



**HUNTER COMMUNITY**  
LEGAL CENTRE INC.

# **ANNUAL REPORT 2023**

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The background image is a photograph. On the right side, there is a close-up of a tree trunk with rough, textured bark. To the left of the tree trunk, there is a mural of a First Nations person's face, looking directly at the camera. In the background, a modern building with white balconies and blue railings is visible. The sky is blue with some yellow and orange leaves hanging from a tree in the upper left corner.

## Acknowledgement

The Hunter Community Legal Centre (Hunter CLC) acknowledges and pays respect to Elders past and present of the Awabakal, Birpai, Darkinjung, Geawegal, Wanaruah and Worimi people, the traditional custodians of the land which makes up our catchment. We appreciate the strength, resilience and culture of First Nations People and recognise their connection to country and the right to a constitutional voice.

We acknowledge that progress requires Indigenous leadership, action and control across all areas of policy and services. Hunter CLC 's staff come from a range of cultural backgrounds.

We share a single goal to support and provide a platform to First Nations people, who can inform and guide our community in working towards recognition and justice.

## About Us

Community Legal Centres (CLC's) play a pivotal role in increasing access to justice and legal assistance for individuals in NSW and across Australia. CLC's serve as crucial pillars of support for Communities that are marginalized and affected by disadvantage, offering free legal services that might otherwise be financially out of reach. Many CLC's cater to the unique needs of their community, addressing specialist issues ranging from tenancy disputes and employment rights to family law matters. Importantly CLC's also provide community legal education and advocacy for social justice and law reform.

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

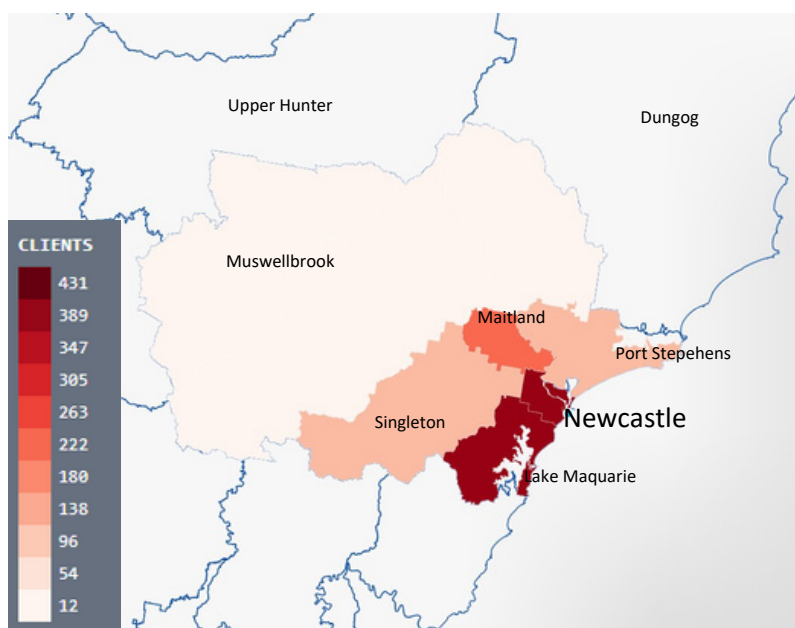
## Our Catchment

Hunter CLC's catchment covers 10 local government areas with a geographical area of approximately 22,000 square kilometres and a population of almost 800,000.

CLC's generally work within Local Government Areas (LGAs), although Hunter CLC does assist people from all over Australia in Family Law (FL). The Centre also has a reciprocal referral arrangement with the Central Coast and Mid-North Coast CLC's to assist clients when we are unable. Below are the number of clients we assisted from each LGA in our catchment:

NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL	431
LAKE MACQUARIE CITY COUNCIL	423
MAITLAND CITY COUNCIL	248
PORT STEPHENS COUNCIL	176
CESSNOCK CITY COUNCIL	151
MID-COAST COUNCIL	69
<b>CENTRAL COAST COUNCIL*</b>	64
SINGLETON COUNCIL	27
MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE COUNCIL	23
DUNGOG SHIRE COUNCIL	17
UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL	12
<b>All OTHER AREAS*</b>	27

\*(Red areas above outside catchment)



Clients in Catchment Distribution Heat Map



## 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.

## Our Core Values

- Respect
- Accountability
- Integrity
- Social Justice
- Equality

## Our Strategic Plan 2022-2025

The strategic objectives are:

- Provide quality legal advice to clients who are living with disadvantage in our community
- Build a strong & sustainable organisation to deliver our vision & mission to the community
- Develop systems & processes which are responsive to our community in times of change

## Our Resources

Staff - We employed 16 people as of 30th June 2023 with a turnover rate of 31.25%

Revenue - \$1.75 million - \$731,686 revenue from the Commonwealth Government and \$542,702 from the NSW Government.

# Performance Highlights

2022-2023 was a year of change for Hunter CLC, we welcomed a new generation of Lawyers and support staff who will be continuing existing programs and expanding into new ones, thanks to additional funding. Hunter CLC has embraced technological change, moving to an increasingly digital workflow to keep in step with the demands of a changing world.

## Develop systems and processes which are responsive to our community in times of change

Key highlights of 2022-23 include:

- Hunter CLC continued its digitization project, completely digitizing existing paper files and moving to a digital workflow for all services except casework.
- Increased number of Community Legal Education sessions provided for the community, with a focus on Seniors, the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and First Nations People.

## Build a strong and sustainable workforce to deliver Hunter CLC's vision and mission to our community

Key highlights of 2022-23 include:

- Recruitment of three new solicitors, Amber Bridge, Madeleine Cahalan, and Kate Loughnan. Recruitment of New Admin Staff Elise McGann, Eleanor Rodger, and Ryan Nguyen
- Expansion of the Employee Assistance Program providing additional support to staff to combat the effects of vicarious Trauma.

## Provide quality legal advice to clients who are living with disadvantage in our community

Key highlights of 2022-23 include:

- Funding and commencement of Hunter Youth Law Service Extension, Family Law and Family Violence programs.
- Welcomed new Pro Bono partners to the Employment Law Program, expanding Hunter CLC's capacity to deliver Employment Law services to more people.



Pictured above Newcastle Courthouse.



## Challenges

Despite new funding streams and new programs in FY 22-23 helping to address more of the legal needs in the Hunter community, demand still exceeds the Centre's ability to provide legal help to all who need it. FY 22-23 also saw several experienced members of our legal team seek new career challenges outside of Hunter CLC, with resources redirected toward training and supervision of the new junior team of solicitors, a time and resource investment we know will pay dividends for years to come.



Hunter CLC Social Media Post informing the community of service disruptions to the Free Legal Helpline due to legal staff being over capacity.

# Our People

## Board of Management

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

## Our Staff

Managing Solicitor	Bronwyn Ambrogetti
Solicitors	Briony Manning
	Michael Giles
	Greg Bullard
	Clair Tait
	Madeleine Cahalan
	Zach Biddles
	Amber Bridge
	Kate Loughnan

Finance	Julie Vitnell
Coordinator	Patrick Bartholomew
ALO	Shanayah Slade-Potts
Administration	Susan Douglass
	Elise McGann
	Eleanor Rodger
	Gabrielle Hooper
	Ryan Nguyen

### Student Volunteers, Solicitor Volunteers & Secondees

Ellena Vozzo, Zoe Hayes, Timothy Outram, Temperance Gollan, Tarisha Guranatnam, Srivarsha Thirmalagi Murali, Sofia Bryan, Ryan Nguyen, Piper Lovett, Paul Loudon, Nora Truong, Ned Hoswell, Muhammad Ali, Molly Lancett, Margueritte Henneberry, Lorra Mills, Lauren Isaac, Lauren Fairchild, Jessica Enright, Jaylene Trovato, James Wetherall, Heyma Nahar, Daryl Lee, Daniel Shmidt, Daniel Johnston, Cheryl Arce Pacheco, Charlotte Wintle, Caroline Brown, Ashley Walker, Aiden Ewer, Kate Brown, Darren Whitbourne.



Paralegal Eleanor Rodger and Student Volunteer Ned Hoswell celebrating Volunteers Week.



## Pro Bono Assistance & Volunteers

Hunter CLC is thankful to its Pro Bono partners for providing assistance to the Centre, helping to assist our clients with their legal issues, and to deliver high-quality Community Legal education relevant to vulnerable people or those experiencing disadvantage. Pro Bono lawyers augment the capabilities of Community Legal Centres to address a broader spectrum of legal issues, enabling us to help more people whilst nurturing a sense of social responsibility among legal practitioners. Pro Bono contributions across legal domains significantly contribute to the promotion of social justice and the overall well-being of communities. We thank all our Pro Bono partners for their continued good work and dedication.

### **Volunteer & Pro Bono Firms, Solicitors and Barristers**

Sparke Helmore  
Hicksons  
Clayton Utz  
K&L Gates  
Gilbert & Tobin  
Hall & Payne  
SWS Lawyers  
HWL Ebsworth Lawyers  
Holding Redlich  
Joanne Burr  
Daniel Schmidt  
Brent Moran  
Richard Hardy  
Joe Kennedy  
Seamus Burke  
Jessica Phillips  
Hai-Van Nguyen  
George Stribling  
Antonino Meduri  
Leila Moddel  
Jocelyn Leung  
Chantelle Ingenito  
Lizzie McLaughlin



Above, Hunter CLC celebrates National Pro Bono Day, pictured Pro Bono solicitor for Employment law, Hai-Van Nguyen (left), from Clayton Utz with Bronwyn Ambrogetti, Susan Douglass, and Gabrielle Hooper.

## Chair's Report

Demand for assistance from Hunter CLC by residents of the Newcastle and Hunter region remained high in both the civil and family law areas in 2022-2023. Clearly, our community is not immune from the national stresses of a rising cost of living and increasing homelessness. Nor are we immune from the impacts of domestic violence. Many vulnerable people require the legal assistance of Hunter CLC to reduce the risk of a miscarriage of justice.

The past year has seen us largely back in the office and returning in person to the courts. We could not continue this work without the strong support of numerous partners and funders, including the assistance of pro-bono lawyers and final year or recently graduating students. The Board remains in awe of the team effort of so many, capably led by our Managing Solicitor, Bronwyn Ambrogetti, who is ably assisted by Patrick Bartholomew. The dedication and skill of our staff members are evident, and the Board is consistently impressed when staff come to Board meetings for presentations.

The nature of the work undertaken by Hunter CLC can put a strain on our people. Accordingly, the organisation has taken steps to provide stress management support. We have also upgraded our IT capability and taken measures towards enhanced cyber-security governance principles.

We appreciate the financial support of our key funders, the State and Commonwealth Attorneys General. Specific funding for domestic, sexual and family violence from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice enabled an additional solicitor to be employed four days per week which assists in meeting the demand for AVO duty and telephone advice services.

Commonwealth Family Law and Family Violence support has enabled a new programme with an additional full-time solicitor to provide family law advice and AVO duty services at the Newcastle Local Court and other outreach services. We are grateful for the provision of all funding.



**Bill Bowman**

Hunter Youth Law Service extension has been funded by the Department of Regional NSW's Regional Youth Investment Programme. This has enabled the hiring of a full-time solicitor to provide weekly services at the Broadmeadow Children's Court in the areas of a youth outreach service, telephone advice and community legal education to disadvantaged youth, at the time of writing this service is also expanding to the Raymond Terrace Children's Court. Multicultural NSW funding allows us to provide a paralegal three days per week to administer the programme providing legal information and community legal education to culturally and linguistically diverse residents. We appreciate the funding support without which we could not provide this assistance.

Last, but not least, I express my gratitude to my fellow Board members of Hunter CLC. They give their time and expertise voluntarily in service of the community and bring considerable value to the organisation.



## Managing Solicitor's Report

Having weathered the storm of the pandemic, 2022-2023 saw the spiralling cost of living bring a new wave of hardship, particularly to the most vulnerable in our communities. Rising prices, falling real incomes and household stress has resulted in a continued high incidence of legal problems related to consumer credit, employment law, housing issues and domestic violence. In the face of rising unmet demand for legal services, Hunter CLC continued its legal advice services by telephone and broadened its reach in the areas of community legal education (CLE) and family law.

We continued our outreach to Newcastle, Belmont and Maitland local courts, providing a duty solicitor for our free domestic violence service. We also organised Community Legal Education (CLE) and advice sessions at Yacaaba in Nelson Bay, Miruma at Cessnock Correctional Centre, and attended a number of outreach events with the First Nations community, including free wills days assisted by Gilbert & Tobin Lawyers, at Wahroonga Aboriginal Corporation in Raymond Terrace and Wanaruah Aboriginal Land Council at Muswellbrook.

Our telepresence robot named MARLA (Mobile, Accessible Remote Legal Assistant) was officially launched in October 2022. MARLA allows people to connect with Hunter CLC remotely from Maitland and receive free legal assistance.

Hunter CLC was successful in a number of important grant applications during the period. A grant from Multicultural NSW allowed us to commence CLE outreach to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities with focused presentations on legal areas of particular interest to them, including family law, renting, fines, and employment law.

A grant from Commonwealth Attorney General allowed us to boost our family law team to work across state and Commonwealth jurisdictions in the areas of family law and family violence. During the year, Hunter CLC's family law team assisted 618 clients, the majority of whom were at risk or traumatised due to family violence and financial disadvantage, with 1,255 family law, parenting, property, and divorce matters.

(continued Page 12)



Pictured Above: Bronwyn Ambrogetti presents to a group of CALD seniors on Wills and power of attorney.

In the area of employment law, our pro-bono partnerships with Clayton Utz, Hall Payne and Spark Helmore, and HWL Ebsworth Lawyers have allowed us to provide an important free legal service to people who would otherwise be unable to access free employment law advice. Feedback from our partner firms indicates that wage theft continues to be a major issue and that most clients were unaware of their basic employment rights and were incredibly grateful for the advice that Hunter CLC pro bono lawyers offered.

Given the increasing number of high-profile cyber breaches during the year, Hunter CLC is increasing its focus on cyber security with increased training for staff and volunteers, cyber insurance and the implementation of tightened cyber policies and measures.

We also renewed our lease on our office space with an option to stay through until 2027, which allows for continued stability at the centre.

On a personal note, in September 2022, I co presented with Hunter CLC solicitor Julia Adamski and HWL Ebsworth Partner and Head of Pro Bono Karen Keogh at the Asia Pro Bono Conference on working with remote pro bono secondees to assist survivors of gender based violence.

Finally I would like to thank all our staff and our volunteers and pro bono supporters, in particular, our Board - Bill Bowman, Richard Lane, Jeff Shute, Lucy Urach, Jill Evans, Maree Callaghan, Ndi Ruppert and Steve Wendtman - who give their time to make legal services more accessible to our community.

I look forward to working with you all again next year.



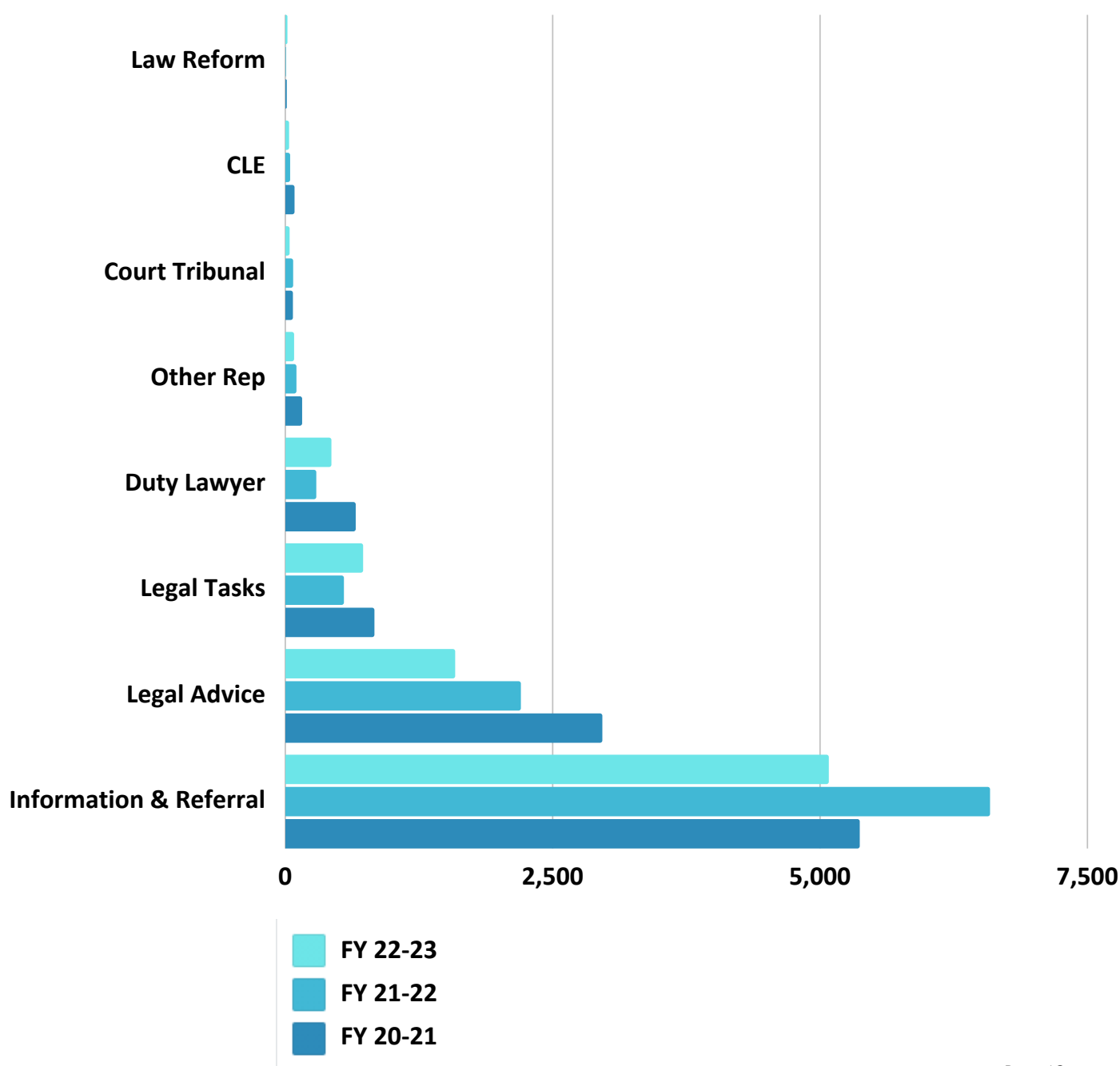
Pictured above Bronwyn Ambrogetti with the Hon Jenny Aitchison MP Maitland with M.A.R.L.A the robot.

**Bronwyn Ambrogetti**



## Our Services

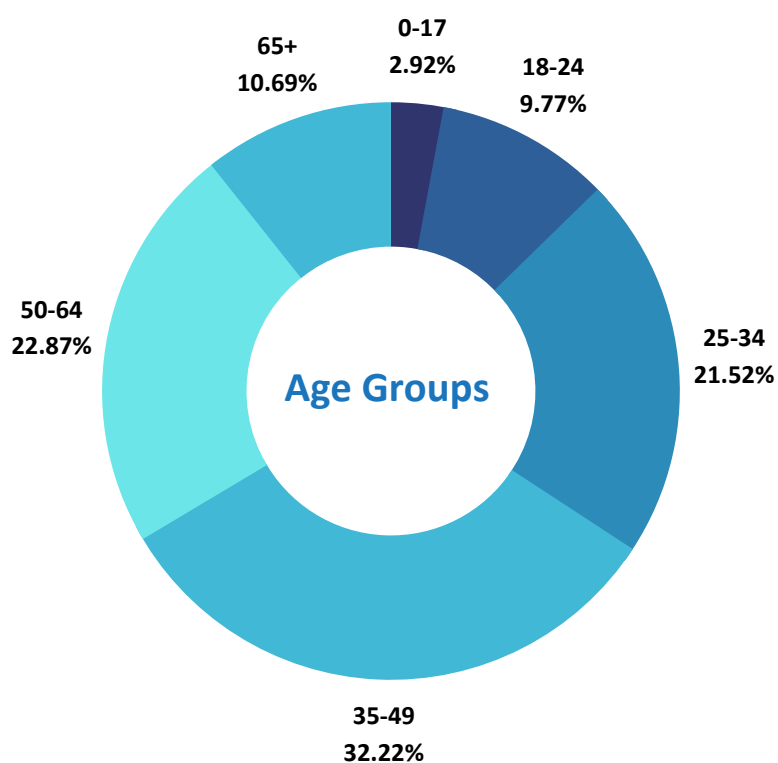
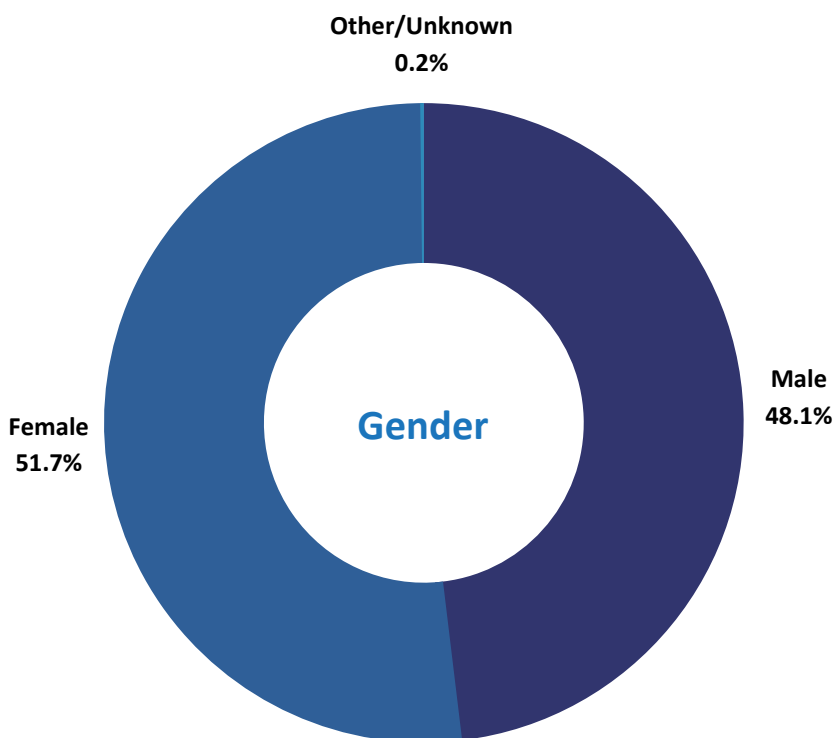
Hunter CLC continues to see a high demand for its services, and as the world returns to a new normal post the worst of the pandemic, more face-to-face services with a 47.92% increase in Duty services during FY 22-23. Hunter CLC was fortunate to secure new streams of funding to continue its Hunter Youth Law Service and start new programs assisting with Family Violence. These funding streams allowed the Centre to recruit new staff, however, the recruitment of junior and recent graduate solicitors means more time devoted by the existing legal staff to training and supervision, impacting the number of services provided in FY 22-23. As these new recruits develop their skills, we expect to see an increase in service delivery in FY 23-24. Sadly despite new funding streams, demand still outstrips Hunter CLC's ability to deliver services.



# Our Clients

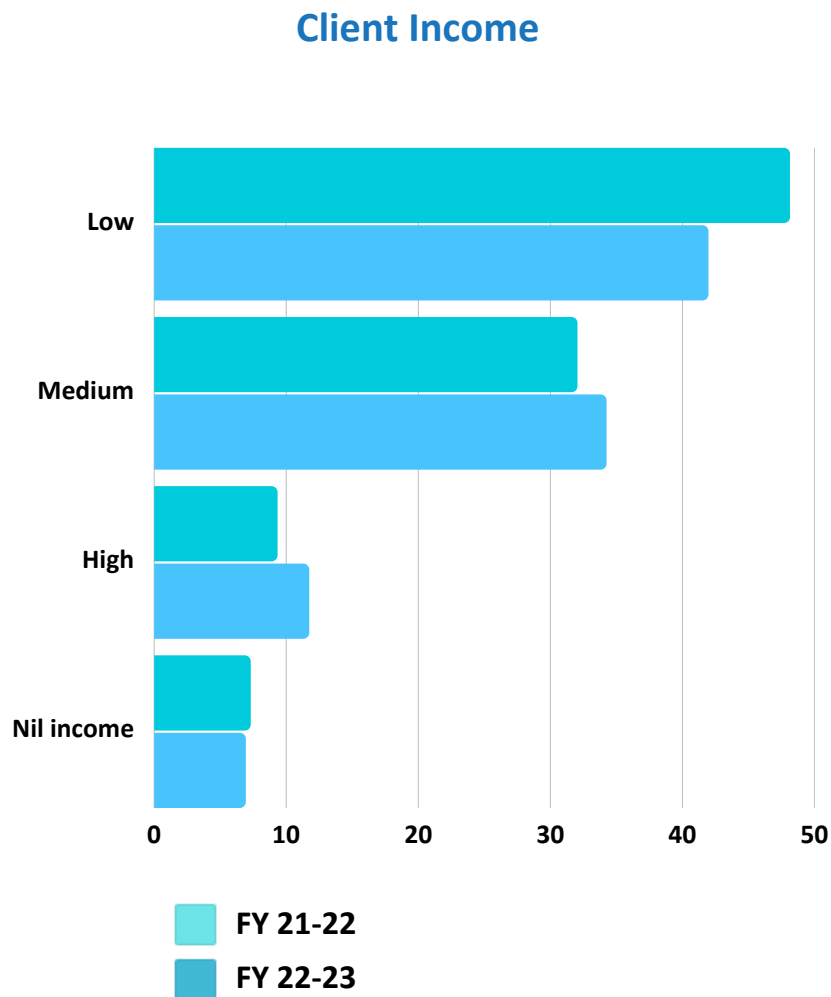
## Age & Gender

FY 22-23 saw the demographic breakdown of the Centre's clients remain largely stable across age ranges and gender, with no significant changes from FY 21-22. Children under 17 remain the smallest percentage of our clients, although as the Hunter Youth Service Extension commenced towards the latter part of the reporting period a shift in those numbers is expected for FY 23-24.



## Clients experiencing socio-economic disadvantage

The reporting period showed only minor shifts in the socio-economic breakdown of Hunter CLC's clients, FY 22-23 saw a slight rise in high and medium-income earners, however, 88.19% of clients assisted were people experiencing financial disadvantage. Hunter CLC will provide one-off advice to clients with higher incomes, but if an individual can afford a private solicitor we will generally refer them to one for ongoing legal assistance.





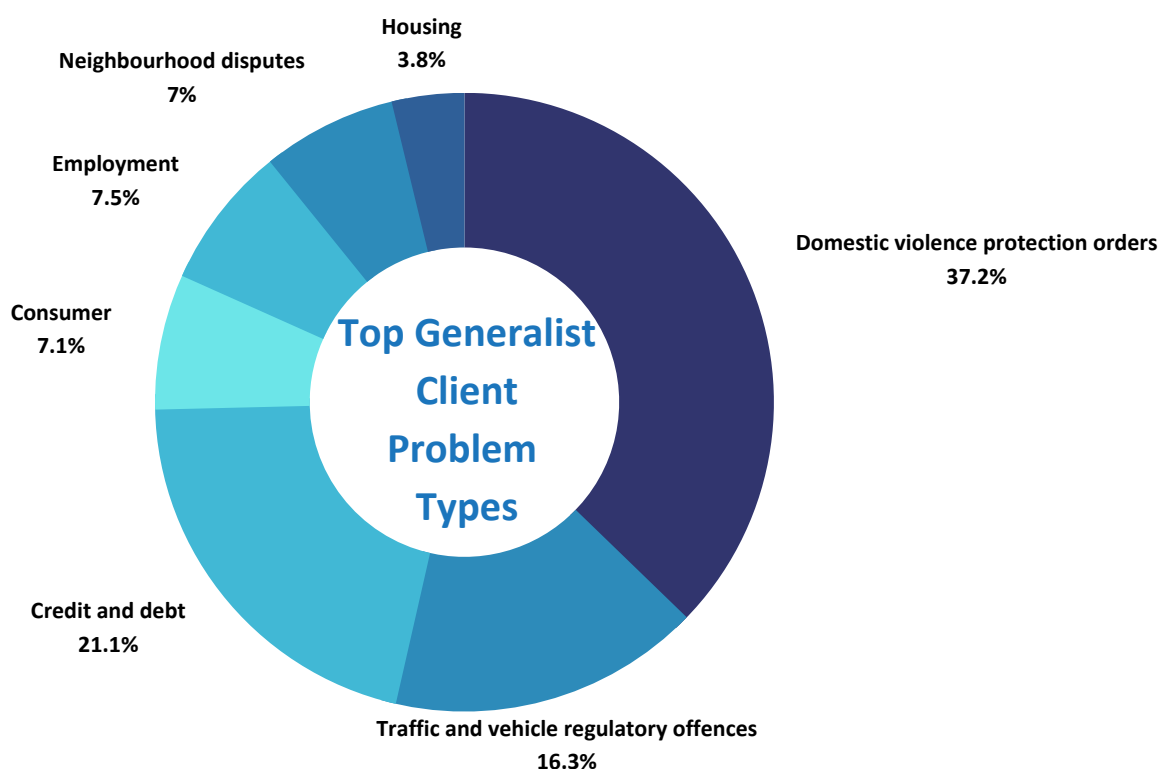
## Generalist Solicitors' Report

Demand for generalist legal services remained high during the 2022-2023 year. However, a number of concerning trends are emerging which are reflective of increased financial and emotional stress in the communities which Hunter CLC serves.

Most of Hunter CLC's clients are suffering from significant financial disadvantage and the resulting stresses are being exacerbated by the pressures of the economic downturn. While the overall number of advices we provided fell from 3,049 to 2,458, the types of legal matters we are dealing with are becoming more complex in the face of increasing economic hardship. This means each matter requires more time at each stage of interaction between Hunter CLC personnel and our clients, from intake/screening, through taking instruction to ultimately giving advice and assistance.

Our advice remains primarily by telephone, with the most common areas for which advice or assistance was sought remaining Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders and Apprehended Personal Violence Orders, road and traffic offences, neighbour disputes, and increasingly credit/debt and consumer law issues.

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Two new solicitors started during the year – one generalist and one family violence/family law solicitor. This brings our Generalist Team up to three generalist solicitors, one youth solicitor and one family violence solicitor we share with our Family Law Team. In addition, we have had a number of volunteer solicitors who have assisted with telephone advice. We also supervise a number of law students during their Professional Legal Training who assist with intake and telephone advice under the supervision of a senior solicitor.

During this year, our AVO Duty Service at Newcastle, Maitland and Belmont courts was fully re-instated (Maitland and Newcastle once each week, and Belmont every other week), with our duty solicitors dealing with a disturbing 48% increase in AVO matters from 305 in 2021-22 to 451 in 2022-2023.

The Generalist Team continues to be active in Community Legal Education activities. We also maintain strong referral pathways, particularly in relation to domestic violence matters. We also maintain good dialogue with Legal Aid and the Aboriginal Legal Service.



Pictured above left, Michael Giles Senior Solicitor from Hunter CLC's Generalist team, above right Hunter CLC Staff outside Newcastle Court.

## Case Study- Traffic Law, 'Doing the Right Thing'

Preeti\*, her two adult sons, their partners and three grandchildren emigrated to Australia from Gujarat province in India after the borders re-opened following the pandemic. A trained bookkeeper who had worked in various Government jobs, Preeti was particularly proud that she had held a driving licence for more than 20 years – one of the small minority of female drivers negotiating the chaotic streets of her home city of Gandhinagar.

After relocating to Newcastle, her two adult children managed to find various part-time jobs which had them working long hours. They purchased a small car as a family, and enrolled Preeti's three grandchildren into the local primary school. Preeti was able to help out by driving the grandchildren to and from school each day.

One morning in March, the grandchildren were running late for school. Trying to make up time, Preeti was driving faster than usual as she approached the School Zone and found the first available space to pull over and let them out. After waving goodbye and telling the grandchildren to hurry, Preeti was about to pull away from the kerb when there was a knock on her driver's side window.

She turned to see a Highway Patrol officer and her heart sank. She wound down the window, and the officer asked to see her driving licence. While she reached into her handbag for her licence, the officer informed her that she had been driving 47 km per hour as she entered the 40 kph School Zone and that where she had stopped to let out the grandchildren was a "No Stopping" zone. Preeti handed him her Indian driving licence. "How long have you been in Australia?" he asked. "Ten weeks," replied Preeti.

The officer explained to Preeti that she could only drive on her foreign licence for three months before she must obtain a NSW driver's licence. He also issued her with two on the spot fines – one for exceeding the speed limit by not more than 10 kph, and one for stopping in No Stopping Zone near a school. The fines totaled \$2498 and carried two demerit points each.

Preeti wanted to do the right thing. She paid the fines and immediately set about getting her NSW driver's licence. She obtained her Learner Driving Licence and a family friend from the Gujarati community with a full licence began to give her driving lessons and help her with language difficulties in reading road signage. (It is not commonly known that less than 15% of Indians are fluent in English, and even fewer in older age groups.) Her friend also drove with her on the school runs to comply with the supervision conditions of the Learner Licence.

A few months later, Preeti was preparing to sit her driving test when she received in the mail a Notice of Suspension from Transport NSW. Her son read the letter and told her that her Learner Licence would be suspended for three months commencing on June 1 as a consequence of the four demerit points she received back in March. Following the suspension period, she would need to re-apply for a new Learner Licence.

Preeti was confused. She was also upset that she could no longer help her family by driving her grandchildren to and from school. Preeti's friend suggested she contact the Hunter CLC for advice.

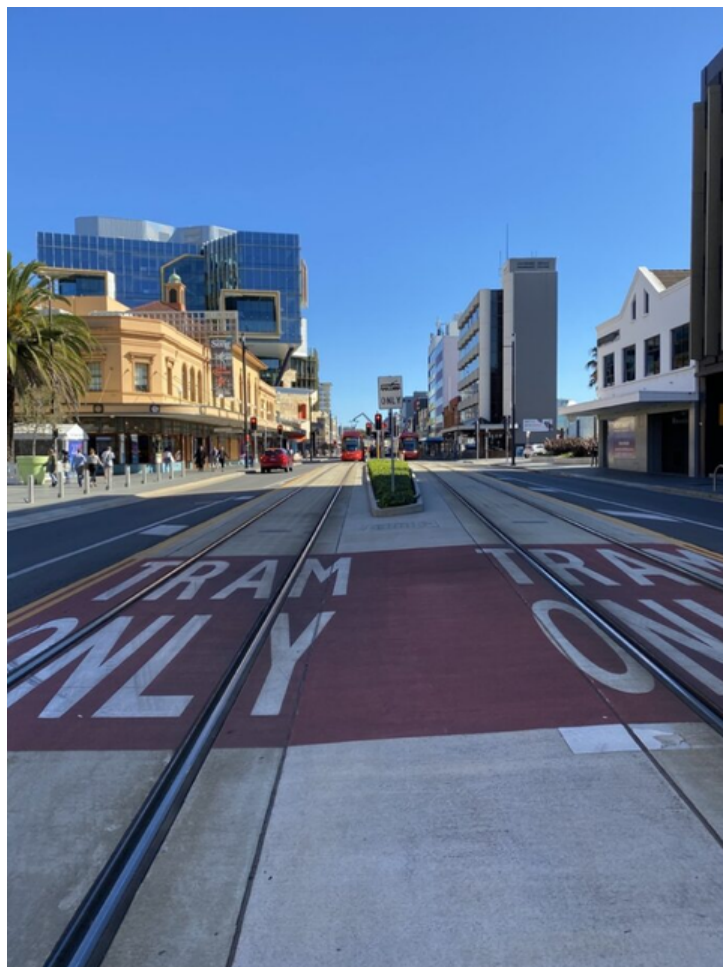
The legal issue: A driver in NSW, driving on an overseas licence, loses their licence (suspension) when they accumulate 13 demerit points or more, the same as a regular NSW full licence holder. However, a Learner Licence holder will lose their licence if they accumulate more than four demerit points. Transport NSW had retrospectively applied the four demerits from the March on-the-spot fines to her Learner Licence.

Hunter CLC advised Preeti that she could appeal the suspension in the Local Court, and that once the appeal was lodged the suspension date would cease to have effect and she could continue driving her grandchildren. Any suspension would then be a matter for the court and would only commence if she lost the appeal.

Hunter CLC's file review committee agreed to assist and represent her in court. This decision was based on Preeti's immigration status and her language difficulties. Transport NSW's action was also considered unfair by the team as Preeti would still be able to drive had she not done the right thing in seeking to become licenced in NSW.

The Magistrate agreed with our submissions and Preeti's appeal was successful. This meant the suspension would not be imposed and she could continue to drive (under supervision) and apply for her P plates in the coming weeks. Preeti and her family attended court and expressed their deepest gratitude to Hunter CLC for their assistance and representation.

\*Names and other details have been changed.



Pictured above, Hunter Street Newcastle.

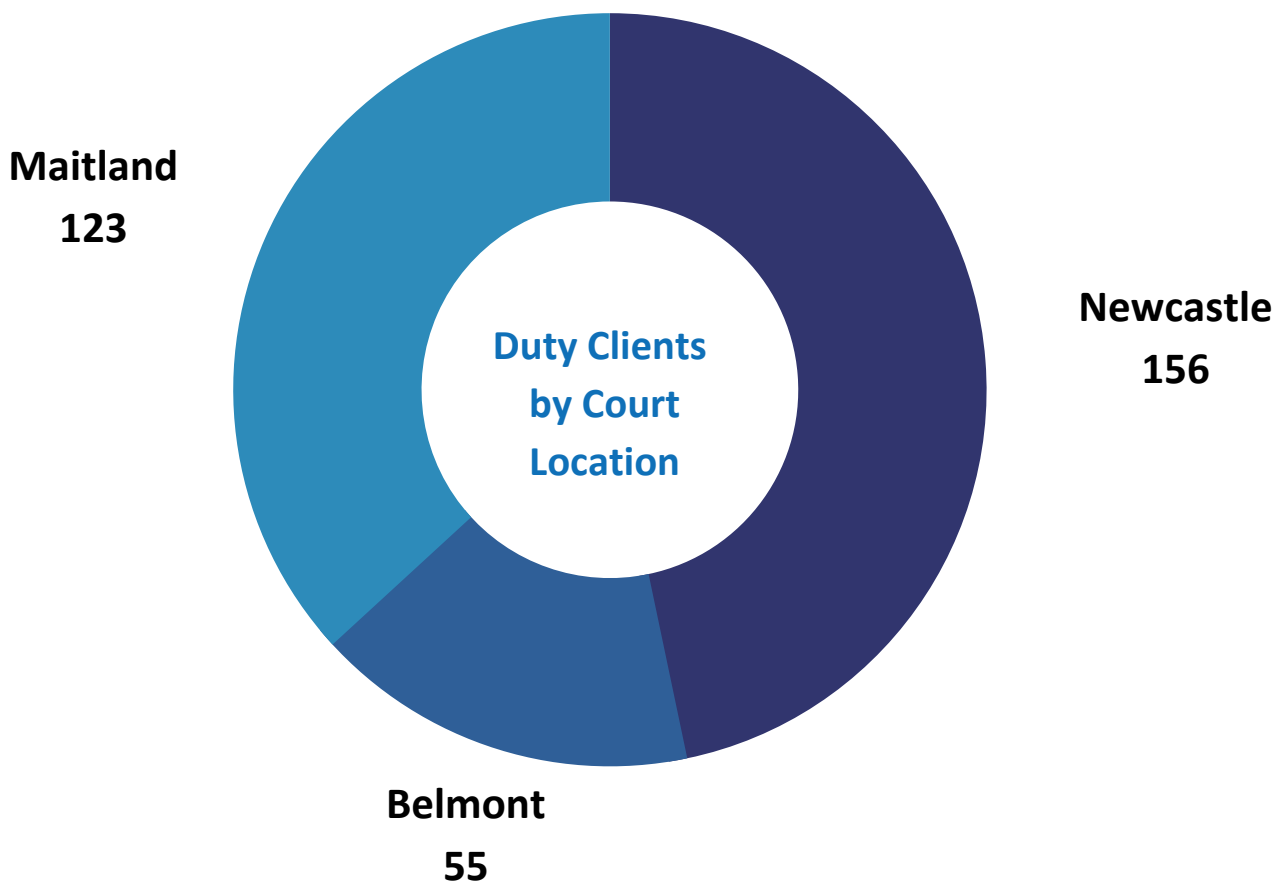


## AVO Duty Service

The Hunter CLC Generalist Solicitors continued to provide an AVO Duty Service to the Belmont, Maitland, and Newcastle Local Courts during the reporting period. The AVO Duty service provides access to a Hunter CLC Duty Solicitor at these courts for clients to obtain on the spot legal advice in relation to Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders or Apprehended Personal Violence Orders. Our Solicitors obtain instructions from clients who are in court and provide them with advice on AVOs and court procedures. Depending on their circumstances, representation in court is provided to many of these clients.

The Maitland AVO Duty Service is part of the Department of Community and Justice's Domestic Violence (DV) Hub Pilot Project. The Hub consists of a number of service providers attending the court to support both victims and perpetrators of DV. The Hub coordinator has praised the Hunter CLC Duty Service at Maitland for its work at the court. Hunter CLC received the most referrals out of all participating services at the Hub.

During the reporting period, our AVO Duty Solicitors provided 427 Duty services, an increase of 47.92% from FY 21-22.



## Misidentification of Victims in AVO Matters.

Misidentification of victims continues to be a recurring thread in matters dealt with by Hunter CLC.

Misidentification is when female victim-survivors of domestic violence are falsely identified as perpetrators. This can lead to them being arrested, held in custody, and sometimes formally charged. Misidentification can also involve failing to identify the person most in need of protection, failing to identify the person inflicting the greatest harm and fear or power and control, and wrongly assessing victims of intimate partner violence as the person perpetrating violence.

The confluence of victim misidentification and the (mis)use of court domestic violence applications by convicted perpetrators has been identified as a particular area of concern by Hunter CLC. The growing mis(use) of process is where a convicted perpetrator of a domestic violence offence (who is also subject of an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order) makes a private application against their victim-survivor.

This 'abuse' falls within the standard definition of an 'abuse of process' but is 'domestic' in nature. For example, where a convicted perpetrator uses court process with the intention to further intimidate or harass their victims as a means of retribution.

Our law reform committee is considering potential remedies to reduce or alleviate this 'abuse', such as stronger deterrence to such litigants by way of monetary and criminal penalties and a higher initial threshold test, to commence the proceedings.

## Case Study- AVO Duty, Weaponising the Court.

There is a disturbing trend of perpetrators of domestic violence using court processes to continue to intimidate their victims.

Julie\* and John\* were in a domestic relationship for 16 years. At first, John would lose his temper and throw things at Julie, but she was sure he wouldn't hit her. Then one day he did, and from then on it didn't stop.

Over the course of an abusive relationship, it is common for abuse to escalate, and often victim-survivors find themselves experiencing something they never thought their partner would, or even could, do.

After years of escalating abuse, Julie summoned up the courage to leave the relationship and sought assistance from the police and Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV), a targeted program to prevent victim-survivors of domestic violence (DV) from becoming homeless as a result of ending the abusive relationship.

(continued Page 20)

In 2021, John was charged with intimidation under s 13 of the Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007, and final orders were put in place for an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) naming Julie as the Person In Need Of Protection (PINOP). In court, John pleaded not guilty to the charge, lying that Julie had made up the story about the physical and emotional abuse. This is not uncommon and indicates that John is a perpetrator who takes no ownership of his abusive behaviour, shows no remorse for his actions and is quite comfortable lying in court. The court was not convinced. John was found guilty of the offence and fined 50 penalty points (\$5,500), narrowly avoiding a custodial sentence.

After the court case, Julie tried to get on with her life. She still has many friends in the area where she had lived with John and would return there for visits. She also supplemented her pension delivering catalogues with her car, sometimes delivering in the same area.

In 2022, Julie was shocked to discover that John applied to the court for an ADVO order against her. She was confused and re-traumatised when she was served with John's ADVO application and sought assistance from her SHLV caseworker, who referred Julie to the Hunter CLC.

John's application claimed that when Julie was delivering pamphlets, she would drive past the family home and stick her middle finger up to him. One day he claimed he was sitting out the front of the house when Julie stopped the car and threw a heavy roll of pamphlets which hit him on the head.

We talked with Julie and discovered her to be a timid person and that for numerous reasons John's claim about her throwing the catalogues is bordering on being factually impossible. We assisted Julie in compiling a statement and filing evidence as her legal representative.

The legal issue: It is disturbing when perpetrators of domestic violence use court processes to continue to intimidate their victims. At the initial mention of this matter at the Local Court, we indicated we would be seeking costs against John if we were successful at hearing.

Hunter CLC were in regular communication with John's legal representative, reminding him of our intention to seek a cost order against his client if we successfully defended the application. As the hearing date approached, the application was withdrawn, and Julie did not have to attend court or face her former partner, the perpetrator.

Julie now resides in comfortable subsidised housing (in a different area) and has engaged in a training course to assist children who have been the victims of domestic violence and abuse. She says she has never felt so secure and supported in the community and has a positive outlook for her own future. She expressed her gratitude to the various support services who had assisted her in breaking away from an abusive relationship. She was extremely grateful to HCLC for providing her with legal guidance and representation in relation to her court matter.

\*Names and other details have been changed.

## Case Study- AVO Duty, Disability and Access to Justice.

Courts continue to be a place many, especially those with any cognitive or learning disabilities, find nearly impossible to navigate.

Molly\* was a tenant in social housing who had been bullied and threatened by one of her neighbours. She was referred to us by a women's support organisation for assistance in lodging an application for an APVO against her neighbour. Molly had evidence of specific threats and was seriously worried about her safety.

We assisted Molly with the application and at the first court mention, we were told that the APVO application had not been served on the neighbour yet. We explained to Molly what this meant and advised her that we were hopeful that the Police could soon effect service, and that she should approach Hunter CLC's duty solicitor on the next court date.

Legal issue: Like many of Hunter CLC's clients, Molly is on a disability support pension and has difficulty understanding the court process. Hunter CLC frequently spends advice time on providing simple, plain English explanations to clients about complicated court matters. The courts continue to be a place many, especially those with any cognitive or learning disabilities, find nearly impossible to navigate.

When the next date came around, Molly did not appear, and at mention we were told that the neighbour had still not been served. We had no alternative but to request a further adjournment and called the Police to try and ascertain the status of the service. We spoke to Molly and she told us that she knew the neighbour was avoiding service. She said she had seen the Police knocking at the neighbour's door, but they didn't answer even though she knew they were home. We represented Molly at court on the next occasion and were once again informed there had been no service. We then made an oral application for substituted service to have the APVO application served by post as there was evidence that the neighbour was living at the property. The Magistrate gave directions for substituted service, and we arranged to have the APVO application served by Registered Post. This allowed the application to be deemed served once confirmation of delivery was received from Australia Post.

At the next court date, we presented the court with documentation from Australia Post demonstrating the application had been delivered to the address and the court accepted service was effected. The neighbour had not presented himself to court, so we asked for the AVO to be finalised in their absence. This was done and Molly was relieved she now had some protection and could call the Police if there were further problems.

In this case, Molly's application would have just kept being adjourned again and again for service as the neighbour would just continue to avoid service simply by not answering the door when the Police knocked. Our knowledge of the legislation allowed us to advise Molly on alternatives that she never would have known or been made aware of. We were then able to expedite the whole process and successfully obtain an APVO for her.

\*Names and other details have been changed.



## Case Study- Police Initiated AVO's, a Blunt Instrument.

It is often the case that AVOs are taken out by the Police as a response to an incident of intimate partner domestic violence with little consultation with the protected person. This sometimes leads to unfortunate unintended consequences.

Jemma\* was a protected person referred to us by the Aboriginal Legal Service. Jemma's partner was in prison for domestic violence offences, and she was protected by an AVO taken out by Police which prevented any contact between them.

Prior to the charges and the AVO, Jemma was pregnant with her partner's child. Sadly, Jemma went into an early labour and the premature baby did not survive long after birth.

Both Jemma and her partner identify as Aboriginal, for whom the grieving process is culturally significant. While the news of the tragedy had been communicated to her partner in prison, the conditions of the AVO meant Jemma and her partner could not meet and grieve over their loss or plan the funeral. There was even a question mark over whether the partner obtaining day release to attend the funeral would represent a breach of the AVO.

Legal issue: Often Protected Persons in AVOs struggle with the conditions of the AVO. The AVO is taken out by Police, usually with very limited discussion with the Protected Person, and the conditions are decided by the Police. The Police do not take look at the circumstances overall and often the conditions are neither appropriate nor the type of protection the Protected Person wants. When a Protected Person discovers the AVO does not meet their needs, either for more or less protection, Police usually are unwilling to make applications for changes. Protected Persons try to make an application on their own, which is difficult and often unsuccessful because Police oppose any changes.

Jemma sought our advice in varying the conditions of the AVO to allow the partner to attend the funeral and for them to have some contact for the purposes of grieving together. We advised Jemma that her partner would need to apply himself for bereavement leave to Corrective Services. While was not something we could help with, we could assist her in making an application to vary the AVO.

We took Jemma's instructions over the telephone and drafted an Application to Vary the AVO which we emailed to the court where the AVO had been taken out. We requested that the court expedite processing of the application due the circumstances and sought for it to be listed on the next AVO day in a week's time. We also contacted the Police Domestic Violence Liaison Officer for the area to see if we could reach agreement before the court date, but they indicated they would oppose the request.

(continued Page 25)

Armed with this knowledge, we prepared submissions for the Magistrate on Jemma's behalf. Police opposed the AVO in court but given the urgency of the situation, we asked the Magistrate to decide the variation on the day as a hearing date would not be available until well into next year.

The Magistrate wanted to know why there was a need for telephone contact rather than just a variation for the partner to attend the funeral. We explained the need for the partner to participate in the funeral planning and the cultural factors in relation to their grieving.

The Magistrate accepted our submissions and varied the AVO to allow the partner to attend and have contact with Jemma during the funeral. He also varied the AVO to allow telephone contact while he remained in prison to allow for the grieving and funeral planning. The AVO will revert to the original no-contact conditions once he is released.

The Aboriginal Legal Service referred Jemma to us as they are very familiar with Hunter CLC's AVO service and there is a very good working relationship between us. ALS also knows that we always try to assist Aboriginal clients in a safe manner with culturally informed practice.

Jemma would not have been able to draft the Application to Vary the AVO herself given the complex circumstances and the specific variations that were being requested. Hunter CLC was also able to communicate with the court to have the application expedited and listed for the next possible list day.

Hunter CLC listens to clients' instructions and is able to look at all the circumstances of the matter. This allows us to provide non-judgmental advice that is not patronising to the Protected Person. We keep the Protected Person's safety as the priority in the matter and advise on what can be done that will suit all parties.

Names and other details have been changed.



Pictured above, the Old Newcastle Courthouse.

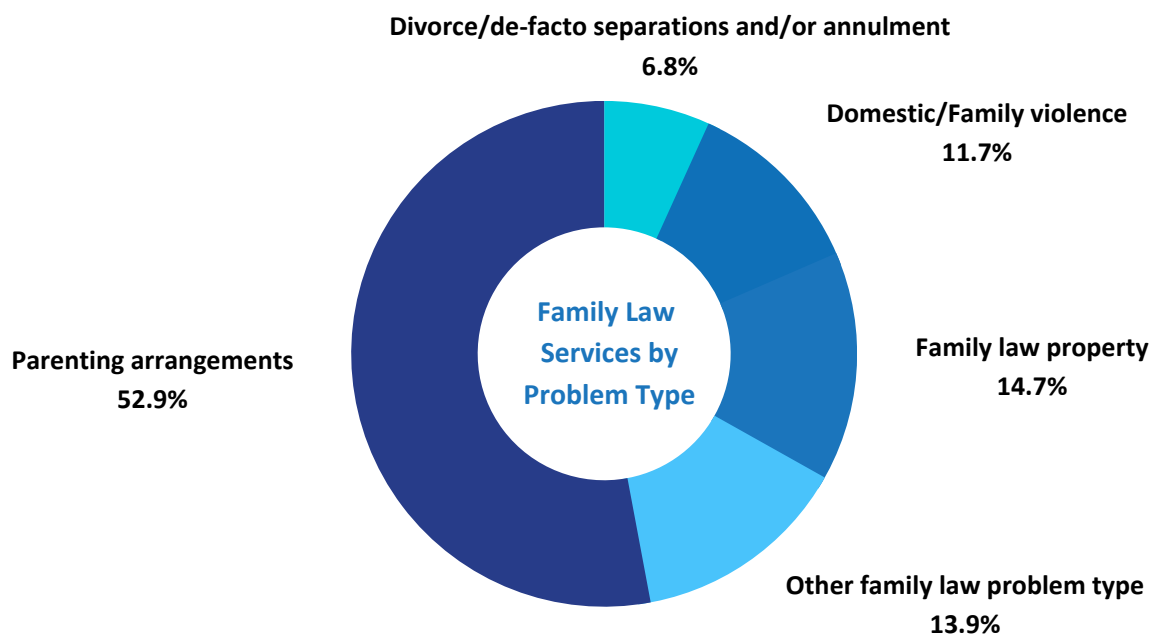
## Family Law Report

The Family Law Program offers free legal advice and assistance to people in the Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Hunter Valley, and surrounding regions who cannot afford a private lawyer or who are ineligible for a grant of Legal Aid. Our service is predominantly telephone based, but in some cases we can offer ongoing assistance, subject to our policy guidelines. We also appear as a duty solicitor for people who have a matter in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia at Newcastle.

We have had a long-standing partnership with the Family Relationship Centre at Newcastle and recently entered into a partnership with Uniting, both of which are going very well. Through these partnerships we can offer legal advice to parents going through the dispute resolution process. We are also able to attend legally assisted mediations where it is considered appropriate to do so. By doing this we can offer legal support and advice to clients who may not otherwise have been able to mediate because it would be deemed unsuitable or inappropriate. The Family Law team has had another busy year assisting members of our community who needed legal advice and assistance with their family law, parenting, property, or divorce matters. The majority of our clients are at risk or traumatised due to family violence and are financially and socially disadvantaged.

From 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023, we assisted 618 clients with 1,255 family law matters and referrals. Our assistance ranged from giving them telephone advice to ongoing assistance for clients that met our policy guidelines, including negotiations with the other party, drafting court documents, appearances at mediation and assistance on a duty basis in court matters. While telephone advice was our primary means of assistance, we also assisted on face-to-face basis and via electronic means for mediations and court appearances.

We look forward to assisting our clients on an ongoing basis now and in the future.



## Case Study- Family Law Property, Separating Lives.

When George\* and Lydia\* decided to end their 25-year relationship, like most couples they wanted to separate their lives as soon as possible. However, this can be complicated when property is involved, as resolving this issue can be hard at an already emotionally charged time. In George and Lydia's case, Lydia had taken an ADVO out against George as the relationship broke down which had resulted in him moving out of the family home into temporary accommodation. After speaking to George, it became apparent he needed assistance from the legal centre as he had modest financial resources, limited access to technology and didn't know how to resolve the situation.

While the value of George and Lydia's house was modest, achieving a property settlement was complicated by a loan from Lydia's parents which had assisted the couple to purchase the house in the first place.

The legal issue: many people are under the impression a court will split property assets 50:50 between the parties. This is not the case. Instead, the court uses a lengthier process that takes in such things as the financial and non-financial contributions made during the relationship and each party's future needs in order to decide on a fair and equitable division of property.

Lydia had been successful in obtaining Legal Aid funding for Family Dispute Resolution. Compared with going to court, mediation is a faster, cheaper and generally more satisfactory means of coming to a property settlement. We agreed to assist George to navigate this process. We wrote to Lydia requesting full and frank financial disclosure which she provided. With our assistance, George did the same. The financial disclosure was exchanged, and the parties attended a mediation in May 2022. Unfortunately, the first mediation was not successful. Instead the parties agreed to obtain a jointly instructed single expert valuation on the family home.

With the independent valuation to hand, the parties attended a second Legal Aid mediation in February 2023 where agreement was reached. The agreed total net property split was 60% in favour of Lydia and 40% to George. This split took into consideration Lydia's future financial needs as she is the parent that the children live with. The agreed property adjustment also enabled Lydia to retain the family home.

The legal centre assisted George in drafting the terms of settlement which have since been filed with the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia.

George is thankful for our assistance and pleased that their property matter is close to resolution, and they can both move forward with their lives.

\*Names and other details have been changed.



Pictured far left, a Family at Newcastle Beach, left Newcastle Family Court.



# Community Legal Education Report

Community Legal Education (CLE) is an outreach service provided by Hunter CLC to raise community awareness of key legal issues such as wills, family law, birth certificates and tenancy issues, particularly issues facing at-risk groups.

CLE outreach is provided in conjunction with community partners and pro-bono legal services provided by other law firms and facilitated by a team of Hunter CLC members including the Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Hunter CLC solicitors, and University of Newcastle law students. These well-attended events fulfill a community need evidenced by past participation and the continued request from community partners for future events.

The key areas of law that our CLE services have focused on include:

- Wills
- Tenancy issues
- Senior's law
- Housing and homelessness
- Youth law
- Family law, including marriage, separation, and parenting.
- First Nations issues
- Carer law
- Employment law and rights at work.
- Family and domestic violence law and access to Apprehended Violence Orders.
- Problems with Government departments and the legal system.
- Criminal law, including traffic law.

Key client groups that have accessed CLE include:

- Youth law for clients under 25
- Clients with a disability
- First Nations clients.
- Seniors
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) clients extending from recent arrivals to permanent citizens
- Economically vulnerable clients



Pictured left, Shanayah Slade-Potts (Standing Centre) Hunter CLC's ALO attends the 2023 Big Yarn Up at the CLCA Conference.

The types of CLE events that Hunter CLC host include operating a booth at community legal days, organising and providing presentations on key legal issues, and providing support to community partners providing pro-bono legal services. CLE services are also provided to the staff of community groups when it is relevant to their area of expertise.

The successful CLE services provided by Hunter CLC including joint Wills Days with Gilbert & Tobin Lawyers and three events with Transcare on legal issues facing Seniors.

Hunter CLC also delivered a presentation on Australian marriage law to over 60 members of the Arabic and Afghan community at the Settlement Services International Office in Hamilton. The event consisted of a plain-English presentation by a family law solicitor on marriage and separation in Australia supported by community interpreters of Arabic and Dari. The presentation was followed by a large number of questions from the participants including things such as the legality of international marriages.

To facilitate easier access to community legal education for our community partners Hunter CLC has created a form that can be completed by the group requesting the event which helps tailor the presentation to the specific needs of the group.

This form has been accessed multiple times by our community partners to organise future events. Three events have already been planned for the near future due to implementing the form.

Through these events, Hunter Community Legal Centre has stronger connections with important community organizations.

## Aboriginal Liaison Officer's Report

The First Nations community continues to be one of the most vulnerable groups in Australia according to the Australian Human Rights Commission. Through the implementation of community legal education and provision of free legal advice, Hunter CLC works to help address the needs of the First Nations community.

Hunter CLC's Aboriginal Liaison Officer Shanayah Slade-Potts has built strong community connections with the First Nations community and organises community legal education seminars on relevant areas of law.

Shanayah works as an advocate for First Nations clients throughout the entire legal process. She works at the courts and at community events where she builds rapport with First Nations clients and guides them as needed to our service. Shanayah also provides referrals to First Nation clients as needed to external service providers. Further Shanayah continues to advocate for First Nations clients throughout the entire legal process with the Hunter Community Legal Centre solicitors.

During 2022-23:

- 337 First Nations Clients accessed Hunter Community Legal Centre, up 18% from 2021-2022.
- Hunter CLC assisted First Nations clients with 387 matters and referrals, up 11% from 2021-2022.

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As the First Nations community is especially vulnerable with regards to issues with the law, the Hunter Community Legal Centre has run a number of legal education events particularly targeted towards issues faced by the First Nations community. These events were well attended and proof of the strong connections between Hunter Community Legal Centre and the Wanaruah Land Council and Wahrenoonga Aboriginal Corporation.

Some of the largest events were the free Wills Day events that were organised in conjunction with Gilbert & Tobin Lawyers, Wahrenoonga Aboriginal Corporation in Raymond Terrace and Wanaruah Aboriginal Land Council at Muswellbrook.

Hunter CLC also attended three events during NAIDOC week primarily centered around legal education for the First Nations community. At these events we had a Hunter CLC weaving station for community, kids and staff to get involved and create amazing artwork together. Hunter CLC is currently planning new events for the First Nations community, including another Wills Workshop in conjunction with Gilbert & Tobin in early 2024.

#### Community Connections

Events and outreach facilitated by Hunter CLC and the centre's Aboriginal Liaison Officer, have allowed us to foster and strengthen strong connections with key First Nations stakeholders including Wahrenoonga Aboriginal Corporation and Wanaruah Aboriginal Land Council.

These events and outreach have ensured that Hunter CLC has fostered a good reputation with the elders of the First Nations groups, which is crucial to maintaining our future connection with these groups.

Hunter CLC has made it a priority to foster culturally appropriate communication with the First Nations community and regularly updates its Reconciliation Action Plan.

To ensure all staff are trained in a culturally competent way an atmosphere of learning is fostered within Hunter CLC, with staff able to raise any First Nations communication questions with the Aboriginal Liaison Officer. Further there is a current plan in place to help Hunter CLC staff to access cultural competency training for First Nations people.

Another way that the Hunter Community Legal Centre is helping to implement culturally competent communication is by the design and implementation of free legal health checks. These checks utilise pictures and clear concise statements which help First Nations clients to scan for any other legal issues they may be facing from fines to problems with Centrelink, debt related matters etc. These documents are easy to access for clients and help to foster clear communication between Hunter CLC staff and clients.



Above, First Nations Community Members Participating in Uniting's Mental Health Day.

## First Nations Wills Work Shop

Hunter CLC in conjunction with the Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council and the Wahrenoong Aboriginal Corporation facilitated Wills Day workshops for First Nations people at Muswellbrook and Raymond Terrace during May 2023.

This service was provided with the support of Gilbert & Tobin Lawyers who supplied pro bono legal services to advise and draft the wills for the First Nations people who attended. At the beginning of each workshop the solicitors ran a presentation on the importance of wills, powers of attorney and enduring guardian documents and what these documents entail to help ensure the people accessing these services understood the impact of executing these documents.

Hunter CLC's Aboriginal Liaison Officer Shanayah Slade-Potts along with University of Newcastle law student volunteers helped organise the workshops and ensured they ran smoothly by confirming attendance and overseeing effective time management.

Importantly, Hunter CLC strengthened connections with the First Nations community on the days by offering legal health checks to attendees to determine if there were any other legal issues they were facing. Hunter CLC was then able to provide referrals to other services, including doctors and debt counselling services as needed, or provide referrals to Hunter CLC legal teams for any general or family law advice.

As a result of these consultations connections between First Nations Elders and the Hunter Community Legal Centre were strengthened and knowledge of our services through referrals was enabled.

The high attendance on the days indicated there is a strong need in the First Nations community for these events. Also evident, is the need for the information about the importance of these types of documents and what they entail as attendees indicated they either did not know about them or did not understand what each document was.

Finally, the workshops allowed misconceptions about the lack of need for a will when an estate was small to be corrected, particularly the significance of being able to articulate in these documents any wishes after death as well as their role in helping prevent family discord with regard to assets



Left, Shanayah Slade-Potts works on a community art project that community members contributed to at Hunter CLC's 2023 Naidoc events



## Youth Law Report

Hunter CLC's Youth Law Service (HYLS) provides a youth lawyer at Broadmeadow Children's Court (BCC) Hub on Mondays before court commences. The service provides civil legal services to young people attending court by providing legal health checks and assistance with civil matters. Since attending the Broadmeadow Hub, the HYLS has received an increase in referrals from other service providers, with legal issues for young clients ranging from visa issues, fines, birth certificates and identification, to Centrelink issues. The BCC Hub is a great resource for HYLS to network with other service providers and raise concerns and issues with respect to youth law. The HYLS also attends outreach and community events to connect with other community groups and promote the services of the Hunter CLC. Events this year included the You're Kidding Me Day at Charlestown Shopping Centre and a Law Society CPD event at Souths Leagues Club. HYLS also attended the Community Connect event at Tomaree and the NAIDOC Week Community Fun Day Riverside Park event in Raymond Terrace during June. This was a great opportunity to network with service providers in the region. At the Riverside Park event, HYLS worked in conjunction with Legal Aid to promote a free service for youth clients to obtain a copy of their birth certificates (See Case Study). HYLS is currently implementing an outreach service in the Maitland area, which utilises the assistance of a telepresence robot named MARLA (Mobile, Accessible Remote Legal Assistant) to provide a legal service for young people in the area. MARLA will allow young people to connect with the Youth Law Solicitor remotely from Maitland and receive free youth law assistance.



Above left, a young worker in Newcastle, Right Kate Louhgnan Hunter CLC's Solicitor from the Hunter Youth Law Service.

## Case Study-Youth Law, Late Birth Registration.

Hunter CLC's client was a young person aged 16 years old. The young person wanted to apply for a job but needed a tax file number. To get a tax file number, the youth client needed a birth certificate. Youth Justice sent a request to Births, Deaths and Marriages in December 2022 for a copy of the young person's birth certificate but was advised that the young person had not been registered at birth. Consequently, the young person was unable to proceed with the process of applying for a tax file number and the job.

In February 2023, Youth Justice referred the client to Hunter CLC to assist with the registration application as the process was becoming difficult to navigate. Once the necessary application was sourced, we sent it to the young person's birth mother to be filled out. The mother returned the form to Hunter CLC, but it was missing the three requisite forms of identification from each parent listed on the registration form. We corresponded back and forward with the birth mother and the identifying documents were received by Hunter CLC at the end of June 2023 and the completed application has been sent to Births, Deaths, and Marriages to be processed. It has now been six months since the commencement of the process, and the young person is still not able to apply for a job.

**Legal Issue:** A birth certificate is a basic human right. A young person without a birth certificate is prevented from accessing important aspects of society such as education, employment, financial assistance, licenses, and healthcare. Additionally, the inability to access such services can result in offending amongst young people and lead to a lower quality of life.

### Barriers

The NSW Government requires that all births must be registered within 60 days. If this does not occur the birth is considered a "late registration". The Births, Deaths, and Marriages website states that: "Only the parents of the child can register the birth". Parents must supply three forms of identification and the young person must also supply forms of identification. The website is very difficult to navigate and locating where to lodge late registrations is also problematic. Once you find the tab, which is located at the bottom of the webpage, you are advised on what identification must be provided for the child. You are not directed where to lodge the late registration.

The process of attaining a birth certificate is very difficult for a young person. Especially if the young person is estranged or not in contact with their birth parents. This can be the case with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who often live with grandparents or other relatives and are not in contact with their birth parents.

Strict guidelines and legislation apply for the registering of births and the issuing of birth certificates. While this is understandable, there is a huge gap in the process where some of the most at-risk young people in our communities are not able to obtain the basic human right of having a birth certificate.

# Employment Law Report

The Hunter CLC works with a number of employment and industrial law specialists who have provided pro-bono assistance during the year for a significant number of clients with employment law issues, including unfair dismissal, breach of general employment protections such as discrimination, redundancy, parental leave entitlements, enterprise agreements and post-employment restraint provisions.

One of our partner firms, Clayton Utz, has also provided ongoing pro-bono representation to three clients referred from the Employment Law Program. Two of these cases settled following conciliation in the Fair Work Commission, and in the third case we persuaded an employer not to pursue our client for a debt arising from an unfair contractual term.

The Employment Law Program provides an essential service to people in the Hunter who would otherwise be unable to access specialist employment law advice. Most clients advised through the Program lacked awareness of their most basic employment rights and were incredibly grateful for the advice that Hunter CLC's pro-bono lawyers offered.

Wage theft continues to be a significant issue facing workers, whether it involves not being paid the correct wages or not receiving full entitlements at the termination of employment. In addition to the financial hardship which wage theft causes, there can be significant adverse consequences on a client's mental health and personal relationships.

Another common feature is the inability on the part of clients to afford legal representation to allow litigation to commence after we give the advice. This is caused by various factors, including low union membership and the limited funding for free representation past the advice stage. The lack of legal representation is particularly daunting for court claims – underpayment of wages and general protections. Almost all clients we have helped have been genuinely disadvantaged people with a strong claim.

Our partner firms Clayton Utz, Hall Payne and Spark Helman report that their lawyers have been rewarded immensely by their involvement in the pro-bono program and look forward to assisting more clients in the year ahead.

## Special thanks to:

Hai-Van Nguyen, Senior Associate, Clayton Utz  
Joseph Kennedy, Director and Principal Accredited  
Specialist Employment & Industrial Law, Hall Payne  
Lawyers

Seamus Burke, Partner Workplace, Sparke  
Helmore Lawyers



Left, a worker in Newcastle takes a break

## Domestic and Family Violence Program

The Domestic and Family Violence program has been active since March 2023. During this time, Hunter CLC has hired an additional solicitor who is working between our Generalist and Family Law teams, and currently attends Newcastle Local Court as an AVO duty solicitor each Tuesday. The program is unique in its scope and the ability to provide legal services to defendants of ADVO matters on a duty basis. This fills a gap in free legal services for family and domestic violence matters.

The Family Law aspect of the role allows for advice on Family Law and ADVO/domestic violence related matters to be given by the same solicitor, providing a more trauma informed, holistic service.

We continue to see an increase in domestic violence issues coming through with Family Law matters and this service is supportive of this need.

## First Nations Cadetship Program

Hunter CLC was pleased to host, Tonyka Jamieson, as part of CLC NSW's First Nations Cadetship program in FY 22-23. The program was made possible with funding from the NSW Attorney General. Participating in the program was a rewarding experience and we wish Tonyka all the best in what we are sure will be a stellar legal career. Hunter CLC was excited to hear the Attorney General's March 2022 announcement regarding ongoing funding for the program and hopes we will again be lucky to be chosen by a future Cadet.



Pictured above left, former Attorney General Mark Speakman (right) with Hunter CLC cadet Tonyka Jamieson, (centre) and Seniors Rights Service Cadet Oliver John Williams. Above right (from left) HCLC Cadet Tonyka Jamieson, HCLC Solicitor Michael Giles, and HCLC Volunteers Louy Bonnay and Joanne Burr attend their admissions ceremony.



## Volunteer's Reflections

Let me first begin by saying how disappointed I am that my secondment has come to an end. My time spent with Hunter CLC over the last few weeks has not only been an incredibly valuable learning experience, but I was able to gain experience as a junior solicitor in a role I feel I might not have had for some time.

By being able to deal directly with clients and do my own research to come up with my own solutions to client's legal enquiries significantly increased my confidence and also my legal literacy. I also have learned things which will help me, my friends and family in day-to-day life! All of the staff were incredibly friendly, helpful, knowledgeable, and patient. However, I must make a special mention of Michael. If I can have half of the knowledge and skills he has as a solicitor one day, I will feel incredibly accomplished! Michael helped to build my experience and confidence in this role and made my time not only valuable, but fun and enjoyable as well. I really commend what Hunter CLC is doing for the community - and passing on the feedback from the clients I dealt with, they feel incredibly lucky to have a service to help them when they are in need. It was great to be a part of that service.

Thank you again for your time and giving us the experience of assisting with the legal reform paper. I hope it is of some help to you.

Thanks again for such a great experience.

### Jessica Enright

My secondment at Hunter CLC was a very informative and impactful learning experience. I really appreciate the training and guidance provided by my supervising solicitors. I worked primarily on Victims Services matters and a law reform project on incorporating coercive control into Victims Services legislation.

The combination of practical advice work and legal research provided a holistic learning experience and allowed me to think critically about the legal framework underpinning the matters I was working on. I was also able to sit in on a couple of advice sessions which provided useful insights on how to navigate difficult conversations and create a safe space for victims of trauma to retell their stories.

My supervising solicitor also made sure that we looked after ourselves and took breaks as needed. The overall experience was overwhelmingly positive. I would love to volunteer again if an opportunity arises.

### Nora Truong



## Photo Credits

All Photos included in this report were taken by Hunter CLC Staff. & Volunteers.

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