



INNER MELBOURNE  
COMMUNITY LEGAL

HOW WE WERE

FEAR

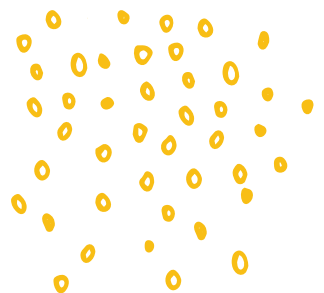
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JUSTICE



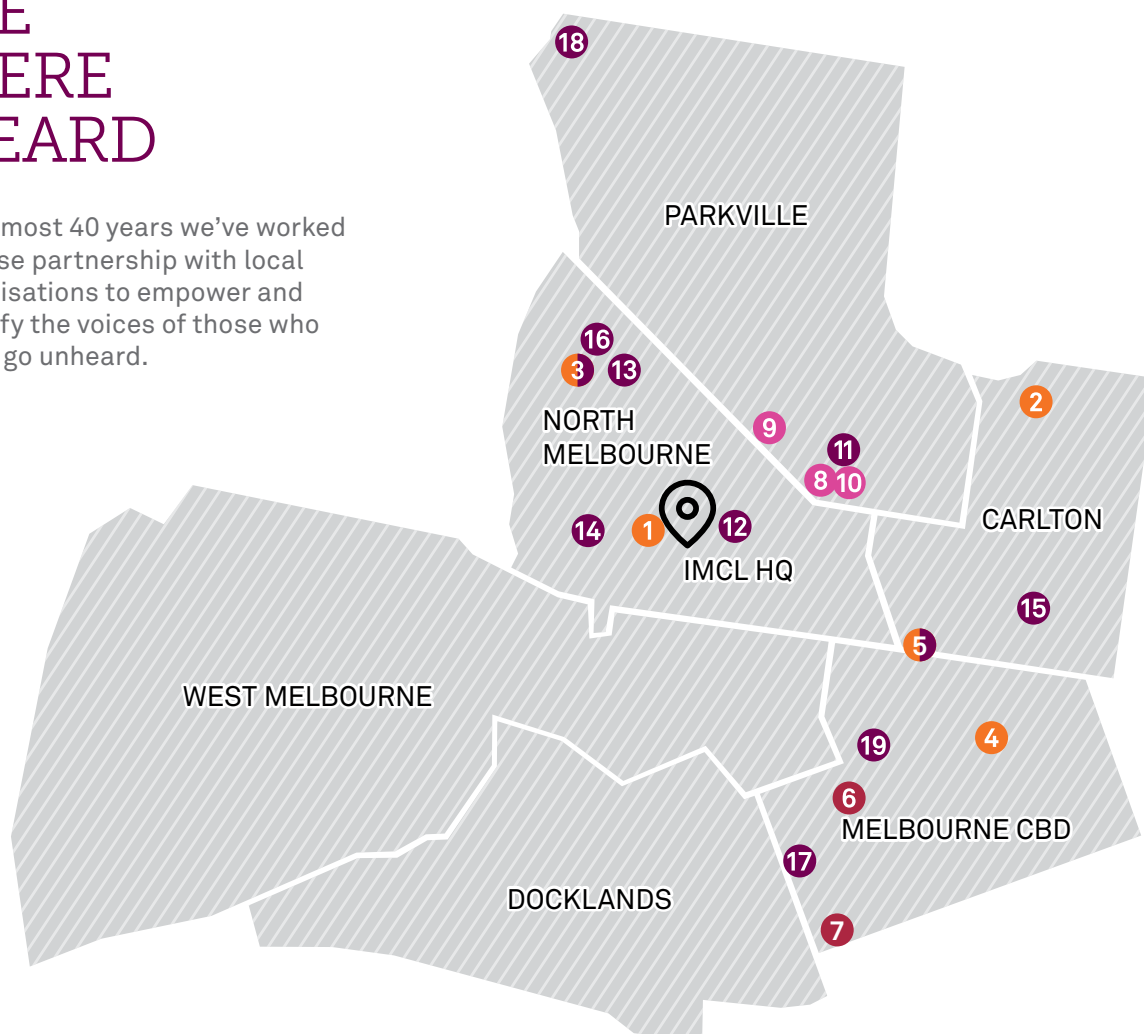
2016–17 ANNUAL REPORT

[www.imcl.org.au](http://www.imcl.org.au)



# WHERE WE WERE HEARD

For almost 40 years we've worked in close partnership with local organisations to empower and amplify the voices of those who often go unheard.



## In Community Spaces

- 1 Ozanam Community Centre
- 2 The Community Space at 480 Lygon Street (Carlton Public Housing Estate)
- 3 cohealth (North Melbourne Public Housing Estate)
- 4 Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA House)
- 5 cohealth (Central City)

## In Courts and Tribunals

- 6 Melbourne Magistrates' Court
- 7 Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

## In Hospitals

- 8 Royal Women's Hospital
- 9 Royal Children's Hospital
- 10 Royal Melbourne Hospital

## Community Legal Education

- 11 University High
- 12 St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre
- 13 St Aloysius College
- 14 The Huddle, North Melbourne Football Club
- 3 cohealth (North Melbourne Public Housing Estate)
- 15 The Drum Youth Services
- 16 North Melbourne Language and Learning Centre
- 5 cohealth (Central City)
- 17 Study Melbourne Student Centre
- 18 McAuley House
- 19 Housing Choices Australia

# WHO WE ARE AND HOW WE WERE HEARD IN 2016-17

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# SNAPSHOT OF THE YEAR'S WORK

OVER  
**650**

INDIVIDUALS ACCESSED OUR  
ADVICE CLINICS MANY OF  
WHOM WE ASSISTED WITH  
ONGOING CASEWORK



**50%**

WE SAW AN EQUAL  
AMOUNT OF MEN  
AND WOMEN



WE HELPED  
OVER

**350**

PEOPLE AS COURT  
DUTY LAWYERS



**30%\***

OF OUR CLIENTS  
WERE EXPERIENCING  
OR AT RISK OF  
HOMELESSNESS



WE SAW  
OVER

**90**

CLIENTS AS PART OF OUR  
EARLY INTERVENTION  
LEGAL SERVICE



AROUND

**40%\***

OF OUR CLIENTS  
HAD EXPERIENCED  
FAMILY VIOLENCE



**30%\***

OF OUR CLIENTS  
INDICATED THAT THEY  
HAD A DISABILITY



AROUND

**1000**

TOTAL LEGAL  
ADVICES PROVIDED



## TOP LEGAL PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY OUR CLIENTS:

Family law

Criminal law

Fines

Tenancy

Family violence

Debt

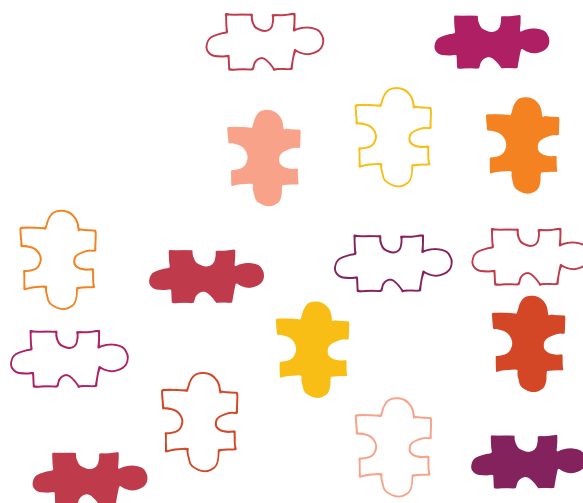
\*As at 31 March 2017. Updated data as at June 2017 was unable to be extracted due to CLC database migration.

# OUR IMPACT ON JUSTICE

Providing legal assistance alone doesn't necessarily lead to justice for our clients or our community.

Because legal problems don't happen in isolation, we look beyond immediate legal need to understand each of the parts of the puzzle that make up peoples' multifaceted lives.

To have long-term, sustainable impact, we work hand-in-hand with a diverse set of service providers to piece together tailored solutions to complex social justice problems.



## BEING HEARD OUT AND ABOUT

### Community Partnerships

For Amal, Steve and Liam, **Ozanam Community Centre** is a community in the true sense of the word. It's more than just a place to get a meal, have a warm shower and access the support workers they need. More importantly, it's a place to catch up with friends with similar life circumstances and speak to others who'll take the time to listen.

For many years, IMCL has been a core part of community meeting places like Ozanam and **The Community Space at The Carlton Public Housing Estate**, providing regular co-located legal advice services. We go there knowing that people like Amal, Steve and Liam experience chronic disadvantage from homelessness, mental illness, addiction and social isolation. Because of this they are more exposed to legal problems and find it difficult to speak out and voice their needs.

As is often the case, we came to help Amal, Steve and Liam after they'd spoken to their workers at Ozanam. Like many people at Ozanam, Amal has an acquired brain injury that significantly impairs his memory. The police didn't know this when they charged him with theft after it was alleged that he used someone else's credits in a pokie machine. Amal told us it was a mistake as he thought it was his machine.



"It made me feel worse. I was trying to find a place to live and then you know getting these fines was another thing on my mind, another stress in my life, another thing over my head.

"If you're sleeping rough, you have no money, so how are you going to pay the fines? A lot of these people have got a mental illness or substance or alcohol issues; so fines are just going to be on top of having no money and having no home!"

– Steve

\*Names have been changed in the report, unless clients have consented to the use of their real names.



We explained Amal's condition to the police who were now able to take it into consideration. As a result they recommended diversion, which was granted by a magistrate after we appeared in court. Without us, Amal's underlying circumstances may have never come to light, leaving him unfairly criminalised.

Similarly, Steve's circumstances may never have been taken into account if IMCL hadn't taken on his case and represented him in court.

He was fortunate enough to own a car, but was homeless. Whilst accessing crisis accommodation in our area, he'd racked up parking fines in the thousands of dollars. He wasn't eligible for a local parking permit, and was forced to park in one and two hour spots.

A financial counsellor at Ozanam helped him write to the local council to have the fines waived because he'd received them as a consequence of his homelessness. The council rejected his application, questioning the connection between the fines and his homelessness. As a result, Steve was sent to court. His counsellor let us know.

Find your  
voice

Fortunately the law is not always a blunt instrument, and we had an opportunity to put our case to a Magistrate, who agreed that Steve's fines were indeed caused by his homelessness and for that, he shouldn't be penalised. As a result, the fines were waived.



Scan the code or [click here](#) to learn more about Steve and our work with people experiencing homelessness.

## LIAM

*Liam had a rough start. He grew up within a complex and underprivileged household and started drinking from a young age. Later on in life, his severe alcohol dependency got him in trouble with the law.*

*Liam came to us at Ozanam Community Centre seeking assistance to vary his Community Corrections Order. Liam was having trouble with the community work component of the order. His physical disability and mental health issues made it difficult for him to catch public transport to attend the program. His lack of compliance with this aspect of the order was causing Liam a great deal of stress.*

*"When I am in my room thinking about it I feel so upset and anxious I don't know what to do."*

*This was particularly the case as Liam had put a lot of effort into complying with the order. He had fulfilled all the reporting and treatment obligations, a crucial part of his rehabilitation. Liam had made no further attempts to break the law and had even gone further, voluntarily reaching out to support services.*

*Despite these efforts, Liam felt unsupported by his corrections worker. "No one listens to me", he told us. IMCL listened.*

*We represented Liam in the Magistrates' Court and made submissions on his behalf to reduce his community work hours. The Magistrate removed the community work component in full, citing Liam's "commendable compliance" with the order and his "admirable rehabilitation efforts".*

*Liam was very pleased with the outcome and his decision to SPEAK UP, showing that sometimes accessing justice means help being heard.*

## Health Justice Partnerships

Health Justice Partnerships (HJPs) are a holistic model of service delivery which sees free legal services integrated into public health-care settings.

### The Royal Children's Hospital – Connecting the Dots

Samantha's daughter, Bella, was receiving counselling at the Royal Children's Hospital after disclosing sexual abuse by Samantha's partner, Brett.

Samantha told the counsellor that there had also been a long history of family violence.

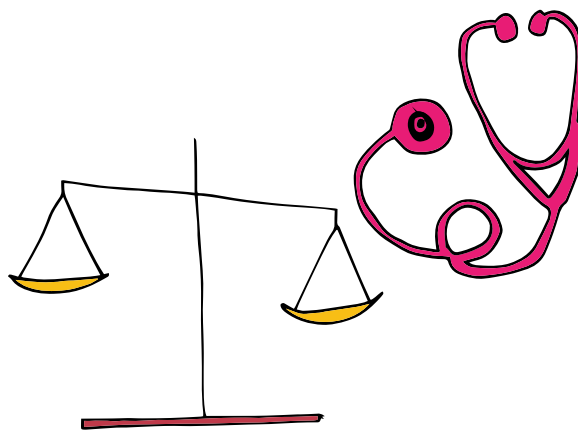
Despite it all – including DHHS and police involvement – Samantha and Bella were still residing in the same home as Brett. Samantha had never been offered independent legal advice and didn't think they could ever escape. Not until her social worker at the hospital connected her to IMCL.

In its second year of this project, IMCL has continued to provide legal help to families with children in need, like Bella, with the aim of protecting their health and wellbeing and enabling them to flourish in life.

**"If it wasn't for the hospital, the counselling and the legal side...We would have been stuck there, afraid and just living in an unsafe environment..."**



To hear Samantha in her own words on an episode of *The Law Report*, scan this code or [click here](#).



In Samantha's case, an unsafe home environment was affecting her whole family.

Samantha also had two other children under 18. Acknowledging the severity of the risk posed to them, we acted quickly to help Samantha apply for an intervention order for herself and her two other children, and to vary Bella's Intervention order to preclude any contact with Brett. Fearing Bella would be forcibly sent overseas by other family members against her and her mother's wishes, we obtained urgent airport watch list orders.

With the immediate concerns addressed, we then applied for parenting orders for all three children to provide them certainty and safety around their contact with Samantha's ex-partner.

**"We feel protected by the law and we have people working here [IMCL] who not only do legal stuff, but they're warm and open hearted and they listen...open ears, they hear us, they heard our story and they want to help us do things to set things straight."**

**- Samantha**

We continue to help Samantha to obtain a divorce and seek out child support payments to give her family complete freedom and the best chance to move on.



## The Royal Women's Hospital – Acting on the Warning Signs

Trapped within the confines of controlling and abusive relationships, women experiencing family violence are often silenced. We help them escape their isolation by taking opportunities within the hospital setting to provide legal assistance.

### NELLIE

*For Nellie, a refugee and a polio survivor with a resulting mobility disability, arriving in Australia did not result in the fresh start she had hoped for. Nellie began a relationship with a man but he quickly became violent. This only escalated after she fell pregnant. Choked, pushed down stairs and abused using her own crutches, Nellie was fearful of what her partner would do after their child was born.*

*Two weeks after Nellie gave birth to her daughter she followed the advice of her social worker at the Royal Women's and turned to IMCL for help. English was Nellie's second language and she knew little about the legal process.*

*We appeared for Nellie in the Melbourne Magistrates' Court and helped her protect herself and her newborn by preventing all contact with her abusive ex-partner. This early intervention helped Nellie to escape further family violence.*

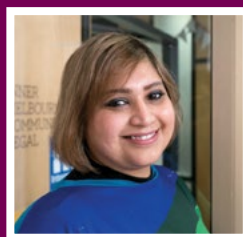
*We also identified that Nellie may have been entitled to make an application through the victims of crime scheme and provided her further advice in relation to this.*

*After engaging with IMCL Nellie has been able to focus on raising her young daughter.*

## Royal Melbourne Hospital – Melbourne Legal Care

May 2017 marked the formal launch of this partnership, which sees IMCL provide a weekly onsite advice clinic to some of our organisation's most vulnerable clients.

### NANDITA



*Nandita lives with an acquired brain injury (ABI) – a disability resulting from a 40 meter fall whilst rock-climbing. After her accident Nandita rushed her recovery so she could return to work*

*but it quickly became clear that her decision-making abilities had been affected by her fall.*

*Nandita was regularly visiting the Royal Melbourne Hospital for treatment for her ABI. It was a social worker there that suggested she might have legal needs as well as health needs, referring her to our onsite legal clinic.*

*Unable to work, Nandita was suffering from great financial stress. When we saw her at the hospital she had been evicted from the property where she was living.*

*Nandita disclosed that she had a number of debts for large personal loans that she had incurred to support herself when her employment ceased. She also explained that her ABI was like "a life-long concussion," which made it very difficult to manage her finances.*

*IMCL sent debt waiver requests along with a letter of support from Nandita's social worker to various debt collectors, asking them to take her circumstances into account. The result was a waiving of nearly \$50,000 of Nandita's outstanding debts.*

*"Now I am actually able to breathe, I can fully focus on my therapy... I can plan for my future." – Nandita*

Image: © Susan Fitzgerald



To hear Nandita in her own words on an episode of The Law Report, scan this code or [click here](#).



## Victorian Community Lawyer of the Year – IMCL's Linda Gyorki

**A testament to IMCL's HJP leadership, in May 2017, IMCL lawyer Linda Gyorki was named Community Lawyer of the Year 2017!**



The award recognises Linda's pioneering HJP work and deep commitment to redefining the way legal services are delivered to those most in need.

In accepting her award, Linda expressed her hope that

**“in the future lawyers will be considered a core part of the care team in every public hospital”.**

Anybody who's witnessed Linda's enthusiasm and dedication over the last five years will know she's determined to make this happen.

In Linda's view, community legal centres (CLCs) like IMCL are well placed to deliver this type of integrated legal service because of their flexible, low cost structure and expertise in community law. But, integrating a small CLC like ours into a major hospital is no easy feat. To find out how to do it well, Linda spent two months travelling the world in 2014 to investigate as part of a Churchill Fellowship. She's used this knowledge to set-up new hospital partnerships and advise others wanting to do the same, establishing herself as an expert in a rapidly developing field.

Determined to see this large policy shift take place and enable more people to access justice, Linda is now also knee-deep in a Masters in Public Policy and Management at Melbourne University.



## Community Legal Education

Empowering our community to understand the law is important to us. This year we delivered more sessions than ever with **over 60 sessions for over 1,000 community members**.

We provided tailored sessions to people vulnerable to experiencing legal problems on a range of topics ranging from public and private tenancy rights, police powers, dealing with fines to driving and public transport rules. Participants included public housing residents, newly arrived people and young people from diverse backgrounds.

Notably, we continued our **Youth Advocates Against Family Violence** project into it's fifth year, believing that violence against women is preventable if we all work together. Since 2013 IMCL has been consistently engaging with young people in our area through partnerships with local schools and youth centres to build a culture of respectful relationships.

In a new initiative this year with state government funding, IMCL began to forge connections with **international students** to teach them about their rights and responsibilities in Australia. With tens of thousands living, working or studying within our catchment and possessing little to no knowledge of Australian law, we identified them as a priority audience.

We also delivered **professional development legal education sessions** to staff at community services in our area, such as social workers, doctors, teachers, nurses and housing workers. We do this because we know these trusted intermediaries are often the first and only points of contact for people with legal problems. Equipping staff with legal knowledge makes them better placed to identify legal problems and refer clients to us.



## Courts, Tribunals & Mediations

**It's not always easy for people to find their voice within the legal system. The language of the law is foreign and the formality of the processes can feel intimidating and peculiar. Without the ability to effectively use dispute resolution processes, there is no access to justice. IMCL upholds this principle by helping people be heard in formal proceedings as duty lawyers, in ongoing casework involving court and tribunal hearings and also in mediations.**

Brenda, a mother in her 50s and her son Jack – a teenager with a severe developmental disability – both experienced family violence perpetrated by Brenda's former partner, Ben.

Ben called Brenda belittling names in front of her son. He'd assaulted her by kicking and also tried to choke her. Ben also physically hurt Jack by punching him in the face. When Brenda tried to call the police, Ben would always confiscate her phone.

One evening Ben returned home in a rage. He began throwing things around the house whilst verbally abusing Brenda. On this occasion, the police attended and excluded Ben from the property.

Brenda had applied for an intervention order but didn't have a lawyer when we met her at IMCL's **Melbourne Magistrates' Court Duty Lawyer Service** on the day of her hearing.

In its second year, we scaled up this service to three days per week to keep up with ever increasing demand to help parties to intervention orders like Brenda or Jack.

This means that people who are otherwise unrepresented have an opportunity to speak directly to a lawyer about their case to understand the process, negotiate appropriate orders and be heard in court.

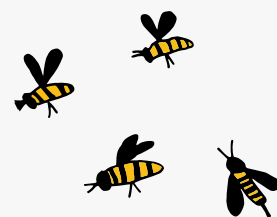
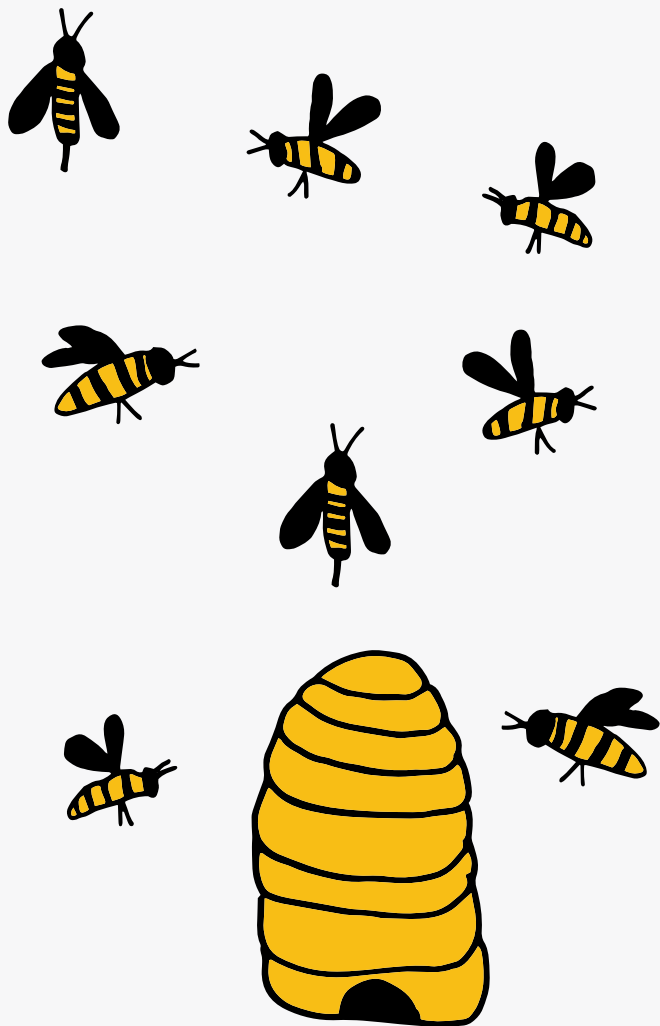
Brenda was extremely concerned about facing the hearing with no lawyer. She was shaken by her experience and frightened of the other party and the unfamiliarity of the court environment, like many clients we see there.

As part of our service, on the day of her hearing we created a buffer and took some of the pressure off by gently guiding Brenda through her day in court and speaking on her behalf, helping her to secure an order for two years.

For Brenda, the intervention order process was only the start of the legal problems connected with her previous relationship. Whilst the order excluded her former partner from the home, the title was in his name. Even though Brenda had contributed to the mortgage and upkeep of the house, she anticipated that Ben would take action to get her and her son out of the property.

We arranged a follow-up phone appointment with her as part of our **Early Intervention Legal Service**. In its second year, this service provides supplementary support to clients seen as part of the duty lawyer service for secondary legal problems connected with family violence. We provided Brenda with critical advice and swiftly connected her with one of our partner pro bono lawyer firms to assist with the property settlement.

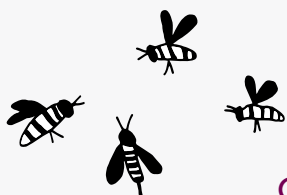
Without the pro bono referral, Brenda would have been unable to obtain any legal help as she could not pay for a lawyer or obtain representation through Victoria Legal Aid. This meant she could have walked away from the situation without negotiating a fair and equitable property settlement. IMCL made sure her rights were preserved.



## OUR VOICE BACK AT HQ

Like a swarm of bees, our lawyers go out into the community to pollinate our vision of justice. And like bees, at the end of the day IMCL staff fly back to their nest at HQ where the behind-the-scenes work takes place.

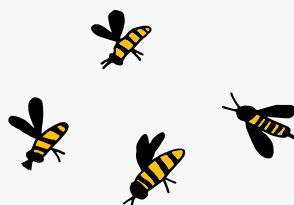
Here staff are joined by an invaluable crew of volunteers. Visit our [website](#) to meet the team!



## Our onsite advice clinics & ongoing casework

At 508 Queensberry Street, our clients can access a number of onsite specialist legal advice clinics for a wide variety of legal issues:

- debt and infringements
- family law and family violence
- criminal law
- general law



## Debt and infringements

Debt and infringements can be a heavy weight on the shoulders of our clients. Debts may be incurred in unfair circumstances where our clients' vulnerabilities are exploited, while infringements can arise where people cannot

control or understand their offending behaviour. IMCL works to remove people inappropriately caught up within enforcement systems, to break down cycles of disadvantage.

### STEPHANIE

*Five years ago Stephanie was forced into homelessness after experiencing sustained family violence over the course of a long marriage. She fled the family home with nothing. She had no other supports.*

*For a short while she stayed in motels, including in regional areas, but she quickly depleted all her savings.*

*Unable to continue working as a nurse because of her experiences and a chronic physical injury, she relied on government benefits. But those benefits were not enough to support private rental and she spent time in a tent.*

*She found an empty and run-down public housing block and took shelter there. It was filthy and she spent days cleaning to make it inhabitable. With running water, warmth and somewhere to store her belongings she was finally able to maintain a part time job. But it was a dangerous place and she had no choice but to leave.*

*She managed to take possession of a van she owned with her former partner and for two years it became her home.*

*But, a car roof over her head wasn't enough to allow her to get on with her life. She couldn't do anything but attend to her essential needs.*



*To make things worse, she continually received parking fines. The only safe parking spots were in the city in well-lit areas, but they were time restricted. She tried to keep up, but moving every one or two hours was unmanageable.*

*Knowing that the law allows personal hardship like this to be taken into account, IMCL helped Stephanie to have the fines waived. Without that extra burden she was able to concentrate on finding appropriate accommodation.*

*While Stephanie achieved a good result, the fines process is resource intensive for community legal centres like IMCL and also for the courts. So, when the City of Melbourne proposed fining even more people for sleeping rough, we used our experience with cases like Stephanie's to explain to the Council that it just didn't make economic sense and simply wasn't fair. Our view was echoed by many other services and as a result the Council changed its mind.*

Image: © ABC News, Jane Cowan

To hear Stephanie in her own words, scan the codes or click the hyperlinks to watch the ABC 7pm Sunday News Report which aired on Sunday 25 June 2017 and read the accompanying ABC online article



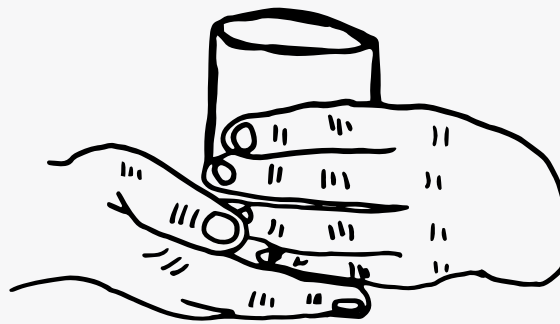
ABC online



ABC 7pm news

## Family law and family violence

People can experience a range of legal problems when an intimate relationship ends. Our community's demand for legal help with these matters is high and consequently this is our largest area of practice, with a focus on clients with multiple and complex needs.



### ELLE

*Reflecting the prevalence of family violence within the general community, we prioritise helping women and children, like Elle and her family, escape violent relationships.*

*For Elle, like many women who experience family violence, her interaction with the law started with the police putting an intervention order in place to protect her and her three young children.*

*However, single parents like Elle typically experience heightened vulnerability, resulting in substantial and multiple legal problems. Although the intervention order allowed Elle to separate from her partner safely, she still had a range of legal issues that had compounded as a result of the separation.*

*Trying to respect her children's right to see their father, Elle was supervising time between them and her ex-partner. However, Elle was uncomfortable with this arrangement due to the history of family violence, her ex-partner's long criminal history and his drug and alcohol abuse.*

*Her ex-partner was also breaching the intervention order whilst they were unsuccessfully trying to come to a parenting agreement in mediation.*

*Making things more difficult for Elle were her traffic fines which had resulted in the suspension of her driving licence. As a single parent, Elle needed her licence to drive her children to appointments. She turned to IMCL for help.*

*IMCL assisted Elle to complete an application for supervised contact to be conducted by a contact centre and to complete an application to extend the intervention order. We communicated this to Elle's ex-partner so the order wasn't breached.*

*IMCL was also able to secure a grant of aid from Victoria Legal Aid for Elle to re-engage with mediation with her ex-partner with the hope of coming to a more permanent parenting arrangement.*

*With our help, the suspension of Elle's licence was repealed, leaving her with only a \$250 fine and the freedom to transport her children.*

*IMCL continues to help Elle by handling her victims of crimes application.*

*Elle and her family are now living happily and safely, allowing them to achieve their full potential.*



## Criminal law

In crime, the stakes are always high and this is why at IMCL we believe that everyone has a right to quality legal advice and representation, whether they can afford it or not.

In this role, it's not our place to judge. Rather, we make sure the law and its processes are being used properly and reasonably, to prevent people from being unfairly caught-up within the criminal law system.



**WE HELPED 13 CLIENTS  
GET DIVERSION  
AND AVOID A  
CRIMINAL RECORD**

We try to give clients charged with criminal offences a second chance, knowing that a heavy handed approach to law and order doesn't always bring about positive social results. Whether that be through a reduction in the sentencing outcome or diversion, IMCL advocates for fair sentences and smart justice and that protects us all.

## JOHN

*For John, access to a lawyer at IMCL meant ensuring his personal circumstances were properly taken into consideration by the court.*

*We first saw John by chance in the **Family Violence List at the Melbourne Magistrates' Court** when he'd been ordered by the Court to not contact a family member. He was more vulnerable than most owing to the fact that he was diagnosed with high-functioning autism, had serious mental health issues which significantly affected his decision-making capacity and was unable to write. The intervention order was a tricky matter, involving his partner who also had an intellectual disability, but it was resolved by agreement, allowing the parties to safely continue to see each other as they both wished.*

*During this consultation we checked-in with John to make sure he didn't have any other legal problems. He told us he'd been charged with unrelated criminal offences. Whilst living in supported accommodation, he'd broken into the staff office and damaged property. He was likely experiencing poor mental health at the time.*

*This was an important cross-roads in his life and we knew it was important that he received comprehensive legal help. We booked him into our **criminal law clinic** for a subsequent appointment.*

*Ill-equipped to represent himself, IMCL appeared on his behalf at court and we successfully argued that he was an appropriate candidate for diversion. We explained that his experience of going through the court system had been a significant lesson, and punishment enough, particularly because his unstable mental health made him less morally culpable than others. He understood that damaging other people's property wouldn't be tolerated and agreed that as a condition of his diversion, he would consistently engage with mental health support workers to manage his symptoms and reduce his chances of getting into trouble again.*

*Diversion not only reflected the leniency John deserved, but it meant that he was able to avoid a criminal record and that this information would not be available to potential employers. This was crucial for John, as moving forward he hopes to secure paid work. This was crucial for John, as moving forward he hopes to secure paid work and contribute to his community.*

*John's experience shows that IMCL provides a proper safety net, so that those in need can get the help they require before legal issues escalate and permanent damage is done, for the both the individuals and the community at large.*

**"If I could turn back the pages and change history I would do so but I can't, so again I say I'm sorry, truly sorry." – John**

## General law

No two client problems are ever the same. Personal and factual circumstances are always different and issues often intersect. This means that to address diverse client need, we deal with matters spanning a vast range of legal areas from consumer disputes, tenancy, personal safety intervention orders

to complaints against government decision makers, such as social security law. Although seemingly unconnected, these areas all involve IMCL addressing power imbalances, whether that be as between individuals or individuals and the state, to ensure people are treated fairly and fundamental rights are upheld.

### MARY

*Mary had been living in a public housing property for over 25 years with her mother, Pina.*

*For many years Mary had been the primary carer for her mother, whilst dealing with her own mental health issues for which she was receiving assistance from a range of local services.*

*While the Office of Housing knew that Mary had been living there since she was 14 and that she was paying rent, she was not on the lease and therefore considered a resident rather than a tenant. This wasn't a problem for Mary until mid-2016, when Mary's mother fell seriously ill and was moved into a nursing home. As a result, Mary was told that she would need to move out as the lease would be ending with the departure of her mother.*

*This was extremely distressing and destabilising for Mary, undermining her efforts to properly manage her mental well-being. Taking away her home meant taking away everything she had ever known.*

*The Office of Housing initially told Mary there was nothing they could do as she was only a resident and did not have tenancy rights to the property. Mary was referred by the Office of Housing to a housing support service, Wombat Housing, and her case manager then referred her to IMCL.*

*We engaged the law and assisted Mary to apply for a transfer of the tenancy into her name. We explained her connection to the property and community, and pointed to her rights under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities to have her familial connections protected. Eventually the Office of Housing agreed with our submissions and agreed to transfer the tenancy into Mary's name.*

*Certainty around her housing status was a huge relief for Mary. With this stability, she was able to focus on other important aspects of her life. She felt safe, secure and supported again.*



NO-ONE  
CAN HEAR

DOES IT  
MAKE A  
SOUND?



## Monitoring and evaluation

If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound? If we don't critically assess our work, how do we know if we've made an impact?

We want to make sure we're doing things right, so we evaluate the work that we do. This year, here's some of what we found, so far:

- We are reaching people who would otherwise not access a lawyer. For example, 82% of our **HJP** clients had never seen a lawyer about their issue before and nor had 57% of clients at our **outreach clinic at the Carlton Public Housing Estate**.
- 64% of our **Carlton Public Housing Estate outreach** clients and 43% of our HJP clients surveyed would not have sought legal assistance if it had not been for the onsite free legal clinic.
- Through the **Early Intervention Legal Service**, IMCL lawyers were able to reach out, maintain contact and provide legal services for over 90% of clients. This is a notable achievement considering the difficulty in engaging with at-risk and transient clients going through the court system.
- We delivered community legal education sessions to over 200 international students through the **International Student Work Rights Legal Service**. Of the students surveyed 97.9% found it useful because it was informative and well explained. 98.3% said the sessions would be helpful for other students.
- Over 80% of local high school students who participated in our **Youth Advocates Against Family Violence** Project developed greater awareness and understanding about forms of abuse. Overall they also made statements that were less excusing or encouraging of family violence. Importantly, a higher proportion had a better idea of where to get help if they, or someone they knew, needed it.

## Our law reform and systemic advocacy work

While achieving individual results for our clients is at the core of what we do, often their problems are rooted in systemic failings. By addressing laws and systems that operate unfairly, ineffectively or inefficiently, we bring about better solutions for clients with existing problems and prevent others from experiencing the same issues. In turn, this allows us to maximise our own resources and value.

This year **we continued to participate in over twenty working groups** to advocate on behalf of our clients and our community on issues from infringements to homelessness to health justice and tenancy.

Additionally, **we contributed written submissions as part of the following law reform activities:**

- A response to the *Residential Tenancies Act* consultation paper, advocating for changes to the Act which would strengthen the rights of tenants.
- The VLA Means Test Review, providing suggestions for improvements which would result in a fairer application of their grant eligibility guidelines.
- Submission to the Minister for Roads regarding the disproportionate and discriminatory effect of change of address offences on those experiencing homelessness and family violence.
- The Victorian Ombudsman's own motion investigation into unfair maintenance charges against tenants (MCATs), which we consider to be a systemic issue for vulnerable tenants.
- Submission to the City of Melbourne's proposed 'homeless ban' on the potential of the changes to further entrench disadvantage due to the impact of fines on people experiencing homelessness.



# HOW WE WILL BE HEARD NEXT – CHAIRPERSON/CEO REPORT



In 2016–17, IMCL listened to, advocated for and told the stories of our clients to make a difference. Respecting the power of their own experience and voices, we will honour clients like Samantha's positive feedback: we will listen, open our ears, hear them and tell their stories to set things straight.



## **1. Strategically target Inner Melbourne Community Legal's activities to address priority community needs and maximise our impact**

IMCL's community partnerships are a key way we hear from vulnerable people to advocate for justice on their behalf.

To build on last year's achievements, in 2017-18 we will continue to assess the legal needs of international students and explore digital methods of community legal education delivery to make sure the message that they are protected under Australian law is spread far and wide.

In the coming year, we also look forward to cultivating our close links with St Joseph's – a flexible learning centre for VCAL students – to deliver tailored legal education for the range of at risk young people at this school.

To ensure we were heard on systemic issues facing our clients, in 2016-17 we identified key trends and issues in our casework to inform strategic law reform and policy advocacy work. In 2017-18 we will keep a keen eye on the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. We will campaign for fairer social housing rights, acknowledging that housing stress and homelessness cannot be solved in the absence of stable and affordable stock. And we will use our extensive knowledge of the victims of crime assistance scheme and our clients' first-hand experiences to advocate for much-needed improvements.

## **2. Promote Health Justice Partnerships to improve access to justice and community health and wellbeing**

This year we evaluated our cross-site partnerships and in 2017–18 we will formally launch the comprehensive report. We know it will show the importance of this work.

Over the course of the year, we worked closely with clients and the media to help our HJP clients tell their own stories in a safe and respectful way, breaking down reservations about the risks of being heard. By working with The Law Report, we showed that it can be done for everyone's benefit.

## **3. Strengthen Inner Melbourne Community Legal's organisational capacity to achieve its mission**

The coming year brings a new beginning as we start to implement our forward-looking 2018-2020 Strategic Plan. Key organisational changes we will make include: refinement of our already growing IMCL Alumni Network to keep in touch with all of our supporters from over the years and to get everyone together for the occasion of our historic 40th anniversary at the grand Melbourne Town Hall in August 2018; search for new premises to accommodate the staff and volunteers IMCL needs for its diverse and growing services; and implementation of new ways to measure and show our impact and effectiveness.

Last year, we farewelled an important member of IMCL's Board, Nicola Weston. Nicola played a key role in supporting the development of our online communications and web presence – an objective that was achieved with obvious success. We look forward to welcoming a new board member to help shape our fundraising initiatives.

As we enter our 40th year, we reflect on the foundations we have laid for a fair and empowered community and look to a future in which we continue to weave

*a golden thread of justice.*

Peter Fridell,  
Chair

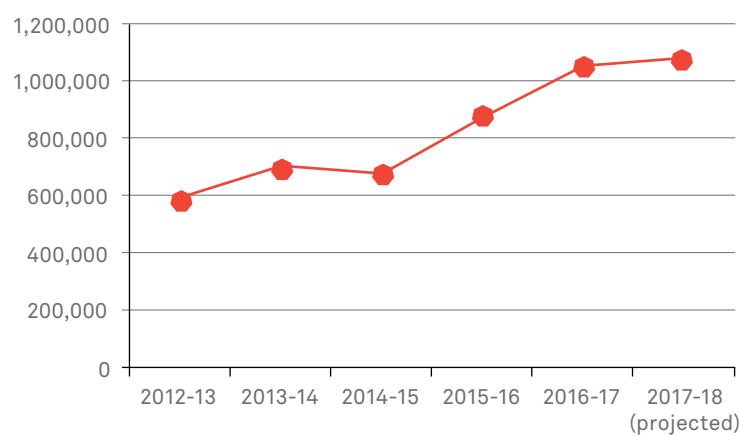
Daniel Stubbs,  
CEO



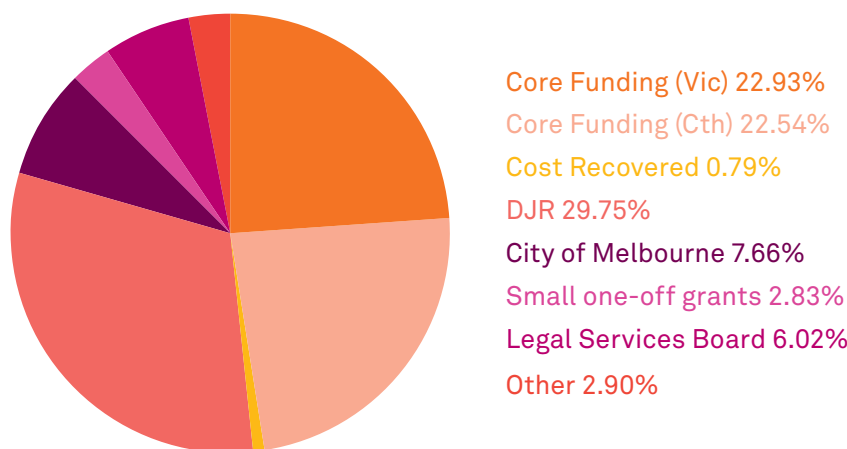
# FINANCIAL REPORT: THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE JUSTICE STORY

Our total income for the year was \$1,062,551. This shows a 20% growth of income since last year and an average annual growth of 13% over the last five years.

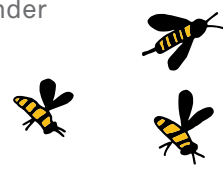
IMCL's income Journey

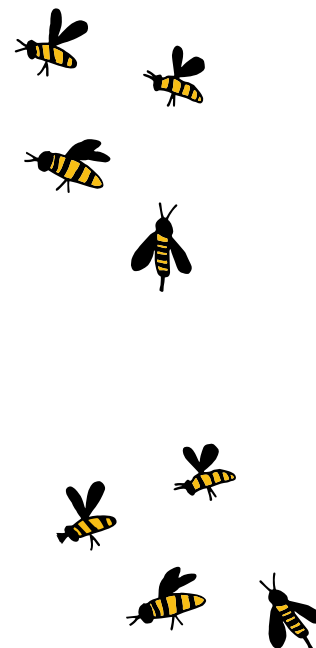
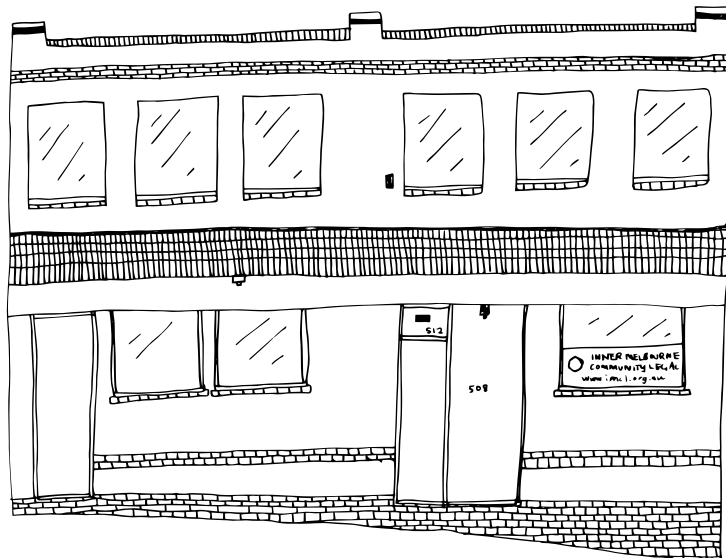


In 2016–17 we received financial support for our work from the State and Federal Governments, the Legal Services Board, City of Melbourne and the Department of Justice. We very much appreciate the support that we receive from all these bodies. In the coming year we expect to diversify our income to more non-government sources, such as donations and philanthropic foundations, to support our innovative and inspiring work.



The majority of IMCL's expenditure is dedicated to staff salaries – over 75 per cent. The remainder is spent on key basics, such as rent (3.7 %), staff training (2%) and information technology and communications (3.7%).





## Pro Bono Support

During the year the pro bono contributions of our partnering law firms and volunteers were equivalent to IMCL expenditure of \$505,350.

We have a long-standing, extremely valuable and mutually beneficial relationship with the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office which supports our work by placing one of their talented lawyers on a year-long secondment in our office. Moray & Agnew generously employ a full-time lawyer who works on our health justice partnerships at The Royal Women's Hospital and Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Herbert Smith Freehills provided two full-time secondments to us for three and four months resulting in much needed support for our legal outreach and health justice partnerships. HSF also enhanced our capacity to engage in philanthropic fundraising which will result in a much needed increase in our non-government income next year.

Clayton Utz is IMCL's newest pro bono partner providing expert lawyers to deliver our first specialised employment law clinic. This advice clinic will commence in the coming year.

Through the receipt of a large number of pro bono referrals, Ryan Carlisle Thomas, Lander and Rogers and Hall & Wilcox have provided a significant amount of legal assistance for our clients.

We also received significant support from several other law firms who provide volunteers for our clinics, accept referrals, give us legal advice and assist us to develop law reform and policy submissions. Much of our work would not be possible without this support. We specifically acknowledge the support of Colin Biggers & Paisley, Baker and McKenzie, and Erskine Rodan & Associates.

## Future of our Funding

IMCL played a lead role throughout the year in turning around the proposed Federal Government funding cuts of over \$12M per year. We went to Canberra on many occasions and we were heard through all forms of media. This helped convince politicians and other decision makers of the value of our services by getting our clients' voices heard. Our work and our clients' stories were so compelling that government was convinced to continue this funding.

For IMCL this funding decision means continuation of \$120,000 of our Commonwealth funding. With this funding IMCL will continue key family law and family violence legal services for a significant number of highly vulnerable women.

In 2017-18 IMCL will fund our work in new and diverse ways. We will develop an alumni program to reconnect with former volunteers and supporters from our 39 years assisting vulnerable community members as well as seek support from philanthropic foundations aligned with our justice message. From 2018 we will also need to meet the challenge of fully funding our land-mark health justice partnerships with the major metropolitan hospitals in our area. Therefore we are confident that next year's report will show a further diversification of financial supporters for this great work.

IMCL's complete audited financial report can be downloaded from our website at [www.imcl.org.au/publications-and-media](http://www.imcl.org.au/publications-and-media).

**John Mangan**  
Treasurer

**Daniel Stubbs**  
CEO



INNER  
MELBOURNE  
COMMUNITY  
LEGAL

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