



# 2020 Annual Report

A Year of Accomplishments.

**Hunter Community Legal Centre Inc.**

02 40409121 | [www.hunterclc.com.au](http://www.hunterclc.com.au) | 116 Hunter Street, Newcastle

## 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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The Hunter Community Legal Centre would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, traditions, culture and hope of Indigenous Australians.

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# About Us

Community Legal Centres recognise the barriers which exist for many people in their interaction with and understanding of the law and our legal system. These barriers are reinforced by the high cost of private legal services, the restrictions on the availability of Legal Aid, the complexity of the law and legal processes, and the fact that many people are powerless to deal with their legal problems because of social, economic or other disadvantage.

The Hunter Community Legal Centre (CLC) aims to address the unmet need for legal services and to eliminate the structural and systemic barriers to justice which exist for many disadvantaged members of its community.

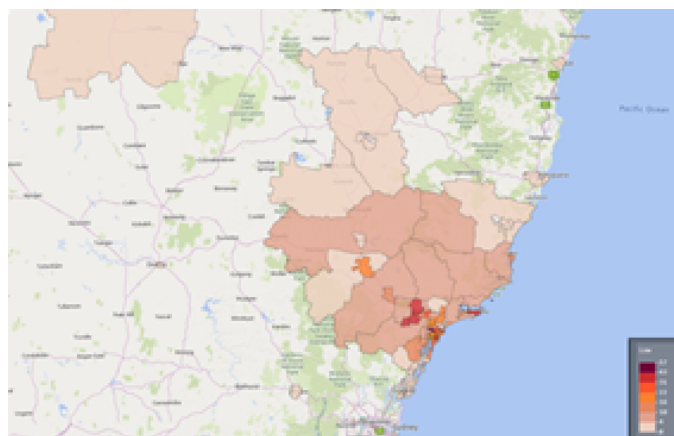
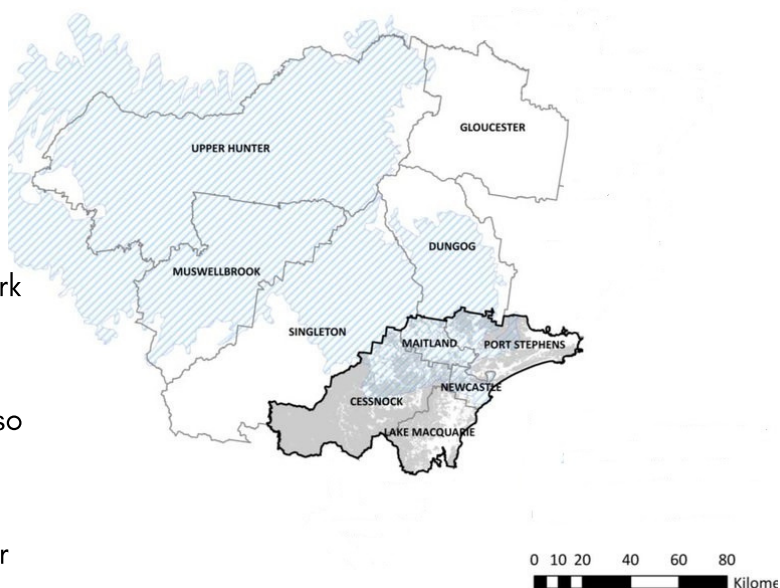
The Hunter CLC was established in 1991 as a not-for-profit community legal centre to provide free legal advice, assistance and representation for those with most need in the Newcastle and Hunter region.

## Our Catchment

Hunter CLC's catchment covers 10 local government areas with a geographical area of approximately 22,000 square kilometres and a population of over 700,000.

Community Legal Centres (CLC) generally work within Local Government Areas (LGAs), although Hunter CLC does assist people from all over Australia in family law. The Centre also has reciprocal referral arrangement with the Central Coast and Mid-North Coast CLCs to assist clients when we are unable. The number of clients we assisted from each LGA in our catchment:

Cessnock City Council	167
Dungog Shire Council	13
Lake Macquarie City Council	513
Maitland City Council	231
Mid-Coast Council	75
Muswellbrook Shire Council	53
Newcastle City Council	606
Port Stephens Council	217
Singleton Council	35
Upper Hunter Shire Council	16
Referrals from Central Coast Council	55



Distribution of priority clients

## Our Vision

An empowered community that values equal access to justice and upholds and respects human rights

## Our Mission

To enhance access to justice and promote human rights in the Hunter region by:

- Providing a high quality accessible legal service to disadvantaged and vulnerable people.
- Delivering legal information and education to service providers, clients and the community.
- Identifying and engaging in law reform activities to address inequalities in the legal system.

## We Value

- **R**espect
- **A**ccountability
- **I**ntegrity
- **S**ocial Justice
- **E**quality

## Our Strategic Plan 2018-2021

The strategic objectives are:

- Responsive to our community in a time of change.
- Enhance our workforce.
- Achieve positive outcomes for our clients.

## Our Resources

**Staff** – We employed 16 people (13 full-time equivalent) as at 30th June 2020 with a turnover rate of 6%.

**Revenue** – \$1.22 million – \$688,972 revenue from the Commonwealth Government and \$533,826 from the NSW Government.

# Performance Highlights

Hunter Community Legal Centre delivered another successful year in 2019-20 despite the challenges presented to us by COVID-19. We continued to maintain our high level of service delivery by assisting **2035** clients with their legal issues under the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) with the Commonwealth Government and the Community Legal Services Program Agreement with the NSW State Government.



## **Responsive to our community in a time of change.**

Key highlights of 2019-20 include:

- providing a Hunter Youth Civil Law service at Children's Courts in East Maitland, Raymond Terrace, Broadmeadow and Muswellbrook.
- working collaboratively with Transcare to provide legal education sessions to seniors in the Hunter Valley.
- establishing a new AVO duty service at Belmont Court.
- providing virtual community legal education sessions by Zoom and Teams.
- Produced 6 episodes of the Podcast 'Know Your Rights' in collaboration with Newcastle library and Community Disability Alliance Hunter (CDAH).



## **Enhance our workforce**

Key highlights of 2019-20 include:

- reviewed and refreshed our Performance Supervision Policy to ensure staff are well supported and are able to provide feedback.

- continue to provide relevant training for all staff including professional development sessions by Zoom.
- implement a staff wellness program.
- All eligible solicitors have successfully completed the Practice Management Course.



## **Achieve positive outcomes for our clients**

Key highlights of 2019-20 include:

- 65% of the young people surveyed through the Hunter Youth Civil Law Service (HYCLS) felt that they knew where they could get legal assistance in the future.
- \$38,971 worth of debt and fines were waived for our clients in financial hardship.
- 7 clients that were represented in court on criminal matters avoided custodial sentences.
- Pro bono employment solicitor gained compensation for a client for an unfair dismissal.
- assisted a client to make a submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care.
- 20 young people in HYCLS reconnected to/re-entered education.



## Challenges

Major challenges we faced during 2019-20 included:

- unsuccessful grant applications for School Lawyer program, Hunter Early Intervention Domestic Violence Service, CLE to refugees & asylum seekers.
- Hunter Youth Civil Law Service funding not renewed.
- producing policies and establishing systems for working in a COVID-19 pandemic.



Julia, Duhita and Cath Mahony (CDAH)  
in the Newcastle Podcast Station studio producing a Podcast



Duhita & Toobah in the Upper Hunter for CLE

# Our People

## Board of Management

Chair: Colin James  
Vice Chair: Richard Lane  
Secretary: Lucy Urach  
Treasurer: Jeff Shute  
Members: Jill Evans  
Bill Bowman  
Ndi Ruppert  
Maree Callaghan  
Steven Wendtman

## Our Staff

Mangaging Solicitor	Bronwyn Ambrogetti
Solicitors	Kim Richardson Briony Manning Michael Giles Clair Tait Zach Biddles Toobah Choudhari Julia Adamski Josephine Adamson
Coordinator/Finance	Julie Vitnell
CLE Coordinator	Duhita Lewis
Administration	Kathrina Balston Susan Douglass Eileen McGovern Matthew Beugeling Emma Townend
Research Assistant	Emily Hart



Julia Adamski

A new generalist solicitor commenced November 2019



Josephine Adamson

Our new Generalist Solicitor this year



# Pro Bono Assistance & Volunteers

We would like to acknowledge and pay tribute to the solicitors and barristers who have donated many hours of pro bono assistance. We are indebted to our student and solicitor volunteers, for their assistance during the year and look forward to recommencing our volunteer program when COVID 19 restrictions allow. The generous support of our volunteers and pro bono partners significantly increases our capacity to provide legal services.

Lizzie McLaughlin Barrister

Sparke Helmore

LBC Lawyers

CC Lawyers

McCullough Robertson

Australian Business Lawyers

Lynn Flanagan

Seamus Burke

Jessica Phillips

Annette West

Rebecca Stokes

Darren Whitbourne

Tim Stansfield

David Behne-Smith



David Behne-Smith at NAIDOC Week

Eileen McGovern, University of Newcastle

Glen Hyland, University of Southern Queensland

Tika Wright, University of Newcastle

Darren Whitbourne, University of New England

Matthew Beugeling, University of Newcastle

Jasmin Lund, University of Newcastle

Emma Townend, University of New England

Jordan Young, University of Newcastle

Irini Kassas, University of Newcastle

Lindsay Thompson, University of Newcastle

Jennifer Metcalfe, Southern Cross University

Olivia Gallimore, University of Newcastle

Chantay Fenn, Central Queensland University

Nicola Grittani University of Newcastle

Emily Hart, University of Newcastle



Eastlakes NAIDOC Week

# Chair's Report

The Hunter Community Legal Centre has again provided an excellent legal service to the broader Newcastle community over the past year, despite more than usual uncertainty, new challenges and working conditions. I'd like to congratulate and thank all our staff for their continuing productivity and effectiveness, and their willingness to be flexible as we adapt to the pandemic risks and adopt new policies and practices to maximise the safety of staff and clients. We had to make some difficult decisions including suspending our PLT and volunteer program for a period, and all staff began working from home in March with a rotating small presence in the office.

At the Commonwealth level this year our National Partnership Agreement expired on 30 June 2020, and it is due to be replaced by the "National Legal Assistance Partnership", although the details had not yet been confirmed. As well, details of the revised Community Legal Services Program Agreement (CLSP) had not yet been finalised at the time of writing this report. Our Managing Solicitor Bronwyn Ambrogetti has been actively applying for grants to service identified needs including a School Lawyer program, a Hunter Early Intervention Domestic Violence Service, and a community legal education service for refugees and asylum seekers. Unfortunately to date none have been successful, although we did receive additional funding to help cope with the impacts of the pandemic.

The Hunter Youth Law Service, which had only began in February 2019, lost its funding during the year when the Law and Justice Foundation grants ceased. We have managed to keep it going with a reduced service and we get very positive feedback from young people whom we assist with a wide range of support. The service takes referrals of young people from the court, Legal Aid, Juvenile Justice and schools and it provides legal information, advice and appropriate referrals for further assistance. Common issues include disclosures of being victims of violence in the past, unpaid fines and school suspensions and strategies for re-engaging with school.

On a positive note our centre has achieved Phase 3 status with the National Accreditation Scheme for Community Legal Centres. This is one better than last year and credit goes to Bronwyn and our Coordinator Julie Vitnell for getting us over those hurdles.

Another positive aspect of the year has been our new staff and I want to welcome several new solicitors including Julia Adamski who started in November, Josephine Adamson in February and part-time admin assistant Matthew Beugeling who began in February and Emma Townend in May.

I want to thank especially our Managing Solicitor Bronwyn Ambrogetti and our Coordinator Julie Vitnell for their continuing endurance in management of all the programs, staffing issues and funding concerns over this year of uncertainty and disruption. Thanks also to all the staff and volunteers who had to cope with the disruption and did so without complaint, and thanks to members of our Board of Management for its continued diligence.

Colin James

# Managing Solicitor's Report

Following our success in the NSW funding tender process of 2018/19 we were able to recruit new staff to help us meet the growing demand for community legal services in the Hunter. We welcomed Julia Adamski and Josephine Adamson to our sought after civil law team. They quickly settled in and have been assisting Kim Richardson, Michael Giles and Toobah Choudhari to provide advice and representation to our clients in the domestic violence court lists, our regional outreach legal clinics, jail visits and our community legal education programme.

Our highly regarded Family Law team; Briony Manning, Clair Tait and Zach Biddles continued to provide an excellent service for unrepresented litigants in Family Law Matters. This service includes advice, document drafting and mediation in parenting matters and property settlement case work. The Family Law Team were about to expand this service to include a Divorce Duty Service when the pandemic started. This new service has been postponed until the family law courts are allowing people to appear in person.

For the duration of the pandemic, our team has been patient, flexible and resilient. I would like to thank all the legal staff who had to quickly adapt their practices to work from home but in particular the admin team; Julie Vitnell, Kathrina Balston, Eileen McGovern, Susan Douglass, Matt Beugeling and Emma Townend who were not able to work from home due to technical issues but instead, continued to staff the office and keep the doors safely open for our most vulnerable clients throughout the pandemic.

Our Community Legal Education Co-ordinator Duhita Lewis also had to adapt quickly to the changing and uncertain times. And I thank her and the team for their hard work in producing podcasts, with no prior experience of the medium, of our legal information series "Know Your Rights".

A highlight for me in 2019, was attending the international Global Alliance for Justice Education Conference in Bandung, Indonesia in December 2019. Toobah Choudhari and I were invited to give an interactive presentation on our Hunter Youth Law Service to an audience that included children's court judges, academics and law students from around the world.

Finally I would like to thank all our volunteers and pro bono supporters, in particular, our Board; Dr Colin James, Richard Lane, Jeff Shute, Lucy Urach, Jill Evans, Bill Bowman, Maree Callaghan, Ndi Ruppert and Steve Wendtman, who give their time freely to make legal services more accessible to our community. I look forward to working with you all again next year.

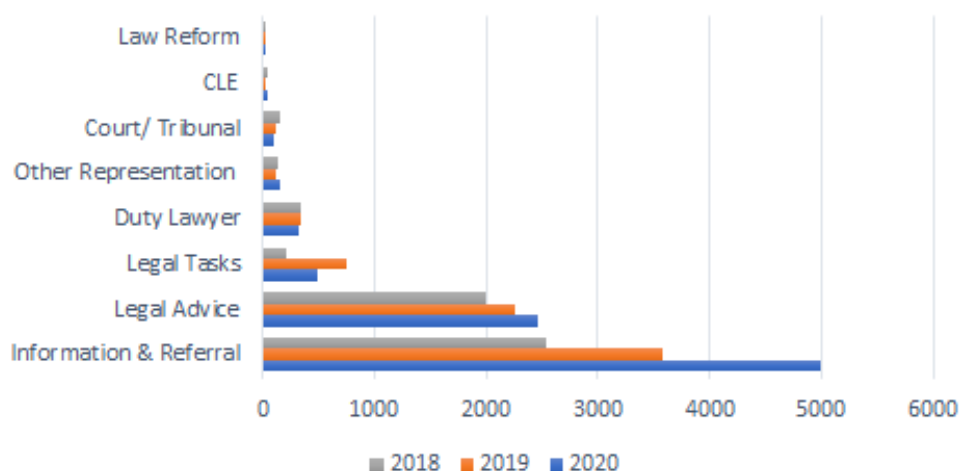
Bronwyn Ambrogetti

# Our Services

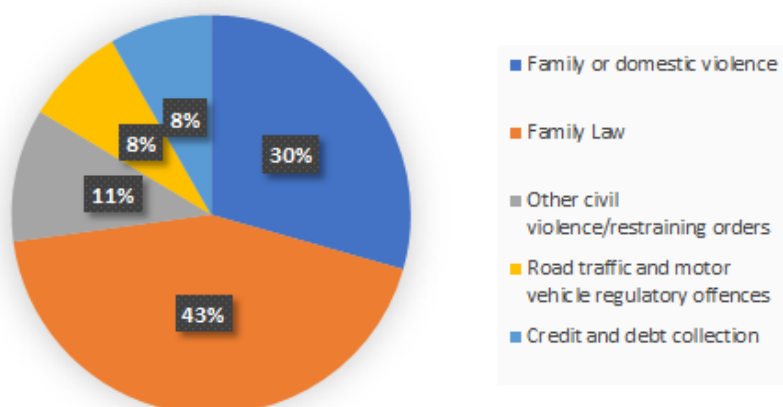
Hunter Community Legal Centre delivered another successful year in 2019-20 despite the challenges of COVID-19 presented us. The team assisted **2035** people with their legal problems. The team has maintained the level of services provided throughout the pandemic. The number of information and referrals has increased dramatically for various reason including, our lack of capacity in some areas and referrals to specialist services. The court work undertaken has been reduced due to the COVID-19 restrictions in place. However some of the solicitors have been able to engage in this work remotely. The main problem types continue to be family or domestic violence, family law, traffic offences and credit and debt.



## Services



## Top 5 Problem Types



# Our Clients

The gender split of our clients remains constant around 50/50.

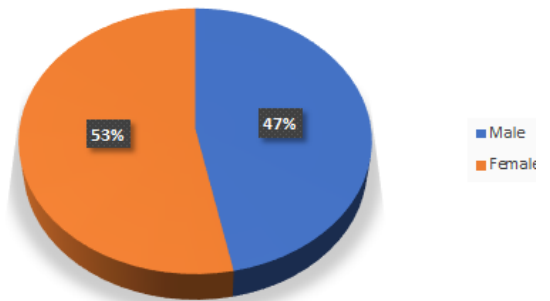
The largest percentage of clients is aged between 35 to 49 at 34.48% however the percentage of clients younger than 25 years has increased this financial year due to the success of the Youth Civil Law Service.

**91.2%** of clients are experiencing financial disadvantage. Furthermore, 8.25% indicated at the time of contact they had no income, which was an increase from 6.5% in 2018-19.

**31%** of clients disclosed they had a disability.

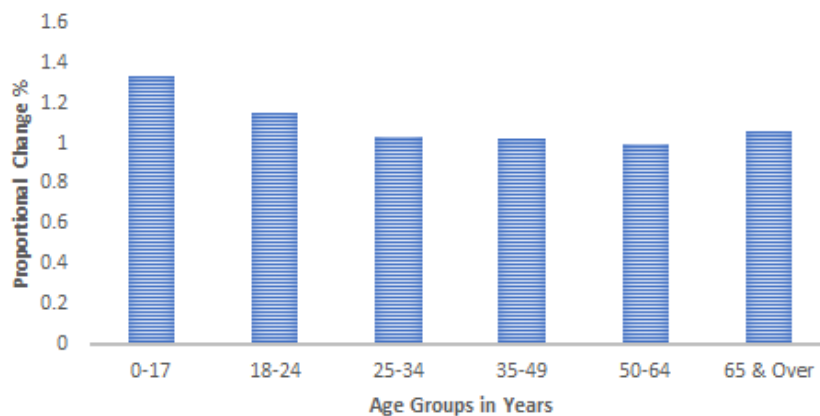
**9.5%** identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Gender

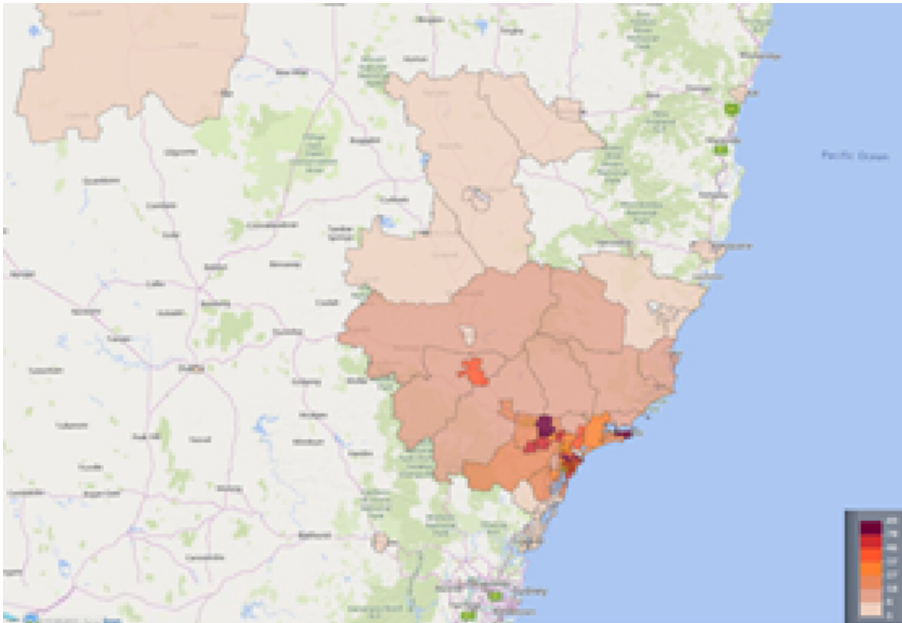


Seniors in the Upper Hunter

AGE GROUPS



The distribution of clients with low incomes and those experiencing domestic or family violence is very similar as can be seen in the maps



Clients with low income



Clients experiencing domestic or family violence



# Our Legal Teams

## **Message from the Family Law Team**

We are very thankful that the Centre is able to continue to remain operational during this unprecedented time of global uncertainty and economic turmoil brought about by the coronavirus. Our transition to telephone advice only, has gone well and substantial effort by our office manager and support staff has made this possible. We miss the interactions with our fellow colleagues on a daily basis and the face to face conferences with clients. The social distancing and isolation has not prevented us from assisting clients draft documents to commence family law proceedings, continue with ongoing casework and assist our clients resolve their disputes.

Our clients remain appreciative of our service and have expressed relief to us that there is an organisation that they can approach. Given so many hard working individuals in our community are now unemployed, the demand for our service will likely increase. We are working with our colleagues to continue to promote our services as we are aware that there may be those in our community who may not know of our Centre, as they were previously in a financial position where they would have been able to engage a private solicitor.

**Briony Manning, Clair Tait, Zach Biddles**

**Message from the Civil Law Team** There have been some challenges working from home. Some of these challenges are not so challenging anymore but have been replaced by other challenges instead. Not being able to access digital files from home was challenging, however Bronwyn and Julie have worked hard to make these digital files available through Microsoft Teams. Not being able to access new client intake sheets except when in the office is also challenging.

Thankfully I have been able to keep busy on some rather large matters. Whilst it's great that we are having video team meetings to keep in touch and discuss practice issues it doesn't replace being able to just pop next door to have a chat or share information, or being able to assist junior solicitors with any questions that they might have.

It is also challenging to manage clients' expectations who have matters at Court or a tribunal. Often they do not want to hear of the extensive delays and that it is impossible to give them any accurate indication of when they can expect their matter finalised leading to them being frustrated.

We are thankful that we are able to work from home and know that all of these challenges are worth it in order to continue to be able to provide legal assistance to people who need it.

**Kim Richardson, Michael Giles, Julia Adamski, Toobah Choudhari, Josephine Adamson**

# Hunter Youth Law Service

## Who have we helped?

**645** Young people have engaged with the service.

Levels of engagement range from receiving general information, specific legal or non-legal advice, and/or being referred to appropriate services and representing young people with civil law problems. We have completed **200** legal health check-ups. Young people also get referred to us by the Court, Legal Aid, Juvenile Justice and Education.

## Other ways we're helping young people - Referral Pathways

We have found that young people who come in contact with the criminal justice system frequently come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have complex support needs.

We have made **461** referrals. We refer to Emergency Homelessness Services, Samaritans, Welfare Rights, TAFE NSW, Department of Education, Fair Trading, Legal Aid, Headspace, FACS, Aboriginal Legal Service, Police, domestic violence support services, Centrelink, Neighbourhood Centres and the Youth Development Officers.

## Feedback Received from Clients

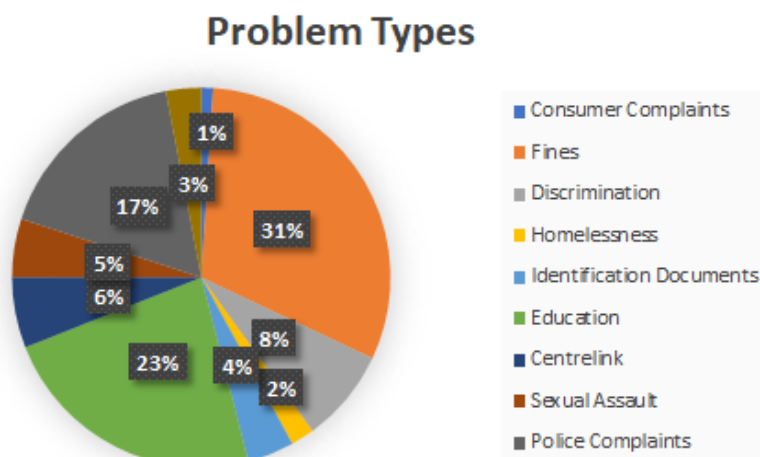
'I would probably give it a 10 because I actually think it's a really good idea being at the court'

'Toobah was friendly and she knew what she was talking about'

'Starting to understand all the legal stuff. You guys helped me heaps'

## What are the issues these young people face?

We've identified 10 different types of legal issues, which relate to:



## Case Example - Emily\*

We met Emily at Children's Court. Emily was at risk of homelessness and had been couch surfing for a couple of weeks at the time. Emily had unpaid fines, police complaints and had lost important identification documents. The lack of ID meant that Emily was unable to access community support services. Emily also could not return home due to her AVO. We were able to advocate on Emily's behalf and assist her in paying off her fines.

We were also able to assist in Emily's application to receive new identification documents. After reviewing the evidence provided by Emily, our Youth Lawyer was able to advise and assist Emily in making a formal police complaint. As a result, the police officers involved have been suspended from their duties. Emily is now relocating to a safe and stable home with family and has a job waiting for her.

\*Names and some details have been changed

# Working with our community

Although COVID 19 has presented us with challenges Hunter CLC has continued to develop and maintain strong relationships with community organisations. We have worked collaboratively with community organisations to provide community legal education and outreach services.

## Community Legal Education

Our community legal education program focused on Seniors, Youth and family and domestic violence and included:

- a collaboration with Transcare to provide legal education for Seniors in the Hunter Region about civil and family law issues, to increase awareness of common civil and family law issues faced by seniors, to empower them to seek legal remedies and participate in the resolution of their legal issues, to create referral pathways for Seniors with legal issues to appropriate free legal and non-legal support services, to promote the early recognition of legal problems and the pathways to assistance and early resolution with the aim of reducing the snowball effect of leaving legal issues unresolved. And ultimately to reduce the risk of elder abuse in the vulnerable seniors community.
- *Burn* presentation at Toronto and Cessnock high schools. *Burn* is a short film that follows the events that unfold when what begins as a typical evening for a group of teenage boys in Sydney takes a turn for the worse. The film sends a powerful and chilling message about how easy it is to get into serious trouble if you find yourself in the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong people.



Seniors roadtrip in the Upper Hunter



We also were part of the organisation and delivery of a successful event called “Cut it Out”. This was a breakfast session for hairdressers to help them learn and identify domestic violence/elder abuse amongst clients. The event had a good turn out and was interactive. The hairdressers reported they learned a lot more about domestic violence and how to respond accordingly.

Once again the Centre was invited to present at the Seniors Forums held by Joel Fitzgibbon MP. These forums were well attended by seniors seeking information on wills, enduring guardianship and enduring power of attorney.

- We were invited by the Callaghan College to be on the panel of their symposium called “Listening to the Voices” to hear some of the students' ideas on Domestic and Family Violence and provide them with additional information based on our experience at the centre.



Bronwyn presenting at a Seniors Forum



Josephine presenting at a Seniors Forum



Olivia assisting attendees at a Seniors Forum



## Stakeholder Engagement

Several State MPs in our catchment agreed to meetings at NSW Parliament House on 27 February 2020.

- Jenny Aitchison: Unfortunately Jenny was held up at an earlier meeting and was not able to attend. However we met with her Electoral Office staff and had a useful discussion about the legal work we do in her electorate and where we see the gaps in services.
- Greg Piper: we had a brief meeting with Greg and his assistant before Greg had to attend another meeting. Greg was very supportive of our School Lawyer grant application however he has already been asked to support 2 other applications to the same fund.
- Kate Washington and Clayton Barr: we met Kate and Clayton together and had a useful chat about the services we provide in their electorates and where there are gaps in services.
- Tim Crakenthorpe: We met Tim together with Justice Connect who had an urgent funding issue to discuss as their state funding is about to end with no renewal in sight. Tim as always was very supportive of our service.
- Michael Johnsen: Michael very kindly offered us a coffee in the Parliament House café. Unfortunately he had not made his support for nuclear power known before the meeting or we might have been able to discuss that with him.



# Outcomes

## Case Studies

### Criminal matter at Belmont Local Court

As the rest of world slows down our office has been kept busy as we try to grapple with the challenge of representing our clients at court whilst complying with the COVID-19 lock-down restrictions. We have been provided directions by the Chief Magistrate that both clients and practitioners should avoid appearing in the local court in person unless necessary. We were advised that we could correspond with the court via email if we were:

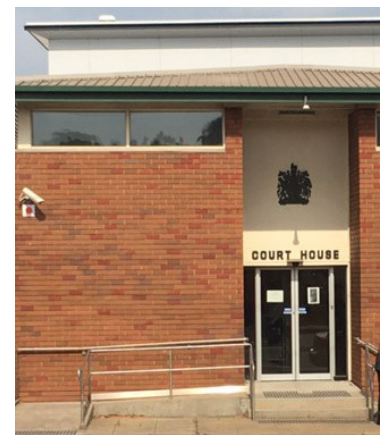
- Seeking an adjournment
- Pleading not guilty and seeking orders for a hearing date
- Pleading guilty and seeking for the matter to be considered in our absence.

I was also advised by the court that I could appear via telephone for a pre-trial review in the small claims division. Most recently I was instructed by a client to enter a plea of guilty and have the matter dealt with in our absence, in this case we emailed the court:

- Written submissions
- Letter from the client's Doctor
- Letter from the client's Counsellor
- Letter from the client's Employer.

The matter was considered by the Magistrate, however it was adjourned until the end of June for sentencing.

Many of my matters have pre-emptively been adjourned until June however others have only been adjourned until the end of the month. With things changing on a weekly and sometimes daily basis it has been difficult to make a solid plan for each client, so it has been important that I remain in regular contact with both the client and courts. Julia Adamski



Belmont Court House

**Economic benefits/ Access to justice Issue:** Our client Amalia\* is a single mother from a CALD background with poor English, who does regular casual work. If she was assessed on current income she would not pass the financial disadvantage test. She came to us for advice when she was charged with a low-range PCA offence and was likely to lose her licence. We represented Amalia at court and made submissions on her behalf and our client received a good behaviour bond and was able to continue to drive. As a result Amalia was able to keep her own casual job and also to drive her 17 year-old daughter to her casual work. This result meant that neither needed to rely on public benefits, but continued to support themselves.

\*name and some details changed



## Family Law – Parenting

Fiona\* is a single mother attempting to negotiate custody arrangements with the father of her disabled child. She does not qualify as financially disadvantaged due to her income, however her particular financial situation does not allow her to pay for a solicitor. Fiona has to pay for her child's medical expenses herself. She has previously engaged a paid solicitor for this issue, but an agreement could not be reached. As the cost of continuing was too high Fiona abandoned these negotiations and remained unrepresented until she came to us. Without the help of our organisation she would have limited access to justice and would ultimately have a worse outcome in her matter. Fiona has had mental health issues including stress and depression in the past. Without representation the mental health of both Fiona and her child would deteriorate and the burden of treating this would be borne by the public health system.

\*name and some details have been changed



Our client, Jess\*, suffers from severe depression, anxiety and schizophrenia. She was living in Department of Housing accommodation and was experiencing harassment, intimidation and stalking from neighbours. At one point she was trapped in her apartment when the neighbours began fighting in the communal corridor with one wielding a knife. The harassment became so bad that she attempted to take her own life. She presented me with a letter from her doctor stating that if Jess was not transferred the GP feared that she would attempt suicide again. Jess was linked in with a number of mental health medical professionals and was working hard to become well again and re-enter the work force. She had made various complaints to Housing over a 12-month period – with no response. Our office provided her with the following assistance:

- to complete an emergency transfer application
- draft a formal complaint to Housing
- draft a complaint to the NSW Ombudsman
- draft an application for a private APVO against her neighbours and
- Assisted her at court in relation to the APVO.

Eventually, after many weeks of negotiating, Housing agreed to transfer Jess. However, they insisted that she return to the property to collect her belongings. We referred her to the Disability Advocacy Service who were able to assist her to move without having to have contact with her neighbours.

\*name and some details changed

Khadijah\* is a refugee with three dependent children. She wanted to learn how to drive to assist her family. Khadijah was learning how to drive, supervised by a friend, when she collided with a gate of a property. Khadijah was told that she would have to repay \$30,000 for the damage she caused. Khadijah understood that what she did was wrong, but didn't have the money to be able to pay for the repairs. Khadijah was receiving a Centrelink payment and was unable to work because she had to care for her family. After paying rent, bills, groceries and other basic financial needs, Khadijah came out with \$11.00 a fortnight. This budget did not account for the cost of her 3 children, for any savings, medical expenses or any unforeseen circumstances. Bankruptcy was a live possibility for Khadijah. Khadijah was extremely distressed about how the repayment of such a large amount would affect her family and their future here in Australia. After months of advocating on behalf of Khadijah, the Hunter Community Legal Centre was able to get Khadijah released from the entire debt due to severe financial hardship. \*Names and some details have been changed



## Conferences



The 2019 **National CLC Conference** was held in Brisbane from 27 to 29 August. The theme of this year's conference was Power, Purpose, Possibilities. Julie and Michael attended on behalf of HCLC. It was announced at the conference that the National Association of CLCs (NACLC) is now rebranded as Community Legal Centres Australia (CLCs Australia, no acronym) and has a new logo. The conference provided an opportunity to see what other CLCs are doing throughout the country and gain insight into some common issues CLCs advise on. Sessions on the Australian Financial Complaints Authority (AFCA) and NDIS were interesting and provided useful information that will assist in providing advice to our clients. One session of particular interest for Michael and Julie was a presentation on an improved intake process by a Victorian CLC. This CLC was able to obtain a significant grant of funding to evaluate and upgrade its intake process to do what HCLC has been doing for years. This highlighted the significant differences and availability of funding between the CLC sector in different states. Other sessions provided updates on CLASS and using National Maps to provide a more substantive story regarding our services and an update on phase 3 of the National Accreditation Scheme that we are now entering into.

## Global Alliance for Justice Education (GAJE) Conference

Toobah and I presented at the GAJE conference in December. Our paper presented the results of the Hunter Youth Law Service to date. I attended sessions on; the role of women lawyers in Islamic countries, international clinical legal education, the role of health science in legal education, the role of game based learning in street law, fostering lawyer effectiveness, integrating human rights in street law, mobile legal clinics, facilitating pro bono activities for students. Following the conference Toobah has been invited to participate in international research on harassment in the legal profession and HCLC has been invited to participate in the setting up of a legal clinic at Bahir Dar University in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia.



Toobah presenting at the GAJE conference

## **My Time at the Hunter Community Legal Centre**

### **Daniel Schmidt**

During my time with the Hunter Community Legal Centre (CLC) I spent most of my time assisting people from disadvantaged backgrounds with their legal issues. These clients included: indigenous people, asylum seekers, victims of domestic violence, the elderly, disabled people, people with mental illnesses and the long term unemployed. There were very few clients of the Hunter CLC that would have been able to afford a private solicitor.

The work itself was varied and included Family, Civil and Criminal. The client file or Intake sheet' would contain the base information about the legal issue with some background information about the client. From there I would conduct legal research and get in contact with the client if I needed further information to properly understand the situation. Then with this information in hand I would consult with a solicitor, advise the solicitor of the situation and then seek instructions to pass onto the client. Then, after advising the client that I am not a solicitor, but I have been instructed by a solicitor, pass on that advice to the client. I found it interesting learning about the different legal problems that people are affected by and enjoyed assisting people to deal with these issues.

The people I volunteered with at the Hunter CLC are passionately committed to improving access to justice. I have observed through my time here that there are many in the Hunter Newcastle area that struggle when navigating the legal system. The Hunter CLC is providing a valuable service for these people and the broader community by facilitating a more equitable justice system.



Daniel Schmidt is a 4th year law student at the University of Newcastle. In between June and September 2019, he volunteered as a law clerk at the Hunter Community Legal Centre.

Hunter Community Legal Centre Inc.  
Level 2/116 Hunter St Newcastle 2300  
PO Box 84 Newcastle 2300  
Phone 40409120  
Email: [admin@hunterclc.com.au](mailto:admin@hunterclc.com.au)  
Web: [www.hunterclc.com.au](http://www.hunterclc.com.au)



@hunterclc