

WEstjustice

Systemic Impact Report

July – December 2023



WEstjustice

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WEstjustice provides free legal help to people in the Western suburbs of Melbourne. We can help with a broad range of everyday problems. Please call (03) 9749 7720 to find out more about our services or to make an appointment.

WEstjustice

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Program: Policy and Innovation
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WEstjustice acknowledges the Peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters of our region. We acknowledge the Kulin Peoples' ongoing connection to Country, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present. As we work to achieve a just and fair society, we acknowledge the fundamental role of First Peoples in the life of this region, as Custodians of the world's oldest living Culture.

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Westjustice Vision

Westjustice believes in a just and fair society where the law and its processes don't discriminate against people, and where those in need have ready and easy access to legal education, information, advice, casework services, systemic advocacy and reform.

Westjustice Mission

To service the legal needs in the West in a way that addresses the systemic nature of disadvantage.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

In the Westjustice Strategic Plan 2020-2023 Westjustice committed to reporting regularly on our Systemic Impact work. This is the **seventh** of these reports, and the final of our 2020-23 Strategy. The first, second, third, [fourth](#), [fifth](#) and [sixth](#) reports are also available.

In 2020-2023, we committed to focusing on the following priority client groups, which are our four impact areas:

- People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities,
- People experiencing family violence or gender-based violence,
- Young people,
- People experiencing economic injustice.

A full explanation of these impact areas is set out in our Impact Areas 2020-2023. Under each area, we have set out the priorities we will focus on.

This report addresses the systemic impact work we have undertaken in line with each of those priorities for the July to December 2023 period. Throughout these six months, staff continued to deliver strong legal and policy outcomes for the West, including delivering legal education to the broader community and commencing new legal clinics, campaigns and partnerships.



ORGANISATION-WIDE DEVELOPMENTS

We have had a strong year in terms of organisational growth, advocacy and high-quality service provision to our clients. Outlined below are the whole-of-organisation highlights for the July – December 2023 period, followed by our systemic impact work by impact area.

- In late July, the Attorney-General, The Hon. Mark Dreyfus KC, MP launched our Settlement Justice Partnership Report, [Don't Settle For Less](#). The launch was a huge success with a large turnout of colleagues, local service providers, and community members. The report also gained media attention, highlighting the barriers newly arrived communities often face and the benefits of place-based, integrated services in helping clients overcome these barriers.



Westjustice and MiCare staff with the Attorney General and Joanne Ryan MP at the SJP launch

- We continued our advocacy to ensure Court users at the new Wyndham Courts can access sustainable justice and life outcomes through proper service provision. With the generous support of the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust and the Paul Ramsay Foundation, we are working with Ernst and Young to develop a business case for better servicing these Courts and have brought in a new Community Development and Engagement Program Manager to consult key community and lived experience groups on the services they need and the environment in which they would like to access them.
- We continued to work on our Reconciliation Action Plan, which we're hoping to officially launch in the next couple of months. We also participated in the YES campaign for a First Nations Voice to Parliament and were thoroughly disappointed with the result, however, we will continue to advocate for self-determination and rights with and for First Nations people.

- We submitted our state budget bid. Due to the fiscal financial environment, we have focused our bid on lapsing funding and have worked to ensure we can show the life outcomes we help clients achieved and the avoided costs to government in doing so. We commenced a series of government engagement meetings with relevant ministers, local MPs, and departments.



Melissa Hardham and Caitlin Caruana with Member for Kororoit, Luba Grigorovitch

- We launched our 2023 Annual Report at our Annual General Meeting, in our new Sunshine office space, which will we move into in mid-2024.
- We have officially wrapped up our first organisation-wide Strategy and are now working with Social Ventures Australia to develop the next Strategy 2024-27 and our new Impact Areas.
- In a speech to Parliament, federal MP Daniel Mulino thanked Westjustice for our work in his seat of Fraser and in the West more broadly. His LinkedIn post also shared a link to a [Westsider article](#) about mortgage Stress Victoria and our services. You can find a transcript of his speech on pg. 7351 of [Hansard](#).





**IMPACT AREA 1: CULTURALLY &
LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES**

IMPACT AREA 1: CULTURALLY & LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

Statement:

We recognise that culturally and linguistically diverse people experience disadvantage as a result of exclusion and racism.

Aim:

Our aim is to assist and empower these communities to identify and enforce their legal rights and understand their responsibilities through case work, community development and education.

Our case work and educational programs inform our reform agenda and systemic impact work.

Key Priorities:

1. Address adverse impact caused by implied and express racism

- Our Employment and Equality Law Program (EELP) is focusing on developing partnerships with community organisations that work with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. They have designed and delivered legal education to these communities and streamlined referral pathways so that those in the community who experience workplace racism can receive legal advice and pursue legal claims with our assistance.
- The EELP met with policy and research staff from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to provide information about our clients' experiences of racism, as part of consultation for the Commission's next statutory guideline on workplace racism.
- The EELP also worked on putting together an article to address key issues in the workplace relating to racism. The article will be published in early 2024 and will form the foundations of our campaign to prevent racism in workplaces.

2. Correct the systems causing financial exclusion and disadvantage for newly arrived people

- The Economic Justice Program (EJP) released the Don't Settle for Less Report, which included recommendations on removing barriers to access justice or newly arrived people based on our experience in the Settlement Justice Program. Following the release of the report, the EJP Director, Joe Nunweek, and Program Manager, Tess Matthews, spoke with [3CR](#), and Tess and our program partner, Poly Kiyaga, spoke with [ABC Melbourne's Conversation Hour](#).

3. Identify and address labour exploitation and unsafe workplace practices

- The EELP received a Knowledge Grant from the Victorian Law Foundation to research legal capability in relation to discrimination and sexual harassment law in migrant communities in the Western suburbs. This work will commence in 2024.
- Our CEO Melissa Hardham is a member of the Victorian Government's Sick Pay Guarantee (SPG) Ministerial Advisory Committee, and both she and EELP Director, Jennifer Jones, attended meetings in this reporting period to provide input and advice about migrant worker communities' access to the SPG program and challenges they face. This work led to the Victorian Government releasing a limited grant program to improve access and uptake of the program among CALD communities in the West (amongst other priority cohorts and locations).
- The EELP played a key role in recent amendments to federal anti-discrimination laws to provide enhanced protection for victim/survivors of workplace sexual harassment. We collaborated with other CLCs, academics, and organisations as part of the "Power2Prevent Coalition", which resulted in improving access to justice for victim/survivors of workplace sexual harassment to pursue claims under federal anti-discrimination laws.
- The EELP continues to work closely with the Migrant Justice Institute and the Human Rights Law Centre on proposed migration law reforms to protect migrant workers from visa cancellation and allow them to stay in the country to pursue their workplace claims.

- The EELP's advocacy efforts contributed to crucial reforms introduced by the Federal Government in late 2023 to address the challenges faced by casual workers locked in cycles of insecure work. The reform now legislates a clear, fair and objective way for casual workers to transition to permanent positions, affording them increased access to leave entitlements and greater financial security.
- The EELP Legal Director, Jennifer Jones, was invited to speak to the Victorian Branch of the Economics Society of Australia (ESA) on common issues our clients face with workplace law. The presentation was part of the ESA's "Policy in the Pub" series and also featured the Grattan Institute on issues relating to the gender pay gap and exploitation of migrant workers (pictured right).
- The EELP Legal Director was also interviewed by researchers from Monash University as part of an ANROWS [research project](#) on Migrant and Refugee Women's Attitudes, Experiences and Responses to Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.



Legal Director Jennifer Jones presenting to Policy in the Pub

4. Provide a culturally safe and accessible service for our client groups

- The Family Violence and Family Law (FVFL) Program have commenced planning of a targeted community education program to reach more CALD community members including engagement with key cultural groups and family support services who support CALD families.





**IMPACT AREA 2: PEOPLE EXPERIENCING
FAMILY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

IMPACT AREA 2: PEOPLE EXPERIENCING FAMILY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Statement:

We recognise that family and gender-based violence are serious community concerns that disproportionately affect women, gender diverse people and children.

Aim:

Our aim is to enable and assist these groups to respond strongly to family and gender-based violence and its effects. This includes providing targeted legal services, addressing injustice in systems and institutions, and engaging in evidence based systemic advocacy.

Key Priorities:

1. Advocate for a justice system that meets the needs of people experiencing family and gender-based violence

- In May 2023, the EELP team submitted a proposal to the Federal Government's Department of Employment and Workplace Relations as part of the consultation on updating the Fair Work Act to protect victim/survivors of family violence. Our submission advocated for stronger protections for workers against family violence discrimination, which resulted in the Federal Government elevating family and domestic violence to the status of a "protected attribute" under the Fair Work Act.
- The EJP contributed to an [article in Choice](#) about the need for essential service providers to improve their privacy and family violence policies to ensure they stop putting family violence victim-survivors in danger.



The Westjustice team with the Hon Ros Spence MP and Sarah Connolly MP

- CEO Melissa Hardham and Family Violence and Family Law (FVFL) Legal Director, Cleona Feuerring, met with the then Minister for Family Violence, the Hon. Ros Spence MP and Sarah Connolly MP to discuss the role of legal assistance at the Specialist Family Violence Court (SFVC) in Sunshine (pictured right).
- The FVFL Program led a project in the SFVC jurisdiction to improve pre-court engagement with Police, Victoria Legal Aid and Brimbank Melton Community Legal Services to resolve family violence intervention orders early and in a trauma informed way. FVFL Program Manager Kirstyn Campbell led a working group to analyse the barriers to early resolution of matters to better meet the needs of court participants the safety of our clients and improve efficiencies for the Court.
- As part of the Justice at Home Research Advisory Group, the FVFL Program facilitated affected family members (AFMs) from Melbourne's West to provide their experiences and perspectives on appearing remotely in SFVC. Our lawyers also shared our perspectives with the lead researcher from Northern CLC on the remote hearing practices from a professional Court user perspective.
- The FVFL Program has improved its systems and processes for team engagement in key family violence community stakeholder events and groups to ensure we have a representative present at key engagements. This ensures we can be targeted in our contributions and follow up with respect to broadening our impact in improving outcomes, systems and access for victim survivors.

- Led by our FVFL program, Westjustice staff participated in the Walk Against Family Violence. We walked in solidarity with family violence victim survivors and called for an end to violence. The event marks the start of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, which we also marked on social media (pictured right and below).



The Westjustice team at the Walk Against Family Violence 2023

2. Address misidentification and criminalisation of victim survivors as perpetrators

- Our new Lead Criminal Law Counsel, Angus Woodward, provides supervision and mentoring on misidentification cases, and a number of diversions and withdrawals have been achieved. To improve our impact in this area, Angus and FVFL Legal Director, Cleona Feuerring, are progressing a Primary Aggressor project in the West. This is a joint project led by Angus and with contributions from team members in the Restoring Financial Safety (RFS) Program and the FVFL team. They have engaged with relevant Victoria Police policy staff to activate the project.

3. Remove economic abuse and restore financial safety and independence for those experiencing family and gender-based violence.

- The FVFL Program continues to deliver financial outcomes for family law clients through our family law property settlement program. They also engaged with the H3 Alliance in Wyndham to improve workers' understanding of family law property settlements, to prevent homelessness and housing instability for mothers and children.
- The FVFL Legal Director, Cleona Feuerring, presented at the Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) Family Law Access Project Panel discussion in November 2023 about the importance of CLCs delivering family law property settlement services to survivors of family violence. The panel also discussed the need for increased Federal funding for CLCs to provide key family law case work services to women and children fleeing abusive relationships.
- In September 2023, our CEO (Melissa Hardham), EJP Legal Director (Joseph Nunweek), EJP Program Manager (Dacia Abela), and FVFL Program Manager (Neshi Sooknandan) met with the Commonwealth Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and with the Victorian Department of Department of Families, Fairness and Housing in relation to securing funding for services to remove economic abuse and restore financial safety and independence for those experiencing family and gender-based violence.
- In December 2023, CEO Melissa Hardham, Policy and Innovation (PI) Director Caitlin Caruana, EJP Legal Director Joseph Nunweek, and FVFL Legal Director Cleona Feuerring met with the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, the Hon Vicki Ward MP and her Chief of Staff to discuss family violence, the RFS Program and the need for increased family support in the West. The Minister was highly engaged and will visit Westjustice and McAuley in early 2024.
- The EJP's Financial Counsellor, Sarah Duane, provided training to the telecommunications Industry hosted by the Telco Together Foundation's Domestic and Family Violence Insights Series. Representatives from the major telecommunications companies were present at this training, which aimed to increase telcos' awareness of how to best support family violence victim-survivors and to provide an opportunity for telcos to ask questions of frontline workers.

- In October 2023, the EJP met with the Orange Door Western Melbourne to promote the Restoring Financial Safety and employment related services. Following this meeting, they scheduled an education session with Orange Door caseworkers to upskill them on referral pathways.
- Westjustice, Good Shepherd and Redfern Legal Centre formed a family violence and economic abuse focus group and met with Commonwealth Treasury in July 2023 to highlight how ineffective the proposed Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) Responsible Lending Obligations would be in preventing harm in the context of abuse. We drafted a paper to Treasury outlining our main concerns and to propose a model which included the risks of identity theft and fraud, coercion to take out unsuitable credit, and inadequate family violence and hardship provisions. We also wrote to the Hon Stephen Jones MP (Minister for Financial Services) and the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP (Minister for Social Services) outlining our concerns.
- Westjustice and Redfern Legal Centre presented to the National Registration and Licencing Taskforce within Austroads to facilitate a national discussion on the intersections of family violence and vehicle registration. We hope to inspire further work on this issue to achieve a greater consistency across states.
- Westjustice continues to lead the work of the Victorian Chapter of the Economic Abuse Reference Group (EARG).

4. Provide early intervention opportunities to circumvent family and gender-based violence and promote positive relationships for education and empowerment.

- We have expanded our Health Justice Partnership: Family Violence Early Intervention Maternity Service (HJP) partnership consisting of Westjustice, Werribee Mercy Hospital and with the new addition of Wyndham Vale Council's Enhanced Maternal Child Health team. This will allow for the continuation of legal and non-legal support to maternity patients once they are discharged from the Mercy Hospital. We also facilitated three workshops with key partner agencies to improve early intervention outcomes for survivors of family violence in the west.

- The FVFL Legal Director Cleona Feuerring, and Program Manager Neshi Sooknandan, attended the two-day Health Justice Australia conference in Melbourne where they attended sessions aimed at early intervention strategies and prevention of family violence.
- The FVFL Program expanded their core family law clinics to include an additional day clinic that serves as a direct referral pathway from McAuley House and The Orange Door. This ensures that clients and families experiencing family violence can be referred to legal advice at their earliest point of contact with a support service, and not after Police, Child Protection, and Courts have become involved at a great cost to families and society.
- Our FVFL Program worked closely with SFVC legal service providers to analyse the early resolution service processes, and advocate for Police to make referrals for victim survivors to get independent legal advice prior to the Court date. This ensures safety measures and therapeutic supports can be in place prior to Court, and clients are empowered to be involved in the Court process.
- As part of Indiacare's Project Maitri, FVFL Program Manager, Kirstyn Campbell, participated in workshops to analyse the unique needs of South Asian communities, which has identified a gap in services for those communities. The next phase will seek to create targeted programs within Indiacare and upskilling organisations to better reach and service those communities.

5. Identify and address causes of family and gender-based violence

- The FVFL team delivered seven Community Legal Education sessions on Family Violence and Family Law to various services including MiCare, CoHealth, Wyndham Community Education Centre, Junubi Workers and Werribee Mercy Hospital.
- The FVFL Program Manager, Neshi Sooknandan, attended Family Law Network meetings and Federation' of Community Legal Centres' Policy and Law Reform Network Meeting.
- In November 2023, FVFL endorsed Women's Legal Services Australia's submission to the Exposure Draft of the Family Law Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2023.



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IMPACT AREA 3: YOUNG PEOPLE

IMPACT AREA 3: YOUNG PEOPLE

Statement:

We recognise that young people (10 to 25 years inclusive) are marginalised and often excluded from the legal system and youth support services.

Aim:

We aim to offer holistic, youth centred, multidisciplinary services as a response to a legal system that is often not appropriately designed for our youth.

We support young people to exercise their agency and legal rights in their family life, community, and society.

Our case work and educational programs provide the evidence for our reform agenda and systemic impact advocacy.

Key Priorities:

1. Divert children and young people away from the criminal justice system, including raising the age

- The Youth law Program (YLP Legal Director, Anoushka Jeronimus, appeared on [ABC Melbourne's Conversation Hour](#) to discuss why increasing Security Guards isn't always the most effective way to increase public safety.
- YLP Legal Director, Anoushka Jeronimus, co-convened the Smart Justice For Young People Coalition, who published their [Action Plan](#) to End the Over-Representation of Particular Groups of Young People in the Criminal Justice System, in October 2023. The Action Plan outlines the path to ending overrepresentation, based on two years of collective work and many years of shared practice experience.
- Our Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Project (YCPEIP) continues to be a success. Phase 2 of the pilot is expanding the caution framework for 18-24-year-olds. The final evaluation report is due in March. We are advocating to state government to expand the program across the state.



The YCPEIP Steering Committee

2. Advocate for a fairer and more equitable system which includes better access to services.

- Then Program Manager of the YLP Angus Woodward appeared on ABC Melbourne and Channel 7 to discuss why early intervention, education and listening to young people are important ways to ensure young people feel safe (pictured below).
- Westjustice CEO, Melissa Hardham, discussed how we can best reach and support young people in contact with the justice system and the importance and benefits of early intervention on [ABC Melbourne's Conversation Hour](#).



Angus Woodward on Channel 7 news

3. Address discrimination, workplace exploitation and inequality affecting children and young people with a focus on the systemic drivers of disproportionate involvement with the justice system

- The Legal Directors of YLP and EELP are members of the Pathways in Place Action Network (PiPAN), a [Victoria University initiative](#) bringing together practitioners, policy makers, researchers and communities in Brimbank to identify and address youth unemployment and related issues.



Vincent Shin receives the Minister's Award for Excellence in Protecting Children from the Minister for Children, the Hon Lizzie Blandthorn

- Youth Law Program Manager, Vincent Shin, won the Minister's Award for Excellence in Protecting Children. The award recognises Vinnie's dedication to young people and his advanced approach to intervention to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people and their families or carers (pictured right).

4. Amplify the voice of children and young people and enhance agency through education and engagement

- We delivered 52 legal education sessions across our programs. The top 3 areas of education were Criminal Law, Bullying/Cyberbullying and Employment Law.

- We engaged an external evaluator from Emma Pritchard Consulting to evaluate the Out of Home Care Legal Clinics project. Through the evaluation period, a number of surveys and interviews were conducted with children who have been assisted through our project. Their voices and feedback will be a valuable feature in the final evaluation report.

5. Collaborate with and influence stakeholders to maximise potential for positive life outcomes for young people

- We continue our partnership with Anglicare Victoria to deliver our outreach legal services in their western metro region residential care homes for children in the child protection system.
- We continue our partnership with The Grange P12 College, Hester Hornbrook Academy, Parkville College and Wyndham Central College to deliver outreach legal services at their schools.
- Youth Law Program Manager, Vincent Shin, was appointed as a member of the Lived Experience Advisory Council to support the work of the *Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission*, to monitor the implementation of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*. The appointment was made by Minister Justine Elliot, the federal assistant minister for Prevention of Family Violence and Social Services. Through this work, we are able to influence the federal government in achieving better life outcomes for children experiencing family violence.



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**IMPACT AREA 4: ECONOMIC
INJUSTICE**

IMPACT AREA 4: ECONOMIC INJUSTICE

Statement:

We recognise that we have an intrinsically inequitable economic and legal system, a consequence of which includes the criminalisation of poverty.

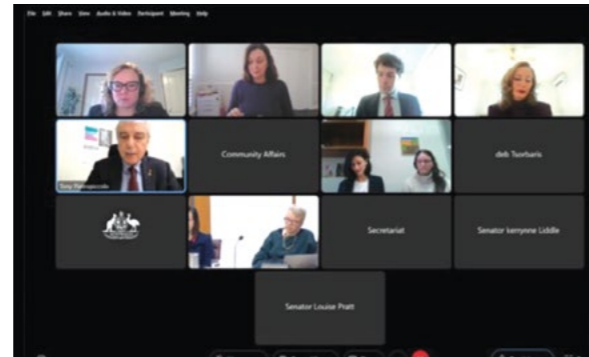
Aim:

Our aim is to assist people to navigate and enforce their rights within the justice system and effect fundamental and necessary improvements. Our case work and educational programs provide the evidence for our reform agenda and systemic impact advocacy.

Key Priorities:

1. Challenge organisations that take advantage of people experiencing hardship or barriers to accessing economic justice
 - In October 2023 =, Westjustice was accepted an invitation to join the National Scams Centre's Communication and Awareness Group as a consultative member. The EJP team attended the first two meetings of that working group and will continue to engage with the Group in 2024.
 - The EJP team used trends in our scams casework arising over the second half of 2023 to inform our submission to Federal Treasury's ongoing Scams – Mandatory Industry Codes consultation.
 - Westjustice provided input arising casework experience to the joint consumer sector submission – 'Make Unfair Illegal' - to the Federal Treasury Consultation Regulatory Impact Statement: Protecting Consumers from Unfair Trade Practices.
2. Improve the systems, policies and procedures of government, industry and other parties which create economic injustice
 - Legal Director of EJP, Joseph Nunweek, spoke with [Choice](#) about how car insurers are failing migrants and refugees.

- Our CEO, Melissa Hardham, Legal Director of EJP Joe Nunweek, and Legal Director of EELP Jennifer Jones gave evidence at the Senate Inquiry into Poverty in Australia. We discussed the cyclical nature of poverty and the need for access to services, affordable housing and adequate support payments (pictured below).



The Westjustice team giving evidence to the Poverty Inquiry

- Our Legal Director of Mortgage Stress Victoria (MSV), Matthew Martin, spoke to [ABC News](#) about what customers in financial hardship should be asking from their lender, and what the lenders should be doing to help their customers in these tough times. Legal Director of EJP, Joseph Nunweek, spoke to ABC Radio Melbourne about the impact of interest rate rises in the West.
- The Legal Director of MSV also spoke to [ABC News](#) to urge local councils to consider deferring and waiving debts for rate payers in financial hardship. We also called on Local Government Victoria to adequately protect ratepayers in its upcoming ministerial guidelines.
- The MSV and EJP teams provided a [submission](#) in response to Australian Financial Complaints Authority's (AFCA)'s proposed Approach to Responsible Lending. We were pleased to see that the new approach document incorporated some of our suggested changes and is a strong guidance document for victim-survivors of economic abuse to rely on when making claims to lenders and AFCA itself.
- He AFCA Ombudsman attended MSV client appointments for a Day In The Life experience to understand what clients' lives and circumstances look like on the ground and give greater general perspective to the Ombudsmen when making determinations.

- Westjustice continues to support the Consumer Action led campaign advocating for an alternative dispute resolution scheme for motor vehicle purchase disputes in Victoria. We regularly participate in both Consumer Action's Victorian campaign, as well as the National Lemon Laws working group. Between July and October 2023, we provided input based on our CAAP casework experience to the Consumer Policy Research Centre in support of its 'Detours and Roadblocks' report ([Detours and Roadblocks - CPRC](#)).
 - Based on our casework experience over the second half of 2023, Westjustice is contributing to a joint submission with Consumer Action to the General Insurance Code Governance Committee re: the Committee's 2024 – 2025 monitoring priorities.
 - MSV attended numerous consumer representative meetings on the Australian Banking Association's Customer Advocate and Consumer Representative Forum, the Insurance Council of Australia's Consumer Advisory Committee, the Australian Financial Complaints Authority's Consumer Advocate Liaison group, Commonwealth Bank's Community Council and Westpac's Customer Council to report on systemic issues in our casework and improve industry practices to address the issues.
 - MSV attended quarterly meetings with six banks to discuss systemic issues in our casework and improve industry practice to address the issues, including advocating for consistent minimum hardship assistance standards.
3. Investigate pathways to promote and protect fundamental human rights including the right to safe housing, access to food and utilities
 - CEO Melissa Hardham, EJP Legal Director Joseph Nunweek, Director of MSV Matthew Martin, and General Manager of MSV Nadia Harrison briefed Labor for Housing (a collective of State Labor MPs interested in housing policy) on our work supporting Victorians to maintain stable housing including in support for mortgagees and for tenants.



The Westjustice team with Labor for Housing

- The EJP Program Manager, Chris Carr, appeared before the Senate Committee for the Inquiry Into the Worsening Housing Crisis. The evidence Chris provided was quoted throughout the final report prepared by the committee.
- The EJP continued engagement with the Essential Services Commission by attending the Community Sector roundtables and the Family Violence Leader's forum.
- Westjustice continues to sit on the Australian Media and Communications Authority (ACMA) Consumer Consultative Forum and the Telstra CEO Consumer Roundtable. For the past several years, we have advocated for direct regulation of consumer protections in the telco industry. As a member of the Australian Communications Consumers Action Network ('ACCAN'), we endorsed ACCAN's submission to the ACMA develop the contents of a standard for financial hardship. We were encouraged by the Minister for Communications Hon Michelle Rowland MP's direction to the ACMA in July 2023 to develop and implement said standard.
- We met with Minister Rowland, the Minister for Communications to express our concerns about the lack of protections afforded to consumers due to weak regulation under the Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code (TCP Code). This included expressing our significant concerns around family violence and economic abuse.
- We have continued our involvement with the Safe at Home campaign group. Safe at Home is a rapid, culturally nuanced response that interrupts the cycle of family violence and transforms our current system's solution of supporting victim-survivors and children to escape violence by leaving the family home, Instead, offering them the choice to stay home safely. A crucial element of this pilot is ensuring that women and their families gain and retain economic security.

4. Enhance agency to improve people's ability to navigate, legal, housing and financial systems

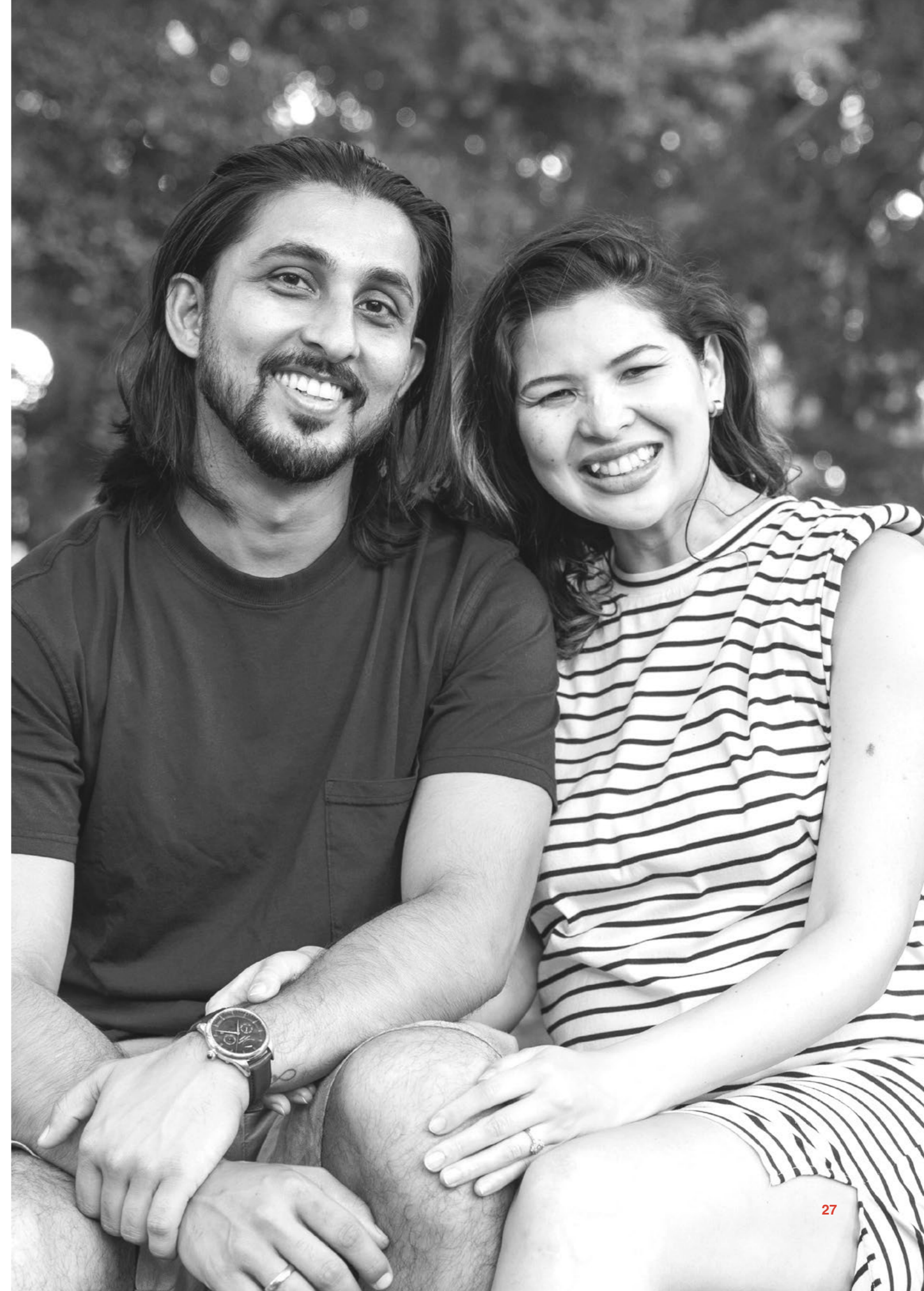
- The MSV and EJP teams met with the Minister for Local Government, the Hon Melissa Horne MP, regarding the exposure draft of the proposed Ministerial Guidelines Relating to Payment of Rates and Charges. We provided written feedback and suggested changes on the document and subsequently consulted with Local Government Victoria regarding our recommendations.
- Westjustice continues to be an active member of the Wyndham Humanitarian Network Consumer Law and Housing Working Group. On 20 September 2023, Westjustice participated in a Bring Your Issues (/Bring Your Bills) day in Werribee, organised through this working group.



Westjustice staff, Mary Kozlovski, Darren Boon, Joe Nunweek, Tess Matthews and intern Batsirai Mutatiri at the Bring Your Issues day

5. Explore methods by which to advocate for a fair and generous safety net

- The RFS team has started exploring how we can offer increased assistance to people experiencing financial abuse and sinsecurity because of Social Security issues and debt.



WEstjustice