as previous years with Family Law and Civil Law being the primary legal issues faced by our clients.

We have changed and added to our outreaches to include three new locations from the start of 2023. The Cobargo Community Access Centre outreach was established by request from their volunteer committee who led disaster recovery efforts in Cobargo after the 2019/20 Bushfires. We commenced outreach there in February and are finding it to be a great way to reach our clients in the northern part of the Bega Valley Shire while our long-established outreaches in Bega and Eden cater for the central and southern reaches of the community. We continue to be the only fortnightly service offering free legal assistance to this LGA.

We also established the Bay & Basin Community Centre outreach in Sanctuary Point in November 2022 as part of a trial location for the DSVS funding from DCJ. This new location has continued through to 2023 as it has proven to be extremely popular and well attended.

Finally, a new monthly outreach to Jindabyne (Snowy Mountains Neighbourhood Centre) was commenced in February and we are continuing in 2023/24 in the Jindabyne Library meeting rooms. Reaching more of our rural, regional and remote areas has been a priority for our service as we ensure that disadvantaged clients have access to justice no matter where they are.

We continued our other outreach clinics at the Nowra SCLC office, Wreck Bay, Ulladulla, Batemans Bay, Moruya, Cooma and Queanbeyan. We also attended fortnightly at Milton local court as DV Duty service.

We assisted in the Nowra DV Duty Solicitor roster but that will not continue in 2023/24 as we look at more opportunities to increase our assistance at the many unsupported local courts in our catchments.



### **The move to Actionstep for Case Management (AKA the end of paper files!)**

In June 2022 our Centre made the momentous leap into the future, we went onto a case management system. For a legal practice of 22 years standing, this was a turning point as we fully embraced the wonders of technology after sitting on the fence with a foot in both worlds.

From July 2022 we have moved ahead, we are a year into the process now and have entirely online file keeping for the practice. Thank you to our very patient and committed staff who have endured the updating of pretty much every work process we have in less than 12 months. We did it!!

### **Next for Shoalcoast**

In late May 2023 we commenced SCLC's first Financial Counsellor Geoff Cornwall – he joined our team from our sibling centre Illawarra Legal Centre and has onboarded to commence work for our Commonwealth Disaster Related Commonwealth Flood & Disaster Related legal Assistance Funding received off the back of the 2022 Federal election. This additional resource will be for four years, allowing us to provide additional legal services, as well as the non-legal financial counselling services. We have spent time inducting Geoff and his work will be alongside our legal team offering a new dimension to the assistance we can offer clients in financial disadvantage.

We are so excited to have this practical and much needed help for our clients particularly those affected by the Bushfires in 2019/20 in our LGAs and many of whom still have related issues such as credit and debt, welfare issues, family breakdown and mental health concerns that detrimentally affected their ability to deal with their legal issues.

We will continue to respond and assist clients where we can and be a safe first door to walk through or call when a client is in need. We will continue to offer free and confidential services that aim to improve our clients lives for the better.

**Louisa Stewart,**  
Principal Solicitor



# CENTRE REPORT

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## JULY 2022

- We continued our transition to using Actionstep – entering data and planning for the future use. At the same time we transition to Office 365.
- We were worried about another COVID outbreak, but thankfully it did not happen!
- Caitlin Mairinger finished her 4 week Legal Intern period with us.

## AUGUST 2022

- We welcomed Josephine Wittman and Len Brown to the team.
- We continued with our new system, Actionstep – with training and data entry.
- The quarterly CLSD meeting was held this month.

## SEPTEMBER 2022

- We said farewell to Justine O'Reilly and Lachlan White.
- Louisa Stewart acted in the Principal Solicitor role during the recruitment phase.
- We hosted a Year 10 Work Experience Student – Bella McCrudden from Novo Education Space – Vincentia.

## OCTOBER 2022

- We welcomed Grant Hodgson as our Locum Generalist Solicitor.
- We congratulated Louisa Stewart on becoming our new Principal Solicitor.
- We said farewell to Ashwyn Sormus.

## NOVEMBER 2022

- We said farewell to Ruth Ferguson.
- We hosted a Year 10 Work Experience Student – Harrison Wood from Nowra Anglican College.
- Jasmine Huang moved from being full time to working part time.
- The quarterly CLSD meeting was held this month.

## DECEMBER 2022

- We welcomed Linda Tucker back to the team to cover the Bega Valley outreaches.
- We welcomed our office juniors to the team – Harrison Wood and Evie Stewart.
- We started a welcome Christmas break – a well deserved break for all!

## JANUARY 2023

- We started the new year, refreshed and ready to go!
- Our social work student, Nick Bottarlini to the team for placement.
- We said farewell to Brad Rusak.

## **FEBRUARY 2023**

- We welcomed Grant to the team permanently as the Generalist Solicitor for Postcode 2541, Worrigeer and East Nowra.
- The quarterly CLSD meeting was held this month.

## **MARCH 2023**

- We welcomed Shiree Gehlhaar and Angela Boyland to the team.
- We said farewell to Joanne Pollock and Nick Bottalini.
- Erin, Emma, Louisa and Caryn attended the CLC Australia National Conference in Hobart, Tasmania.
- We held an induction session for new management committee members – Luke Elliott, Jane Mussett and Megan Pikett.
- We commenced work on our next Reconciliation Action Plan.
- We celebrated Harmony Week.

## **APRIL 2023**

- We submitted the final report for our Phase 3 Accreditation.
- We applied for the First National Cadet Program – sadly we were unsuccessful.
- Erin and Louisa went to Sydney to Baker McKenzie to train their pro-bono section in Victims Services matters, as part of our partnership.

## **MAY 2023**

- We welcomed Geoff Cornwall to the team.
- We welcomed Eleanor Drury to the team for her 4 week Legal Intern period.
- Emma and Louisa completed a road trip to Queanbeyan and Cooma area for promotion of Shoalcoast.
- The quarterly CLSD meeting was held in Queanbeyan.
- We attended Sorry Day events in Bega and Nowra.
- We celebrated Law Week by completing 6 Community Legal Education sessions.

## **JUNE 2023**

- We said farewell to Linda Tucker.
- We completed a big clean up and reorganisation of the office and the mezzanine at 80 Bridge Road.
- We held our Annual Planning Day.
- We held our Annual Cultural Awareness Day.
- We enjoyed and contributed to Australia's Biggest Morning Tea.

**Emma Wood,**

Centre Manager

# NORTHERN SHOALHAVEN

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Shoalcoast services the Northern Shoalhaven region which spans from Berry and Kangaroo Valley down to Huskisson and Vincentia. There are a number of small towns in the region that are serviced mainly by the large regional centre located at Nowra. Given the hike in petrol prices, inflation and increases in the cost of living generally over the past year, public transport has become an even greater issue in the region than it used to be, with some towns being located almost a 100km round trip from Nowra. Many people in this area struggle managing casual employment and insecure tenancies. Rents are high and many struggle to afford basic necessities. There is significant welfare dependence. We have observed that increasing cost of living pressures have manifested in an increase in homelessness, mental health issues, inability to repay debts, family violence and family breakdown.

Shoalcoast runs two regular, fortnightly outreach clinics in the region: one at the Bay and Basin Community Resources Centre in Sanctuary Point; and the other at the Wreck Bay Administration Centre in Jervis Bay.

Wreck Bay is a small Aboriginal Community located at the edge of Booderee National Park. There are about 48 houses in the Wreck Bay village which also has a Medical Centre, an Early Education Learning Centre, an Administration Centre and a cemetery. At the request of the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council (WBACC), Shoalcoast has committed to a fortnightly outreach on Tuesdays. The Wreck Bay Clinic is regularly well attended.

We coordinate regularly with other legal services at Wreck Bay, including ACT Legal Aid, and with private law firms such as Hall & Wilcox and Clayton Utz, who provide specialised pro bono legal services to our Wreck Bay clients. We also coordinate with WBACC to ensure that our service is advertised broadly across not only the Wreck Bay community but more widely to all Aboriginal people in the region. We were invited to participate in the WBACC NAIDOC Week celebrations, the WBACC Cancer Council Morning Tea and we liaise regularly with the WBACC Community Liaison Officer to discuss community needs and appropriate Community Legal Education options.





Our outreach clinic in Sanctuary Point commenced as a pilot location under the DSVV funding in November 2022. We have partnered with BCR Communities (Formerly: Bay and Basin Community Resources), a community based, not-for-profit organisation. BCR Communities is an active community organisation aiming to coordinate and implement community services in the region. Shoalcoast's outreach clinic is always well attended.

Shoalcoast regularly attended the Bay and Basin Police and Community Services fortnightly meeting, which is auspiced by Bay and Basin Community Resources, to network with other community groups and ensure we were assisting those most in need. This allows us to work in conjunction with many government agencies and local community services to deliver positive outcomes, including with Department of Corrections, NSW Police, Waminda and WDVCS.

Shoalcoast regularly offers CLE in the region, including in aged care facilities, community groups and community support services. Shoalcoast has an excellent reputation in the region as evidenced by the popularity of the outreach clinics and the volume of legal advice being sought by members of the region.

**Jo Wittman,**  
Generalist Solicitor



## **NOWRA AND SURROUNDS**

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This is the Centre's largest population base and contains many areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Outreach took place each fortnight at the SCLC office on Bridge Road, Nowra with solicitors also available for phone or face to face interviews at other times.

The most common area of work was Family Law/Domestic violence with many advices being the initial point of contact for clients with the legal profession. Most of our referrals were from community service organisations. Preliminary advice was given and referrals often made to private legal practitioners. After legal advice the clients are in a better position to provide their lawyer with the information and documentation needed to represent them on an ongoing basis. Many initial advices in this area have multiple problem types. Commonly, Criminal Law, ADVOs, Victims Services entitlements, Children's issues, Property Settlement, Child Support, Income Support and Estate Law can all be part of the one appointment or phone call.

We work as a team to ensure that we draw on experience and knowledge to assist our client in their diverse range of problems.

An exciting development this year was Geoff Cornwall commencing work with us in May as Financial Counsellor. The value of his contribution to the team and our clients is apparent even at this early stage. Having practical help for clients in dealing with their debt issues is a great relief to our clients. CLE's were provided this year to interested members of the public via the Shoalhaven Library. More CLEs to Community Service organisations including Mission Australia and the Aboriginal Chronic Care Unit were delivered in Nowra this year also. Planning Ahead and Victims Support presentations were popular with the materials being produced by legal practitioners from Shoalcoast.

There was regular contact with other Legal Service Providers in the Local area at CPD events, including members of the Federal Court and Family Court of Australia many of whom previously worked as private Legal Practitioners in Nowra.

An enjoyable year of varied and interesting legal service.

**Grant Hodgson,**  
Generalist Solicitor

# SOUTHERN SHOALHAVEN

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Erin Mullaly was the solicitor for the area throughout the whole 2022/23 reporting year. She has recently left our service in August 2023.

The Southern Shoalhaven from Sussex Inlet to Durras was the geographical area for outreach and stakeholder engagement and CLE. With a growing and aging population this is one of our busiest outreach locations also. Disability and NDIS related legal issues increased in this area in 2022/23 also. Family breakdown is also common to this region and particularly couples separating and being unable to afford a lawyer as they navigate the post separation parenting and financial issues.

Erin covered the Ulladulla outreach and the Milton Local Court outreach (SCLC Duty service). She was also the CLSD Regional Coordinator for the whole reporting year.

Ulladulla CRC has been one of our longest running outreaches here at Shoalcoast and we continue to collaborate with their dynamic staff in delivering our services there for the local clients. We have seen a diverse range of legal issues there in this past year and with an aging population many of these clients are older persons needing assistance with civil issues and domestic and family violence issues. Erin's skills in Wills and Estates issues were very welcome.

Milton Local Court outreach was first established in 2019/20 to assist clients, usually advice and assistance is provided to the person in need of protection (PINOP), for issues around Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders and related issues such as Family Law parenting at the regular Domestic Violence List days at court. Milton is one of more than six unsupported local courts in our catchment that previously had no domestic violence duty lawyer under the Legal Aid scheme so we offer this service to assist clients attending court. Duty services have then often led to ongoing assistance for clients needing Victims Support applications or Parenting Plans/Family Dispute Resolution assistance. We acknowledge the assistance of the Registrar of Milton Court Ben Brooks for allowing us to use the space and the South Coast WDVCS for their ongoing support for our service and clients there.

Erin's stakeholder engagement for the Southern Shoalhaven Interagency and her CLE work training both frontline workers and client groups in the Southern Shoalhaven was extensive. She completed a number of law reform activities in her role as member of the Shoalhaven Homelessness Taskforce (a Council led working group that arose from the Shoalhaven Homeless Interagency). The knowledge and cooperative work with the local service providers in the region really helped gain a great following from clients and services who knew and trusted Shoalcoast CLC as a result.

**Louisa Stewart,**  
Principal Solicitor



## EUROBODALLA

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Eurobodalla Shire is located on the south coast of New South Wales, between 280 and 360 kilometres south of the Sydney CBD, and between 150 to 220 kilometres south-east of the Canberra CBD. Much of Eurobodalla's employment is based on tourism, which has impacts on job security and economic well being of the population. There is an ageing population in the region, with many residents retired and living on pensions or self funded retirees.

Eurobodalla was significantly impacted by the 2019/20 bushfires. Hundreds of homes, many businesses, and thousands of hectares of bushland were damaged or destroyed. Recovery is a long term process that is different for everyone.

Homelessness and temporary accommodation is an issue in the region. There is an older population and we have completed many Enduring Powers of Attorneys and Enduring Guardianships and advised on proceedings to NCAT for orders in these matters.

Domestic Violence combined with issues from fires and general issues have featured and resulting Victims Services advices. Family Law and Child Protection advice has been provided including for young persons living in the area who have exited statutory care and continue to struggle to maintain stability in housing and employment, experiences of trauma and other adjustment issues. Poor mental health and drug/alcohol abuse have featured in several cases. Limited opportunities for employment in the region for younger persons, with risks of exploitation by business in the hospitality industry including casual employment.

Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre has provided ongoing face to face appointments in the Eurobodalla in the last 12 months. 2022 year and up until March 2023 was conducted by Joanne Pollock and then by Angela Boyland. Face to face appointments have been conducted on a fortnightly basis, Tuesday at Mackillop Family Services and Thursday at The Family Place office in Moruya.

General economic distress for the region is an ongoing issue based on a number of factors already mentioned. Rising costs of living and very limited incomes with many residents relying on Centrelink benefits.

Community Legal Education sessions of SCLC's Planning Ahead was presented at libraries in the region to the general public during law week in May 2023. Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre has an established presence in the local area, which has been continued to be promoted despite changes in staffing. Shoalcoast have attended the Family Network meetings and provided information to the forum members (various support agencies in the region) about Shoalcoast and its benefits to the community. Referrals have been made by various non-government agencies, who are aware of our role in the region.

Shoalcoast are committed to providing legal services to this area where there is a great need for ongoing legal service provision and support.

**Angela Boyland,**  
Generalist Solicitor



# QUEANBEYAN-PALERANG AND SNOWY MONARO

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During 2022/23 Shoalcoast provided a free legal service throughout the Queanbeyan-Palerang and Snowy Monaro regional council areas. This catchment area extends from the Southern Tablelands to the Victorian border with New South Wales. The Snowy Monaro region covers an area of 15,161 sq. kilometres with a population of 21,791, while Queanbeyan-Palerang is 5,319 sq. kilometres with a population of 65,364.

Throughout the year Shoalcoast assisted clients with Family Law, minor Criminal and Civil Law problems. Common legal problems faced by clients included Apprehended Violence Orders, fines, employment law, traffic regulatory offences, motor vehicle property damage, neighbour disputes, credit and debt and consumer complaints. Clients were provided with legal assistance on Family Law issues, such as divorce and separation, parenting, property settlement and family violence. Shoalcoast worked closely with local service providers to promote integrated support for more vulnerable clients. In regional areas, the increases in the cost of living, the price of petrol and the housing crisis have meant that frequently residents cannot make ends meet to pay for food or bills. Unfortunately, many residents live with the threat of possible eviction or are experiencing homelessness.

During the reporting period, regular outreach legal advice clinics were held in the Snowy Monaro and Queanbeyan-Palerang areas. For many years Shoalcoast has operated a successful fortnightly clinic at the Monaro Community Access Service (MCAS) in Cooma. We also conducted an invaluable monthly legal advice clinic at the Cooma Local Court Registry from 2021 until the end of 2022. In response to unmet legal need in the Jindabyne area, Shoalcoast commenced a monthly legal advice clinic at the Jindabyne Neighbourhood Centre in February 2023, to facilitate access for local residents who cannot travel to appointments. The legal advice outreach clinic, held at The Hive in Crawford Street, Queanbeyan is well established and appointments are attended by clients and their support workers.



In 2023 interagency meetings in the region resumed with the option of attending in person and participants finally had the opportunity to meet other participants previously only viewed through Teams meetings. During 2022/23 Shoalcoast attended the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council (QPRC) Interagency Network meetings held each quarter. Participated in the annual Queanbeyan-Palerang DV Interagency planning meeting in February 2023 and attended regular meetings. We also attended the Monaro Regional Interagency planning day in February 2023, and the quarterly Interagency meetings.

Residents of Snowy Monaro and Queanbeyan-Palerang have faced significant challenges in recent years, including a prolonged drought, bushfires, COVID and floods. Increased cost-of-living pressures, mortgage stress and the chronic shortage of affordable, secure rental housing have also impacted on residents across the region. Many clients reported that these factors have compounded the difficulties they experience, and they are more reliant on free community services, such as Shoalcoast for critical support and assistance when problems arise.

**Lisa Woodgate,**  
Generalist Solicitor



## BEGA VALLEY

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Populated by just under 36,000 people, the Bega Valley Local Government Area covers 6,040 square kilometres, with 78% of those being either national parks or state forests. The biggest industries are the production of timber, dairy farming and other agriculture, but a growth in tourism has been emerging over the past few years.

Ruth Ferguson was the area solicitor for Bega Valley from July- November 2022. We then had locum solicitor Linda Tucker back on deck assisting us until early June 2023 when her retirement plans and dreams whisked her away. We are very grateful for Linda's wonderful contributions to our Centre and our clients really appreciated her skills and knowledge. Thank you to Lisa Woodgate, Len Brown also who took some additional weeks to assist in the Bega Valley outreaches this year. Louisa also enjoyed a week of outreach in April. Very much a team effort to continue our valued services to these areas. Len Brown is now the permanent team member that is responsible for the area.

In addition to weekly telephone advice, Shoalcoast offered face to face outreach each alternate week, with appointments available on Tuesdays at Mackillop Family Services, on Wednesdays at the Eden Access Centre, and on Thursdays at Cobargo Community Access Centre.

Over the course of the year Shoalcoast provided legal services with an emphasis on civil disputes and problems and family law. The aged population often sought assistance and advice with Wills, Enduring Powers of Attorney and Enduring Guardianship documents. The lack of affordable legal assistance in relation to Wills continues to be an ongoing issue for disadvantaged clients in the region.

The local courts were serviced by a duty lawyer for criminal matters but otherwise there was extremely limited access in the Bega Valley Shire for free or generally affordable legal representation. The couple of law practices who offered to do family law worked under grants of Legal Aid and did not have the capacity to meet demand, so clients requesting assistance for family law matters was a recurrent theme each week.

Still feeling the effects of the 2019/20 bushfires and reeling from flooding in 2022, many residents of the Bega Valley LGA were both figuratively and literally rebuilding. It has been noticeable over the past year that many clients, regardless of the legal problem they had, still referenced this particularly trying period in their lives. Many were socially and geographically isolated or had been challenged financially for the first time in their lives, but a common theme of all clients was the gratitude for having had access to free legal advice and support.

### **Len Brown,**

Generalist Solicitor and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Solicitor



# DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE FUNDING

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The ongoing prevalence of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence within the Shoalcoast catchment area had a significant effect on many victims who depended on assistance in a range of legal areas. Victims of violence often suffered a range of legal, financial and non-legal issues, caused by the violence and subsequent separation of families that often occurs.

Shoalcoast utilised funding to support the engagement of an additional full-time solicitor with extensive experience in Domestic and Family Violence. The DFSV solicitor provided a range of legal services to victims through legal advices relating to a range of issues including ADVOs, Family Law matters (including parenting and property), Centrelink and Child Support matters, tenancy issues, and credit/debt issues to name a few.

Shoalcoast regularly attended monthly Domestic Violence Duty Solicitor Meetings at Nowra, and fortnightly Milton Local Courts to provide duty lawyer assistance to domestic violence victims, ensuring clients received advice about their legal rights and the effects of being a protected person on an ADVO.

Legal advice was provided to clients about appropriate conditions to be imposed for the client's circumstances and ensuring conditions met their needs. Shoalcoast engaged in negotiations with defendant duty lawyers and Police Liaison Officers and prosecutors to achieve suitable results. Shoalcoast received regular referrals from various court and community support services for victims of domestic violence who required support and advice for other legal issues, most commonly family parenting matters and victim support assistance. Shoalcoast assisted clients with ongoing services including negotiating and preparing parenting plans, supporting clients by attending family dispute resolution processes and assisting clients apply for financial assistance through the Victim Support Scheme.

Shoalcoast provided 121 legal advices, 6 duty lawyer services, 25 legal tasks and 16 ongoing representations.

CLE resources were created in relation to Coercive Control and Affirmative Consent. The Coercive Control CLE was delivered to the Shoalhaven DFSV committee group.

Shoalcoast attended 13 stakeholder engagements through the year through involvement in the Shoalcoast DFSV committee and the DVDS stakeholder group.

## **Len Brown,**

Generalist Solicitor and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Solicitor

# CASE STUDIES

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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.

## **Licence Suspension Matter**

Jenny came to Shoalcoast seeking advice in relation to a Victims Services matter. Jenny was accompanied by a support worker from a community mental health service who drove her to the appointment as she had recently had her provisional drivers licence suspended for non-payment of traffic fines. Upon entering into a payment plan to pay off her fines, Jenny's licence was again automatically suspended for three months for accumulating demerit points over the relevant threshold. Jenny had not realised her licence was again suspended and was caught driving with a suspended licence, the penalty for which includes a mandatory licence disqualification. Shoalcoast assisted Jenny to prepare for Court, including encouraging Jenny to complete a Traffic Offenders Intervention Program and helping with drafting a letter of apology seeking the Court's leniency in relation to the charge of driving whilst suspended. Shoalcoast also assisted the community mental health service to provide Jenny with a character reference for Court. At Court, Jenny self-represented and pleaded guilty. The Court exercised its discretion not to record a conviction against Jenny which meant that Jenny's licence was not disqualified.

## **Tenancy Matter**

Kevin required assistance from Shoalcoast after receiving his ex-landlord's claim for a rental bond due to the condition of the private premises after a no grounds eviction. Despite dealing with various psychological disabilities, brain damage and a severe speech impediment, Kevin was able to provide cogent instructions and Shoalcoast assisted him in drafting and lodging an NCAT application objecting to the return of the bond. Shoalcoast assisted Kevin with the application but were not representing him. At a preliminary NCAT hearing, it became clear that Kevin was unable to represent himself and Shoalcoast stepped in to provide the necessary support to alleviate his distress. Ultimately, Shoalcoast appeared at the hearing and were able to obtain an Order for the return of half the bond amount.



### **Centrelink Matter**

Due to a claim for property settlement which was well out of time, and a revaluation of her assets by Centrelink as a result of the housing boom, Sarah was being financially squeezed by the reduction of her pension, as well as an increase to the mortgage payments being made by her and her ex-partner. After investigation, Shoalcoast were able to provide advice and documents which saw her pension restored on the basis that she had no interest in some of the assets that Centrelink were taking into account. This consequently put Sarah in a financial position to refinance the mortgage, and potentially assisted her in her ongoing negotiations with her ex-partner. Sarah then also had the prospect of making a claim against Centrelink due to the erroneous assessment of her assets which has potentially seen her being underpaid for years.

### **Domestic Violence Matter**

Jane, a victim of long term Domestic and Family Violence from her ex-partner, was living homeless in shelter accommodation while her children had to remain with her ex-partner at home due to a lack of housing and accessible assistance for them. Police had commenced ADVO proceedings against the father which included no contact conditions. Shoalcoast assisted Jane to negotiate a parenting plan and for her to return to the home with the children, and for the ex-partner to relocate elsewhere. Assistance was given to Jane and her ex-partner on dividing their extremely small asset pool, and through negotiations, Police assisted with the handover of the items. After safe arrangements were in place and an ongoing file was opened for Jane, Shoalcoast then assisted her with a Victims Services application for an Immediate Needs, Economic Loss and a Recognition Payment which were all made. Consistent assistance and follow ups with relevant stakeholders assisted Jane to be housed, safe and more financially secure.

### **Traffic Accident Matter**

Daniel had a motor vehicle accident with another motorist, Brad, at an intersection. Both Daniel and Brad were uninsured. Police attended the scene and Brad immediately admitted liability for the accident due to his careless driving. Daniel and Brad swapped contact details and Daniel told Brad he would seek reimbursement for the damage to his car. Unfortunately, Daniel's car was written off in the accident, and Daniel contacted Shoalcast for assistance when Brad stopped responding to his text messages. Shoalcoast assisted Daniel to work out the "written off value" of his car and to draft a letter of demand, which sought reimbursement for his loss and threatened legal action should Brad fail to respond. Shoalcoast then assisted Daniel to negotiate a payment plan with Brad in relation to the agreed sum for reimbursement and to draft a settlement agreement between them.

### **Parenting Matter**

At the time, the father of a young child lived far away, so he and the child's mother, Allana, had a verbal agreement in relation to telephone contact with their child, and arrangements for weekend contact from time to time at a halfway meeting point for changeovers. Allana engaged Shoalcoast for advice following receipt of a proposed Parenting Plan from her ex-partner's legal representative. Mediation was proposed and accepted by both parents. Mediation was conducted, resolving a majority of the issues relating to time spent with each parent, changeover arrangements, telephone contact times and ongoing communication between the parents. A parenting plan was finalised following a further meeting between the parties legal representatives and the dispute resolved successfully.

### **Victims Services Matter**

Shoalcoast assisted Carmen in lodging Victim Services claims for counselling, Immediate Needs Support Package, and Recognition Payment following ongoing Domestic Violence by her partner over an extended number of years. Carmen was approved counselling and an Immediate Needs Support Package. The Package was subject to an internal review and Carmen was awarded additional money. A recognition payment application was lodged on basis of severe psychological harm suffered after receiving a certificate of injury diagnosing Carmen with Complex PTSD. Carmen was awarded a Category D Recognition Payment by Victims Services in the first instance. The original decision of Victims Services was reviewed and the internal review decision was not changed. Shoalcoast assisted in lodging with NCAT an Administrative Review application of Victims Services decision to only award Category D payment. Upon filing additional evidence and submissions with NCAT, Victims Services legal division conceded the submissions and offered to settle the matter on the basis of an award of a Category C payment.

### **Family Dispute Matter**

Travis had not seen his child, Oliver, since he was a few months old. Oliver was now several years old. Travis had previously initiated Family Dispute Resolution himself, however Oliver's mother had failed to attend. After a long period waiting for responses from the other party, Family Dispute Resolution was finally able to go ahead. The mediation took place with both parties represented by lawyers, and a parenting plan was able to be reached. Travis was able to see Oliver for the first time in years. There was a period of difficulty, but with the continued support and advice from Shoalcoast post mediation, both parties have been able to maintain the arrangement.

**Debt Matter**

Client Jason was referred to Shoalcoast to assist with a judgment debt for unpaid rates owed to a remote shire council. Many years earlier, Jason had responded to a newspaper advertisement selling cheap blocks of land in a remote regional area. Jason purchased a couple of blocks as an investment for his old age. Unfortunately Jason had a few hardships over the next few years and as a consequence, Jason was not able to pay the rates. The lots of land became a financial burden as they were unstable and unsellable. Shoalcoast assisted Jason with negotiating with the Council to try to resolve this issue. Jason was fearful that Council would try to force the sale of the family home, as he had no savings or other assets. Shoalcoast worked closely with a financial counselling service to provide evidence in support of financial hardship under the Examination Notice. After some deliberation, Council agreed to write off the large debt and allow Jason to surrender the land to Council. An outcome that provided Jason with a complete resolution of his financial issues with Council.

**Employment Matter**

Craig lived in a regional area where secure work was scarce, particularly for older workers nearing retirement age. Craig had worked as a driver for a transport company for many years and the company was going through a restructure. The employer however failed to follow the significant change process under the Enterprise Agreement, and failed to consult properly with employees. Craig was a reliable and trusted employee, however due to a series of communication breakdowns within the workplace, and an issue with his supervisor, when Craig returned from personal leave, he discovered that he had been taken off the roster and effectively terminated. Craig lodged an Unfair Dismissal Application. Shoalcoast represented Craig at the Fair Work Commission and attended the mediation conference where a negotiated settlement was reached. The settlement provided Craig with reinstatement and payment for remuneration lost.

# COOPERATIVE LEGAL SERVICES DELIVERY PROGRAM

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In the 2022/23 year the CLSD program was delivered by Shoalcoast CLC as the Regional Coordinators for the South Coast and Southern Tablelands. Highlights included our very first CLSD meeting in Queanbeyan in May 2023 bringing together Southern Tablelands service providers, state-wide providers and South Coast services. Erin Mullaly, CLSD Regional Coordinator was responsible for arranging the quarterly meeting for legal and non-legal services to collaborate and she arranged guest speakers to deliver training at each meeting.

Two of the quarterly meetings were held online, and the other two were held in a hybrid format, with both in person and online options available to attend. The first hybrid session was held in Nowra where many of the CLSD partners are based, and was well attended both in person and online. The other hybrid session was hosted in Queanbeyan as an effort to increase engagement with CLSD in the area. All meetings were well attended by key legal and non-legal services.

The quarterly meetings were complemented by open communication channels throughout the year, with the Regional Coordinator sending regular email updates to promote legal services and other non-legal events on the South Coast and Southern Tablelands. Resources were also developed and distributed to the CLSD partners, including the Free Legal Help flyers which were updated by the Regional Coordinator, Nowra Legal Aid and the CLSD Program Unit.

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

These guest speakers included:

- Ann Emmanuel from the Immigration Advice and Rights Centre joined us for the August 2022 meeting and spoke about their service and how they can help CALD clients in DV situations. She also created a case study activity where legal and non-legal service providers worked together to discuss the legal and non-legal issues of the case study.
- Nakul Bhagwat from the NDIS team at Legal Aid and Harry Rutner from the Australian Centre for Disability Law presented at the November 2022 meeting and spoke about how their services can assist with different NDIS issues clients might face.
- Angela Stewart, a Disability Advocate with ADACAS also attended the November 2022 meeting and added to the conversation by speaking about issues identified with the NDIS scheme, as well as providing information on her service, the types of advocacy they can assist with, and how other services can facilitate referrals to them.
- Kerry Wright on behalf of the Civil Law Service for Aboriginal Communities provided information on the Stolen Generations Reparations Scheme at the February 2023 meeting.
- Amy Power and Isabella Daley from the Women's Legal Service NSW discussed domestic violence and tenancy issues at the May 2023 meeting. They also presented three case studies of different tenancy scenarios and what legal steps could be taken to help the client in the relevant situation.

While not specifically on the Action Plan for 2022 – 2024, due to a request from the community, and to further the action item 'working together effectively to help priority client groups', the Regional Coordinator and a Shoalcoast staff member attended Service NSW at Batemans Bay on 12 December to run a Free Birth Certificate clinic. Births Deaths and Marriages and the CLSD unit ran this program to assist people in getting their birth certificates for no fee. Obtaining birth certificates can be expensive for clients and not having one creates barriers, namely as it inhibits their ability to access other services.

A topic that is specifically on the action plan is tackling fine debt in the region and making it easier for people to address their fine debt. This point was addressed at the Q2 meeting where the Regional Coordinator asked service providers who were WDO providers to provide more information on that service and who was eligible to receive assistance. There were a number of attendees at that particular meeting that were able to provide information on their service that was WDO provider.

The Homelessness Taskforce created by Shoalhaven Council and includes other community members, created a working group that developed a strategic action plan to address homelessness and come up with collaborative actions to be implemented in the housing and homelessness sector. The Regional Coordinator was a part of the Advocacy and Lobbying Focus Group within the Strategic Plan, and reached out to the Eurobodalla, Bega Valley, and the Queanbeyan and Snowy Monaro Council to gauge if they had something similar being worked on in the area. The Regional Coordinator continued to attend the Shoalhaven Homelessness Interagency and collaborate with other partners involved in the Interagency in the 2022/23 financial year.

Erin Mulally resigned as CLSD Regional Coordinator in June 2023. The future of CLSD for the South Coast and Southern Tablelands was not yet finalised by reporting dates for this report by we can confirm it is in the safe hands of the CLSD unit at Legal Aid NSW for now. Shoalcoast is very grateful for the many wonderful connections and projects we have been a part of thanks to this program funding.

**Erin Mulally**

Generalist Solicitor and Cooperative Legal Service Delivery Program Coordinator

# SNAPSHOT OF LEGAL SERVICES

## NATIONAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE PARTNERSHIP FUNDING



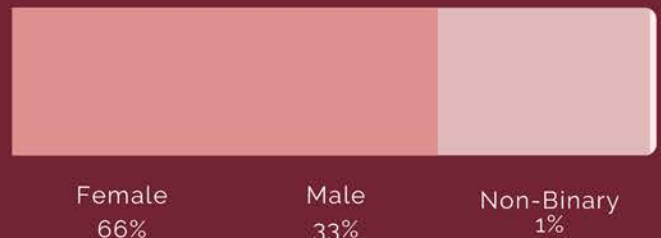
### TOTAL SERVICES PROVIDED

Number of clients	1,269
Information and referrals	1,704
Number of legal Advices	1,545
Number of legal tasks	369
Number of Other Representations (closed)	61
Court/Tribunal	8
DRRS	8
Duty Lawyer	21
CLE Activities	38
CLE Resources	0
Stakeholder Engagements	197
Law Reform	9

### LEGAL SERVICE DELIVERY

Telephone Advice Provided	1,043
Face to Face Advice Provided	489
Advice provided by Letter, Email, or Online	13
Information Provided	313
Referrals Provided	1,391

### CLIENT BY GENDER

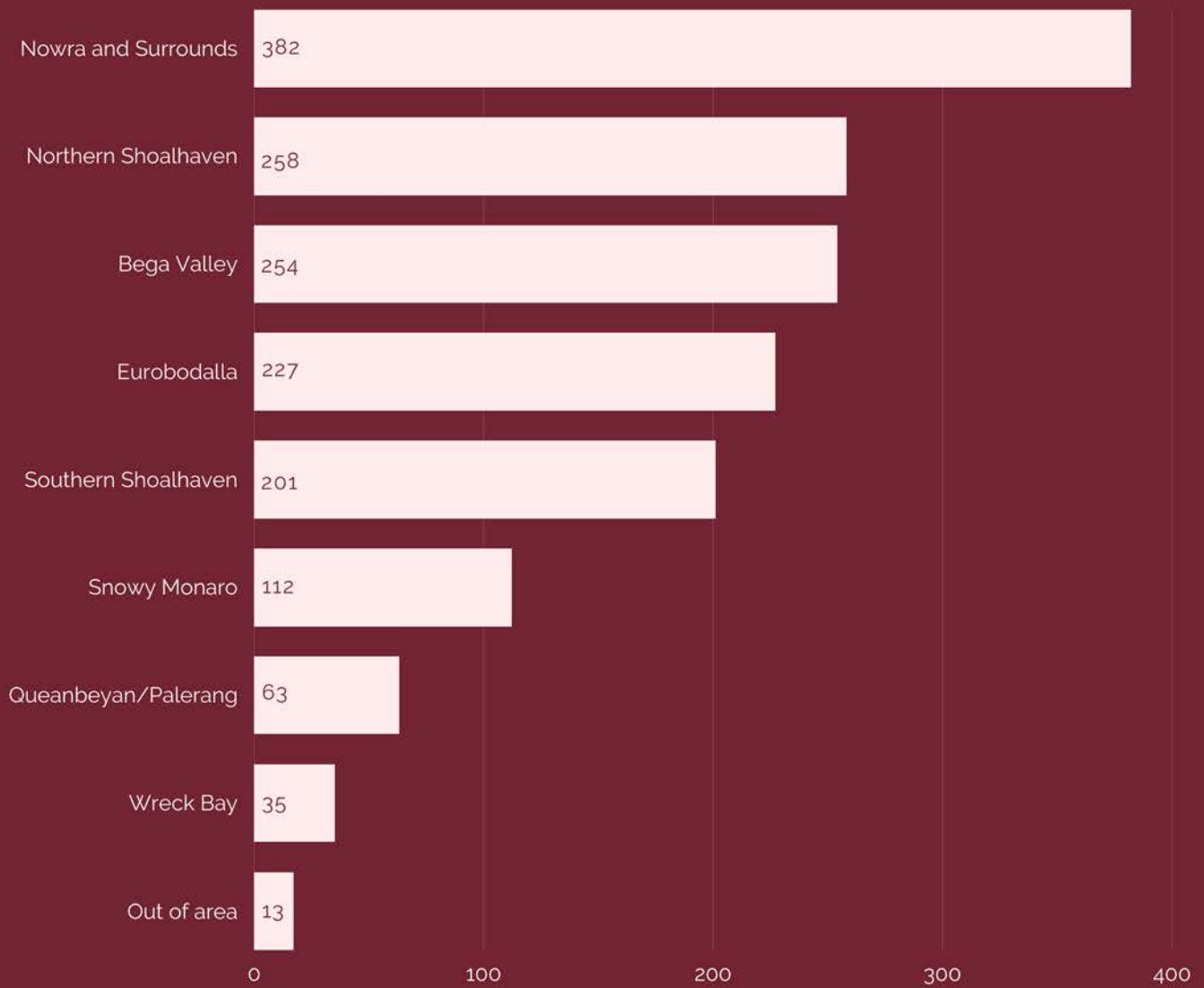


### CLIENT BY AGE

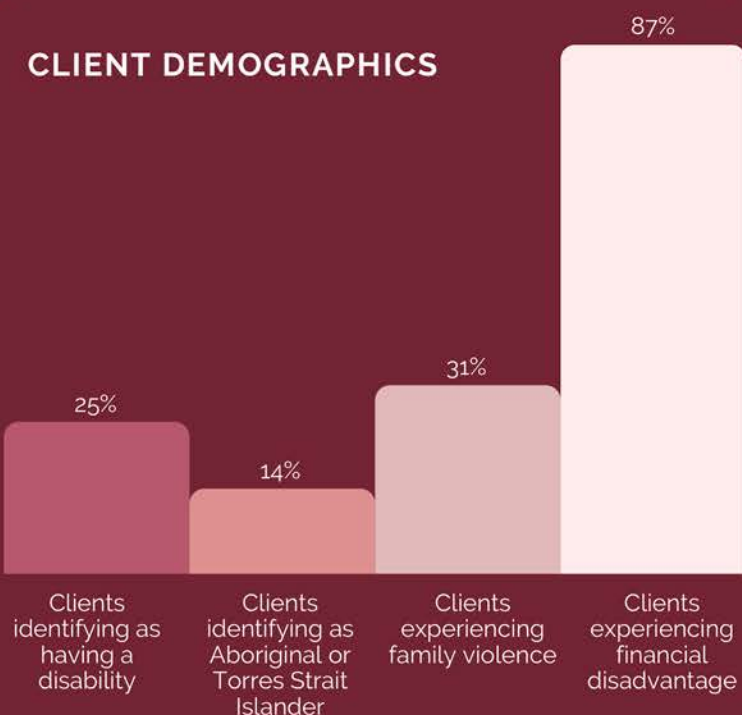




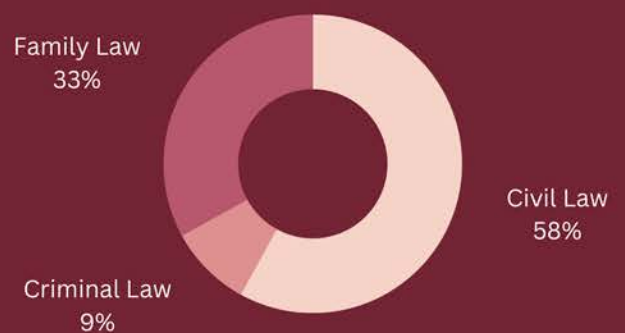
## LEGAL SERVICE BY AREA



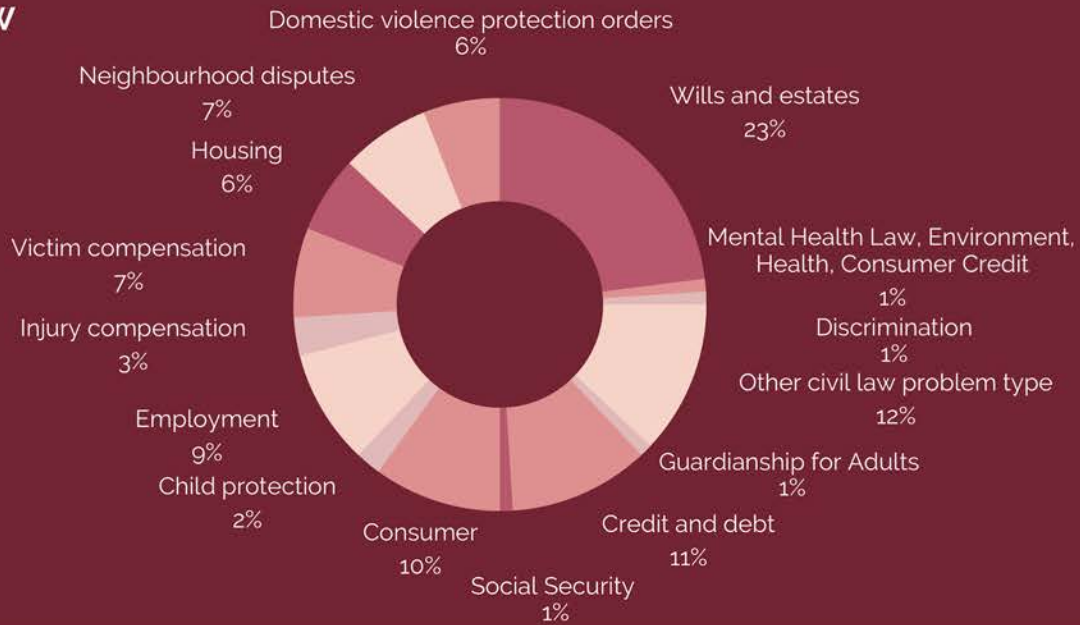
## CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS



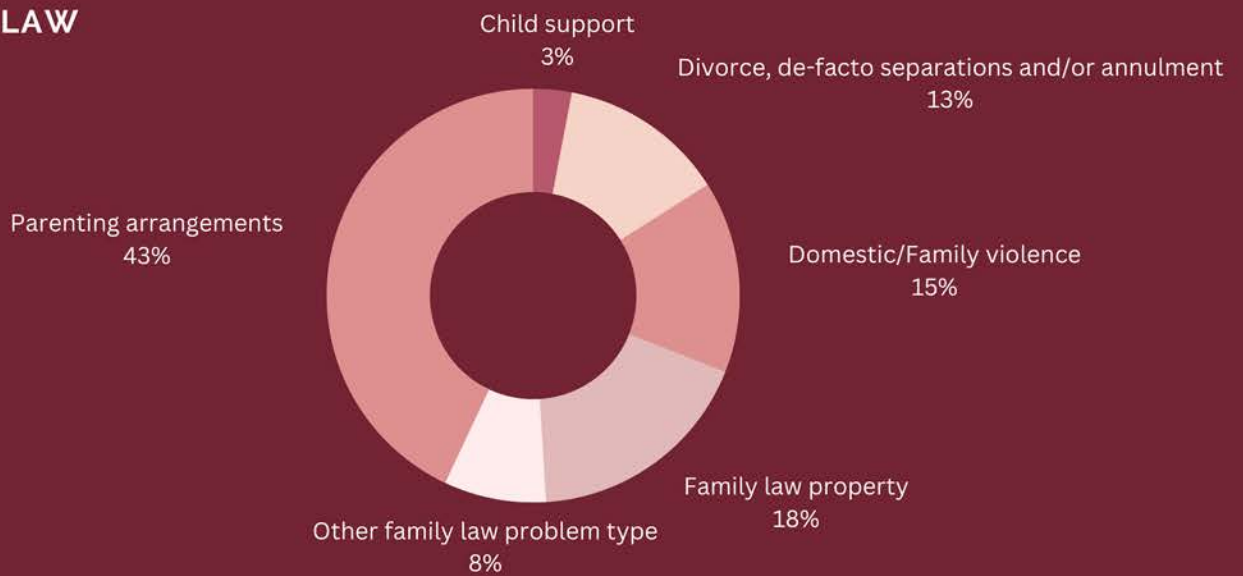
## LAW TYPE FOR LEGAL ADVICES



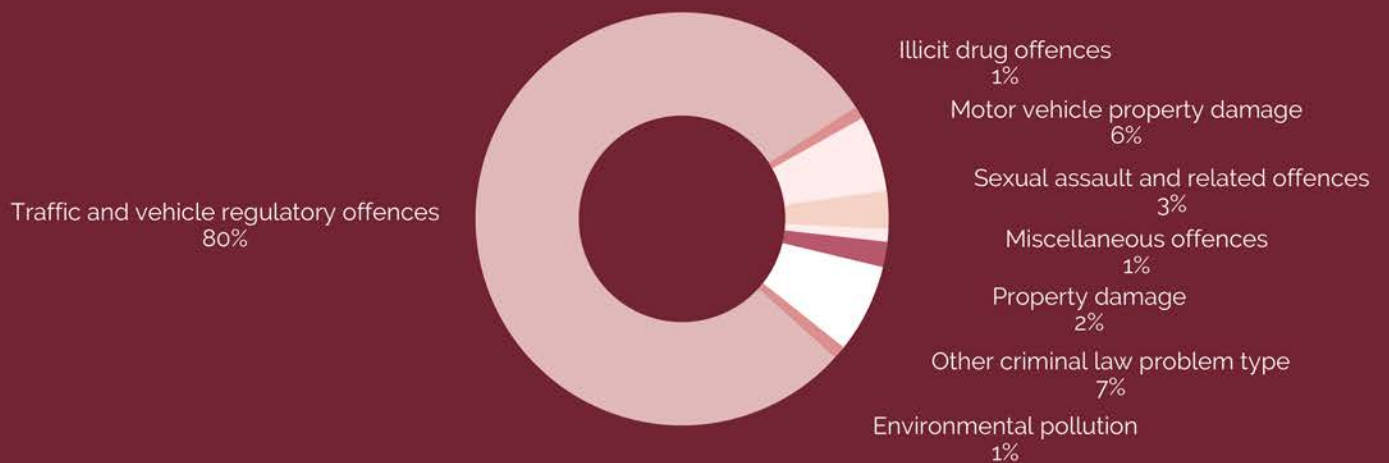
## CIVIL LAW



## FAMILY LAW



## CRIMINAL LAW



# SNAPSHOT OF LEGAL SERVICES

## DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE FUNDING



Funding for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Project was received from DCJ for the a 12 month period (1 July 2023 to 30 June 2023) to provide the delivery of legal assistance services to victim- survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence in NSW.

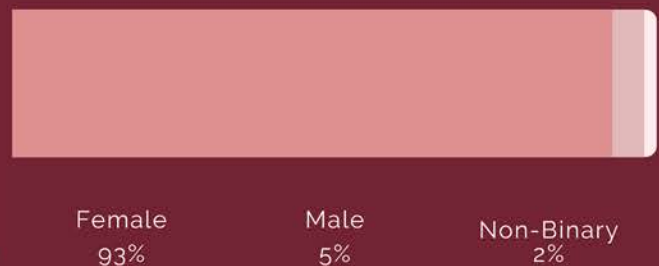
### TOTAL SERVICES PROVIDED FOR

Number of clients	101
Information and referrals	81
Number of legal Advices	123
Number of legal tasks	26
Number of Other Representations (closed)	7
Court/Tribunal	0
DRRS	0
Duty Lawyer	6
CLE Activities	2
CLE Resources	3
Stakeholder Engagements	13
Law Reform	0

### LEGAL SERVICE DELIVERY

Telephone Advice Provided	104
Face to Face Advice Provided	15
Advice provided by Letter, Email, or Online	4
Information Provided	3
Referrals Provided	78

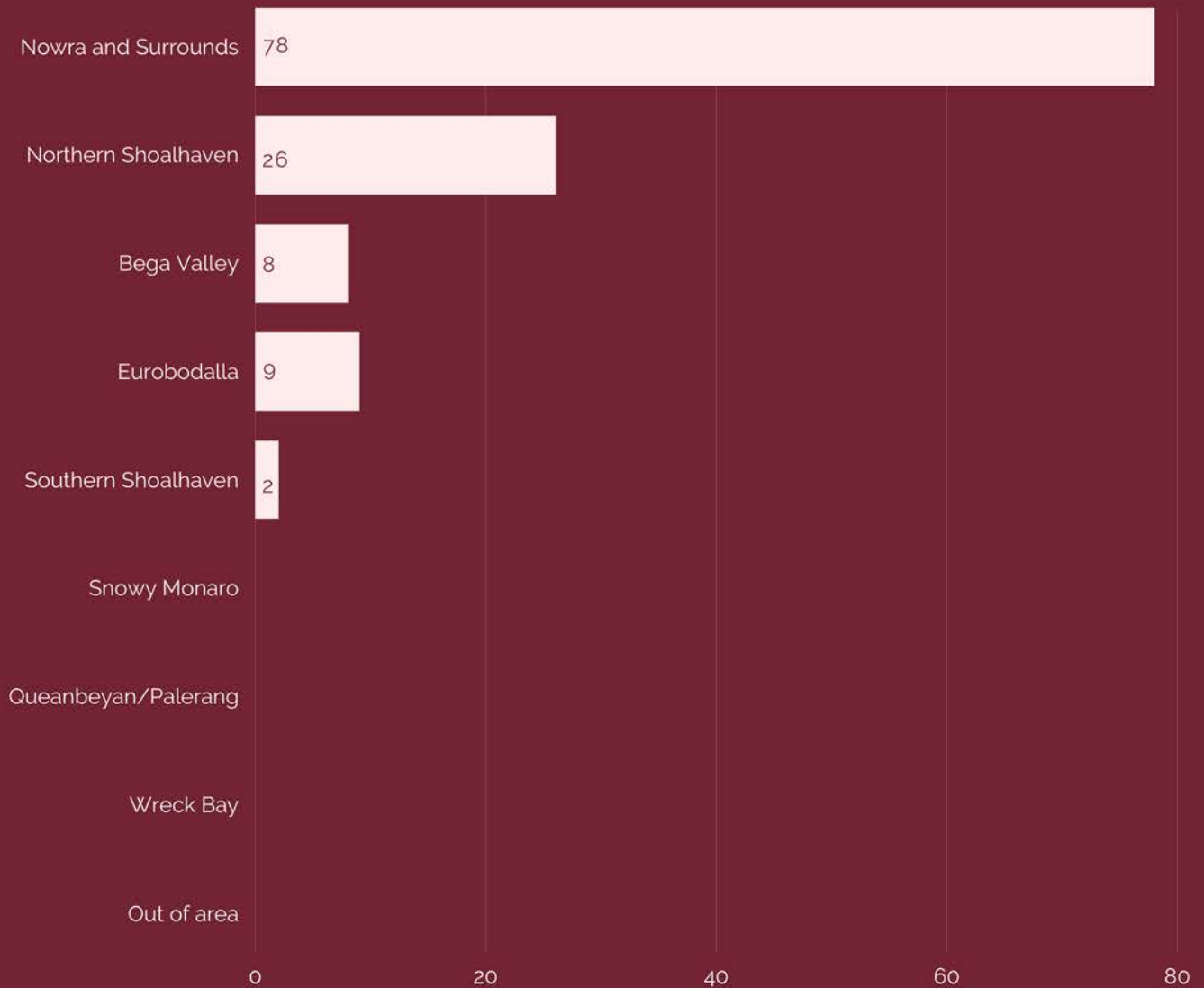
### CLIENT BY GENDER



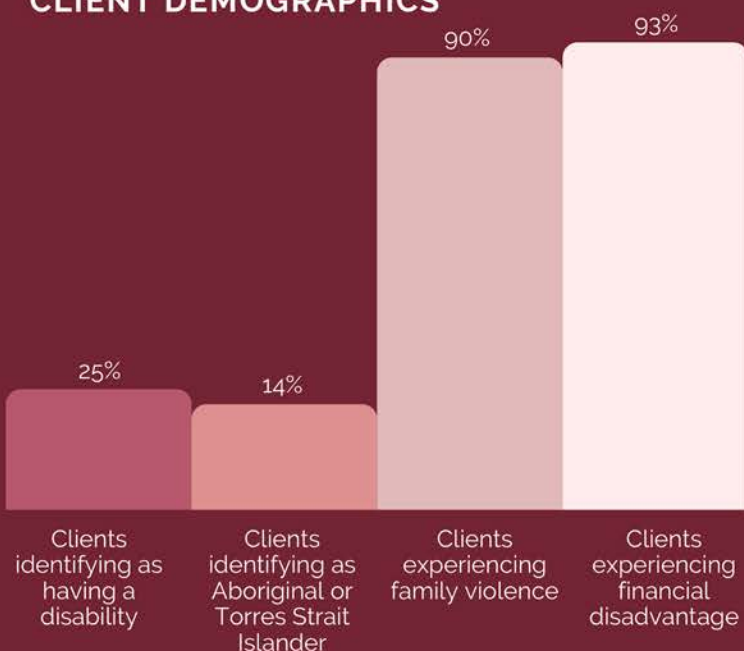
### CLIENT BY AGE



## LEGAL SERVICE BY AREA



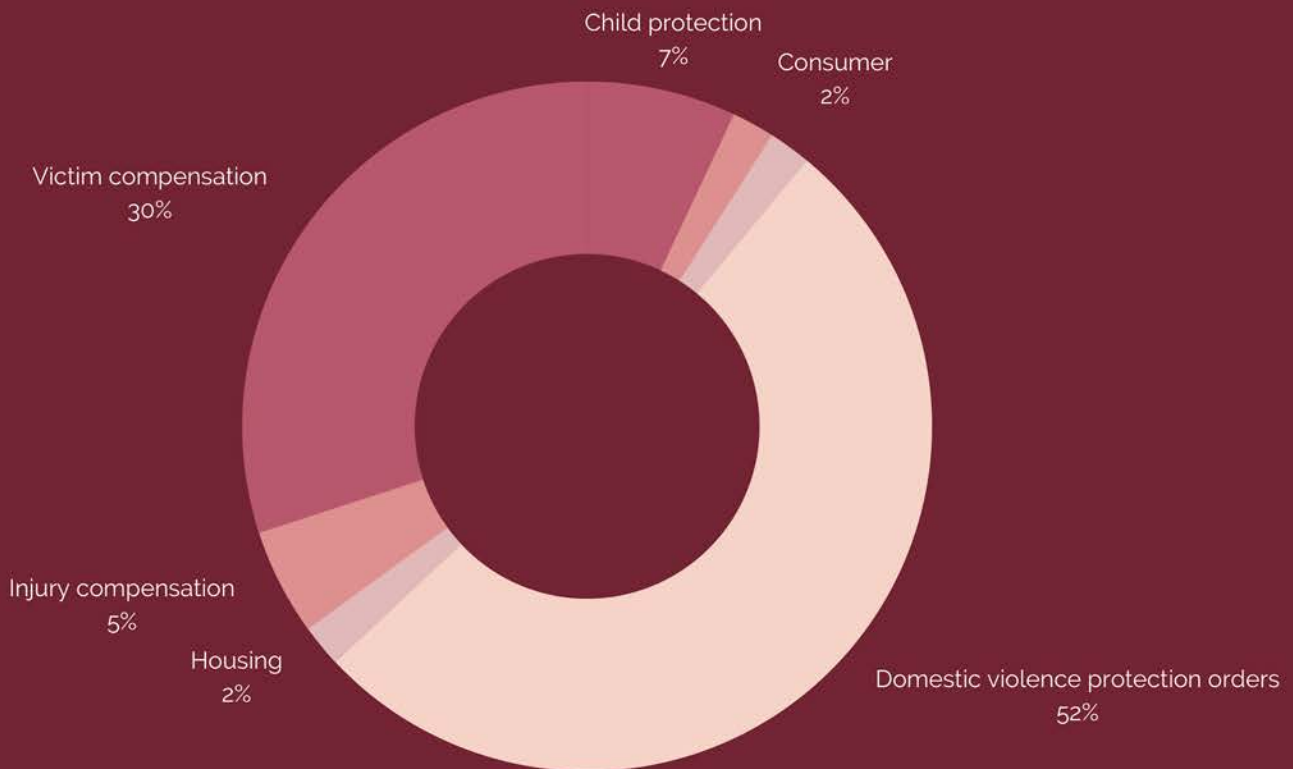
## CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS



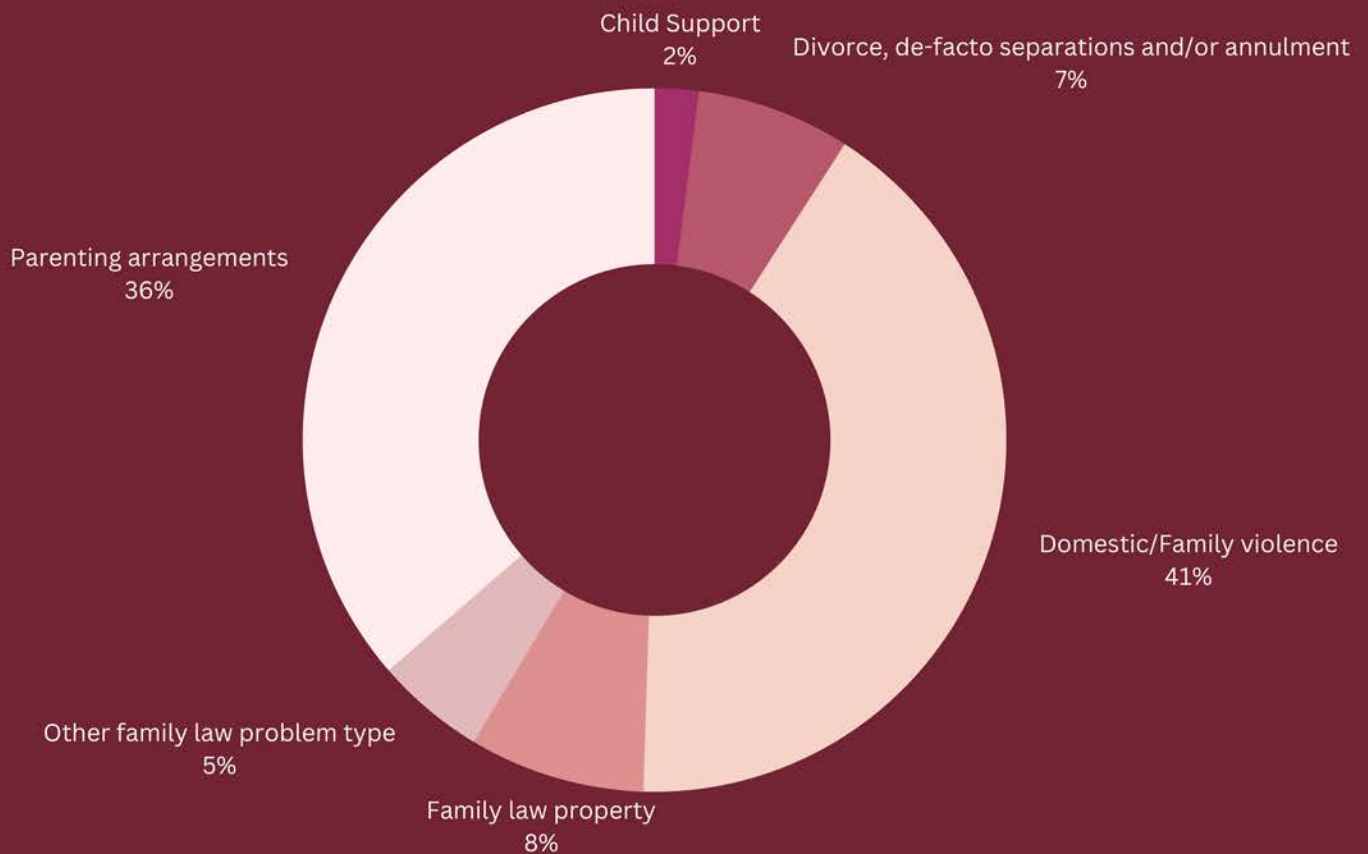
## LAW TYPE FOR LEGAL ADVICES



## CIVIL LAW



## FAMILY LAW



# COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION AND EVENTS

## COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre presented 39 Community Legal Education sessions across the financial year. The majority of them were delivered face to face, and a small handful were offered hybrid, with both in person and online options to attend. Our sessions were rated by participants an average of 9+ out of 10 in terms of usefulness of information, quality of presentation and clear explanation by the presenter.

Throughout the year, community groups including library patrons, RSL members, retirement village residents and others were presented to, with 25 CLEs speaking directly to members within the community. However later in the year, Shoalcoast shifted its strategy and began targeting service providers, rather than smaller community groups. This change in approach meant that the impact of the CLEs could be amplified to vulnerable members of the community who may be in contact with services other than Shoalcoast.

Similar to last year, a significant proportion of the CLE demographic was again, older citizens of society. Usually Seniors Week is relatively CLE focused for Shoalcoast as it allows us to align our Planning Ahead CLE with the nationally recognised week, however with Seniors Week 2023 being much earlier in the year than it has been historically, the timing made the presentations more difficult to organise and market, resulting in low interest and a number of cancellations across all service areas. In contrast to this, as it always does, Law Week helped our CLE numbers climb, allowing us to visit multiple locations and recording 7 CLEs during the week, to both community groups and community service providers.

Many highly demanded services including South Coast AMS and WDVCS were given detailed, updated legal training on Victim's Services Applications and the new Coercive Control laws. This information sharing between services and upskilling of community service staff members aims to provide a more holistic service to those needing assistance.

Overall, we were able to meet our CLE targets for 2022/23 and are proud that we have become an approachable and professional service for clients and service providers to call on for their legal needs,



## RESOURCES

This year Shoalcoast developed 3 brand new resources that all related to the Coercive Control and Affirmative Consent laws that recently came into place. These resources were created as a way to present information on the new laws and help people better understand what the changes to the legislation meant. Two presentations were created, as well as a factsheet to summarise the content in an easy to read manner.

## EVENTS

Events continued to be an enjoyable and engaging way to connect with the community we service, as well as reaching people who may one day need our assistance. With lockdowns and social gathering rules behind us, 2022/23 brought us some great opportunities to attend events.

The annual NAIDOC Family Fun Day was finally reignited after having to put on hold due to the COVID pandemic. Shoalcoast was excited to attend, however very unfortunately, heavy rainfall predicted for the day yet again put a stop to the community favourite event. It seems that the lingering effects of La Niña was still enough to ruin the day. On the other hand, another community favourite, the SAHSSI 30 was attended by Shoalcoast staff who walked to fundraise for the accommodation and homelessness service. Yet another exciting event pulled back from the brink in 2023 was the National Community Legal Centre Conference which was held in Hobart and celebrated 50 years. Four lucky staff members from Shoalcoast attended, learning and networking with many workers across the sector, bringing back valuable learnings to the rest of the team. The relaunch of the National Conference was certainly a highlight of the year and celebrated a fitting theme of Reconnecting and Reimagining. Shoalcoast was also able to attend a number of Christmas party events throughout our catchment area, organised by community housing providers for their tenants. These events were held in multiple locations within the Shoalhaven and Eurobodalla.

After the past couple of years putting a halt on in person events, Shoalcoast eagerly attended 20 events in the 2022/23 financial year and look forward to attending more in following years to come.

### Jasmine Huang

Administration and Events Planner



# STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

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In 2022/23 Shoalcoast attended and were involved in a total of 209 stakeholder engagements. Shoalcoast was involved with the following stakeholders in our local community:

- Actionstep Community of Practice Meeting
- ASU Network meeting
- Bay and Basin Community Safety Meeting
- CLC Australia National Conference
- CLC NSW CLEW Network Meetings
- CLC NSW Disaster Planning and Response Network Meetings
- CLC NSW Family Law and Care and Protection Network Quarterly Meetings
- CLC NSW RRR Network Meetings
- CLCNSW Admin and Finance Network meeting
- CLCNSW and CLCQLD Disaster Funding Meetings
- CLCNSW CLE Workers Network Meeting
- CLCNSW Community of Practice - Vicarious Trauma
- CLCNSW Diversity and Inclusion Network
- CLCNSW DV and VC Network meetings
- CLCNSW DV and VS Network Meeting in person on
- CLCNSW Employment & Discrimination Network Meeting
- CLCNSW Employment and Discrimination Network Meetings
- CLCNSW Family Law and Care and Protection Network Meeting
- CPLAG meetings with DCJ, CLCs and Legal Aid
- Disaster Recovery Assistance Workshop
- DVDS Meetings
- Eden Interagency
- Eurobodalla Domestic Violence Committee Meeting
- Eurobodalla Homelessness and Housing Solutions Forum
- Harmony Day 2023 Committee Meeting
- Investing in Rural Community Futures - Bega Valley
- Links House Open Day
- Monaro Interagency Meeting
- National Disaster Network Meeting
- NCOSS Regional Meeting
- Older Persons Legal Service Network Meeting
- Our Mia Mia Advisory Group
- PFAS Class Action Community Information Session
- PII Committee for Principal Sols in NSW
- PIP SCCH Christmas Party Committee Meeting
- Queanbeyan DV Interagency Planning Day
- Queanbeyan-Palerang Interagency Network Meeting
- SCLC and Legal Aid Nowra Catch up - regular meeting
- Shoalhaven Anti-Poverty Committee Action Planning Meeting
- Shoalhaven Anti-Poverty Meeting
- Shoalhaven City Council - Community Wellbeing Strategy workshops
- Shoalhaven Council Homelessness Strategic Planning Working Group meeting
- Shoalhaven Council Homelessness Taskforce meeting
- Shoalhaven DFV Committee Event - Lunch and Learn Event
- Shoalhaven DFV Committee Meeting
- Shoalhaven DFV Sub Committee Meeting
- Shoalhaven Homelessness Interagency meeting



# LAW REFORM

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In the 2022/23 year we have seen and participated in some vital law reform for NSW and Commonwealth laws that affect the day to day lives of our clients. Some highlights were:

In November 2022 we saw the NSW parliament pass the Coercive Control Bill in a momentous change in the way the law will recognise the often hidden and secretive domestic abuse that is now known widely as Coercive Control. Shoalcoast contributed early on to this law reform and we have then continued to support our colleagues in the CLC sector endorsing further recommendations until the law was passed. While it will not be operative for ADVO grounds and later charges until some time in 2024 we note the recognition of this abuse is important to our clients.

December 2022, we had some changes made to our funding agreements that allowed CLC lawyers and staff to be once again more free to speak about political matters in public. This freedom is important as advocates for our clients so we can speak up when laws are adversely affecting the people we are here to help.

We have been called on to comment on law changes proposed since including the Right To Ask Scheme that the Perrotte government sought to bring back in January 2023 and we were free to give an honest opinion on DV Offender Disclosure schemes and what risks it could pose to clients of our centre.

In February 2023 we attended sessions on the proposed reforms for the Family Law Act and endorsed the Womens Legal Services Australia (WLSA) submissions on the current Family Law Bill. The proposed changes will bring to fruition many of the recommendations we proposed in Shoalcoast's submissions to the ALRC review of the Family Law System in 2019-2021 which like most things has suffered many delays throughout Cyears and is now back on track.

In March 2023 we had the NSW Elections imminent and the opportunity to meet with the local Candidates for our areas was an important part of getting to raise current issues with state politicians who can make real changes that affect our clients in relation to health, transport, education and housing. Insecurity of housing and access to basic services has continued to be an issue across all of our catchments this year.

We also contributed to the Homelessness Taskforce for Shoalhaven LGA and participated in a campaign targeted at MPs who could make a real difference for clients experiencing homelessness and disadvantage in our region.

As the 2022/23 year ended we celebrated NAIDOC week here at the centre with multiple Community events and a focus on the Yes campaign for the Voice to Parliament. We have been providing opportunities for our staff to be informed and many of our staff have taken personal initiative to spread the word about the Referendum in their own communities. Shoalcoast CLC supports the Yes campaign in our SCLC social media posts and will continue to support this and the Uluru Statement until we see a just and fair Constitution for this nation.



# THANK YOU

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Thank you for reading our annual report.

Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre looks forward to the 2023/24 year and continuing our services to the Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla, Bega Valley, Snowy Monaro and Queanbeyan-Palerang Local Government Areas.

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