



Annual Report

Published November 2020

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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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westjustice.org.au

WEstjustice acknowledges the ancestors, Elders and families of the Kulin nations, who are the traditional owners of Western Melbourne, the country we are located on. As we work to achieve a just and fair society we pay our respects to the deep knowledge embedded within the Aboriginal community and Aboriginal custodianship of Country. We acknowledge this land as a place of age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal, and that the Kulin peoples' living culture has a fundamental role in the life of this region.

“2020 will be remembered at WEstjustice as the year that has tested us like no other. Despite the challenges and heartache, overall our staff have displayed remarkable resilience and dignity. Our thoughts and hopes go out to our communities who have been hit the hardest—we are inspired by their strength and resolve.”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

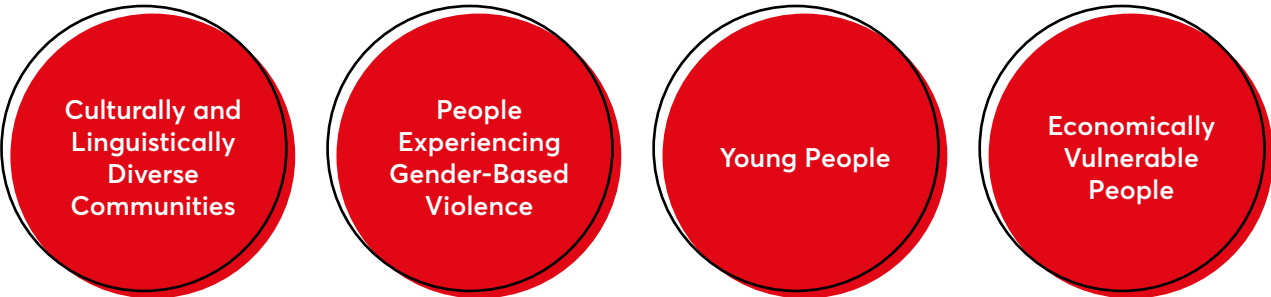
This Annual Report marks the conclusion of the first 5 years of our WEstjustice history. What started as an amalgamation of three separate community legal centres, has transformed into a unification of the hearts, minds and souls of a dedicated team working across a large portion of the Western suburbs. Our work is intense, and challenging and, at times, insurmountable. We draw inspiration from our colleagues, partners and the communities that we represent.

Our communities cover three local government areas (Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong and Wyndham). They are a matrix of many cultures, and are growing at an exponential rate. As a consequence, our client numbers are increasing significantly. Our Courts are struggling to manage the increasing demand and we are in need of many more resources along with integrated, effective multidisciplinary services.

Although we are yet to undertake a detailed needs analysis, we already know that the West is generally underfunded and under serviced across law, housing, health, employment, education and transport. Many of our communities experience post code poverty, the effects of which were further highlighted during the coronavirus pandemic.

Over the past 12 months, in order to deepen our impact and work more effectively, we have developed our strategy, defined our impact areas, built our teams, refined our structure and reflected on what services and programs we require to deliver on our commitments. Whilst this is still a work in progress, we are confident with our refined direction, highly skilled team and unrelenting pursuit of system improvement we can, and will, increase access to justice for our Western communities and create a more fair and just society.

Impact areas 2020–2023

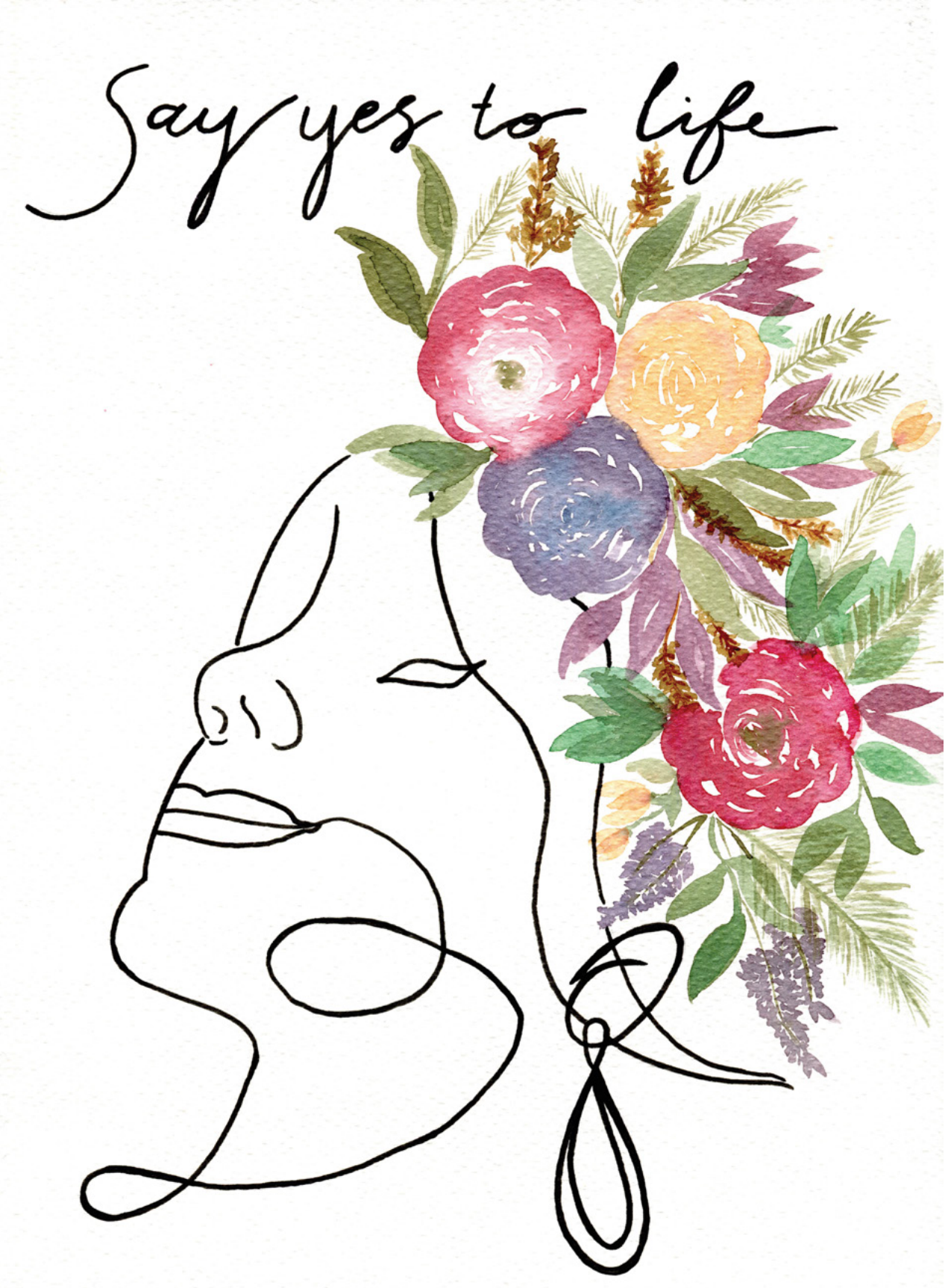


We have many people to thank and acknowledge, in particular we recognise the significant contribution of our former CEO, Denis Nelthorpe. We also farewell our beautiful friend, Skye Hawkins, who recently passed away.

Denis was the founder of WEstjustice and part of the brain trust that led the development of community legal services across Victoria. We have much to thank him for, in particular, the dogged pursuit of practical solutions to complex problems. Denis has assisted many clients over the years, but his greatest legacy is the inspiration he has given to many aspiring community lawyers. He has shaped countless careers and been the driving force for significant and copious systemic change.

Skye taught us to 'Say Yes to Life'. She filled each space with optimism and colour and left her legacy across two seminal WEstjustice programs, the Mortgage Wellbeing Service and the Restoring Financial Safety Project. She has helped countless people avoid homelessness, circumvented many cases of long term crippling debt and been pivotal in assisting many women escape family violence.

We invite you all to read our Strategy 2020-23, our Impact Areas 2020-23 and our Reconciliation Action Plan 2020-22. We are defined, not by what we say, but how we evidence what we do—so we are building an evidence based framework. This is an exciting era for our organisation and we thank the many staff, board members, partners, funders and community members for your valuable support.



Artwork created by Dacia Abela

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2019–2020

We welcome you to our Annual Report 2020.
This year we celebrate the significant and impactful work of our team and partners, and we recognise the resilience and strength of our communities during the most difficult times of our WEstjustice 5-year history.



This year zooming has been a big part of helping us stay connected.

LETTER FROM CHAIR AND CEO

OUR VISION AND PURPOSE

WEstjustice believes in a fair and just society where the law and its processes do not discriminate against vulnerable people, and where those in need have ready access to quality legal education, information, advice and case work. Our purpose is to service the needs in the West in a way that addresses the systemic nature of disadvantage.

OUR PEOPLE

At WEstjustice our people are our greatest asset. Our staff work tirelessly to explore effective ways for our communities to access our services. Through high volumes of case work and legal education, we identify systemic issues, advocate for reform and explore new ways of approaching and solving problems. Our partners assist us to better understand the legal and broader needs of our clients and communities. Our funders ensure that we have the resources we need to perform our work. Our clients, their families and communities provide the feedback and information we need to evaluate our effectiveness in servicing these unmet needs.

STRATEGY AND IMPACT AREAS 2020-23

In order to deepen our community impact, enhance performance and support our team more effectively, we have developed our new WEstjustice Strategy 2020-23. We have also redefined our Impact Areas 2020-23 to ensure that we are servicing those in our communities who are the most disadvantaged. These are:

- Young people.
- People experiencing gender-based violence.
- Economically vulnerable people.
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

COVID-19

COVID-19 has provided significant challenges to the manner in which we reach and assist our clients. Both our staff and communities have shown significant resilience and dignity in managing the ongoing limitations of remote service delivery. We continue to reflect on our priorities to ensure that we are reaching those most in need and ensure we have the greatest impact.

FAREWELLS AND TRIBUTES

At the end of 2019, we farewelled Denis Nelthorpe, our founding Chief Executive Officer. He served WEstjustice throughout the amalgamation of three independent legal services and led WEstjustice to become one of Victoria's most dynamic and innovative legal centres. His leadership, based on the tireless pursuit of finding solutions to complex problems, has inspired many of the WEstjustice staff and leadership team and his legacy will remain a part of WEstjustice.

Sadly, we also recently farewelled a beloved member of our team, Skye Hawkins, who died of cancer. Skye was seminal in the development of two ground-breaking and innovative programs —the WEstjustice Mortgage Wellbeing Service and the WEstjustice Restoring Financial Safety Partnership with McAuley Women's Community Services for Women. Skye's compassion, dedication and commitment to our clients and our team, was exceptional and she will be greatly missed by all who have had the pleasure to work with her during her time at WEstjustice. Our thoughts and best wishes go to her family, friends and work colleagues and we will always remember her advice —'Say Yes to Life'.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Whilst this past year has presented unparalleled challenges, we have much to celebrate and remain inspired by the strength our team, our clients and our communities.

Our new Strategy and Impact Areas 2020-23 can be viewed on our website along with our submissions and law reform projects.

We take this opportunity to thank our Board Members, Senior Management team, staff, clients, communities, partners, funders and all those who contributed to our work and efforts over the past 12 months.

Vern Fettke OAM
Chair of the Board

Melissa Hardham
Chief Executive Officer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Abode Migration Lawyers
- ACCAN
- AMES
- Angela O'Brien—Barrister
- Anglicare
- Births Deaths and Marriages Victoria
- CDC Victoria
- Cindy Dickman—Financial Counsellor
- Clayton Utz
- Cohealth
- Collier Charitable Fund
- Collins & Co
- CommUnity Plus Services
- Consumer Action Law Centre
- Consumer Affairs Victoria
- Corrs Chambers Westgarth
- Council to Homeless Persons
- Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
- Department of Education and Training
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Home Affairs
- Department of Justice and Community Safety
- Department of Premier and Cabinet Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division
- Department of Transport
- Djerriwarrh Health Services
- Doogue O'Brien George
- EACH
- Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Services
- Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria
- Federation of Community Legal Centres
- Gadens
- Gordon Legal
- H3 Alliance
- Hall & Wilcox
- Headspace
- Helen Macpherson Smith Trust
- Hobsons Bay City Council
- HWL Ebsworth
- Insurance Council of Australia
- Iwi n Aus
- Justice Connect
- K&L Gates
- Kimberley Foundation
- King & Wood Mallesons
- KPMG
- Lander & Rogers Lawyers
- Laverton Community Hub
- Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- McAuley Community Services for Women
- Maribyrnong City Council
- Maurice Blackburn
- Melbourne Social Equity Institute
- Melton City Council
- Metro Trains
- MiCare
- Migrant Workers Centre
- Mind Australia
- National Association of Community Legal Centres Australia
- National Union of Workers
- Noel & Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation
- Newsboys Foundation
- Orygen
- Phoenix Youth Centre
- Public Transport Ombudsman
- Public Transport Victoria
- PwC Australia
- Relationships Australia Victoria
- R E Ross Trust
- Ryan Carlisle Thomas Lawyers
- Slater & Gordon
- Social Security Rights Victoria
- Social Ventures Australia
- Springvale Monash Legal Service Inc

- Stary Norton Halphen
 - Sunshine Family Relationship Centre
 - Sunshine Magistrates' Court
 - Study Melbourne Student Centre
 - Sze Lim—Locum
 - Tarneit Senior College
 - The Grange P-12 College
 - The Jack Brockhoff Foundation
 - Thriving Communities Partnership
 - Transdev
 - Transport Accident Commission
 - UnitingCare
 - Uniting Church in Australia
 - Victorian Legal Services Board + Commission
 - Victoria Legal Aid
 - Victorian Ombudsman
 - Victoria University
 - Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust
 - Victorian Women's Trust
 - Visy Cares Hub Sunshine
 - Warringa Park College
 - Werribee Magistrates' Court
 - Werribee Mercy Hospital
 - Werribee VCAT
 - Whitelion
 - William Buckland Foundation
 - Women's Health West
 - WorkSafe Victoria
 - Wyndham Central College
 - Wyndham City Council
 - Wyndham Community and Education Centre
 - Wyndham Youth Resource Centre
 - Youth Junction Inc
 - Yvonne Montfort—Social Worker
- Thank you.

BOARD MEMBERS

- 1. Vernon John Fettke
Chairperson, Director
- 2. Sarah Jane Strapps
Secretary, Public Officer, Director
- 3. Meseret Abebe
Director
- 4. Stuart Brown
Director
- 5. Meredith Blackstock
Director
- 6. Rhys Benny
Director
- 7. Patricia Crossin
Director
- 8. Melissa Hardham
CEO



FINANCIAL REPORT¹

2020

2019

INCOME	\$	\$
Government Grant Funding	2,967,197	2,903,371
Other Grant Funding	754,722	608,521
Philanthropic Funded Projects	655,908	190,124
Other	561,739	59,166
TOTAL INCOME	4,939,566	3,761,182

EXPENDITURE	\$	\$
Administration	125,133	114,667
Depreciation	24,704	36,144
Employment	39,832	23,482
Occupancy	59,524	275,732
Organisational	121,949	118,063
Right of Use Assets—Leased Premises Expenses	235,200	
Staff Salaries and Wages	3,686,425	3,193,907
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	4,292,767	3,761,995

NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE COMPANY	646,799	(813)
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¹ For the full audited financial report, please visit our website: https://www.westjustice.org.au/cms_uploads/docs/western-community-legal-centre-limited-rdr-general-purpose-financial-report-30-june-2020-final-signed-version.pdf or click [here](#).

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION	\$	\$
Current Assets	2,459,943	1,595,152
Non Current Assets	1,012,249	241,769
TOTAL ASSETS	3,472,192	1,836,921

LIABILITIES	\$	\$
Current Liabilities	1,937,002	1,538,914
Non Current Liabilities	590,384	
TOTAL LIABILITIES	2,527,386	1,538,914

NET ASSETS	944,806	298,007
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STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS	\$	\$
From Operating Activities	768,794	389,817
From Investing Activities	(26,559)	(9,044)
From Financing Activities	(176,038)	
NET INCREASE/(DECREASE) IN CASH HELD	566,197	380,773

CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS AT BEGINNING OF FY	1,347,801	967,028
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CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS AT END OF FY	1,913,998	1,347,801
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SAYING FARWELL

DENIS NELTHORPE

A BOLD NEW EXPERIMENT

WEstjustice was a bold experiment. We combined the boards and staff of three small community legal centres to create a new, more ambitious and better funded and resourced organisation to work with low income and vulnerable communities in the West. The goal was to create new and exciting opportunities for lawyers and better outcomes for our clients.

The merger enabled us to improve the facilities, administration and infrastructure of the new Centre. We were able to develop innovative projects that targeted specific client groups such as secondary school students, newly arrived workers and psychiatric in-patients. We were also able to develop legal expertise for clients experiencing mortgage stress, debt, economic abuse and family violence.

These projects led to the expansion of our services at the Sunshine Youth Hub, the creation of the School Lawyer Program and a multi-pronged health justice partnership with the Mercy Hospital in Werribee.



RAPID GROWTH

The Centre grew rapidly, increasing funding and staff threefold over a period of four years. We created new projects which attracted funding from diverse sources and created exciting opportunities for staff. The projects also created new opportunities for meaningful partnerships with key agencies in the West such as Wyndham Community Education Centre and McAuley Community Services for Women.

The projects frequently had state and national implications and resulted in the development of extensive networks for our staff. The school lawyer project has been adopted elsewhere in Victoria and interstate. The public transport access project is being considered for a statewide rollout.

LESSONS LEARNED

The lesson from the merger is that a larger centre has the capacity, resources and stability to provide a broader range of services for clients. WEstjustice has seen a reduction in turnover of staff. This leads to more committed and experienced staff and strengthens our relationships with partners and clients.

WEstjustice has shown that work in community legal centres can be exciting and rewarding in terms of casework, policy and law reform. As the inaugural CEO I was privileged to lead the team as we built a centre that will proudly serve the West for years to come.

Denis Nelthorpe
Former Chief Executive Officer

After 12 years working in Melbourne's west as CEO of Footscray, Wyndham and WEstjustice community legal centres, Denis Nelthorpe has decided to say farewell. Denis has been involved in the work of community legal centres for more than 40 years and remains passionate about consumer law and the need for justice for low income and disadvantaged members of the community. He was appointed an Adjunct Professor of Law for the Victoria University Law School in 2014 and was a consumer Board member of the Financial Ombudsman Service until 2015. He is also a past president of the Consumers' Federation of Australia and a past CEO of the Consumer Credit Legal Service 1986-91 and the Consumer Law Centre Victoria 1993-98.



SKYE HAWKINS

HER LEGACY WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE AN IMPACT

When I think of Skye, I think of her electric and infectious energy, her passion, her determination and above all her huge heart. I think this sentiment is shared by all who cross paths with Skye as she never held back her positivity and she always wore her heart on her sleeve. For most people at WEstjustice, Skye was more than just a colleague, she was a friend. She was the person you would look forward to seeing in the morning, to start the day with a coffee, a chat and a laugh.

Skye's contribution to WEstjustice and the sector was enormous and frankly it would be impossible to put it all into words. She was genuinely passionate about what she did and would always comment on how lucky she was to work with such great people and to do such meaningful work. In truth, it was us who were the lucky ones to have her on our team. Skye came to WEstjustice as an intern while she was still finishing her financial counselling degree. It became immediately apparent that Skye did not just want to be an ordinary financial counsellor. She wanted to be a change maker, a mover and a shaker, she wanted to make the world a better and more compassionate place. From the beginning, Skye was involved in our Restoring Financial Safety project—a project dedicated to helping women who have left a violent relationship become financially secure and independent. Having worked with her in the clinic, I witnessed her amazing ability to connect and engage with people. It didn't matter if she was talking to a client or a CEO of a large company—she always extended the same respect and good will.

Countless women she helped would tell me “**Skye has changed my life**”, “**she has magic powers**”. Skye's magic power was the ability to turn someone's life around—to make an unbearable situation a bit better by removing the financial barriers that were paralysing them and stopping them from being able to live their life. As one woman one told us “**you've given me wings**”.

Skye always did her best for everyone, her tenacity and determination was unwavering, so it is little surprise that she achieved staggering results in her work. Beyond the contribution she made to the lives of so many individuals, she was also well known in the sector. Skye was asked to present at many events, sharing her wisdom and making her contribution all the more widespread. Her legacy will certainly continue to have an impact for years to come.

Even in her darkest days after she was diagnosed with cancer, she remained stoic. Forever positive, forever optimistic. She told me many a time that she couldn't wait to get back to work.

If you know Skye you will know her three greatest achievement are her children Darcy, Brayden and Kearna. Nothing made her more proud than seeing her children happy and loved. On occasion we were graced with the presence of the adorable Darcy in the office, Skye's 6 year old ‘mini me’. One day Darcy was talking to Ebony, while the office was eavesdropping on the conversation. Ebony asked Darcy if he could choose a superpower, what would his superpower be?—and for most children it would be big muscles, flying, fire breathing etc.—but to Ebony's surprise Darcy responded that his superpower would be empathy and perseverance. To me, that is a testament to Skye.

To a woman whose personality was as bright and beautiful as her style. You will be forever missed but if we can all live our lives with our superpowers being empathy and perseverance a little bit of Skye will always be around.

Dacia Abela



AN INCREDIBLE HUMAN, COLLEAGUE AND FRIEND

Skye Hawkins was an incredible human, colleague and friend. Nothing I say about her will come as any surprise to her family, friends or colleagues at WEstjustice, because she was an open book in the way she lived her life. She loved music, she loved to party, she loved clothes and had great style. But what was most obvious to me is that she really loved people. She had an undeniable ability to truly connect with others and make them feel at home and at ease in her presence. I think she just wanted to love and be loved in this life, and I have no doubt she did that.

As a colleague, she advocated fiercely for her clients and gave all of her energy, effort and compassion toward helping each and every one of them. She achieved near on \$1,000,000 in debt waivers for her clients to help them start a new chapter in their lives. She was one of the best financial counsellors I have ever worked with.

As a human, she lived life to the fullest, she cared about all people and the planet she walked on, but it was clear that what was most important to her was her family. She mentioned at least one of her three children almost daily and talked about Kearna, Brayden and Darcy with such admiration and pride. I know that she couldn't have been a better mother if she tried.

As a friend, thank you Skye for teaching me more about how to love people unconditionally and give them the best version of yourself in every moment.

Because I always felt loved by you, considered by you, accepted by you, and that I got the best version of you in every moment that we shared.

Matthew Martin

THE WESTJUSTICE TEAM



ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY
CHANGES AND DEVELOPMENTS

What a year it has been! Unprecedented external pressures and major internal changes were the backdrop as the Economic Vulnerability team was established.

Thank you and acknowledgement to all Economic Vulnerability staff whose efforts and dedication made the transition from old to new as seamless as possible.

The Economic Vulnerability team is entrusted with a vast array of service delivery models and policy and systemic change work spanning 3 different programs. The programs include Financial Services, Tenancy and a generalist stream that includes consumer, economic abuse, fines and pending settlement justice work.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS
AND OUTCOMES

The following important work is only a snapshot of our many accomplishments, outside of casework and life results for our clients:

- Developed a family violence framework with VicRoads.
- Steered and co-created family violence policies with Transurban.
- Submissions to the Inquiry into Homelessness, Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor and Family Violence Scheme Statutory Review.
- Recommendation to the Minister of Housing —incorporated into the RentAssist Bond Loan guidelines.
- Submissions in response to the draft COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) Act 2020.

- Submissions in response to the draft Residential Tenancies (COVID-19 Emergency Measures) Regulations 2020.
- Submissions in relation to public housing tower lockdowns.
- Contributed to submissions in relation to proposed extension and amendments of the COVID-19 Act and Regulations.
- Contributed to a joint letter to local Members of Parliament in relation to lease breaking and compensation during the moratorium.
- Participated in an interview hosted by Sarah Conolly and featuring our CEO and Minister Horne.
- Submitted recommendations for the 2020 General Insurance Code of Practice.
- Attended a roundtable discussion on homelessness with Joanne Ryan MP and Shadow Minister Jason Clare.
- Submissions and evidence at the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness.
- Presented at the Wyndham H3 Alliance Stakeholder Forum regarding mortgage stress and mortgage wellbeing services.
- Assisted with the Banking Code Compliance Monitoring Committee Inquiry into financial difficulty.
- Joined with CALC, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and many other community organisations to provide a comprehensive submission to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications on Consumer Safeguards Review Part C: Choice and Fairness.
- Joined with CALC, Financial Rights Legal Centre and Financial Counselling Australia to make a joint submission to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) on Modernising the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman's Terms of Reference.

A client's husband was extremely violent, abusive and controlling. They had 2 children. After the tragic loss of their daughter, the husband refused to pay the funeral expenses and continued to use the client's Centrelink benefits to fund his lifestyle. The client owed more than \$25,000 in debts. After separation, the client came to WEstjustice. WEstjustice obtained full waivers of her personal loan, telephone, utilities, other banking and debt collection matters. By clearing the client's debts, she could afford to return to a private rental and live safely with her son.

Sadly, along with our many accomplishments this year we have also lost a dear friend and colleague in Skye Hawkins. She contributed immensely to our collegial team dynamic as well as our wonderful work, and will always be missed.



79 new women and their 124 children assisted through the Economic Abuse Clinic



EMPLOYMENT AND DISCRIMINATION LAW

VISION AND PURPOSE

The Employment and Discrimination Law Program (EDLP) vision is for better employment outcomes, improved community participation (social cohesion) and reduced disadvantage for vulnerable workers. Our purpose is to provide quality legal education, advice and casework on employment law issues for vulnerable workers in Melbourne's west, and to use the evidence from this work to effect systemic policy or legislative change aimed at improving the lives of all workers.

PROGRAMS

Throughout 2019/2020 our team, led by Tarni Perkal and Liz Morgan, and supported by Gabby Watson-Munro, Francesca Lai and Thea Depold, provided assistance to over 120 young workers and international students. With support from the Victorian Government, we continued to work with JobWatch and Springvale Monash Legal Service to deliver the International Students' Work Rights Legal Service at Study Melbourne Student Centre. With support from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, we progressed our Youth Employment Project—working with our established youth programs to improve employment outcomes for young people under 25. Funding from the Department of Premier and Cabinet allowed a further roll-out of our award-winning Train the Trainer Program in Melton.

INSECURE WORK

The COVID pandemic has exacerbated and shone a light on the injustice of insecure work. The vast majority of our clients are concentrated in low-paid and insecure industries/employment. For example, at October 2020, over half of our young clients are casual, and three quarters work in sales (including retail and hospitality) or construction.

OUR IMPACT

Notwithstanding this, we recovered over \$160,000 in unpaid wages and entitlements, delivered 23 community legal education presentations (some with help from our Peer Education Network) and assisted two clients to keep their jobs.

We also used client stories and data to make law reform submissions to:

- The State Government *Inquiry into Sustainable Employment for Disadvantaged Jobseekers*;
- Federal Attorney General's Inquiry into *Improving protections of employee's wages and entitlements: Strengthening penalties for non-compliance*; and
- *Senate Standing Committee on Economics 'Inquiry into unlawful underpayment of employees' remuneration'*.

While also fostering strong collaborations within the sector by co-convening the Victorian Employment Law Working Group and Fair Work Ombudsman/CLC forum.

We would like to thank our funders, pro bono partners (in particular Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Clayton Utz, Maurice Blackburn, Slater and Gordon, Gordon Legal and Price Waterhouse Coopers), volunteers and staff for their ongoing commitment and support.

'I feel that even being an international student I can be heard and defended, my wellness and rights are important. As well as, I feel that people cant take advantage of me because I can have the same rights that others... I am really want to thanks to Frankie for all the patience with me, I feel so lucky to have her as my lawyer because I could see how keen was on defending my rights. She was very wise with all the advises and explanations. Thanks for all the time that put on my case and the dedication.'

—Westjustice ISWRLS client



FAMILY VIOLENCE AND FAMILY LAW

DUTY LAWYER SERVICE

Over the past year we delivered family violence duty lawyer services to Sunshine and Werribee Magistrates Courts. The pandemic forced major changes to the services and, as a result, there is now an emphasis on early referrals and preparation in advance of the hearing day. During the pandemic, the volume has been well below previous years. This is consistent with a state-wide trend. We are now preparing for a very busy 12 months ahead with these adjourned matters returning for finalisation.

We wish to acknowledge the hard work of Priyanka Shetty and WEstjustice staff who have provided high-quality services in our duty lawyer lists. We also congratulate Pauline Alabakis on her promotion to Senior Lawyer and acknowledge her ongoing commitment.

MERCY HOSPITAL EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM

We also continued to operate the Early Intervention Family Violence Program in partnership with Mercy Hospital. This program focuses on providing high-risk vulnerable women with access to early intervention legal advice. The program also seeks to strengthen and build the capacity of hospital staff to identify and respond to women experiencing family violence.

As a result of the pandemic, referrals to the program fell in the first half of 2020. As we emerge, we look forward to continuing this work and strengthening our partnership relationships once again. We wish to acknowledge the hard work of Hilary Knack and Kate Robinson on this valuable project.

FAMILY LAW AND FAMILY VIOLENCE CLINICS

During this period, we also continued to deliver a range of family law and family violence clinics with the support of a number of highly skilled private volunteer family lawyers. Our sincere thanks to Vu Kim who coordinated this program, our family law volunteers and our team of paralegals who supported the family law clinic in Laverton.

Regretfully funding for our legally assisted family dispute resolution program conducted in partnership with Relationships Australia (Sunshine) and Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre finished at the end of June 2020. This program assisted many separated families with parenting solutions focusing on the best interests of the children. We are proud of our contribution to this project.

A WEstjustice family violence duty lawyer assisted a high-risk client in a matter where the Respondent was a member of Victoria Police. The Respondent sought to revoke the interim intervention order and the Magistrate put a lot of pressure on the client to resolve the matter. However due to our duty lawyer's extensive advocacy the Magistrate was persuaded not to revoke or vary the interim order. Our client told the lawyer that even though she felt very pressured by the Magistrate, it meant so much that the lawyer had "stood up for her" and believed her.

As we emerge from the pandemic there is no doubt that the demand for family violence and family law assistance will increase. WEstjustice will continue to meet those challenges in order to provide high-quality, long-lasting and meaningful assistance to our clients.



YOUTH LAW

We are pleased to welcome Anoushka Jeronimus to lead the Youth Law Program. Anoushka's extensive skills and experience will enhance an already innovative high performing program.

PLACE BASED AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY

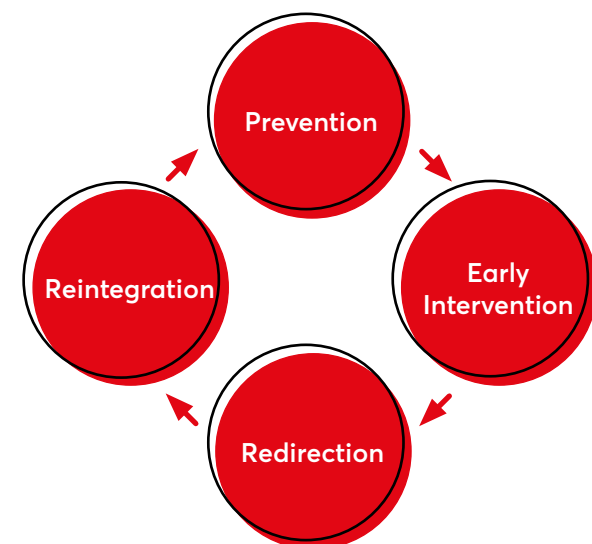
Over the past 12 months, the YLP team has reviewed and expanded our programs across the Western Region. Our placed based models in Schools and Youth Hubs ensure our clients have access to legal advice and representation across multifaceted areas of law with linkages to the health, wellbeing, housing, employment, education and family violence services.

We have broadening our services to include placed based programs in out of home care and custody.

MULTI-FACETED LAW

We currently offer legal services across employment, consumer, debt, fines, tenancy, family violence, and criminal law. We have increased our criminal law services to address overrepresentation of certain groups and we are developing innovative approaches to disrupt these trends.

Our comprehensive approach to youth justice



COVID-19 AND REMOTE SERVICES

Initially COVID-19 impacted on our 'in person' and 'in situ' service delivery model. However, we adapted quickly and established virtual/remote services. Whilst there was an initial decrease in client numbers, we soon returned to target levels.

SYSTEMIC IMPACT

Our systemic work over the past 12 months has been extensive. Highlights include:

- Submissions and advice regarding the Victorian Youth Justice Strategy and Youth Justice Bill.
- Campaigning to Raise the Age of Criminal Responsibility.
- Consultations with Ministers and Departmental staff advising on placed based client centred initiatives.
- Completion of the Travel Assistance Program and campaigning for state-wide expansion.
- Raising awareness of criminalisation of out of home care children.
- Developing increased caution and diversion opportunities through strategic and aligned partnerships.

PEOPLE

We recently welcomed three new team members. Emily Scott, Josephine Choimes and Anoushka Jeronimus. These three skilled and talented additions will enhance an already excellent team of high-quality youth lawyers.

IMPACT AREAS 2020-23 AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Through the organisation wide strategic development process, we revisited our Youth Law Program Strategy and engaged Social Ventures Australia to refine our programmatic and evaluation framework. We have created steering committees and working groups to inform our work and we are in the process of establishing a Youth Advisory Committee.

We believe in improving life outcomes not just legal outcomes—we are well positioned to lead reform and develop a fairer system of justice purpose built for our young people in the West.

A 24 years old hairdresser worked for seven years, four as a manager. In early 2018, she requested to work part-time, access long service leave and set up her own business. Her employer dismissed her and forced her to sign a resignation letter. She was also accused of stealing \$14,000 and told to pay \$2,000 or a complaint would be made to police. After pursuing a general protection claim, she was charged with theft based on fraudulent statements and flimsy evidence. Ultimately the charges were withdrawn, and all entitlements were secured—\$28,000. The client now runs a successful business whilst caring for her young family.



Travel Assistance Program

Key Findings and Recommendations 2019 Program
Published September 2020



266 school students provided with prepaid travel through the Travel Assistance Program

WEstjustice



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

DEEPENING OUR ENGAGEMENT

Following the strategic planning process in 2019, we decided to improve the ways that we engage and support communities in the West. We are in the process of creating a practice group with the aim of co-ordinating, streamlining and centralising the activities of WEstjustice with respect to community engagement, community legal education, community development, and clinical practice.

We have been engaging in the following work since the commencement of the practice:

- **Community Development:** We have commenced a community development framework and theory of practice for the organisation.
- **Community Engagement:** We continue strong community engagement practices including,
 - **Burmese Clinic:** Our Burmese clinic continues to support the communities of Burma on a range of the issues, particularly debt matters and hardship grants, along with Covid-19 related problems.
 - **Iranian Community Work:** Our Iranian community worker has been engaging with various channels across the Iranian community in the Western suburbs.
 - **Pasifika Community Work:** Our Pasifika report will be launched shortly. We continue to support the Pasifika community in the West including a focus on restorative justice and crime prevention.
 - **RAP:** Our first Reconciliation Action Plan is complete after many years of work to build relationships, improve our cultural safety and awareness about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander matters.

- **Clinical Placement Program:** We have relaunched our clinical program with Victoria University as a whole organisation approach to student clinical practice. We have also commenced a clinical framework and theory of practice for the organisation.
- **Community Legal Education:** We have created an audit register for all CLE activities, we have assisted legal practice teams to prepare CLE materials online, and we have commenced a CLE framework and theory of practice for the organisation.

**As always we thank
our volunteers and
partners, without whom
our impact would be
much more limited.**

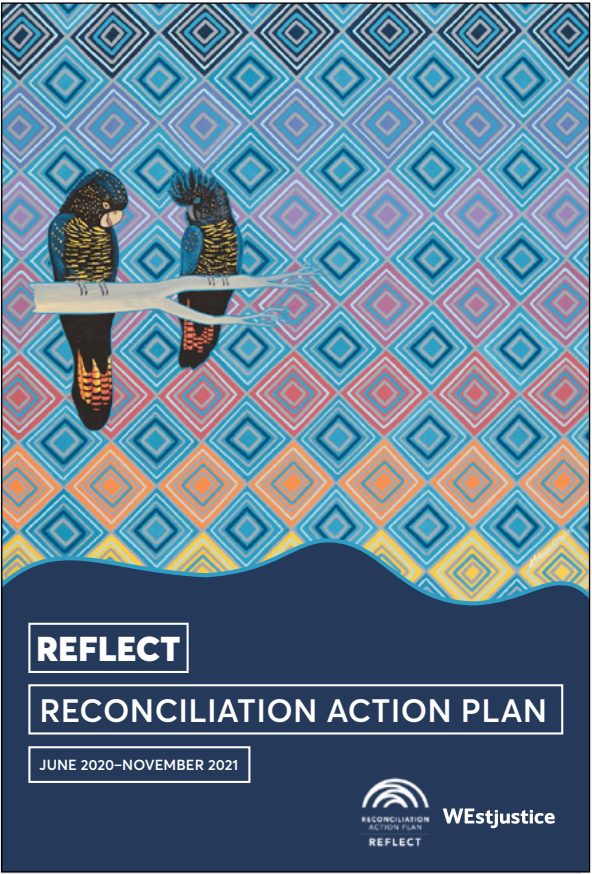
IMPACT OF COVID-19

Covid-19 has hit all of us hard in the Western suburbs, but particularly many in our vulnerable communities who experience financial hardship and casualised work conditions. We are hopeful that as a practice group we can offer a more meaningful interface for our communities to engage with us as an organisation, and we are looking forward to collaborating to achieve this work in the year ahead.

A young client of the Clinic presented saying he was asked by a friend with more English proficiency than himself to take on a loan in his name because our client's friend was not eligible for the loan himself. Our client was shocked to learn that the loan could not automatically be transferred into his friend's name, once his friend became employed. Our client was left with the liability. The Clinic negotiated a very good outcome for our client that ensured he was not left with any liability.



122 clients
assisted through
the Burmese
Clinic



POLICY, INNOVATION AND ENTERPRISE

ORGANISATION WIDE
SYSTEMIC IMPACT

WEstjustice’s Policy, Innovation and Enterprise Program commenced in 2020. And, despite it being the smallest WEstjustice team, it has a big role to play in supporting our lawyers to use the insights gained from their day-to-day legal casework to effect change at a systemic level for our clients.

Under the Policy heading, our work includes convening the WEstjustice’s Systemic Impact Working Group to coordinate and support teams in their strategic policy and campaign work. We know that change at scale comes from identifying the laws, policies or practices that negatively impact our clients and we work with key stakeholders to improve or overhaul these systems and mechanisms. A great example of a creative solution to an everyday legal issue is our Travel Assistance Program—rather than repeatedly assisting disadvantaged young people in the West with public transport fines incurred in circumstances of travel poverty, we have worked with the Public Transport Ombudsman, Wyndham City Council and the State Government to fund pre-paid Myki’s for disadvantaged young people to assist them to travel to school compliantly.

Similarly, we not only have lawyers and financial counsellors assisting women to get debts waived where they were incurred in circumstances of economic abuse, we also regularly meet with utility providers, banks, enforcement agencies and other industry bodies to help inform their family violence policies.

PRACTICAL INNOVATION

For our team, innovation simply means improving the way we work to better meet the needs of our clients and the communities we serve. We have commenced a review of the centre’s measurement and evaluation framework and, in the coming year, we will work to improve the community’s experience of initial contact with our service.

ENTERPRISE

Finally, the Enterprise part of our program focusses on diversifying WEstjustice’s income streams to ensure our services and projects are sustainable funded into the future.

We are excited to be part of WEstjustice’s new structure and we look forward to continuing to support WEstjustice and the communities it serves in the year ahead.

“Our new approach to policy and systemic impact projects at WEstjustice is to build capacity across all teams and programs so we can ensure that our work transcends individual transactions and contributes to long term reform and systems improvement. This work is being led by our Policy, Innovation and Enterprise team.”

Dominic was 20 years old and came to Australia from Kenya in 2009. He had fifteen outstanding fines totalling more than \$6,000. He had struggled with alcohol addiction for some years. He agreed to be linked in with YSAS for counselling, including AOD counselling and vocational courses. His application to work off his fines with YSAS was approved by Fines Victoria. At the time of writing, Dominic has not yet completed his WDP but is on track to complete it and has worked off a significant amount of his fines. He reports that he is benefiting from the support provided by YSAS.



Our systemic impact and reform agenda is integrated across all our work

Health **Agency to Court**

Tackling the Fines System Evaluation Report 2018-2019
Published in September 2020



Generously funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner
WEstjustice

HACP program assisted 119 clients with fines and 84 with debts

OPERATIONS

ORGANISATIONAL
STRUCTURE

Through extensive consultation with staff and change management support by Lirata Ltd, we have introduced a new structure which is based on seven programs effective 1 July 2020:

- Operations
- Policy, Innovation and Enterprise
- Community Development, Education and Engagement
- Youth Law
- Employment and Discrimination
- Family Violence and Family Law
- Economic Vulnerability

The changes are intended to:

- Improve support and supervision for staff.
- Improve overall wellbeing.
- Create certainty regarding roles, responsibilities or accountabilities.
- Improve the management of staff.
- Create opportunities for promotion and career development.

WEstjustice

WEstjustice Strategic Plan 2020-23

Vision

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

Purpose

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

Strategic Priorities and Outcomes

Priority One: Embedding a coherent approach to systemic impact work, informed by, and integrated with, case work, education and community development.

1.1 We have an evidence-based process to determine our impact areas, priorities, campaigns and areas of focus along with allocation of resources and these are reviewed periodically.

1.2 We generate and maintain an ethos of uncompromising strategic pursuit of client and community outcomes.

1.3 Our systemic impact work is collaborative and sits across all areas of our practice.

Priority Two: Designing an operating model, legal services and processes which are client-centred and provide clients with whole of person support.

2.1 Our Operating Model reflects our approach to systemic impact work and responds to the needs of our community. This includes comprehensive triaging, and effective internal and external referral processes.

2.2 Our legal service design:

- is informed by our clients and/or community needs
- ensures consistency and quality delivery.

2.3 We work with partners who have a shared commitment to provide clients with comprehensive, ethical and holistic services.

Priority Three: Deepening our organisational culture to build capability, promote collaboration and deliver excellence.

3.1 Our performance reflects and aligns with our vision, purpose and strategic priorities.

3.2 We have a strengthened understanding as to how our organisation functions.

3.3 We provide opportunities to evolve skills, expertise, leadership and career development.

3.4 Our staff are engaged, motivated and have opportunities to flourish through work life balance.

3.5 We prioritise staff wellbeing.

3.6 Our diverse workforce reflects our diverse community.

1

PEOPLE

We wish to thank all staff for their hard work through the year.

We have said goodbye to:

- Denis Nelthorpe
- Gabrielle Watson-Munro
- Rachel Gregory
- Rachel Shulkes
- Semisi Kailahi
- Shani Williams
- Shorna Moore
- Su Robertson

Please visit our website for a list of our current staff [here](#).

SUPPORT

We have engaged a number of consultants to help strengthen and improve the overall operations of the Centre including:

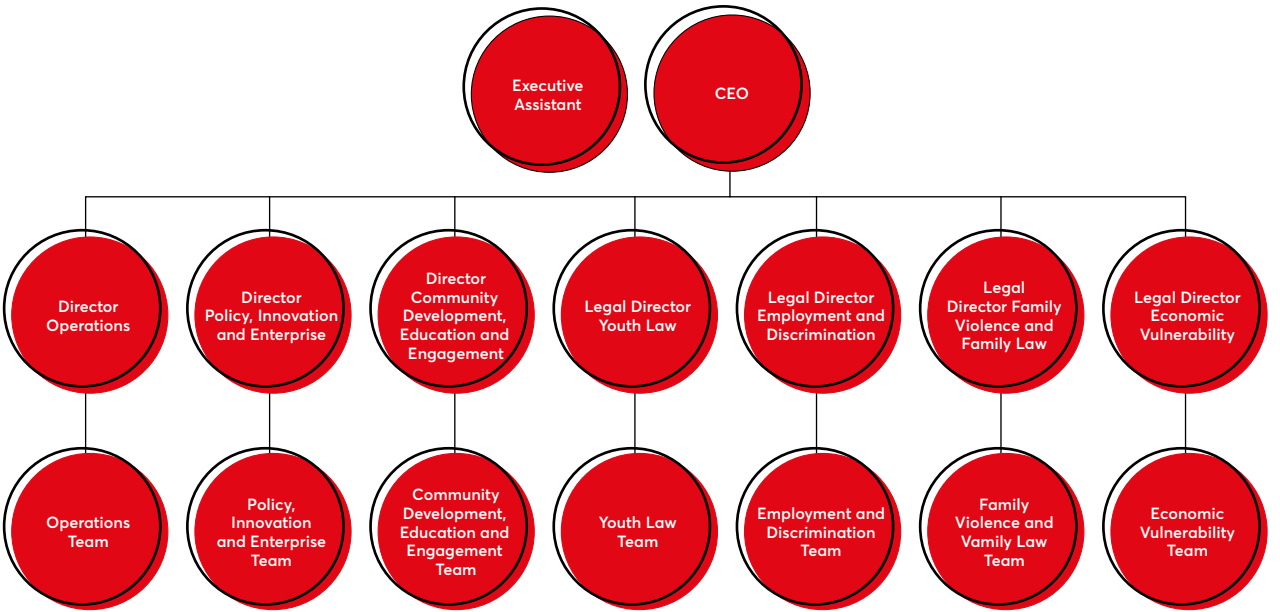
- Change Management—Pam Kennedy and Mark Planigale, Lirata Ltd.
- Digital Management Strategy Development—David McLean and Andrew Jones, Infoxchange.
- Finance—Trent Angove and Pitcher Partners.
- Human Resources—Paul Maguire, Maguire Consulting.
- People Performance Program and Board Review—David Bronwell and Mary Barlow.
- Family Violence Workplace Plan—Deb Bryant.
- Legal—Gordon Legal and Kingston Reid.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

By far the greatest challenge has been the impact of the Coronavirus. From March 2020 all staff have been working from home. This has involved many challenges and changes including the development of a COVID-19 Policy, Business Continuity Plan, Safe Plan, the implementation of a soft phone system, transition to a paperless file system and the shift from predominantly 'in person' client services to a remote service delivery model. Our administration team has worked tirelessly to ensure that all of these changes have been made in a supportive and effective manner. In addition, our finance team have diligently stayed abreast of the financial impact of Covid-19, additional funding opportunities and related rules and regulations. We thank them all for their hard work.

This financial year has been a year of change and opportunity—a change in leadership and an opportunity to review our operational needs to further build and develop WEstjustice.

Organisational structure



COLLECTIVE IMPACT STATEMENT

COLLECTIVE IMPACT STATEMENT

Through our collaborative efforts, WEstjustice has made the following impact...

