



Standing alongside our resilient community through adversity



OUR VISION

We believe in a society where the law is fair and everyone has access to legal help when they need it. A place where there is a shared sense of fairness and wellbeing.

We believe that fair and thriving local communities are the foundation of a just society, and that this starts at the local level.

To contribute to creating a just society, we build fairness and wellbeing in our local community through the law.

WHO WE ARE

We are an independent community legal centre working for social purpose, based in the inner Melbourne area since 1978. We are part of a large network of community legal centres working in local communities across Australia.

Our lawyers are experts in community law, and part of a small, dedicated team of lawyers, administrative and project staff supported by volunteer law students and pro bono corporate partners.

WHY WE EXIST

We work with people experiencing the greatest disadvantage in our area to achieve —

Fairer laws: We help to ensure the legal system is as fair as possible

Fairer outcomes: We help our community be heard, and have their legal rights upheld

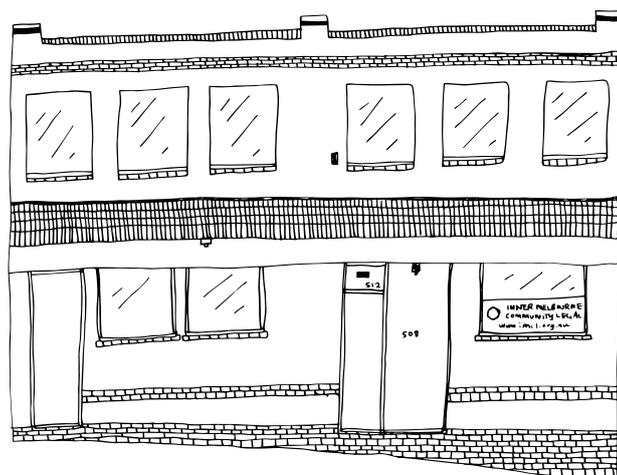
Improved wellbeing: We improve our community's capability to focus on their health and quality of life.

WHAT WE DO

Legal help: We provide free accessible legal help in the form of information, advice, casework and representation.

Legal education: We provide community legal education to targeted community members and professionals that aims to prevent legal problems from occurring or escalating.

Law reform and advocacy: We challenge and work to change unfair laws that disproportionately affect disadvantaged people in our community.



Contents

CHAIRPERSON AND CEO REPORT	4
WHO WE HELP	5
Snapshot of our clients	5
WHAT WE DO	6
FREE LEGAL HELP	7
Client journey and snapshot of the year's work	7
How we provide free legal help	10
Duty lawyer service, Early Intervention and Early Resolution services	14
LEGAL EDUCATION	16
LAW REFORM & ADVOCACY	17
PROJECTS	18
COMMUNITY LEGAL MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT	18
YOUTH OUTREACH LAWYER	18
HOUSING JUSTICE PROJECT	19
MEASURING OUR GOALS	20
FINANCIAL REPORT	21
PRO BONO SUPPORT	22
FUTURE OF OUR FUNDING	23

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Inner Melbourne Community Legal acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land where IMCL is based and works. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

Chairperson and CEO report

Working to minimise COVID-19 inequity

Measures taken in response to the pandemic in the past 12 months amplified for all to see how the law dictates key aspects of people's lives: from our movement and social connections, to our housing security, safety and employment.

Restrictions on our liberties supported the public health response, yet the impacts were not experienced evenly across our communities. While our team was able to transition smoothly to remote working within the safety of our own homes, we were acutely aware that around us the existing disadvantage experienced by already marginalised communities was exacerbated during the pandemic. We witnessed this through the escalating distress shown by people who called our intake line and the stories of our clients who were disproportionately affected. More women experienced family violence when confined to their homes. Racialised communities were policed and fined more heavily than others. Not all private renters were able to negotiate rent reductions resulting in evictions or large debts. Essential workers were faced with the daily risk of exposure and the stress of transmitting the virus to overcrowded households from which there was no escape. And the mental health of many deteriorated as they faced job and financial loss and were restricted in their ability to access vital support funds and services.

The public housing hard lockdown

During a year characterised by increasing adversity as the pandemic maintained a fierce grip, we stood by our community, listening and responding to their evolving legal needs. It was unrelentingly challenging, reaching a crescendo on Saturday 4 July 2020 when public housing estates in our area were suddenly put in hard lockdown. From the moment this unprecedented display of state and police force began, we scrambled to safeguard the rights of residents, including access to such basic necessities as culturally appropriate food and medicine. We vigilantly monitored the use of pandemic emergency legislation and enforcement measures, working with other legal experts to

call out and remedy excesses of power that were not justified in support of the public health objectives, and which disproportionately affected the communities we represent.

The event redefined our priorities for the ensuing 12 months as we responded to the immediate aftermath and seized the opportunity to shine a light on long-standing social inequalities which had been ignored for decades.

Maintaining a steady ship and planning ahead

In the face of unpredictability and uncertainty, we continued to steadily maintain our core practice, flexibly and quickly adjusting our areas of legal focus and service delivery models as needed. We stayed closely connected with our partners to maintain referral pathways and wrap-around care, and worked hard to remain a point of stability for our clients, helping them to navigate and reduce the impact of disrupted and protracted legal processes.

As vaccination plots a pathway out of the pandemic, we look ahead to 2021–22 with more optimism. Reflecting on what we have learnt as an organisation and society, we will embrace the silver linings presented by COVID-19. We will harness improved digital technology, embrace flexible work practices that allow our staff to achieve optimal work-life balance, and importantly, we will maintain the momentum for change that has been generated since social inequities have been so starkly exposed.

Coupled with the findings of our 2021–22 Legal Needs Analysis, in the coming year we will use the lessons from COVID-19 and the best of each organisation to build strong foundations for a potential merged organisation with Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre, enhancing our collective strength to work alongside our local communities to build fairness and wellbeing as we all recover.

— CAROLINE EVANS, CHAIR

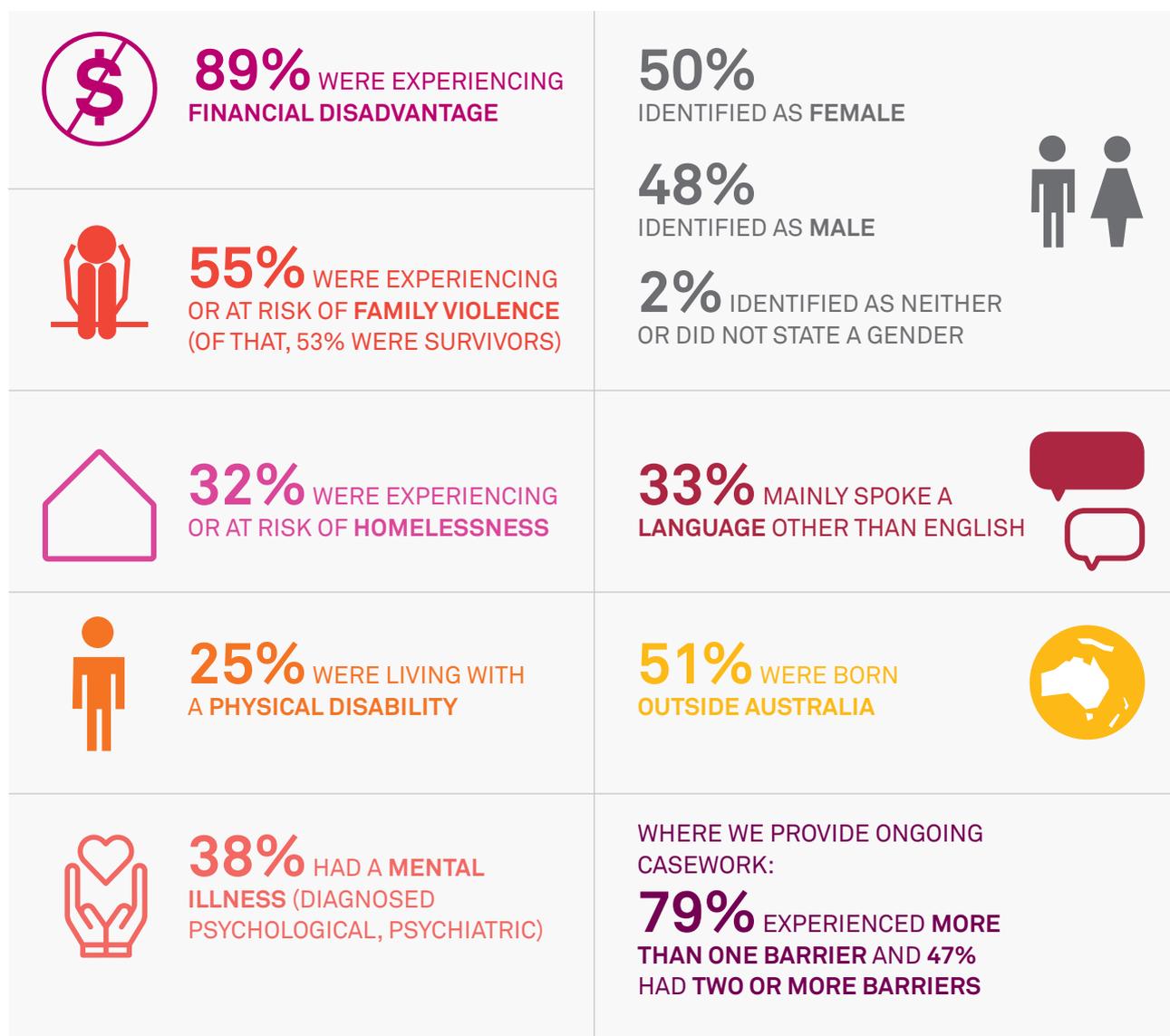
— DAMIAN STOCK, CEO

Who we help

COVID-19 has exposed more people to legal problems and entrenched existing disadvantage within the community. It has also resulted in social isolation, dislocating people from their communities and supports, and made services less accessible by removing on-site presence and face-to-face service delivery.

This year, it was more important than ever to reach those in our local community who were experiencing increased barriers to accessing legal help because of their income, or other life circumstances like homelessness, family violence or mental illness.

Snapshot of our clients



What we do

To respond to fast paced and frequent changes in the law and legal processes precipitated by the pandemic and help people to understand and assert their rights in a changing landscape, we employed all limbs of our three core streams of work.





FREE LEGAL HELP

With our generalist capability across areas of law connected to common life problems, we were well placed to respond to the array of legal issues experienced by members of our local community during COVID-19: relationship and family issues, family violence, housing issues, criminal law, and administrative law issues such as infringements and victims of crime assistance tribunal (VOCAT) claims. Our embedded financial counsellor assisted clients with money problems, while we referred to pro bono partners for matters outside of our practice expertise.

Client journey and snapshot of the year's work

Ordinarily, people can access our services through several different pathways, including directly at our office and on-site at outreach services. However, for much of this year our outreaches were paused, and we connected with clients via phone and video link.

WE HELPED 965 PEOPLE THIS YEAR

WE GAVE 902 LEGAL ADVICES THIS YEAR ABOUT SPECIFIC LEGAL PROBLEMS, WITH THE TOP ISSUES BEING:

- 18% — domestic violence protection orders
- 17% — other civil law problems (like fines)
- 13% — housing problems
- 13% — parenting arrangements

OUR LAWYERS CARRIED OUT 635 LEGAL TASKS THIS YEAR to provide further assistance, such as making phone calls or writing a letter

366 CASES WERE OPENED THIS YEAR for more complex problems that required more intensive support, including court or tribunal representation

Spotlight: COVID-19 fines

HAKIM'S STORY

After fleeing his home country and coming to Australia as a refugee at a young age, Hakim found a home in Melbourne's public housing community, where he has lived for two decades.

In July 2020, public housing towers in North Melbourne and Flemington were imposed with a hard lockdown enforced by Victoria Police. On the second day of lockdown, Hakim was taking his usual daily walk to the estate in Flemington, where his children live with their mother. He has to walk daily as exercise for a medical condition. Calling his kids from outside their towers, like he normally would, they told Hakim that they were locked down in 'detention' and couldn't come down to see him. Hakim told us that this brought back difficult memories from his experience as a refugee.

Crying and surrounded by police, Hakim began walking home while still on the phone to his daughter. As he was walking across an intersection at the estate, which was closed-off by police, he was grabbed by the neck and tackled to the ground by a police officer. Handcuffed and dragged behind a police van, Hakim was told he was apprehended for jaywalking across the closed intersection. He was released by the officers, but two weeks later received a COVID-19 fine in the mail.

Concerned about his \$1600 fine and the behaviour of police, who failed to demonstrate common sense in issuing the fine to Hakim, IMCL lawyer Lloyd Murphy submitted an internal review application on his behalf. Victoria Police failed to provide a response to our application within the legislated timeframe and later formally withdrew the fine. Hakim is happy that he doesn't have to worry about a fine he cannot afford and that he can now go about his daily walks with his children again.

Visit our website to learn more about our work around the [hard lockdown](#) of public housing towers and our calls for a [health-focused approach](#) to COVID-19 restrictions.

Spotlight: Victims of Crime Assistance

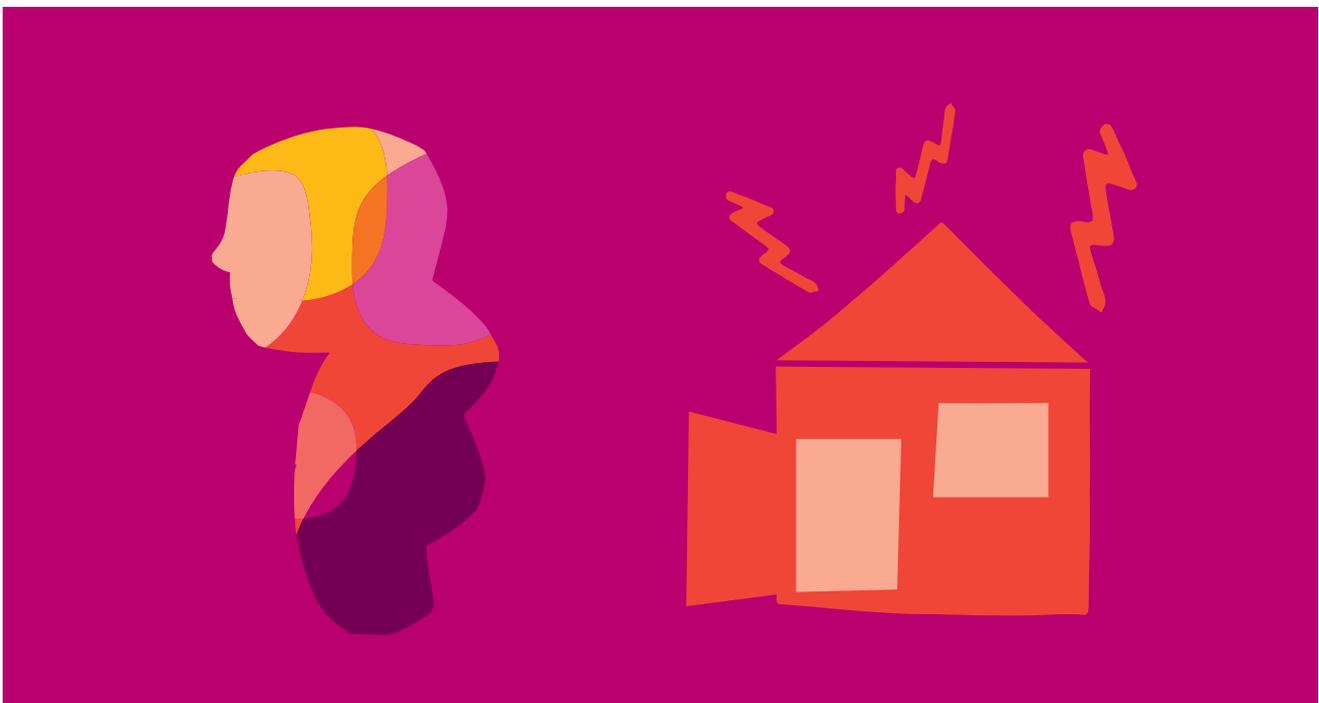
ELLE'S STORY

We first introduced Elle in our [2016–17 Annual Report](#), with a follow-up story in our [2018–19 Annual Report](#).

When she came to our service for help, Elle was dealing with a cluster of legal issues, including family law issues and fines, which we often see after women have experienced family violence. Since then, we have been providing her with intensive, holistic legal help for a number of years.

This year, through the persistence of our lawyers during even more court delays due to COVID-19, Elle finally received a VOCAT order awarding her financial support for expenses like psychological counselling and security which will allow her to prioritise her recovery and focus on her wellbeing.

Visit our website to read more about [Elle's story](#).



Spotlight: Tenancy

In response to the financial hardship brought on by COVID-19 health directives forcing the closure of workplaces, we assisted renters to understand their rights, communicate with their landlords, and navigate new tenancy laws, like the eviction moratorium and rent relief scheme.

The pandemic also compounded issues already facing the public housing community because of chronic underinvestment, with COVID-19 lockdowns exacerbating the effects of extreme overcrowding and inadequate property maintenance. In response to COVID-19, the Victorian Government established a program of transferring severely overcrowded families out of public housing towers into privately owned homes on two-year leases.

AMINA'S STORY

We helped clients like Amina and her family access the scheme and have advocated for changes to their relocation agreements to protect their rights.

Amina was living in crowded conditions in public housing, which created health problems even before the pandemic. Their two-bedroom apartment was totally inadequate for her and her seven dependent children, one of whom was born after we first met her at the Royal Women's Hospital. She and two of her children developed respiratory illnesses due to a mould issue that continued to go untreated despite Amina reporting it repeatedly. The overcrowding led to further health problems, with two of Amina's other children also developing related hearing problems. For a long time, Amina's attempts to get her family transferred to a larger and more suitable property went unheard.

After being persistently brushed aside, Amina was referred to IMCL through our partnership with the Royal Women's Hospital. Through the concerted advocacy and legal assistance provided by our tenancy lawyer, Louisa Bassini, the maintenance issue was finally addressed. However, the mould was only painted over, rather than treated and removed. The mould, of course, continued to grow and Amina and her children continued to be plagued with health problems.

Amina said that the ongoing issue left her questioning herself as a mother.

'You feel like, you know, you're not worthy of mother[hood]. Your kids are coughing. The little ones are coughing. You call [the department] and nobody listens.'

All maintenance work was then ceased due to lockdowns in Melbourne and Amina's public housing tower was subject to a hard lockdown enforced by Victoria Police. Living in a severely overcrowded apartment became unbearable and Amina struggled to care for her children when she contracted COVID-19, which was exacerbated by her mould-related respiratory illness.

'That was the week that I felt like I was helpless. I can't help my kids... Before I loved Australia, but that time that week, I hate Australia, to be honest.'

Our lawyer, Louisa, continued to advocate on Amina's behalf in seeking a transfer to a safer and more appropriate property in light of the danger posed by COVID-19: '... it wasn't until the outbreak of COVID that the plight of people living in the towers kind of came under a bit more scrutiny.'

One month later, Amina was offered a place through the government's Private Rental Relocation program. Amina and her children were able to move into a 4-bedroom house, ensuring they had a safe place to live. Amina could feel at ease knowing that their new home wouldn't make her children sick.

However, Amina and her children believe that it should not have taken media attention during COVID-19 and a hard lockdown to force the government to act.

'It showed us that our voices didn't matter in a way until authorities or the media captured our living conditions,' her daughter said.

Read more about Amina and the public housing relocation program in an [ABC article](#).

How we provide free legal help

Clinics and integrated practice

Despite the limitations brought by COVID-19, and although there is no substitute for the value of face-to-face service, accessibility remained a priority. At the beginning of the pandemic, we acted quickly to redesign our service delivery to facilitate remote working for staff and telephone appointments for clients. Using grant money from the City of Melbourne, we were also able to optimise our remote working systems and operations by building a central online platform to manage our stakeholder management, projects, community legal education, reporting, funding, and law reform and advocacy work.

With more people experiencing legal problems at the same time as reduced service accessibility, our community partnerships have never been more important. Thanks to the strong relationships that form the foundation of our partnerships and despite our lawyers not being able to attend on-site, referral pathways remained operational throughout the year. Working closely with health and social workers to address interrelated life problems, we continued to provide integrated and holistic legal help to some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

OUTREACH LOCATIONS

- 1 Ozanam House
- 2 North Melbourne Language and Learning Centre
- 3 Royal Women's Hospital (including the Social Work Department, the Women's Alcohol and Drugs Service [WADS] and the Centre Against Sexual Assault [CASA House])
- 4 Royal Melbourne Hospital
- 5 (including Royal Park Aged Care and Rehabilitation Units)
- 6 Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
- 7 Family Services at Carlton Baths
- 8 Melbourne Magistrates' Court Family Violence Duty Lawyer Service
- 9 Open Door (the 480 Outreach Hub)
- 10 St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre
- 11 The River Nile Learning Centre
- 12 Salvation Army — Flagstaff Accommodation
- 13 Community Hub at The Dock

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- 13 Launch Housing — Elizabeth Street Common Ground
- 14 The Drum Youth Services
- 15 The Huddle



Spotlight: Health Justice Partnerships

Reflecting the flow-on effects of COVID-19, we saw an increase in Health Justice Partnership clients presenting with family violence and related legal problems.

Royal Women's Hospital

96 CLIENTS

primarily regarding parenting arrangements, domestic violence protection orders and other family law problems

Royal Melbourne Hospital

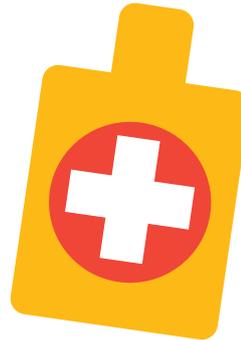
75 CLIENTS

primarily regarding civil law problems, housing and domestic violence protection orders

Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre

16 CLIENTS

primarily regarding parenting arrangements, housing and other civil law problems



EMMA'S STORY

When Emma visited the Royal Women's Hospital in 2019 for an appointment while pregnant with her second child, she confided in her nurse about being the victim of family violence. She had just escaped a violent relationship and entered transitional housing. Aware of the hospital's partnership with IMCL, and recognising that Emma's life had been significantly affected by family violence and needed support to recover from the crimes committed against her, her midwife referred her to us for assistance in applying to VOCAT.

Emma had been struggling to find the right support for her legal problems and didn't know where to go, so she was grateful for the hospital's referral partnership with IMCL.

'Before IMCL, I thought I was never going to get anywhere and would end up in jail paying my fines off. I was just running around in circles chasing my tail. I didn't know how to access the services or what I was entitled to.'

While it took two years for her VOCAT application to be finalised, because of the general and holistic nature of our service, she knew that she could also turn to us for help when additional legal issues arose. Although her ex-partner was now in prison, she was still on high alert whenever she left the house because she didn't know when he was going to be released. Our lawyers advised Emma on how to make sure she received information about his release. To make her feel safer, we then worked with Emma to put in place a Family Violence Intervention Order to prevent him from contacting her.

IMCL lawyers also identified that Emma was finding it hard to pay her bills due to over \$16,000 of fines in her name. As a mother of two children, with Parenting Payment as her sole source of income, she was faced with having to enter into a payment plan that would take years to pay off. If she did not pay, the Sheriff could seize her property and prevent her from driving. However, after speaking further with Emma, we realised that most of the fines in her name were incurred by the perpetrator of family violence or were a direct result of the family violence. On this basis, our lawyer, Wallis Hamilton, successfully applied

to have all of Emma's fines withdrawn. She no longer has to worry about paying off thousands of dollars in fines and feels safer knowing she will be notified when her ex-partner is released from prison.

'When people are at their breaking point and they are an emotional wreck, it's really lovely to have someone take you seriously and guide you out of there.'

When her Victims of Crime application was finally resolved in September 2021 with the help of our lawyer, Libby, Emma was able to obtain close to \$20,000 in financial assistance from the Tribunal. Together with a lump sum payment, she obtained assistance with security systems, counselling and self-defence courses.

With the wrap-around legal support provided by IMCL, Emma is finally in a position where she can focus on recovering from her experiences. She now has the time and the means to focus on getting treatment to address the psychological impacts of the family violence and raising her family. Although it wasn't an easy process, Emma is glad she did it.

'It was hard, and it wasn't just free money. If you want to go through the process, you need to be serious about getting help for yourself. But now, I'm a new person. I've come so far — I have a house and custody of my kids. I'm really getting somewhere.'

'People should know that they're not the only ones facing hard times and that there are amazing services like IMCL out there. Don't be afraid to ask questions and speak to a lawyer to assess your options.'

‘When you’ve experienced trauma, you need someone to hold your hand and walk you through it — IMCL was there for me the whole time.’

— EMMA, IMCL CLIENT



Duty lawyer service, Early Intervention and Early Resolution services

When people have a hearing for family violence intervention orders (FVIVO) matters at Melbourne Magistrates' Court, they may not always have the opportunity to speak with a lawyer first. IMCL has a Duty Lawyer available at MMC two days a week to help people before their hearing. In 2020, court appearances transitioned to WebEx due to social restrictions. Client appointments were by telephone.

People with a family violence matter often have other related legal matters, including tenancy issues, criminal issues or financial problems. If our lawyer identifies that a client at MMC has further legal problems beyond the immediate family violence matter, they can offer further advice through our Early Intervention Legal Service (EILS).

From late this year, we have provided legal assistance for people with a FVIVO matter prior to the date of their hearing at the Melbourne Magistrates' Court through the Early Resolution Service (ERS). This service will be continued in the coming financial year.



THIS YEAR, WE PROVIDED:

298 DUTY LAWYER LEGAL SERVICES

(including advice, negotiating, court appearances)

FOR 264 CLIENTS

23 ADVICE ONLY

144 NEGOTIATIONS with the opposing party or drafting documents

132 APPEARANCES

218 EILS LEGAL SERVICES

(advices, tasks, referrals, cases)

FOR 104 CLIENTS

25 INFORMATION PROVISION AND REFERRALS

73 LEGAL ADVICES

104 LEGAL TASKS

16 PROGRESSED TO CASEWORK

38 ERS LEGAL SERVICES

FOR 17 CLIENTS



LAURA'S STORY

We met Laura through our Early Intervention Legal Service when she was a respondent to a police application for a family violence intervention order (FVIVO) against her on behalf of her ex-partner. However, it quickly became clear to our duty lawyer that Laura had been misidentified by police as the perpetrator.

Throughout their relationship and after their separation, Laura's ex-partner regularly perpetrated verbal, physical and emotional abuse against her. Laura showed us many messages sent to her by her ex-partner that included stalking, harassment and threats of self-harm.

Earlier in the year, in fear for her safety, she applied for and was granted an interim FVIVO against her ex-partner for her protection. But he had little regard for the order, breaching it over 100 times. Despite the FVIVO in place, it seemed that there were no consequences for his actions and Laura still didn't feel safe.

His breaches continued until one day there was an altercation in which Laura was injured and police were called. Despite explaining the history of their relationship and detailing her ex-partner's reported breaches to police, Laura was arrested and questioned. She was eventually served with an application for a FVIVO against her to protect her ex-partner.

As we have seen repeatedly this year, Victoria Police had misidentified Laura as the perpetrator, whereas her ex-partner was actually the 'primary aggressor.'

The police application came before the Court on four separate occasions. Each time, she was required to appear and explain to the Court what had happened, causing her significant trauma. However, each time, the Court was not willing to dismiss the application because of delays by Victoria Police.

Telling us about how she felt trying to deal with this problem on her own, Laura said 'I really didn't have any idea what was going on. I didn't know what the different hearings meant and what I needed to provide to the Court.'

Seeking help, she turned to IMCL's duty lawyer service at the Melbourne Magistrates Court.

'The lawyers really went above and beyond. Even when my case got moved to a different Court, they made sure they could still represent me so I wouldn't have to tell my story all over again.'

Our family lawyer, Indya McMahon, assisted Laura in mounting her argument that Victoria Police had misidentified her as the perpetrator and that her ex-partner was abusing the court process to further perpetrate family violence. These submissions were successful and the Court struck-out the police's application.

At the same time, Indya was successful in having a long order made against Laura's ex-partner, meaning she won't have to attend court again for a long time.

'It took a little longer than we had hoped, but everything was resolved. I didn't think I would get anything close to the outcome that I got, and I never felt like just a number. The duty lawyer and Indya were so personable and empathetic.'

Although Laura is still traumatised by her abuse and the court process after she was misidentified, if it wasn't for the intervention of IMCL's duty lawyer service, Laura would still be subject to a FVIVO that her ex-partner could use as a tool for coercive control.

'Having the help of IMCL lawyers and understanding what I had to do — it felt like there was a light at the end of the tunnel.'



LEGAL EDUCATION

Legal issues are not always easy to identify for individuals or professionals in non-legal work. In 2020-21, we worked closely with our partners at homelessness services, schools and youth organisations, language and learning centres and our hospitals to help address this. By providing legal education tailored for their line of work and the people that they work with – including on-demand individual secondary consultations – we helped our partners identify legal issues and refer people for assistance in circumstances where we could not reach them directly ourselves.

In addition to legal education for professionals, we also provided tailored legal education to targeted community members. To fill information gaps caused by an absence of communication from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, which failed to provide timely and in-language information about public health directions, residents' legal rights, and how to access food and medicine, we produced plain English and translated factsheets and social media posts. During the intervention, there were 1,300 views of our website, with many more accessing our communications material through other platforms such as email, social media and WhatsApp groups.

Acknowledging the power of early intervention to prevent legal problems from occurring or escalating, this year we also prioritised teaching students face-to-face and via digital platforms through our Youth Outreach Lawyer program on topics including work rights, women's rights at home and rights when arrested by police.

We also continued to promote our multilingual online legal education resource, ishelp.org.au, to international students living in Victoria. We were particularly motivated to reach this audience during COVID-19 to assist them to understand their housing, work, employment and personal safety rights, given the vulnerability of students who were unable to access financial support from the government and who work in casualised industries most affected by lockdown closures. Through promotion of the resource across Google and social media platforms frequented by international students, such as Facebook, it was viewed around 40,000 times in the past year.





LAW REFORM & ADVOCACY

Public housing lockdown

On 4 July 2020, public housing estates in North Melbourne and Flemington were subject to an immediate hard lockdown enforced by Victoria Police. Coordinating with local organisations and volunteers, we quickly mobilised to ensure the protection of residents' rights, as well as their access to food, medicine and other essential items. Our lawyers were present on the ground morning and night, staffed a 24-hour phone line, coordinated the publication and distribution of critical information about residents' rights and, along with other legal experts, assessed the lawfulness of the intervention.

Since then, we have continued to engage in individual and systemic advocacy, including by making a detailed submission to the Victorian Ombudsman's investigation, calling on the Victorian Government to apologise to those affected and participating in consultations concerning revisions to pandemic powers. You can visit [our website](#) to read more about our response and continued advocacy.

Fines

As a result of increased financial hardship and social distancing restrictions during COVID-19, people experiencing disadvantage were revealed to be at a greater risk of being issued new fines or defaulting on existing ones. Recognising this, with others, we advocated early on for necessary reforms and changes to the fines system, including a temporary stay on certain sanctions and enforcement measures.

As the restrictions continued, our client experience began to clearly show that police were adopting an unnecessarily punitive approach and failing to adequately review fines. Through internal advocacy with government representatives and by engaging mainstream media, we argued for a public health approach to COVID-19 compliance to be adopted over a punitive approach based on excessive policing. You can visit [our website](#) to read more about our fines advocacy during COVID-19.

Fines — children & young people

Throughout the year, our Youth Outreach Lawyer, Libby O'Dea, led advocacy efforts regarding systemic issues in how the fines system treats children and young people. IMCL and other CLCs found that adult systems, procedures and enforcement measures were being inappropriately applied to children. In response to this advocacy we were pleased when the Department of Justice and Regulation confirmed that it was in the process of withdrawing the affected fines. Libby continues to advocate for the inclusion of a provision in the new Youth Justice Act that would automatically withdraw fines that are no longer enforceable against children. You can visit [our website](#) to read more about our fines advocacy relating to children and young people.

Tenancy

Housing has always been an issue of basic dignity, but its significance as an individual and public health issue was brought to the forefront by COVID-19. Recognising the emerging need at the beginning of the pandemic among private tenants at risk of eviction following the shutdown of workplaces and loss of income, we pivoted our advocacy priorities to work quickly with others to advocate to government for an eviction moratorium, rent reduction scheme and access to emergency relief grants. You can visit [our website](#) to read more.

Social housing advocacy

Building on our advocacy connected with the Public Housing Renewal Program, we continued to call for the increased growth of public housing stock and transparent community housing policies consistent with the standards afforded to public housing renters. Informed by the experience of our clients, 32% of whom were at risk of homelessness this year, we outlined our position in a [submission](#) to the 10 Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy and joined a group of CLCs in developing a [joint position paper](#) aimed at informing the Victorian Government commissioned independent [Social Housing Regulation Review](#). You can read more on [our website](#).

Projects

COMMUNITY LEGAL MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT

We entered our second year partnering with the Police, Ambulance and Clinical Early Response (PACER) team, aimed at delivering integrated and free legal help for people experiencing a mental health crisis. This year saw us adjusting the model to the conditions of COVID-19 by transitioning to phone service without a physical presence at hospitals. Based on our observations and feedback from clients, service delivery via telephone in this context has worked to improve client access to legal help by reducing barriers to attending appointments and will remain a part of our service design.

With the assistance of a Lived Experience Advisor, our project team commenced the exciting implementation of our inaugural consumer advisory group, ensuring the voices and views of mental health consumers are embedded in our work and how our services are designed and delivered. In the year ahead, using our project findings and insights from people with lived experience, we will further optimise our service design and advocate for legal services to form an integral part of the restructured mental health system following the Royal Commission into Mental Health. You can read more about this project on [our website](#).

YOUTH OUTREACH LAWYER

The 2020–21 calendar year brought our City of Melbourne funded two-year Youth Outreach Lawyer pilot project to an end. During this time, the project provided accessible legal assistance to 53 young people, from local North Melbourne schools and youth services. By working at The River Nile School and St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre, our lawyer was integrated within the school setting so that she was available and approachable to students. By working with teachers and support workers, the Youth Outreach Lawyer provided 25 secondary consultations for individual information as required, and legal education to support the identification of legal

issues among their students, to assist with making referrals. Legal education helped students increase their knowledge around rights, law, and how to access legal assistance. Built through a human-centred design process and delivered in person, virtually or via school-hosted social media platforms, feedback from participants indicated this education had improved their knowledge. Access to legal assistance also helped students beyond their legal issue by allowing them to engage more with school and continues to assist teachers to better support the young people they work with.

Students who received legal services were appreciative of having convenient access to a lawyer at their school who could provide tailored legal advice: 'I trust the people working there and feel comfortable asking more questions. The lawyer would always explain, no matter how many questions I asked.'

'[Without the legal help] things wouldn't have turned out as they have. I probably wouldn't have reached out or known where to go.'

Having achieved positive results, IMCL remains committed to the ongoing delivery and expansion of this program as a core stream of work, pledging a further year of funding. We will work with the schools, philanthropy and the state government to secure the programs' long-term sustainability. You can read more about the project on [our website](#).

MADISON'S STORY

While hanging out with a group of friends, a few bad decisions led to Madison facing criminal charges for the first time.

At just 17 years old, this put Madison at a crossroads: a criminal conviction could hang over her head and negatively impact her for the rest of her life, but early intervention and a second chance could provide her with the support she needs to engage with her future and avoid re-offending. Visit [our website](#) to read more about how our Youth Outreach Lawyer, Libby O'Dea, assisted Madison to avoid criminal conviction and complete a diversion plan.

HOUSING JUSTICE PROJECT

In July 2021, IMCL secured funding from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation for a two-year Housing Justice Project. Designed to address the challenges confronting people exiting homelessness, and the impact that unresolved legal problems have on housing security, the project will be co-designed to deliver integrated legal services within specialist homelessness organisations. The project will adopt an early intervention model of addressing legal issues to increase housing readiness as well as providing tenancy law assistance to help prevent evictions and preserve ongoing housing.



Measuring our goals

To assess whether we are achieving our goal of building fairness and wellbeing in our local community through the law, we monitor and evaluate all of our work.

IMCL knows that resolving people's legal issues provides benefits beyond simply removing the legal matter. In 2020–21, lawyers reported that of their casework clients:

62% OF LEGAL ISSUES WERE RESOLVED or their severity reduced and a further 14% in part

MOST LEGAL RESULTS WERE CONSIDERED TO BE **FAIR** IN ALL THE CIRCUMSTANCES

36% WERE IN A BETTER FINANCIAL SITUATION (including **74%** of fines clients)

59% HAD REDUCED STRESS AND ANXIETY

24% HAD AN IMPROVED CAPABILITY TO FOCUS ON THEIR HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Throughout the pandemic, IMCL continued to provide accessible services for people who would not otherwise have had means to speak with a lawyer. 55% of respondents said they would not have been able to speak to a lawyer were it not for IMCL, and further 24% were not sure if they could.

During the periods of social restrictions in Melbourne, legal appointments were made by telephone. Client feedback – also collected by telephone – showed that the services remained accessible and informative:

94% OF RESPONDENTS SAID the phone appointment was convenient and accessible

100% SAID they understood their legal matter better

100% SAID they had more confidence to resolve their legal matter

Clients continued to show their gratitude for the professionalism and compassionate manner of our lawyers.

“(The) lawyer used real language I could understand, no lawyer lingo.”

— IMCL CLIENT

“The lawyer was exceptional, took her time, never rushed.”

— IMCL CLIENT

“I felt safe.”

— IMCL CLIENT

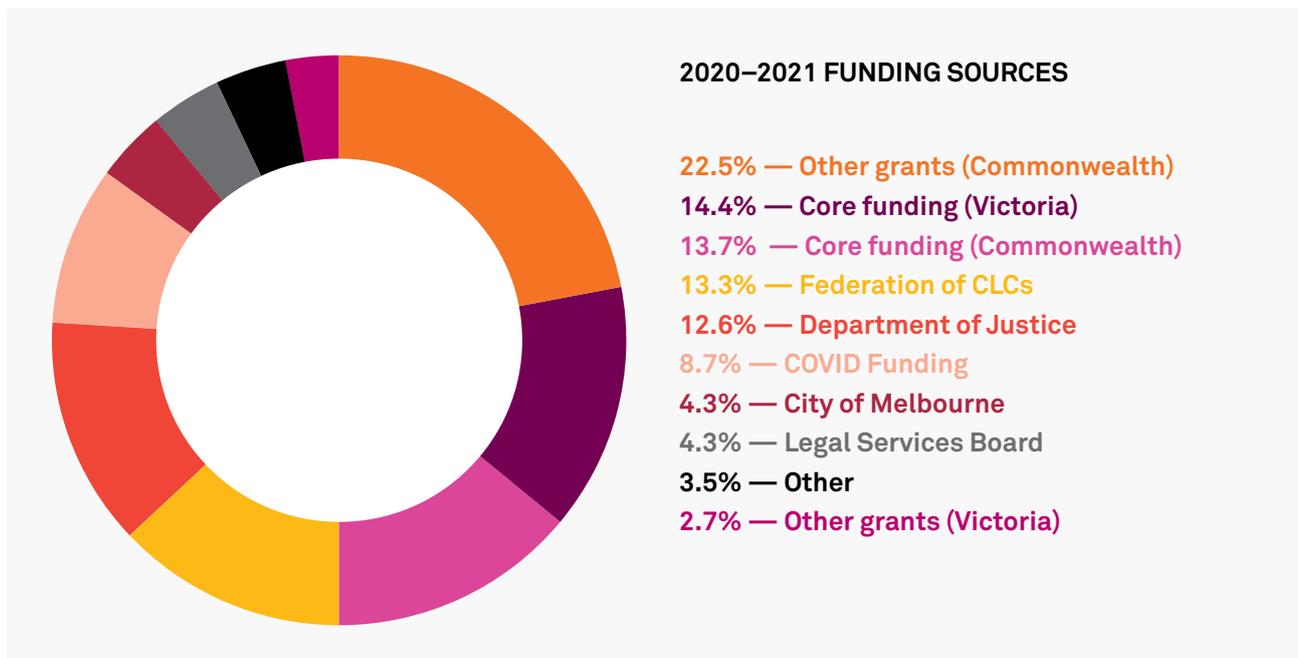
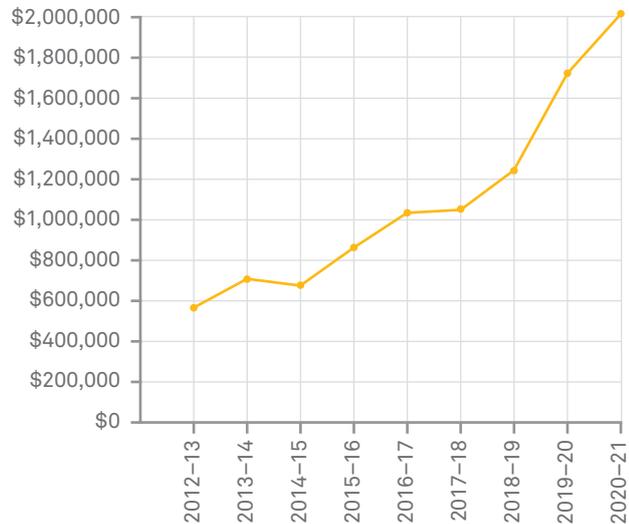


Financial report

The audited financial results for the 2020–21 year show our total income to be \$2,009,107, which is a 14.5% increase on the year before.

We are funded by a range of government, statutory, philanthropic and individual sources. This includes the federal and state governments, the City of Melbourne, the Legal Services Board, the Australian Communities Foundation and individual donors. In 2020–21 we received the last of COVID–19 specific grants that have been used to support our team in responding to increased legal need. That legal need continues to grow as lockdowns ease, and we will be seeking alternate funding sources to continue to provide ongoing support to our community dealing with the social and economic consequences of the pandemic.

IMCL’s complete audited financial report can be downloaded from [our website](#).



Pro bono support

The challenges presented by the pandemic revealed the best of the legal profession, with our long-standing partner pro bono firms maintaining their unwavering support, and others reaching out to offer assistance to meet unprecedented demand.

We thank:

- **Moray & Agney**, who for 12 years have seconded a full-time lawyer, bolstering our capacity to deliver legal services to our community, especially those experiencing homelessness and presenting with criminal law problems
- **VGSO**, a valued partner who continued to demonstrate their support to community law by providing a full-time secondee to the IMCL team for the 13th year running
- **HSF** for demonstrating their financial donation in support of our HJP program, as well as their substantial assistance in relation to our potential merger with Flemington Kensington Legal Centre, duty lawyer service and debt clients
- **Clayton Utz**, a pro bono partner of over 20 years, for continuing to accept client referrals for employment law, tenancy and general civil law matters. They provided this assistance in addition to covering some of IMCL's operational costs
- Jo Renkin, IMCL board member and partner at **Lander & Rogers**, who continued her coordination of complex referrals from IMCL in employment and family law matters.
- **WLW Migration Lawyers** for accepting pro bono and discounted migration referrals from our team
- **Minter Ellison**, who assisted IMCL on employment matters and advice in relation to internal human resources
- A number of other firms that generously offered their time and expertise in accepting pro bono referrals for other matters outside of our own expertise, including: **Ryan Carlisle Thomas** for family, employment and advice in relation to wills; **Hall & Wilcox** for property, estates and taxation matters; and **Collins Biggers Paisley** for employment matters.



We are also extremely grateful for the significant assistance provided by firms and individual lawyers in response to the hard lockdown of public housing residents in our catchment in July 2020. In particular, we thank Alistair Pound SC and Felicity Gerry QC for their pro bono advice with respect to the lawfulness of the lockdown and assessment of remedies for affected residents, as well as Johnson Winter & Slattery for their additional advice on resident litigation options.

We also thank the many pro bono lawyers who provided incredible support by staffing phone lines and attending public housing estates on-site as human rights observers:

- Solicitors/Counsel: Rutendo Muchinguri (Counsel); Tanya Skortsova (Counsel); John Garang Kon; Brendan Annear; Melissa Chung
- Lawyers from other community legal centres: Yusuf Mohamud (West Heidelberg CLC); Hui Zhou (Fitzroy Legal Service (FLS)); Jen Black (FLS); Paul Kidd (FLS); Shamila Liyanage (FLS); Odette Shenfield (FLS); Adrian Snodgrass (FLS); Andrea Main (FKCLC); Gregor Husper (FKCLC); Tania Lefort (FKCLC); Nimet Gurleyen (FKCLC); Dan Nguyen (FKCLC); George Gobrial (FKCLC); Sue Brown (FKCLC); Gary Sullivan (Moonee Valley Legal Service (MVLS)); Brian Burton (MVLS) Katia Lallo (Springvale); Ella Casey (AED); Melissa Hardham (WestJustice (WJ)); Matthew Martin (WJ); Tess Matthews (WJ); Francesca Lai (WJ).

Future of our funding

In late 2020–21 we were delighted to receive confirmation that the Victorian Government had committed to a further three years of integrated services funding. We thank the Victorian Attorney-General and our supporters across the justice system for their support for this funding model, recognising the strength of place-based integrated legal and non-legal services providing early intervention services. For IMCL this means funding certainty for our hallmark Health Justice Partnerships with the Royal Women’s Hospital, the Royal Melbourne Hospital and the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. We worked closely with and appreciate the ongoing advocacy of our peak body, the Federation of Community Legal Centres, as it demonstrates how intervening early and collaboratively saves public money, avoids pressure on the justice system and increases individual and community wellbeing.

We welcomed the ongoing commitment by the Federal Attorney-General’s Department to its contribution to legal and non-legal services in support of health justice partnerships. This program allows IMCL to continue to embed a financial counsellor within our team, providing a much needed priority response to our community members experiencing some of the toughest economic challenges in living memory. The program also bolsters our support for women experiencing family violence at a range of health settings.

We also welcomed the expanded trial of the Early Resolution Service, providing advice and assistance to people attending the Family Violence List at the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court in advance of their hearing date. We will continue to work closely with Victoria Legal Aid and legal assistance partners to demonstrate that this is another early intervention model that reduces stress for people, reduces pressure on courts and achieves better outcomes.

In recent months we were thrilled to receive a philanthropic grant from the Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation for a two-year Housing Justice ‘demonstration project’. Academics and policy makers have known for some time now that the provision of generalist legal services in removing life problems for people exiting

homelessness provides the space necessary to focus on housing stability. Together with our project partners at VincentCare and the Salvation Army we will evaluate and demonstrate the integral role that generalist community lawyers can play within a multi-disciplinary team supporting the transition from homelessness. We know that homes alone do not end homelessness, and we intend to contribute to evidence-informed service design necessary to accompany Victoria’s unprecedented investment in social housing through the Big Housing Build.

However there are areas of our practice where ongoing funding is yet to be secured. Our City of Melbourne-funded Youth Outreach Lawyer project was a success, providing much needed accessible legal support at flexible learning centres to students at risk of disconnecting from education. Funding to continue this important work is a priority for IMCL and our partners across the legal assistance sector, and we will continue to promote its proven value to government and non-government funders. And with COVID-19 funding lapsed and some elements of our core funding not yet secured beyond June 2022, we will continue to promote its proven value to draw on our expertise in evaluation and legal needs analysis to demonstrate to funders the enormous value that community legal services provide to our community as we rebuild fairness and wellbeing for our community.





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