

CANBERRA
COMMUNITY
LAW

Annual Report 2023–24



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Acknowledgment of Land



Canberra Community Law acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the land on which we work in the ACT and surrounding region and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We pay our respects to First Nations elders past, present and future for they hold the stories, traditions and the cultures of their people.

We are grateful that we share this land and express our sorrow for the costs of this sharing to Australia's First Peoples. We will continue to acknowledge the legacy of our history and strive in our goals to empower our community through social justice. We hope that our efforts will contribute to a realisation of equity, justice and partnership with the Traditional Custodians of this land.



Artwork Acknowledgement

We acknowledge Wiradjuri artist Leanne Pope for the use of her artwork 'Fresh Life After Rain' 2017 for our identifier, marketing, and promotional materials.

The original artwork is displayed in the offices of Canberra Community Law.

Introduction

Canberra Community Law (CCL) is an independent community legal service. We provide flexible and accessible legal services free of charge to people facing financial and other barriers.

Our organisation has been part of the Canberra community for 40 years. During this time, we have responded to the changing and increasing legal needs of people in the ACT with trauma informed and culturally responsive legal services.

We work in collaboration with government, social and legal services, both locally and across Australia to realise our vision of a fair and thriving community.

We provide innovative programs, communication, education and systemic advocacy. Our targeted support empowers both clients and the broader community to live a better quality of life.

Our lawyers specialise in legal areas that affect people facing socio-economic barriers to resolving their legal issues. These barriers include insecure accommodation, historical or current experiences of family/domestic violence or being socially isolated.

CCL's Services

Dhurrawang Aboriginal Human Rights Program

A human- rights focused legal service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the areas of Centrelink, public housing and race discrimination law.

We are the only free legal service in the ACT that specialises in race discrimination matters – a practice set up in direct response to a need identified by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Disability Law

Our Disability Law service includes:

- Disability Discrimination Law – the only specialist disability discrimination law service in the ACT. We provide legal services to people who have been discriminated against because of disability in relation to employment, education, access to premises, provisions of goods and services, facilities, accommodation, Commonwealth laws and programs and requests for information.
- Mental Health Justice Clinic – provides socio-economic rights focused legal services to support people with lived experience of mental ill-health.

Whilst working across CCL, our Disability Justice Liaison Officer (DJLO) is based in this team. This role supports both CCL's clients and systemic work in advancing access to justice for people with disability.

Housing Law

We are the only specialist public housing legal service in the ACT. The service also provides legal assistance to community housing tenants and people on occupancy agreements including people who live in caravan parks, crisis accommodation or supported accommodation.

The service also provides a Duty Lawyer service at the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) for the Thursday social housing list.

Street Law

We are the only specialist homelessness legal service in the ACT.

Street Law compliments our Housing Law service by acting as a key legal contact for those working in the homelessness sector and is designed to reach people experiencing or at risk of homelessness who would not otherwise access legal services.

Street Law specialises in such matters as debts, public space law, traffic fines, access to accommodation and obtaining proof of ID.

Social Security Law

We are the only specialist Social Security Law service in the ACT.

The service assists with Centrelink, Social Security, Family Assistance and Paid Parental Leave and related matters.

Social Security Law helps people with a range of Centrelink issues including appealing Centrelink decisions, overpayments, underpayments, entitlements, debt recovery, claims refused and payment cancellations, reductions and suspensions.

Socio-Legal Practice Clinic

CCL pioneered the model of socio-legal practice in the ACT. The Socio-Legal Practice (SLP) Clinic combines legal advice, assistance and representation with intensive social work support to maximise the prospect of a successful outcome.

Our SLP Clinic does not accept direct referrals. Our paralegals or lawyers will make a referral to our clinic.

Parachute

Our Parachute Program provides legal services to vulnerable women (with a particular focus on women experiencing or at risk of family violence) in the areas of social housing and social security law.

Night Time Legal Advice Service (NTLAS)

NTLAS provides information, referral and/or one-off legal advice in most areas of law (not covered by CCL's daytime service) including fines and other traffic infringements, minor criminal law offences, family law and basic advice and referral on parenting plans/orders, separation and assistance, employment law (employees not employers), debts (people being pursued for debts not people seeking to recover debts), complaints and consumer law issues.

National Accreditation Scheme



CCL is accredited under the Community Legal Centre's Australia Accreditation Scheme. The National Accreditation Scheme is an industry-based certification process that provides a quality assurance process that gives funding bodies, community legal centres and clients

confidence that community legal centres are operating according to good practice and industry standards. The National Accreditation Scheme promotes a culture of ongoing continuous improvement.

Funding Sources

CCL acknowledges and thanks all funders for their financial support and assistance.

During the reporting period, CCL received funding from:

- Commonwealth Government under the National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services.
- ACT Government through the Community Services Directorate and Justice and Community Safety Directorate.
- ACT Law Society Statutory Interest Account.
- ACT Government, Snow Foundation, and Clayton Utz Foundation for our Socio-Legal Practice Clinic (SLP Clinic)
- Snow Foundation – Dhurrawang Cadetship Program
- Australian National University for our Community Legal Clinical Program and our Indigenous Community Legal Clinic colloquially known as CLED

Our Vision

A fair and thriving Canberra community.

Who We Are

We lead change towards a fair and thriving Canberra community through delivering expert, legal and socio-related services, community legal education and systemic advocacy. We are Canberra's oldest community legal centre.

Our Strategic Pillars

Client Services

We provide quality, timely, innovative, accessible, targeted, client centred legal and related services.

Advocacy

We advocate for a system that is fairer, more transparent, accessible and human rights focused.

Organisation

We are a healthy and supportive organisation.

Our Values

Respect

We respect our clients' lived experience, listen deeply and are non-judgemental. We acknowledge our clients' capacity for self-determination. We interact respectfully with individuals and organisations, recognising different opinions and approaches.

Empathy

We are empathetic to our clients' circumstances. We create space for clients to be heard. Our service is accessible and responsive to the diverse needs of the Canberra community. We support each other and are non-judgemental when things get tough.

Integrity

We deliver a best practice, professional, and ethical community legal service which is trusted by clients and stakeholders. We set clear expectations around our service offering with clients and stakeholders.

Creative and Innovative

We are constantly adapting as our client needs and the external environment changes. We provide innovative solutions to meet the unique needs of our clients and the Canberra community. We offer flexible work arrangements and support each other by working across programs.

Social Justice Driven

Everything we do seeks to achieve positive outcomes for individuals and the broader community. Our advocacy work is evidence based and targeted at challenging unfair laws, policies, practices and systems.

Collaboration

We see strength in working with others to create impact, within and external to our organisation.

CCL's Client Work for 2023–2024

- Total number of clients assisted – 980
- Information/Referrals – 1227
- Legal Advices (one off) – 2287
- Duty Lawyer services – 246
- Legal Task services – 1289
- Cases (ongoing) – 85
- Discrete Non Legal Support – 379
- Ongoing Non-Legal Support – 1

The People We Helped

- Gender – Male 36%, Female – 63% and Other – 1%
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People – 17%
- People with Disability – 64%
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background – 14%
- Disclosed experiencing domestic or family violence – 45%
- People experiencing homelessness – 55%
- People experiencing financial disadvantage – 94%

Hours of Operation and Location

During the reporting period, CCL was in the ACT Community Legal Centre Hub on level 1, 21 Barry Drive (corner of Watson Street) Turner.

In July 2024, CCL moved to Level 5, 10 Rudd Street Canberra City.

CCL's business hours are from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

Our Night Time Legal Advice Service (NTLAS) operates on Tuesday evenings from 6pm to 8pm (excluding December and January).

CCL's Board of Directors 2023–2024

Daniel Stewart, Chairperson

Genevieve Bolton, Secretary

Amanda Ryan, Director (Resigned – 31 October 2023)

Laura Hilly, Director

John Alati, Staff Representative (Resigned – 22 November 2023)

Dominic Cookman, Director

Steven Meyer, Director

Elizabeth Melville, Director

Emma Towney, Staff Representative
(Appointed – 22 November 2023)

Radhika Chaudhri, Director (Appointed – 28 February 2024)

Thomas Allen, Director (Appointed – 28 February 2024)

CCL Staff

John Alati, Street Law and NTLAS Supervising Solicitor

Genevieve Bolton, Executive Director/Principal Solicitor

Sarah Carroll, Intake Officer (Part Time)

Farzana Choudhury, Supervising Solicitor, Disability Law

Rachael Clark, Dhurrawang Aboriginal Human Rights Program Solicitor/Program Manager

Clyde Cosentino, Senior Solicitor, Housing Law
(extended leave from October 2023)

Philippa Duell-Piening, Disability Advisory Group Pilot Project
(Part Time) (end of contract 24 November 23)

Anusha Goonetilleke, Supervising Solicitor,
Social Security Law (Part Time)

Edith Graham, Business and Finance Manager (Part Time)

Georgia Graham, Office Manager (resigned 8 September 2023)
 Dorothy Gunner, Social Worker (commenced 28 August 2023)
 Parastou Hatami, Project Worker (short term contract from 30 August 2023 to 13 October 2023)
 Anisha Hegde, Solicitor, Litigation
 Jye Hopkins, Dhurrawang Aboriginal Human Rights Program Cadet (one day per week) (commenced 2 December 2023)
 Kate Kenny, Social Security Law, Paralegal (Part Time)
 Ruby Lew, Litigation Solicitor
 Sarah Lim, Disability Law, Paralegal (Part Time) (Resigned 9 February 2024)
 Isabel Moss, Disability Justice Liaison Officer (Commenced 21 August 2023)

Alexandra Palk, Supervising Solicitor, Dhurrawang Aboriginal Human Rights Program/Litigation
 Mikaela Panting, Intake Officer (Commenced 28 August 2023)
 Agata Pukiewicz, Supervising Solicitor, Parachute (Commenced 11 June 2024)
 Erin Rikus, Disability Discrimination Solicitor
 Gemma Smith, Housing Law Solicitor
 Jessica Spargo, Paralegal, Social Security Law (Part Time) (Resigned 11 August 2023)
 Kavitha Sivasamy, Parachute Solicitor (Resigned 1 December 2023)
 Shayleah Wanganeen, Dhurrawang Cadet (Part Time) (Commenced 7 December 2023)



CCL Staff at Planning Day October 2023

Chairperson's Report



As I write this report, Canberra Community Law (CCL) has just finished celebrating its 40th birthday and the launch of the Strategic Plan for the next 4 years.

It was a great event, with some very kind words from Shane Rattenbury, the ACT Attorney General as he launched the Strategic Plan, along with Dr Marisa Paterson MLA and Peter Cain, Shadow Attorney General as they took time out from preparing for the upcoming ACT Election to help CCL celebrate. Many thanks to Auntie Violet for the Welcome to Country, to Mia Swainson for talking about the strategic plan's consultation process, and for Helen Dalley-Fisher for agreeing to come back and reflect on her time as a staff- and board -member and the contribution that CCL has made to the community sector along the way. Many thanks to Farzana Choudhury for the Kahoot quiz and all the staff who made the event happen. I was particularly grateful for the opportunity to thank our funders, including the Clayton Utz Foundation and Snow Foundation, our pro bono partners and the many representatives of the organisations who staff of CCL work with every day in helping to serve our community.

The Strategic Plan is a very impressive document, ambitious but achievable, setting out CCL's values and the strategic pillars that will underlie the work the Centre is hoping to

do and the change it is hoping to make over the next four years. It is the product of an extensive consultation process, including discussions with numerous funders, clients, community bodies and stakeholders and, most importantly, the staff of the Centre. Thank you to Mia Swainson who helped with the consultation and drafting of the plan, and to the willingness of staff to engage with the process and help make the document a reflection of what makes CCL such a special place.

The Birthday event was held in CCL's new premises. CCL is no longer in the Community Legal Centre Hub where we spent over a decade sharing space with the Women's Legal Centre, originally the Tenant's Union and recently the Environmental Defender's Office (EDO). It was great to see the new offices and facilities, which we share with the EDO, with a little more space to grow in the future. Make sure if you haven't seen it yet that you drop in to get a tour. Many thanks to all the staff in making the move to the new space, to Sally Campbell and Dylan Glover from Clayton Utz for their work in negotiating the new lease and finalising the arrangements with our previous premises, especially to Edith Graham, CCL's Finance and Business Manager, for her incredible work in making the move happen.

Welcome to all new staff who have joined us in the past year and all the best to staff going on parental and other leave in their adventures ahead. Thanks to Dominic Cookman who recently had to leave the Board for his contributions to the Board and all the best in his new role. Thanks also to Emma Towney who joined the Board as staff representative, taking over from John Alati. And I would like to welcome Tiffany Long who only just sneaked in to join the Board before I finalised this report.

Unfortunately for me this is my last report as Chair and a member of the Board of CCL at least in the foreseeable future. I joined the Board of what was then the Welfare Rights and Legal Centre over 20 years ago. I managed to get at least one thing right, having been a member of the Committee who appointed Genevieve Bolton as Supervising Solicitor, now CCL's Executive Director/Principal Solicitor. Under her leadership the Centre has developed into the vital service it is today, and I know that the Centre will continue to develop and serve the most vulnerable in our community for many years to come. Thank you to all the Board members who have indulged my chairing over many years and thank you to everyone at CCL for the work you do. It has been an incredible privilege to be a part of the CCL journey.

Daniel Stewart
Chair

Executive Director / Principal Solicitor's Report



In its 40th year, CCL is well recognised for adopting innovative approaches in serving emerging needs in our community.

2023–2024 has been another action-packed year for CCL as we have rolled out new initiatives, delivered on key projects whilst keeping our clients' interests at the centre of everything we do.

New Strategic Plan, New Home and New Accreditation Milestone

During the reporting period, we adopted a new 4-year Strategic Plan that continues our commitment to developing innovative legal and related services in response to community need. Our new strategic pillars are focused on client services, making progressive long-term change and providing a healthy and supportive workplace.

Thank you to Mia Swainson for her excellent work in guiding us through the strategic planning process and to my co-design team colleagues, Edith Graham and Emma Towney who met on a fortnightly basis over a 6-month period to provide high level input and to progress the drafting of the plan. My sincere thanks to our key stakeholders who generously gave of their time to meet with us to share their thoughts and reflections on our work and to all CCL Staff and Board members for providing invaluable contributions and insights. Our new Strategic Plan reflects our shared vision and provides a clear roadmap to guide our work over the next 4 years.

Another significant highlight was securing a new home for CCL (and the Environmental Defender's Office) that would better meet the needs of both organisations in the years to come. Just after the end of this reporting period, we moved into our new office, with increased amenities including a fully accessible office space, more meeting rooms, end of trip facilities and a fabulous kitchen and seating area for people to come together over lunch, birthday celebrations and other important CCL events. We now have a great space for our volunteers, students and secondees and some capacity for further growth. We even have a balcony!

I would like to record my huge thanks to Edith Graham for her outstanding leadership in overseeing the move to our new office accommodation within a very tight timeframe and to my niece, Catherine Topping, who in late 2023 set us the challenge and supported our efforts on a pro bono basis to find more modern office accommodation. Thanks also to our wonderful front office team of Sarah Carroll and Mikaela Panting for their tireless work in packing up and then setting up our new office and everything else they did in between to ensure that there was minimal disruption to our work during the move. Special thanks to Sally Campbell and Dylan Glover from Clayton Utz for their advice and assistance with both the new and end of lease negotiations.

Our accreditation work under the National Accreditation Scheme for Community Legal Centres Australia continued during the year thanks to the hard work of Anusha Goonetilleke who reviewed and updated many of our policies and procedures and put together the assessment material.

It was pleasing to see the quality of our systems, policies and procedures recognised by the assessor:

Your centre has an excellent result on the accreditation and is one of the best performing centres in Australia.

More Key Achievements

I would like to acknowledge the incredible work undertaken by our CCL team this year.

Congratulations to Farzana Choudhury who was awarded the Pro Bono/Not for Profit Community legal Centre Lawyer at the 2023 Lawyers Weekly Women in Law Awards in 2023 for her tireless and innovative work increasing access to justice for our clients.

Here are some of our key achievements over the reporting period:

1. Developing our Disability Lived Experience Framework and Project Report following extensive research and consultation.

Thank you to Phillipa Duell-Piening for her visionary work and to Hands Across Canberra and the Aspen Foundation for funding this project.

2. Establishment of a Lived Experience Disability Advisory Group to assist us to improve the accessibility of our community legal education materials.

Many thanks to the Disability Advisory Group members for their expertise and thoughtful feedback and to Isabel Moss, our Disability Justice Liaison Officer, for establishing and co-ordinating the group's activities.

3. Finalisation of our Best Practice Guidelines for providing culturally appropriate and respectful legal services to First Nations people in the ACT.

Huge thanks to Rachelle Kelly-Church (Sisters in Spirit) and our Dhurrawang Solicitors Emma Towney and Rachael Clark for their leadership and guidance in drafting, consulting and finalising the guidelines and for the contributions of our local Aboriginal and Torres Islander community which also informed their development.

4. Grant funding from the Snow Foundation to reinstate our First Nations Cadetship Program and welcoming Jye Hopkins and Shayleah Wanganeen to the cadet roles. We are very appreciative of the Snow Foundation's ongoing support of CCL.

5. The transition of our Dhurrawang Aboriginal Human Rights Program to a fully First Nations led and staffed program of CCL. Congratulations to Emma Towney and Rachael Clark on their appointments as joint Dhurrawang Supervising Solicitors from 1 July 2024. My heartfelt thanks to Alexandra Palk who was instrumental in facilitating and supporting this transition.

6. The roll out of new outreaches and clinics including a new Health Justice Partnership with Head to Health and a Housing Repairs Clinic and getting our Women in Prison Legal Empowerment Sessions (WIPLES) and Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) Advice Service up and running again. Another demonstration of the great work our Disability Law, Housing Law, Street Law and Social Security Law teams are doing to increase access to justice for Canberrans.

7. The forging of new pro bono relationships with Maddocks, Wotton + Kearney and HWL Ebsworth Lawyers.

Farewells and Thanks

During the year, we farewelled Phillippa Duell-Piening, Georgia Graham, Sarah Lim and Jessica Spargo and wished them well in their new endeavours. Thank you also to Parastou Hatami who came back on a short-term contract basis to put together our submission to the Commonwealth Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement informed by staff feedback.

Thank you to all our pro bono partners, volunteers, students and funders who have supported our work throughout the year. This support is critical to CCL realising our vision of a fair and thriving Canberra community as is a strong and engaged Board. Many thanks to CCL Board members for your engagement and support during the year.

I would also like to record my thanks to Supervising Solicitors, John Alati, Farzana Choudhury, Anusha Goonetilleke and Alexandra Palk who have all worked incredibly hard to support their teams to deliver high quality legal services. My sincere thanks to all our staff for your fantastic work during the year.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge Daniel Stewart's tireless leadership, dedication and commitment to the Centre for more than 20 years. Sadly, for CCL, Daniel has made what has been a difficult decision to stand down from the Board as he takes on new professional responsibilities. His support of CCL staff and fellow Board Members, sense of humour, wise counsel and skill in successfully steering the Centre through some challenging times will be deeply missed.

Genevieve Bolton

Executive Director / Principal Solicitor

Disability Action and Inclusion Plan Report

CCL continues to support people with disability across all our Programs and has maintained its strong reputation as a trusted legal service for the disability community.

2023 is the second year of implementation of our fourth Disability Action and Inclusion Plan. Our DAIP outlines our commitment to improving access and participation for people with disability, both within our Centre and the wider community. Our DAIP is led by our Disability Justice Liaison Officer (DJLO) and our Disability Law Supervising Solicitor; however, all programs contribute to the achievement of the DAIP.

Our plan outlines practical actions the Centre aims to achieve across 5 focus areas to improve access to justice for people with disability both internally and externally.

These focus areas aligned with the focus areas of the ACT Disability Justice Strategy:

- Information and Communication
- Education and Guidance
- Identification, Screening and Assessment
- Better Service Delivery
- Data, Research and Review

In this financial year:

- 65% of CCL's clients identified as having a disability, representing an increase in the number of clients with disability since the 2022–23 financial year.
- The most common disabilities that clients disclosed were psychosocial disability, physical disability and intellectual disability. Of those who disclosed disability, 43% identified as having lived experience of mental ill-health, and 27% had physical disabilities.

CCL, and the Disability Law team would like to thank Phillipa Duell-Piening for her incredible hard work to support the goals of the DAIP as the Lived Experience Framework Project Officer. Phillipa completed her temporary role with us in December 2023.

Focus Area 1: Information and Communication

Our work under this focus area seeks to ensure that people with disability know their rights and can participate effectively in the justice system. We are also committed to publishing accessible information.

Some of our achievements over the last financial year included:

- Our Mental Health Justice Clinic (MHJC) developing and publishing a fact sheet on Mental Health and Employment in September 2022 and Making Vulnerable Persons Complaints to the ACT Human Rights Commission in June 2023. The Vulnerable Persons Complaint Fact Sheet was translated to Easy English by Scope Australia in September 2023.
- Hosting annual consultation forum for organisations that represent and support people with disability, carers, and parents/guardians of people with disability in 2022 and 2023.



Guests at the launch of the Lived Experience Framework

Focus Area 2: Education and Guidance

CCL provides an annual training program, which includes training on disability focused topics. CCL's vision is that our staff are disability confident and well equipped to communicate with people with disability effectively.

Some of the training provided during the 2023–24 financial year included:

- Training on supporting clients with intellectual disability, run by ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability.
- From October 2022 onwards, CCL staff and volunteers attending our *Just Hearing* interactive training on supporting people with severe mental health challenges in the justice system. *Just Hearing* has been developed through a partnership between Rebus Theatre, CCL and Legal Aid ACT.
- Staff participating in the *With You* training program for trauma-informed, rights-based legal services to people experiencing distress, poor mental health and/or suicidality, through National Legal Aid.

- The DJLO creating an internal resources folder for staff on supporting people with disability, including training materials, information on making related referrals and other resources. Staff have been encouraged to add training materials and other resources to the shared folder.



Izzy Moss (DJLO) and Emma Beardsley from ASPECT presenting the Sensory Awareness Training

Focus Area 3: Identification, Screening and Assessment

Actions under this focus area are designed to support CCL to effectively identify and support clients with disability or other support needs.

Work completed under this focus area included:

- The preparation and implementation of a new Access and Inclusion policy to support the delivery of person-centered, accessible and trauma informed services by CCL.
- A review of our internal stakeholder register to ensure that it includes current information about organisations that support and represent people with disability, parents/guardians and carers.

Focus Area 4: Better Service Delivery

Focus Area 4 establishes our commitment to continuous improvement in our delivery of services, particularly to people with disability.

Over the past financial year, we have looked particularly at actions which increased participation opportunities for people with disability.

Some of these actions included:

- MHJC delivering a fortnightly Health Justice Partnership based at Canberra Head to Health (since November 2023).
- Our DJLO and Disability Law Supervising Solicitor presenting a webinar on human rights and inclusion webinar on disability justice, as part of the ACT Law Society's *Let's Talk About Rights* human rights and inclusion webinar series (a series that was developed and facilitated by our Disability Law Supervising Solicitor).
- Our DJLO presenting on a panel for the ACTCOSS Members Forum on lived experience workforces, focusing on sharing CCL's Disability Lived Experience Framework (March 2024).
- Our Disability Law Supervising Solicitor regularly attending the Australian Disability Rights Network (ADRN) meetings and contributing to the Network's activities.
- Our DJLO delivering a session in the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) as part of our Women in Prison Legal Empowerment Service Program (WIPLES), on accessing the NDIS in July 2024.

Focus Area 5: Data, Research, and Review

CCL is committed to contributing to positive, systemic change for people with disability in the justice system, and to ensuring our modes of service delivery are up-to-date with evidence and best practice. To do so we aim to collect accurate data about the services we provide, ensure that the voices of lived experience contribute to our service design, and that we promote the value of disability access and inclusion to the wider community.

- Developing and launching our Disability Lived Experience Framework and Project Report in December 2023, which describes CCL's approach to ensuring that lived experience advice shapes our work and provides guidance on how activities under the Framework will be monitored and evaluated.
- CCL's Disability Advisory Group was established to assist us in improving the accessibility of our Community Legal Education (CLE) and ensuring that our CLE content includes topics that are of relevance to people with disability.
- The DJLO presented on a panel for the ACTCOSS Members Forum on lived experience workforces, focusing on sharing CCL's Disability Lived Experience Framework.
- Our DJLO and Disability Law Supervising Solicitor featured in a video produced by GetAboutAble, promoting Disability Access and Inclusion Plans to businesses.

Reconciliation Action Plan Report

Reconciliation is a journey of continuous learning, acknowledgement of the truth about our past and efforts committed to building trusting relationships for future generations.

In the aftermath of the Voice to Parliament Referendum in October 2023, the National Reconciliation Week (NRW) theme for 2023 'Be a Voice for Generations' served as a reminder that reconciliation is fundamentally a journey of learning and acknowledgement of our shared history and cultures and one where leadership promoting justice and equity needs to be taken by many at individual and grassroots levels if we are to make meaningful progress for future generations. It is in this spirit that CCL continues to commit to fostering a working culture and relationships where reconciliation is woven into everything we do.

On our reconciliation journey throughout 2023–2024, CCL held two main reconciliation and cultural immersion days alongside our bi-annual planning days, deepening our knowledge and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, histories, and social structures among CCL staff and leadership.

In October 2023, CCL staff learned about Indigenous plant uses on the lands of Ngunnawal and Ngambri people at the National Arboretum. Rachelle Kelly-Church (then Gulanga policy officer, ACTCOSS; now Sisters in Spirit) led us in a discussion about best practices for mainstream services seeking to engage in a culturally safe way with First Nations peoples, whether colleagues, stakeholders or clients. We discussed systemic issues impacting ACT First Nations communities; and had an opportunity both to review our achievements and prioritise our reconciliation goals for 2023–2024.

In February 2024, CCL staff and members of our Board reconvened at Old Parliament House for cultural immersion and truth telling sessions, gaining important insights into the experiences of First Nations Australians in Australian politics in a tour of Old Parliament House. We heard about the tenacity and courage of First Nations leaders who advocated in Canberra for the rights of First Australians despite facing great adversity and discrimination. We were fortunate to learn from Bel Kendall (Curijo) in a session about culture and social structures of Aboriginal families and communities and the impact of western-designed social systems on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We were also fortunate to attend our own immersive truth telling session with Dr. Raymond Lovett, social epidemiologist from ANU, in which he shared the empirical findings of his Mayi Kuwayu study of the impacts of exposure to racism and discrimination on the health and social outcomes of First Australians.

As always, we have been enriched and inspired through cultural immersion this year. We extend our gratitude to our First Nations colleagues for delivering such impactful learning opportunities and acknowledge that this sharing comes at a cost for First Nations people.

During National Reconciliation Week (NRW) (27 May to 3 June 2024) CCL staff attended various events across Canberra and shared their experiences with the broader organization. We also held our annual NAIDOC week event in July 2024, the first at CCL's new Rudd Street premises, hosting a screening and discussion about the documentary *Heart of Country* by the Australian Conservation Foundation, a film about First Nations peoples protecting country from fossil fuel and nuclear projects. The film was selected in keeping with this year's NAIDOC theme (*Keep the Fire Burning! Blak, Loud and Proud*), documenting acts of First Nations resilience and resistance, in their fight to maintain connection to country.



CCL Planning Day, National Arboretum, October 2023



Dorothy Gunner and Farzana Choudhury with Dean Freeman on CIT Yurauna on Country Cultural Experience

In 2023–2024, CCL finalised and implemented several key protocols and policies to guide current and future staff and the CCL Board in the work of the Centre. We updated our formal protocol for making Acknowledgments of Country and for requesting a Welcome to Country. We also finalised our Best Practice Guidelines for providing culturally appropriate and respectful legal services to First Nations people in the ACT. We thank Rachelle Kelly-Church (Sisters in Spirit) and our own Emma Towney and Rachael Clark for their leadership and guidance in formulating, consulting on and finalising the guidelines. CCL is also very grateful for the contributions of members of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri communities in the ACT, whose ongoing feedback has also informed the development of the Best Practice Guidelines.

During the reporting period, CCL also undertook a process of consultation and review of our internal policies and processes to ensure that our current and future First Nations staff are culturally supported and can not only participate fully in our workplace but can excel. To this end, we finalised our first, First Nations Staff Retention and Recruitment policy.

At the end of June 2023, we were thrilled to receive news that the Snow Foundation had agreed to fund a pilot to enable us to reinstate our First Nations Cadetship Program and subsequently welcomed Jye Hopkins and Shayleah Wanganeen to the roles later in the year. After a successful pilot, we received news in June 2024 of a generous 3-year grant from the Snow Foundation to continue the program. We extend our sincere thanks to the Snow Foundation for its ongoing support.

At the end of the 2023–2024 year, CCL was proud to announce the completion of the transition of our Dhurrawang Aboriginal Human Rights Program to a fully First Nations led and staffed program of the Centre. Our Dhurrawang team is now jointly led by our experienced solicitors Emma Towney and Rachael Clark. Big congratulations to Emma and Rachael on this milestone achievement. We look forward to seeing the Dhurrawang team flourish with the addition of a new Solicitor in late 2024.

Huge thanks to the members of our large and motivated RAP working group, without whom we could not have fulfilled the important milestones we have achieved this year. Thanks also to our Executive Officer/Principal Solicitor Genevieve Bolton who leads by example and our Board, which continues to support us to undertake this journey. As always, thank you to our First Nations colleagues and partners in the community who continue to offer their time, guidance and encouragement and embrace us as allies in our shared reconciliation journey. We look forward to walking this path with you again next year.

Alexandra Palk
RAP Chair

Sector Engagement

CCL continues to work with other community legal centres, government agencies, the private profession, and other services to ensure that our resources are targeted to best meet legal needs and avoid duplication.

During this reporting period, Genevieve Bolton continued to Chair Economic Justice Australia's Board a position which she has held since August 2016. Genevieve also continued as the ACT Representative on the Community Legal Centre Australia's Professional Indemnity Insurance Network a position which she has held since 2007.

During the 2023–2024 financial year, we participated in several forums and meetings including:

- Community Legal Centre's Australia – Professional Indemnity Insurance Network
- Community Legal Centre's Australia – Community Services Network
- Economic Justice Australia – Members' Meetings and Board Meetings
- Monthly Meetings with Housing ACT
- CCL's Annual Disability Forum
- Community Legal Centre's Australia – Disability Rights Network
- Who's New on the Street Meeting
- ACT Legal Assistance Forum
- Disability Liaison Officers' Community of Practice
- Community Legal Centre's Australia – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Network
- ACT Disability Justice Reference Group
- Sisters in Spirit – Community Sector Meeting
- Access to Justice and Inclusion Committee (ACT Law Society)
- ACT Mental Health Network
- Youth Coalition Housing and Homelessness Forum
- Cross Sector Networking Forum – Woden Community Services
- ACTCOSS Meetings



Linda Forbes, Genevieve Bolton and Catherine Eagle at Economic Justice Australia Conference

Dhurrawang Aboriginal Human Rights Program

Overview

CCL would like to acknowledge and pay special thanks to the United Ngunnawal Elders Council for gifting us the name **Dhurrawang** for our Aboriginal Human Rights Program in 2017.

Dhurrawang means 'light'. When gifting us this name, the United Ngunnawal Elders Council said:

"UNEC sends Ngunnawal Blessing, we wish your Program much success in spreading 'Dhurrawang' through your Aboriginal Human Rights Program."

We also give thanks to Wiradjuri artist Leanne Pope for creating the beautiful artwork as identifier for our program. The artwork is called **'Fresh Life After Rain'** which tells the story of the Yellow Crested Black Cockatoo;

"Often you will hear the Black and Yellow Crested cockatoo call and fly over the cityscapes of Canberra just before it rains. The green gum leaves and gum nuts represent new life that blossoms around our City after the rain. Our Spiritual Ancestors dance with rain drops nourishing the country."

Dhurrawang is grateful for the support we have received from the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work. Your support strengthens the Dhurrawang solicitors and our resolve to empower our community through social justice.

During the 2023–2024 financial year we continued our work advising and representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in disputes relating to their housing, social security and race discrimination complaints. In particular, during this financial year we saw a rise in clients needing assistance in getting repair works done to their Housing ACT or community housing home. The consistently heavy demand for our service highlights the reality of the continuing struggle for recognition, equality and self-determination for First Nations people and communities.

Our clients appreciate the wrap-round assistance and support offered by the Dhurrawang Team including the work we do to be accessible to our clients. During this financial year Dhurrawang was able to reach clients via home visits, out reaches, in person and AVL link ups in the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC), in person and remotely either over the phone or by video conference.

We thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the ACT and surrounding regions for your ongoing support and referrals, which are critical to our ability to continue our important work. We offer thanks

and respect to the organisations and programs who have supported us again this year including the Sisters in Spirit Aboriginal Corporation; the Gulanga Program, Yeddung Mura, Yhurwun Bullan, Mulleun Mura Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Access to Justice Program, Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service, Gudan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation, Victims Support ACT, Aboriginal Legal Service, Legal Aid ACT and Yerrabi Yurwang Child & Family Aboriginal Corporation.

Our Staff

This financial year saw little movement within the Dhurrawang team apart from Gemma Smith who moved to our Housing Advice Service in late 2023. Thank you Gemma for all your hard work in Dhurrawang assisting our clients and achieving great outcomes for them.

The retention of staff within the Dhurrawang Team has been important for our clients so they could continue to benefit from the stability of existing and trusted legal relationships and from having access to solicitors experienced in specified areas of law in which we work, and who have the requisite knowledge of the systems in the ACT and services more generally.

The end of this financial year saw Alexandra Palk, our Supervising Senior Solicitor finish up with as Supervising Solicitor of Dhurrawang to enable Dhurrawang to embark on an exciting path of being fully First Nations staffed and supervised going into the 2024–2025 financial year. We thank Alex for her dedication, experience and commitment to assisting our clients and her passion for First Nations justice. Alex is a strong ally to First Nations people, and we look forward to drawing on her expertise while she continues to Supervise CCL's Litigation practice.



Some Dhurrawang Team Members: Gemma Smith, Emma Towney and Alex Palk

Wiradjuri woman, Rachael Clark our Solicitor/Program Manager continued to consistently work tirelessly to assist our clients on the ground. Rachael has been instrumental in building and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders by establishing key outreach services where the First Nations community has identified a need. Rachael continues to go above and beyond for our client group and had obtained some fantastic results both within and outside of a litigation setting.

Wiradjuri woman, Emma Towney, Senior Solicitor has continued to maintain her legal practice whilst working part-time. Emma has been able to appear remotely and in person for our clients who have matters in the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) as well as continue to achieve good outcomes for our clients outside of the Tribunal Process. In February 2024 Emma completed the Legal Practice Management Workshop, a requirement to obtain an unrestricted Practising Certificate.

This year also saw Dhurrawang be successful in securing funding to employ an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cadet (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law student) to work within our Program. With such a strong candidate pool and within funding requirements we were able to employ two Aboriginal cadets, Jye Hopkins and Shayleah Wanganeen to work one day per week which commenced in December 2023. Jye is a proud Luritja and Wurrumungu man. Shayleah is a proud South Australian Aboriginal woman with ancestry and ancestral links to Kurna of the Adelaide Plains and Wirringu from the West Coast. We thank the Snow Foundation for the funding to employ our cadets. Both Jye and Shayleah have showed great enthusiasm and commitment to learn and assist our clients. We look forward to watching them grow and develop.

Students, Volunteers and Secondees

During this reporting period Dhurrawang guided and supervised ANU CLED students Diva Choudhary, Matteo Di Genua Lannan, Neeve O'Hara and Jessica Taylor who assisted with research and legal work for our clients. We delivered tutorials for CCL CLED students, educating them about Dhurrawang's work and the legal and broader access to justice issues faced by Dhurrawang clients.

The Dhurrawang Team would also like to thank our volunteers Kate Wang and Megan Baker Goldsmith for their assistance throughout the financial year and Secondees: Charles Marques from HWL Ebsworth; and Khashif Jadwat from Maddocks.

Outreaches

In response to wide requests, this year, we have increased our visibility and accessibility to the Community by attending outreaches and client appointments in other organisations. Dhurrawang understands that some of the Community prefer to access legal services within practical and safe spaces, which are familiar to them.

Dhurrawang regularly attends an outreach at Yeddung Mura and has found that by attending other organisations, that some of the Community, who would not otherwise attend the CCL office, or pick up a phone to make a call, are able to seek legal assistance that they might never have been able to access. Dhurrawang aspires to increase working in this manner to further improve access to justice in our community.

Whilst undertaking outreaches, Dhurrawang has been able to closely engage with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in different organisations and assist them in their work by answering enquires and providing support.



Rachael Clark, Solicitor/Program Manager

Law Reform & Community Development

During this financial year, Dhurrawang continued to participate in external meetings and other committees in relation to First Nations peoples' issues. This included meetings with ACAT, ACT Government, the ACT Inspector of Corrections Office, Housing ACT and the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department Legal Assistance Branch.

Law reform work in this financial year included:

- consultation regarding introduction of Human Rights Commissioner/regulatory body and occupancy law issues;
- contribution to CCL's submission to the National Legal Assistance Partnership Review addressing how self determination and closing the gap targets can be best supported through legal assistance arrangements;
- Contributing to Community Legal Centres Australia's national consultation for First Nations sector workers on the Voice referendum; and
- Contributing to an Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) focus group.

Rachael continued to attend Community Sector Networking Events throughout the financial year as well as attending many community events such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Caucus Community Open Day, the Smoking Ceremony for the new building site for Gudan Gulwan, International Womens Day at Sisters in Spirit, Beryl's NAIDOC Event & Cultural Plan Launch, R U OK? Day at Gudan Gulwan, the 16th National Apology Anniversary Remembrance and witnessing the Ceremonial Sitting and Swearing in of Justice Louise Taylor.

In September 2023, Emma was a panellist on The Kind Lawyers Forum on the topic of Humans First, Humans Second, addressing the topic of privilege and inclusion within the legal profession.

Also in September 2023, Emma and Rachael were speakers as part of an ACT Law Society webinar on First Nations led legal service delivery.

In the latter half of 2023, Emma was put forward by a senior First Nations community member to sit on a tender panel with the ACT Government with respect to selecting a tenderer to conduct an Independent Review into the Overrepresentation of First Nations People in the ACT Criminal Justice System. This review commenced in 2024.

To the end of 2023, Emma continued her membership in the ACT Law Society's Access to Justice Inclusion Committee.

Emma and Rachael were also members of CLC Australia's Human Rights Network and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Network.

Professional Development

Dhurrawang staff also participated in a broad range of professional development events including attending the following conferences and training sessions:

- Community Legal Centres Australia Conference;
- Foundations of Building Trauma Awareness;
- Cultural Training;
- First Nations Leadership and Allyship Summit;
- National Indigenous Legal Conference

Casework

Dhurrawang assisted 140 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. Of the 140 clients, 45 were new clients to Dhurrawang and CCL.

Dhurrawang provided:

- 615 discrete services (advice, legal tasks and duty lawyer services)
- 31 representation services (including tribunal and other representation services)

As in previous years, many of our clients were referred by a friend or relative. This highlights the trust and support for Dhurrawang in the community and the success of Dhurrawang's efforts to reach clients through our engagement with community and outreach activities.

In addition to providing discrete services, Dhurrawang provided ongoing and multiple Tribunal representation to clients via the ACAT Duty Lawyer service and through direct referrals for assistance in relation to repair matters. Repair matters in ACAT are often lengthy and complex and can continue over multiple months prior to a resolution. While time consuming this type of assistance has been invaluable to our clients who with our assistance are finally able to have repair issues addressed which may have been ongoing for years.

Dhurrawang Case Study 1: Maddy's Story

Maddy (not her real name) is an Aboriginal woman and survivor of severe domestic violence, living in the Housing ACT property in which the violence had taken place. Despite her ex-partner moving away, she felt unsafe remaining in the property, whose address was known to her abuser and was part of a high-density complex with a high incidence of domestic violence and drug use. She struggled with severe mental ill-health and was, at times, housebound.

Maddy applied for a transfer and was assessed to the High Needs List for a one-bedroom property. She told Housing ACT that she needed a low-density property due to the trauma she had suffered, and an additional bedroom to host family and friends to assist her during depressive periods. These requests were denied.

Dhurrawang wrote reassessment submissions to Housing ACT and Maddy was placed on the Priority Needs List for a two-bedroom property. Housing ACT then offered Maddy multiple properties that were part of high-density complexes. Dhurrawang sought review of these offers, each time providing further supporting documentation outlining Maddy's needs. Housing ACT withdrew the property offers. Finally, Housing ACT made an eighth offer consistent with Maddy's needs. Maddy has accepted her low-density property and looks forward to healing in a safe environment with the support of her loved ones.

Dhurrawang Case Study 2: Nina's Story

Nina (not her real name) is an Aboriginal Elder. Upon her family's request Dhurrawang previously assisted Nina with a transfer application to an older persons aged unit from her previous property where she was kept awake from the sounds of noisy neighbours and barking dogs.

Being an elderly and frail woman, Nina's family (again) asked Dhurrawang to assist Nina in requesting repairs of her newly allocated unit as they were having no luck in getting any repairs done. Nina was grateful for any assistance that Dhurrawang could provide as her strength had been waning for some time, and she did not have the energy to repeatedly contact Housing for repairs.

Dhurrawang attended the property to inspect the list of repairs and to take photos. Nina was unable to do so herself given her limited ability with technology and was too proud to ask her family to help her.

Dhurrawang then provided a request for repairs to Housing ACT in writing and also provided photographs to them showing the work which was required. The Dhurrawang team then repeatedly contacted Housing ACT to request that the repairs were undertaken to ensure that Nina's repairs were made a priority. The Dhurrawang team kept in constant contact with Nina throughout the entire process of having the repairs undertaken, liaising with contractors and ensuring that all the work was undertaken properly and to Nina's satisfaction.

Disability Law

Our Staff

Disability Law had the following staffing changes in the 2023–24 financial year:

- Phillipa Duell-Piening (Project Officer, Disability Advisory Group Pilot Project) completed her temporary role with us on 15 December 2023. We thank Phillipa for her invaluable expertise in preparing our Disability Lived Experience Framework and Project Report following extensive research and consultation.
- Izzy Moss joined CCL as our Disability Justice Liaison Officer (DJLO) on 21 August 2023. Izzy has brought her experience working with people with disability to progress local and national disability policy to the role.
- Sarah Lim (Disability Law Paralegal) had been primarily working with the Mental Health Justice Clinic (MHJC) and completed her role with CCL on 16 December 2023. Sarah was a highly valued member of the Disability Law team. We appreciated Sarah's proactive approach to all tasks, and her excellent legal research and analysis skills. We also congratulate Sarah Lim on her admission as a solicitor in December 2023.
- Ruby Lew (Disability Law Paralegal) completed her role with Disability Law on 15 August 2023, before taking up a position with our ACAT Duty Lawyer Service. We thank Ruby for her fantastic contributions and are pleased that Ruby is continuing to contribute to the work of the centre.
- Farzana Choudhury continued in her role as Disability Law Supervising Solicitor, which includes delivering the Mental Health Justice Clinic (MHJC) and providing overall supervision of the Disability Law team. Farzana returned to full-time work in this role from January 2024, after previously reducing her hours to fulfill her commitments as President of the ACT Law Society.
- Erin Rikus continued as our Disability Discrimination Law (DDL) Solicitor.



Izzy Moss, Ruby Lew, Farzana Choudhury, Erin Rikus and Sarah Lim

Client work

Disability Law assisted a total of 178 clients across each of its services (legal assistance for 140 clients, and DJLO assistance for 38 clients). This represents an overall increase in the number of clients assisted by the Disability Law team since the last financial Year.

Disability Discrimination Law (DDL)

DDL provided legal services to 38 clients during the reporting period. The primary areas of assistance that DDL provided was discrimination.

The three major disability discrimination areas for DDL were provision of services and facilities, education and employment. Examples of successful settlement terms included formal apologies, the payment of monetary compensation (including reimbursement for medical expenses; changes to policies and procedures; the provision of reasonable adjustments for clients; and the provision of training.

DDL also provided assistance in other related matters, including employment law, housing law and other civil law matters.

DDL provided:

- 71 discrete services (advice and legal tasks)
- 13 representation services (including dispute resolution and tribunal representation).

Mental Health Justice Clinic (MHJC)

MHJC provided legal services to 102 clients during the reporting period. The primary areas of assistance that MHJC provided was in housing law, discrimination law, social security law and employment law.

The three major disability discrimination areas for MHJC were provision of services and facilities, employment, and education. Examples of successful settlement terms included formal apologies; changes to policies and procedures; the provision of reasonable adjustments for clients; statements of education completion; and the provision of training.

MHJC also provided assistance in other related matters, mental health law, traffic fines, and other civil law matters.

MHJC provided:

- 280 discrete services (advice, legal tasks, and duty lawyer services)
- 15 representation services (dispute resolution, tribunal, and other representation services).

DDL Case Study 1: Sophie's Story

Sophie (not her real name) is a student completing studying at a tertiary education provider ('the provider'). Sophie has multiple disabilities, and an access plan to support her learning. The access plan had not been complied with, and the provider had raised other concerns about Sophie. Sophie contacted CCL for assistance with a meeting with the institution regarding these issues.

DDL assisted Sophie by:

- Liaising with the provider to obtain further information about the provider's concerns.
- Advising Sophie on her discrimination law rights.
- Connecting Sophie to CCL's Social Legal Practice (SLP) for social support.
- Providing advocacy support alongside the CCL Social Worker at a meeting between Sophie and the provider.

Sophie experienced significant distress during the meeting. Our social worker was able to provide additional support to help her with this. At the meeting, ways the provider could support Sophie, create an inclusive environment, and ensure that her access plan was implemented were also discussed. CCL's DDL and Social Worker assistance ensured that Sophie was able to continue her studies. We were happy to observe that the provider came back with some ideas on how to better support Sophie in future after our first consultation. Sophie reported feeling much happier in her studies.

MHJC Case Study 2: Nora's Story

Nora (not her real name) is an older woman who had been a long-term social housing tenant. She has several ongoing mental health challenges (which had resulted in significant hoarding), chronic pain and mobility issues.

After challenges with complying with ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) orders to tidy the property, the housing provider sought Nora's eviction.

Nora was referred to MHJC by our ACAT Duty Lawyer service. MHJC assisted Nora by:

- Giving advice on her matter,
- Connecting Nora to our SLP Clinic for social support (including referrals, communication support and other advocacy), and
- Providing Duty Lawyer Representation at ACAT at a conference and final hearing.

Nora was initially hesitant to accept assistance from CCL's Social Worker, because of mistrust of people, community, and government systems.

Our Social Worker was able to build rapport, gain Nora's trust, identify social supports including referrals to mental health and specialist hoarding support, and assist Nora to share her story which formed the basis for a witness statement to assist in the legal proceedings. The Social Worker also accompanied Nora to the ACAT hearing as a support person.

Following active efforts from Nora and her supports, ACAT made new orders by consent to improve the condition of the property with realistic timeframes, allowing Nora to avoid eviction.

Disability Justice Liaison Officer (DJLO)

The Disability Liaison Officer (DJLO) supports lawyers across all CCL programs. DJLO referrals for client work are internal and relate directly to progressing the legal matter.

The primary areas of DJLO assistance related to housing law, discrimination law and social security law. DJLO also provided assistance in relation to employment law and other civil law matters.

During the reporting period, the DJLO provided non-legal support to 38 clients.

The DJLO provided:

- 97 discrete non-legal support services
- 1 ongoing non-legal support service.

This support included:

- Supports and adjustments for clients during appointments.
- Facilitating appointment through assistance such as contacting and supporting vulnerable clients, and community or home visits.
- Referrals to other agencies as appropriate.
- Additional support relating to the legal issue, such as structuring and scribing personal statements for clients with literacy or cognitive difficulties.
- Support to lawyers in relation to health reports, home modifications, and general disability queries.

DJLO Case study: Frankie's Story

Frankie (not their real name) is a non-binary person with multiple, complex physical and psychosocial disabilities. Frankie was facing eviction from a social housing property due to alleged property damage.

Because of the stress of facing eviction, as well as their anxiety and other mental health issues, Frankie struggled significantly to engage with our service.

The DJLO was able to support them to engage with the MHJC by working with the solicitor to provide communication support and advice on accommodating Frankie's disabilities.

The DJLO and the MHJC Solicitor liaised with Frankie in advance of the conference to prepare them for the experience and to seek detailed instructions. The DJLO liaised with the DLO at the Courts and Tribunals to ensure that Frankie would be able to enter the building with their mobility device and that the tribunal room would be accessible for them. During the conference the DJLO liaised with Frankie and our MHJC Solicitor to facilitate regular breaks for Frankie and assisted communicating the proceedings throughout the day.

As a result, Frankie was able to participate for the full duration of the conference. Orders by consent were reached between both parties, which prevented Frankie's eviction.

Stakeholder Engagement and Community Education

Disability Law was active in engaging with stakeholders, in particular organisations that work with people with disabilities. Disability Law was also involved in stakeholder engagement nationally through the Community Law Centre's Australia Disability Rights Network, and locally through the ACT Law Society's Access to Justice and Inclusion Committee, the ACT Disability Justice Reference Group, and the ACT Disability Liaison Officers Community of Practice.

The Disability Law Supervising Solicitor engaged in a range of other stakeholder engagement activities throughout the reporting period, including but not limited to:

- Meeting with the UK Government Open Innovation Team to provide an Australian perspective on the legal assistance sector and collaborative practice
- Delivering a keynote address at the ANU Law Graduation Ceremony (December 2023), focusing her presentation on human rights, inclusion and wellbeing
- Being interviewed for the Law and Disorder podcast (ANU College of Law podcast) on an episode titled *Farzana Choudhury on Community Law and the Law Community*
- Participating in a focus group on human rights and the AMC
- Presenting at the Kind Lawyers Forum on privilege and diversity
- Presenting on a panel for the ANU Law Students Society on social justice careers
- Meetings with Canberra Head to Health to work towards establishment of the MHJC/Head to Health Justice Partnership
- Several meetings with pro bono partners to discuss how CCL's work can be supported.

Farzana Choudhury was awarded Pro Bono/Not-For-Profit/Community Legal Centre Lawyer of the Year at the 2023 Lawyers Weekly Women in Law Awards the 2023, in recognition of her contributions towards greater access to justice, particularly for the disability community and people experiencing homelessness and other barriers.

Our DJLO and Disability Law Supervising Solicitor presented a webinar on human rights and inclusion webinar on disability justice, as part of the ACT Law Society's *Let's Talk About Rights* human rights and inclusion webinar series.

The DJLO contributes to community engagement activities as appropriate, including as part of the Community of Practice through fortnightly meetings and liaising with counterparts in other justice agencies in relation to advice, resources, and warm referrals.

Outreaches

MHJC launched a new Health Justice Partnership (HJP) with Canberra Head to Health in November 2023. An HJP is a collaboration that brings lawyers into healthcare settings to address legal need that can have an impact on health outcomes. As part of MHJC's HJP with Canberra Head to Health, MHJC works from the Canberra Head to Health office fortnightly, to assist clients who have been identified as having a legal issue we can assistance with while on-site.

MHJC has continued to run its monthly outreach at the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network.

Community Legal Education

During the reporting period, MHJC delivered training on:

- Discrimination law for the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network
- Spotting legal issues and referrals to the MHJC as part of our health justice partnership with Canberra Head to Health (November 2023)
- Inclusion of lived experience of disability through community legal education at the 2024 Economic Justice Australia Conference
- Changes to the ACT Discrimination Act, with two sessions jointly developed and delivered with the ACT Human Rights Commission
- Community legal education (to our ANU CLED students)
- Working with clients and integrated legal services (to our CLED students, jointly with the DJLO)
- A range of legal and justice stakeholders through *Just Hearing* performances.

The Disability Law Supervising Solicitor Farzana Choudhury coordinated and facilitated a human rights and inclusion focused webinar series through the ACT Law Society called *Let's Talk About Rights*. In addition to coordinating and facilitating the webinar, Farzana presented a session on homelessness, human rights and discrimination.

A key component of the MHJC's community education arm is our collaboration with Rebus Theatre and Legal Aid ACT for the delivery of interactive presentations for the justice sector. The training, called *Just Hearing*, seeks to ensure that the sector is better equipped to respond to the needs of people with lived experience of mental ill-health who may have experience in the justice system. Using an interactive model known as Forum Theatre, *Just Hearing* is a 90-minute performance that explores issues faced by people with lived experience of severe mental health challenges and their

interactions with the legal system. *Just Hearing* is performed by actors and has been written and produced by people with lived experience of mental ill-health.

During the reporting period:

- *Just Hearing* was delivered to ANU Law students and CCL volunteers, the public, targeted performances for our pro bono partners, at the Economic Justice Australia Conference 2024, and Queensland Community Legal Centres.
- There were 9 performances to a total of 187 participants.

The Disability Law Supervising Solicitor and DJLO also contributed to a promotional video produced by GetAboutAble to encourage businesses to develop their own Disability Action and Inclusion Plans with the aim of assisting businesses in becoming more accessible and inclusive.

Law Reform

Disability Law prepared a detailed submission for the Disability Inclusion Bill 2023 (ACT) in September 2023. The Bill has subsequently passed in August 2024.

Disability also actively contributed to CCL's submission on the Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework.

Disability Law looks forward to continuing our important work towards alleviating barriers for people with disability through our Programs.



CCL and Rebus Theatre Just Hearing Qld Community Legal Centre's Performance

Housing Law (including Parachute)

Overview

Housing Law assisted 360 clients in the 2023–2024 financial year.

Housing Law provided the following assistance in relation to public housing, occupancy agreements, community housing and crisis accommodation matters and related issues:

- 525 information and referrals
- 875 legal advices
- 415 legal tasks
- 210 duty lawyer services
- 55 representation services

Trends in Housing Law

In the 2023–2024 financial year, the Housing Law team continued to receive a large volume of requests for advice and assistance from vulnerable clients seeking reassessment of their placement on the social housing waitlists, to move from the Standard or High Needs lists to the Priority Needs list. Many of the at-risk clients we assisted have been waitlisted for many years. Many are experiencing severe overcrowding, the exacerbation of mental and physical health conditions due to inadequate housing and emotional and financial distress. Due to the continuing shortage of social housing stock and acute demand for social housing in the community, it continues to be difficult to assist clients experiencing significant disadvantage to gain placement on and be housed from the Priority Needs housing list.

Outstanding property condition issues have been a major concern for clients across CCL's programs. The condition of Housing ACT properties continues to deteriorate at a rate outpacing the ACT government's renewal efforts. In the 2023–2024 financial year, CCL clients sought our assistance to address numerous instances of inadequate heating and cooling, extensive mould infestation, water ingress and water damage, dilapidated and non-functioning kitchens and bathrooms, and a lack of insulation and ventilation in their homes. In most cases, clients resorted to legal advice and/or legal action because their repair and maintenance issues remained unresolved for months or years, despite renters' best efforts to have them addressed.

Throughout this reporting period Housing Law also continued to advise clients about their rights and obligations in relation to rental rebates, rental debts and tenant responsible maintenance charges. We provided urgent advice and advocated on behalf of renters who received Notices to Remedy or Notices to Vacate. We also advised clients about

tenancy breakdowns, co-tenancies, tenancy and occupancy contract negotiations, and assisted clients to seek internal review of Housing ACT decisions and reasons for decisions. Due to an increased number of renters complaining of illnesses believed to be caused or exacerbated by the condition of their homes, our Housing Law team also made more referrals for personal injury advice.



Some of our Housing Law Team: Clyde Cosentino, Genevieve Bolton, Anisha Hegde and Alex Palk

Housing Advice Line and Housing Repairs Clinic

In response to the increased demand on CCL services for repairs and maintenance advice, advocacy and Tribunal representation, in 2023 with the support of our pro-bono partners, CCL established a Housing Repairs Clinic (the repairs clinic) as part of our Housing Advice Line. The repairs clinic worked closely with CCL's ACAT Duty Lawyer Service and Dhurrawang Aboriginal Human Rights Program to help clients get repair and maintenance issues actioned, or alternatively to progress their repair matters to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT).

The repairs clinic assisted several clients to successfully self-represent at ACAT, preparing them with legal advice and assisting with drafting of Notices to Remedy and ACAT applications seeking repairs, rent reduction and compensation. CCL continues to provide full representation services in repair and compensation matters in exceptional cases, where our clients face multiple barriers that prevent them from self-representing and the condition of their homes places clients' health or tenancies at risk. We are pleased to have observed greater responsiveness from Housing ACT and its contractors to our client's requests for

repairs and maintenance with the benefit of our advocacy. Clients have also reported overwhelmingly positive outcomes in ACAT applications prepared with CCL's assistance.

Despite observing some improvement in responsiveness to outstanding repair and maintenance issues, CCL's Housing Law team continues to receive concerning feedback from clients who try to resolve issues without legal assistance. Housing ACT tenants, and Community and Crisis Accommodation renters reported on numerous occasions that contractors had not attended, had attended outside of business hours or otherwise than agreed, and that repairs although conducted, were incomplete or had failed altogether to resolve the outstanding issue. Others reported that work orders were not recorded, cancelled without notice, or marked complete without the works being conducted. Some renters reported being advised that works were delayed or cancelled due to funding constraints. Many clients complained that maintenance issues they raised with their Housing managers at inspections was not lodged on the maintenance system. Clients who lodged complaints about repairs and maintenance issues reported being given conflicting information about who was responsible for responding to and resolving their complaint and repair issue. CCL anticipates that advocating for our client's rights to live in homes that comply with minimum standards and that are in a reasonable state of repair, reasonably clean and secure will continue to be a focus of CCL's advocacy in the coming year.

ACAT Duty Lawyer Service

In the 2023–2024 financial year, the ACAT Duty Lawyer Service continued to assist with a very high volume of requests for advice and advocacy assistance from social housing renters defending their tenancies at ACAT, and occupants who need to initiate legal proceedings to prevent imminent eviction from community housing and crisis accommodation properties.

ACAT Duty Lawyer clients are often experiencing crises at the point of eviction, which can pose challenges for engaging with Tribunal processes. The ACAT Duty Lawyer Service worked collaboratively with other CCL programs including the Socio-Legal Practice Clinic, Parachute (Domestic and Family Violence Program), the Dhurrawang Aboriginal Human Rights Program, Mental Health Justice Clinic and Street Law, as well as community-based organisations such as Care Financial Counselling Service and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, to provide effective, holistic legal services that are cognisant of and respond to clients' needs while ACAT proceedings are ongoing.

During the reporting period the ACAT Duty Lawyer Service focused on resolving disputes outside of the Tribunal process where possible, through alternative dispute resolution and by building on existing relationships with housing providers and community support organisations. The ACAT Duty Lawyer Service has continued to work productively with Housing ACT to reach fair and sustainable outcomes in ACAT matters wherever possible.

Type of Assistance Provided at ACAT

As in previous years, the ACAT Duty Lawyer service primarily assisted clients facing eviction due to rental or occupancy fee arrears. We have also seen several ACAT applications by housing providers in relation to managing property condition including hoarding and squalor issues.

During the reporting period, however, we observed a particular increase in ACAT applications being brought by social housing lessors and grantors seeking termination on the basis of alleged anti-social behaviour. We have seen an increase in the use of recently enacted *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* provisions which lower the evidentiary bar for lessors or grantors seeking to evict renters based on alleged threatening, intimidating, harassing or abusive behaviour. The ACAT Duty Lawyer service has observed that these applications predominantly impact renters experiencing acute mental ill health and trauma. Accordingly, we have redoubled our efforts to advocate with housing providers to put in place mechanisms and supports that make reasonable adjustments for and help to manage the concerns of social housing renters experiencing mental ill health and trauma before matters reach crisis point.

Many ACAT Duty Lawyer clients facing eviction are women experiencing or fleeing domestic and family violence (DFV). We have observed that the responsibility for rent arrears debts accrued jointly with violent ex-partners, or accrued during and in the aftermath of DFV where the victim-survivor has incurred the rent arrears under duress, often falls upon victim-survivors by default. Facing eviction can be extremely distressing for victim-survivors faced with the prospect of their and their children's homelessness and it often involves disclosure of traumatic and personal information during the Tribunal process. The ACAT Duty Lawyer Service continues to advocate strongly with housing providers to adhere to and apply their DFV policies when managing these tenancies and to take victim-survivors and their children's circumstances into account when deciding whether to bring ACAT proceedings.

In 2023–2024 financial year, we assisted many renters in community and crisis accommodation occupancies to apply to ACAT to defend against eviction for relatively minor breaches or for relatively small amounts of rent arrears. In most cases renters fell into rent arrears due to difficult life circumstances including relapsing mental ill-health, DFV or due to unexpected financial hardship. In some cases, social housing grantors agreed to reinstate an occupancy if the renter could discharge the debt in a lump sum, which often is impossible for this cohort of renters. The ACAT Duty Lawyer Service and the Housing Law team continues to advocate for stronger housing rights for occupants, as housing insecurity only exacerbates the already significant range of difficulties occupants face, and places them at a higher risk of primary homelessness.

For all of our ACAT Duty Lawyer clients, we continued to utilise the ACT *Human Rights Act 2004* as the basis for advocating that decision-makers' discretion at all stages of engagement with vulnerable renters should be exercised in accordance with the requirements of the *Human Rights Act*, by taking into account vulnerable renters' protected human rights.

Parachute

Our Parachute program has a specific focus on assisting women experiencing or at risk of family violence with social housing and social security matters. During the reporting period, Parachute assisted many women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (including from refugee backgrounds), women living with disabilities and LGBRIQA+ identifying people. Parachute also continued to work with our community partners to ensure that there were clear referral pathways into the program.

During the reporting period, Parachute saw an increasing number of clients with complex matters which often involved more than one legal issue. For example, often women contacted Parachute seeking a priority transfer but were also facing significant repair issues in their current property.



Gemma Smith, Genevieve Bolton with Kavitha Sivasamy (Parachute Solicitor)

Parachute engaged with government at both Commonwealth and Territory level on issues impacting women experiencing or at risk of family violence including where visa status issues preventing them from accessing public housing and social security payments and its impact.

During the reporting period, Parachute made submissions in relation to the Commonwealth Government's proposal to develop and deliver training for legal practitioners on coercive control.

Towards the end of 2024, we farewelled Kavitha Sivasamy and wished her all the best in her next great adventure. CCL was incredibly fortunate to have Kavitha at the helm of Parachute. Kavitha worked tirelessly to champion the rights of our clients, and her strong advocacy resulted in her achieving outstanding outcomes Parachute's clients.

Housing Law Case Study 1: Casey's Story

Casey (not their real name) is a Housing ACT tenant. They were referred to CCL from Housing ACT after ACAT had ordered their eviction into homelessness. Casey is a First Nations person who experienced childhood trauma, depression and anxiety, suicidal ideation, and discrimination from neighbours at their Housing ACT property. Casey is also a kinship carer for their younger family members. Casey had difficulty engaging with external services or formal proceedings due to their mental ill-health. Casey had also been without income for several months, as their mental ill-health had prevented them from fulfilling reporting obligations for their social security income.

CCL successfully assisted Casey to apply to ACAT to set aside the eviction order and return the matter to the list for hearing. CCL liaised with Centrelink to assist Casey to reinstate regular social security payments. CCL also supported Casey to engage with culturally appropriate services, including health services for mental health support. CCL assisted Casey at the ACAT hearing, to defend their tenancy based on their human rights, including their distinct cultural rights as a First Nations person.

CCL was able to successfully advocate for the ACAT matter to be resolved by way of a payment order and Casey was able to stay in their home.

Housing Law Case Study 2: Peter's Story

Peter (not their real name) is a Housing ACT tenant. He is a DSP and NDIS recipient who lives with health conditions that impact his mental and physical wellbeing. Since 2020, his bathroom roof had leaked, and his carpets were stained and threadbare. He reported the outstanding repairs to Housing ACT numerous times over the years, but nothing was done. The condition of his home had taken a considerable toll on Peter's mental and physical health.

CCL gave Housing ACT a Notice to Remedy on Peter's behalf. When Housing ACT took no action in relation to the repairs, CCL assisted Peter to make an application to the ACAT for orders for repairs, a rent reduction and compensation. Peter attended the ACAT hearing, and orders were made in his favour. ACAT granted Peter \$5000 in refunded rent and ordered Housing ACT to replace the carpet and fix the leaking roof.

The Tribunal ordered that Peter was not obliged to pay the full rate of rent until the repairs were completed.

Night Time Legal Advice Service

Overview

The Night Time Legal Advice Service (NTLAS) provides advice, assistance, and referrals to the broader Canberra community in most areas of law and operates on Tuesday nights. We take enquiries through the front office and our dedicated email address throughout the week.

John Alati is the Supervising Solicitor and is the only employed solicitor in the service. Other legal assistance is provided by our pro bono partners and volunteers.

In the 2023–24 year we provided over 250 separate advices for more than 100 clients in the Canberra community.

NTLAS is one of Canberra's little known, but much-admired legal services.

It operates entirely remotely, a change made during the COVID pandemic. It is responsive and agile, responding quickly to the changing legal needs of the community.

Our remote model has meant that our solicitors generally work alone. They take instructions from clients and provide advice after conferring with the supervising solicitor and conducting any necessary research.

Due to challenges with scheduling, we have not called on as many volunteers as we had pre-covid, but as always, we have relied on the enthusiastic support of our volunteers and pro-bono partners and their high-quality work. We currently mostly rely on a core group of pro-bono partners to provide assistance to us as needed. This allows us to take on more complex matters and match our clients' matters with the required expertise.

NTLAS Trends

Many of our clients are the 'missing middle' – people who do not qualify for traditional free legal services, but could not access private legal services, or it would not be viable for them to do so.

One of our key areas of growth has been property disputes, as the cost of land, building, interest rates and all aspects of property rise significantly, many people are caught in difficult situations. The result is that any delay causes significant hardship, but there is little protection for consumers in this area for delays.

In response to the growing complexity of some of these matters, we have continued to call on our pro-bono partners who have the relevant expertise in property and building disputes. It has been a great benefit to us and our clients to be able to source the expertise of specialists in these areas from top tier firms.

The ACT Government's Affordable Housing Scheme, whilst well intentioned, has caused problems for some consumers with its lack of protection for delays in construction and some concerning contract arrangements. In our experience, these clients are struggling to get into their first home and are suffering greatly from gaps in the scheme. We would like to see more transparency for consumers in this area.

We try to be as practical as possible, assisting clients with next steps, whatever they may be. We find so many clients simply don't know what to do next in a legal dispute. We pride ourselves on being responsive to the differing needs of our clients.

We are as ever very grateful to those members of the Canberra legal community who give generously of their time and expertise. A special thanks also to our front office team – Sarah, Mikaela and the secondees and volunteers who do an amazing job with the very busy and complicated task of triage and intake for our clients. Their patience and skill are vital to our service and highly valued by our clients and we simply could not operate without them.

NTLAS Volunteers

As always, NTLAS has enjoyed enthusiastic support from pro bono partners, including Minter Ellison, Clayton Utz, Hall & Wilcox, Sparke Helmore, as well as several private individuals who gave of their time. Lauren Armstrong, Lara Douglas, Mya Anumarlapudi and the team at Sparke Helmore have provided a great deal of support to us.

Currently our pro bono partners usually conduct research on complex matters for us, saving us valuable resources and providing an outstanding service to our clients, which they generally cannot get elsewhere on a pro-bono basis.

We usually give them work with fairly tight timeframes and they always accommodate our needs. It has, as always, been a pleasure and a privilege working with them. Their dedication to helping members of the Canberra community with legal issues is inspiring.



**John Alati, Supervising
Solicitor, Night Time Legal
Advice Service**

Social Security Law

Overview

Social Security Law assisted 131 clients in the 2023–2024 financial year.

Social Security Law provided assistance in relation to Centrelink, Social Security and Family Assistance law, Paid Parental Leave and related issues:

- 262 legal advices
- 75 legal tasks
- 11 duty law services
- 3 representation services open at the start of the financial year, 5 representation services opened during the period and 6 representation service closed during the period
- 3 court/tribunal matters open at the start of the financial year

During this time, Social Security Law was staffed by Jessica Spargo, Kate Kenny, Anusha Goonetilleke and Genevieve Bolton. Jessica Spargo finished up with Social Security Law during the financial year. We thank her for her contribution throughout her long time working with the Canberra Community Law (CCL) in various roles.



Genevieve Bolton and Anusha Goonetilleke

Trends

Common issues included:

- Assisting clients to get on income support or a more appropriate payment;
- Dealing with Centrelink debt;
- Advising around cuts or reduction to payments.

People who contact CCL for assistance with their social security questions are generally Canberra's most vulnerable citizens who are facing a myriad of overlapping and reinforcing socio-economic challenges including identifying as having a disability, mental ill health, experience of domestic violence, substance abuse and low literacy.

Clients continue to report difficulties navigating Centrelink alternative service options such as the phone and online systems, particularly when they are from a non-English speaking background. When they can speak with a Centrelink worker, they often describe challenges with their interactions.

Those individuals who come to us for assistance tend to have complex social security questions, and there are no other organisations within the community that can assist them.

We listen to their story, undertake legal research on their behalf and explain the information and their options to them in a way they can understand so that they feel heard and empowered. By doing so, the assistance we provide can help break the cycle of disadvantage.

Social Security Law Case Study 1: Meg's Story

Meg (not her real name) was referred to CCL's AAT Duty Lawyer Service for assistance with appealing her Centrelink debt to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).

The debt was raised against Meg for her failure to satisfy the Youth Allowance (YA) study requirements for several months. Meg was in her early twenties and had a significant trauma history. Meg suffered a severe domestic violence incident from her former partner and her young child was removed from her care. Meg subsequently entered herself into a drug rehabilitation program. In the last couple of years, Meg was in and out of rehabilitation and stopped studying full-time. Meg was not aware of the requirements, nor did she have the capacity, to inform Centrelink of her study status.

During this time, Meg also suffered mental ill health and homelessness, which was compounded by the childhood trauma and abuse she suffered as a child. The debt for more than \$10,000 was causing significant stress to Meg, as she had made significant progress since completing rehabilitation having found full-time work and looking to get full time care of her child.

After initial advice and assistance, CCL represented Meg at Tier 1 of the AAT. Our Social Security Law Paralegal and Solicitor put together extensive submissions as to why Meg's debt should be waived on the grounds that she had special circumstances that made it desirable to waive the debt in full. CCL also worked with Meg to collect appropriate evidence to support her case. The Tribunal advised that Meg did have complex special circumstances that made it appropriate to waive the debt in full. Meg was extremely appreciative of CCL's assistance in dealing with this stressful and complex issue. Meg and her child are working towards living independently and building their life together without this financial strain.

Social Security Law Case Study 2: Jane's Story

Jane (not her real name) has experienced crisis due to mental ill health and drug dependency, which led to her having to resign from her job. Jane's marriage ended and she was no longer able to care for her children. Due to this period of crisis, Jane was not able to inform Centrelink in the change of her activity requirement, which led to a significant childcare subsidy debt. Arguably her ex-husband who had care of the children would have eligible for the childcare subsidy and the children benefited from accessing this care at a difficult time. Jane was paying this debt out of her JobSeeker payment, even though she was experiencing homelessness.

Jane reached out to CCL for assistance. CCL represented Jane in her appeal to the AAT, including putting together extensive written and oral submissions. CCL's social worker supported Jane during and after the Tribunal process. The Tribunal decided to waive the remaining debt (more than 90% of the debt). CCL was also able to advise Jane around her eligibility for the Disability Support Payment, including providing her with documents to be filled out by her doctors. After the debt was waived, Jane entered a rehabilitation program and was hopeful about returning to work and caring for her children.

Social Security Law Case Study 3: Mia's Story

Mia (not her real name) was referred to CCL from another community legal centre. She is a temporary visa holder living in Canberra. Her visa sub-class prevents her from being eligible for a Centrelink income payment. Her partner is also a temporary visa holder. Mia and her partner have a toddler born in Australia.

Recently, Mia was diagnosed with cancer. She is currently undergoing treatment. Mia's visa conditions require her to continue working despite her illness, but she is too unwell to work full-time. She is now only working part-time.

Mia and her partner are struggling financially and have no savings. They have credit card and utility debt, and have been relying on assistance from friends, co-workers and community services. Given her reduced working hours, Mia can no longer afford the full rate of her son's childcare fees. None of her friends can mind her son and they have no family living permanently in Australia, so childcare is the only option.

CCL provided Mia with initial advice about the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and the CCS residency exemption. CCL assisted Mia with her claim for CCS, which allowed her to also apply for the Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) based on her temporary financial hardship. This included writing submissions to Centrelink. CCL reviewed Mia's support letters from her hospital social worker, her oncologist and from her son's childcare provider, and provided an additional letter of support from its in-house social worker. Mia was eventually approved for CCS and ACCS (temporary hardship). CCL provided Mia with follow-up advice regarding ongoing obligations to update Centrelink with changes to her family's circumstances and income, as well as ongoing activity tests. This decision allows Mia to focus on her recovery and will allow her to return to full-time when she has recovered.

As illustrated in the case studies above, the Social Security Law service enjoyed working closely with the Socio-Legal Practice Clinic to help vulnerable clients with complex social and legal issues.

With their legal issues resolved, our clients can focus on rebuilding their lives which often means returning to work, education, training or having the headspace to focus on other issues in their lives that need to be resolved.

Pro Bono Support

We thank HWL Ebsworth for partnering with us to provide legal support to the advice line with their graduates undertaking 1-2 rotations of 3 weeks full-time. They provided invaluable assistance writing up interview notes, undertaking legal research, drafting correspondence and submissions, and making follow up calls.

Philip Finley continued his volunteering with Social Security Law, and we thank him for his assistance.

Socio-Legal Practice Clinic

Overview

At the start of the reporting period, we welcomed Dorothy Gunner to our Socio-Legal Practice (SLP) Clinic.

Our SLP Clinic model involves a solicitor and an in-house social worker working together to provide intensive legal and social support to help clients progress their legal matters. CCL pioneered this model in the ACT in 2013 after it was identified that socio-legal support was beneficial in working with clients who had barriers to accessing legal assistance.

By considering what has happened to the person (instead of the person being the problem) and by recognising a person's coping strategies, the SLP Clinic tries to work with the client to resolve their legal matter. Further to address a client's legal issue, CCL also aims to provide support with the client's broader social barriers that have contributed to their legal issue such as financial barriers and access to health support, housing and social support.

Many of our SLP Clinic clients are very resourceful and are adept at finding solutions to the challenges and systemic barriers they are facing. Many have experience of complex trauma throughout their childhood and beyond, which may impact on their emotional, physical and psychological well-being. For example, their cognition, their emotional regulation, and their memory may all be adversely affected. Whilst people might want to obtain a Centrelink income or secure social housing for many the energy and effort required to participate in their legal matter is sometimes overwhelming. By providing wrap around support involving legal and psychological support clients are better supported to progress their legal matters and address broader social challenges.

Our Social Worker works across all programs of CCL with a specific focus on assisting people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and people with disability.

Year in Review

The SLP Clinic assisted 89 client (including 64 repeat clients) through providing 265 discrete non legal support services. By providing holistic trauma informed and intensive support to clients, communicating with them as regularly as possible and acknowledging and validating their concerns and fears the SLP Clinic actively encouraged clients to be involved in their legal matter.

Our Social Worker also participated in professional development, and the Community Legal Centre's Community Services Network all of which provided learning support, and connection with other social workers.

Case Study

The following case study highlights the important work of the SLP Clinic.

Socio-Legal Practice

Case Study 1: Beth's story

Beth was a middle-aged woman who had an auto-immune disease, a heart condition, a thyroid condition, hearing impairment, visual impairment, severe anxiety and depression. She had experienced significant childhood trauma and also domestic violence from her former husband.

Beth contacted our Disability Discrimination Law (DDL) service about a possible disability discrimination complaint against the university she was studying at as it had failed to make sufficient adjustments for her disabilities. Beth had withdrawn from several units as she had not been able to complete them because of insufficient adjustments even though she was receiving some assistance from the Disability Support Service at the university. Beth had been medically retired from the public service several years previously and the course was important to her to try to re-enter the workforce and re-establish her self-esteem. Beth was at risk of being excluded from the course because of her failure to complete.

The DDL solicitor referred Beth to the SLP Clinic as she had not provided the university with adequate documentation about her disabilities; their impact on her ability to undertake her courses; and recommendations from health professionals about the adjustments she required. Because of her disabilities, Beth was unable to co-ordinate obtaining this information herself.

The SLP Clinic was able to engage and support Beth to obtain the necessary information by approaching her treating health professionals and organizing assessments and recommendations about assistive technology. The SLP Clinic provided some counselling relating to the childhood trauma and domestic violence and referrals for ongoing

counselling about these issues. Following the provision of this information, the university made further adjustments for Beth, including by providing her with further assistive technology.

With the assistance of the SLP Clinic, Beth was able to complete several courses and maintain her place at the university.

Acknowledgement and Thanks

Huge thanks to the Snow Foundation, the Clayton Utz Foundation and the ACT Government for funding this service.



Carolyn Ludovici (Snow Foundation), Dorothy Gunner, Megan Parsons (Snow Foundation) and Genevieve Bolton at CCL's 40th Birthday Celebration

Street Law

Our Staff

Street Law staff in the 2023–2024 year:

John Alati continued as full time Supervising Solicitor; John began with Street Law in 2017.

Bodhi Dun continued as a Full-Time Solicitor. Bodhi started with Street Law in November 2022.

Noni McDonald continued as a Full Time Solicitor. Noni joined Street Law in November 2022.

Program Overview

Street Law provides free legal outreach services to individuals who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. It works on an outreach model: Street Law lawyers attend places where people experiencing homelessness are already accessing support services such as refuges or food pantries. Street Law also provides community legal education and undertakes law and policy reform activities.

Year in Review

As an outreach service, Street outreaches continue to be one of the core pillars of our work.

One of the highlights for us was getting our Women in Prison Legal Empowerment Service program (WIPLES) at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) program back up and running through negotiations with staff at AMC who have provided ongoing support for the program and for Street Law staff.

Most of the women incarcerated at the AMC are Indigenous women, which serves as a stark reminder of Australia's shocking Indigenous incarceration rates, which continue to increase and were again up in the March quarter of 2024.

We are busy not just with client work but also with stakeholder meetings and community legal education, both important aspects of our work. Our Street Law team has continued to provide high quality legal services to our client group.

We have heard much about the rising cost of living, but the impact on our client base has been extreme. A fixed fortnightly benefit allows little room for the impacts of inflation, the reality of which is often harsher than the statistics show. The results for our clients are unpaid bills, threatened evictions, unpaid fines and increasing reliance on the goodwill of community organisations and charities.

Our services continue to be of benefit to our client group, and obtaining primary identification for clients is one of our

most important services. This assists our clients in several ways, but most importantly to establish their identity and access services such as housing and social security.

We are grateful to our outreach partners for providing a range of innovative services and venues for us to make contact with clients. Their patience and care are a great asset to the community but so often go unrecognised.

As always, we are grateful to our incredible team, our front office staff who do an amazing job with intake and triage, and our pro-bono partners, volunteers and secondees who are always willing to assist.



Street Law Team: Bodhi Dun, John Alati and Noni McDonald

Outreaches

Street Law provides outreach services at our partner locations where clients who are experiencing homelessness are already accessing services. This is done to make it easier for homeless clients to access legal services.

In 2023–2024, Street Law provided regular outreach services at the following locations:

- Early Morning Centre, Canberra City
- St John's Care Reid
- WIPLES at AMC
- Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation & Advocacy (CAHMA)
- Toora AOD
- Mackillop House

Street Law also provided outreach services to other organisations on an ad hoc basis where clients or service providers requested that we attend, such as Wooden Youth Centre.

Pro Bono Support – Secondees and Volunteers

Street Law continued to receive outstanding support from the ACT legal community. We have been able to consistently call on our pro bono partners for assistance when required.

We would like to thank all our pro bono partners who provide invaluable support to Street Law's operations, including the pro bono teams at Clayton Utz and Sparke Helmore.

We also supervised students from our Clinical Legal Education Program (CLED) who, as always, provided enthusiastic support and further opportunities for reflective practice.

Client work

This has been an extremely busy year for Street Law, as shown in our casework figures. The sharp increase in services is due to a significant increase in demand, and the tireless work of our team.

In 2023–2024 Street Law assisted 226 clients, up significantly from 154 last year.

Street Law continues to assist clients in relation to a wide range of legal issues, including housing, consumer law, credit and debt matters, employment, minor criminal matters, obtaining identification documents and other general civil matters.

During the reporting period, Street Law provided:

- 457 one-off legal advices up from 217 last year
- 278 legal task assistance services, up from 79 last year
- Opened 19 cases and finalised 15 cases, up from 4 last year.
- 25 ongoing legal support matters

Community Legal Education (CLE)

Street Law has continued to deliver sessions on legal topics relevant to our client group and community workers.

Through our WIPLES program, we ran the following CLE sessions:

- 12 December 2023 – How to Spot a Legal Issue
- 16 January 2024 – Fines, Traffic and Court
- 13 February 2024 – Victims of Crime
- 12 March 2024 – Public Housing
- 2 May 2024 – Public Housing
- 16 May 2024 – Conviction Issues
- 11 June 2024 – Disability Support Pension

During the reporting period, Street Law delivered CLE sessions for Toora AOD on Disability Support Pension and Fines. Street Law also delivered a How to Spot a Legal Issue session for Karinya House Group Program.

Law Reform

During the period, Street Law consulted with various stakeholders and made a submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Penalties for Minor Offences and Vulnerable people and gave evidence at the hearing on 21 June 2023. The submission highlighted the disproportionate impact that penalties for minor offences have on our client group.

Street Law also contributed to CCL's work around responding to proposed reforms to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*.

Street Law also meet with ACTCOSS to provide input into their joint housing and homelessness framework.

Community Engagement – Meetings and Events

Street Law continued to engage with the community sector to raise awareness of our service and engage with developments in the sector.

We have participated in a range of meetings and forums including:

- Joint Pathways forums
- Whos New on the Streets Meeting
- Youth Coalition Housing and Homelessness forums
- Cross Sector Networking Forum – Woden Community Services
- Homelessness Sector Cross Sector Workshop
- ACTCOSS meetings

Some Recent Client Feedback

From a client we assisted with a complex Housing Application:

Thank you so much for your assistance. I would have been unable to get all this together without you. You are so good at your job.'

And a vulnerable client from a refugee background with limited English whom we assisted with a range of matters:

'Thank you so much for listening. Before speaking with you I did not think I could advocate for myself. You have shown me that I can go and get assistance on my own.'

Street Law Case Study 1: George's Story

George (not his real name) was a refugee who recently became a permanent resident. He required the use of an interpreter. He applied for Jobseeker, but it was denied due to a compensation preclusion period (CPP) which excluded him from receiving income support for a couple of years.

Street Law advised George on the evidence and grounds required to end the compensation preclusion period based on special circumstances.

Unfortunately, George had spent all his compensation money and could no longer support himself due to barriers finding ongoing employment including his limited English and significant physical injuries. He was subsequently provided free accommodation by friends to prevent primary homelessness.

Street Law liaised with George's psychologist to obtain evidence of his traumatic past including political persecution and the effect his lack of income and current living situation was having on his deteriorating mental health.

Street Law also drafted a statement for George setting out his personal circumstances and the impact that the current situation was having on him. George explained he had transferred a significant proportion of the compensation money to his family overseas over several years through foreign exchange agents. He also repaid some debts he had incurred supporting himself and his family before receiving the compensation payment and spent some on unrelated legal fees and medical costs.

Street Law lodged an internal review application against Centrelink's decision to impose a compensation preclusion period on behalf of George and prepared detailed written submissions. Street Law also made oral

submissions to Centrelink's Authorised Review Officer (ARO). Through reviewing the evidence, Street Law was able to provide evidence that George had spent a significant amount of his compensation money supporting his family which the ARO accepted as reasonable in the circumstances.

The ARO waived the CPP. George is now engaging with employment services and is progressing his public housing application, giving him some renewed hope for the future. Importantly for George he was also issued with a health care card enabling him to access affordable health services and medication.

Street Law Case Study 2: Jamie's Story

Jamie (not his real name) applied for Working with Vulnerable Person registration to work in aged care and received conditional registration that he must not work with children.

Throughout the process he had engaged a private lawyer to help him respond to requests for further information as to the circumstances of his criminal history. He was now unemployed and could not afford further legal fees.

Jamie was concerned that the assessors had taken his criminal history into account when deciding that he should not be approved to work with children.

He sought advice from Street Law about his options to progress his application to work as a public transport driver. Street Law researched the matter and advised Jamie that his criminal history should not preclude him from working with children.

Street Law assisted Jamie to seek a reconsideration and made submissions on his behalf. The submissions were accepted with Jamie being issued a new card that allowed him to work with children.

Social Media

CCL continues to maintain an active presence on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. However, we decided to discontinue our activity on X (formerly Twitter) due to concerns about recent shifts in its management, content moderation, and public perception, which no longer align with our organisation's values.

Throughout 2023–24, we utilised these platforms to promote community legal education, share event details, advertise employment opportunities, and disseminate relevant announcements to our clients, colleagues, and the broader community.

Our social media strategy remains integral to our outreach efforts, enabling us to connect and engage with our audience across various sectors.

We use our social media presence to:

- Engage directly with the community on legal changes and important announcements.
- Share resources from both government and non-government sources, providing guidance on where to seek assistance for various legal and social needs.
- Promote events and job opportunities within our organisation and the broader sector, targeting our client base primarily on Facebook and Instagram, and our professional colleagues on LinkedIn.
- Highlight our team through staff profile posts, introducing our staff members, sharing their roles, and including a fun fact to give our audience a more personal connection to our team.
- Respond to general inquiries from clients who message us on different platforms, referring them to appropriate legal services to ensure they receive the support they need.

We create most of our social media content using Canva, and we have made significant efforts to enhance the accessibility of our posts by adding image descriptions and video transcripts whenever possible.

We have 2,815 followers on Facebook, 1,213 follows on LinkedIn, and 932 on Instagram.



[Street Law Outreach Social Media Post](#)

Professional Development

CCL is committed to providing professional development opportunities for all our staff.

CCL supported all staff lawyers holding practising certificates to meet their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements.

Professional Developments provided to staff during the reporting period included:

- McKinsey Executive Leadership Program
- Gulgan Media Training
- ACT Intermediary Program
- Disaster Management Training
- Best Case Advocacy in the AAT
- The Robodebt Royal Commission (Australian Institute of Administrative Law Training)
- How to Pro Bono – using pro bono partners to maximise your CLC impact
- Presentation on Financial Assistance Scheme
- Economic Justice Australia Conference
- Blackburn Lecture on AL and the legal profession
- Strategic Communications for NGO's training
- CIT Yurauna Country Cultural Experience
- First Nations and AI-lyship Conference
- Australian Institute of Company Directors Bridging Perspectives – Two Way Learning in Governance
- Procuring from First Nations Business
- Community Information Session on new human rights complaints pathways



Sarah Lim on her Admission with Farzana Choudhury

Our Volunteers, Students and Secondees

We greatly appreciate the volunteer, student and pro bono support we have received over the past year.

Thanks to our pro bono partners Ashurst, Minter Ellison, Clayton Utz, Hall & Wilcox, Sparke Helmore, HWL Ebsworth, Clayton Utz, Maddocks, Australian Government Solicitor, Moray and Agnew, Wotton + Kearney for their ongoing commitment to CCL and our work.

NTLAS Volunteers

Pro Bono Support

As always, NTLAS has enjoyed enthusiastic support from pro bono partners, including Minter Ellison, Clayton Utz, Hall & Wilcox, Sparke Helmore, as well as several private individuals who gave of their time.

Individual NTLAS Volunteers and Supporters

Lauren Armstrong

Lara Douglas

Mya Anumalapudi and the team at Sparke Helmore

Australian Government Solicitor (AGS) Secondees

AGS secondees provided legal support one day a week over a 12-week period:

Roshni Kaila

Alex Christie

Oliver Wilkes

HWL Ebsworth Secondees

HWL Ebsworth secondees provide legal assistance to our Social Security Law advice line with their graduates undertaking 1-2 rotations of 3 weeks full time.

Eric Cao

Bradley Yeomans

Kirk Yonan

Sarah Moss

Ryan Neufeld

Anton Pavic

Elizma Nel

Sheldon Lee

Max Astner

Madeleine Chia

We also had HWL Ebsworth solicitors on secondment one day per fortnight

Charles Marques, HWL Ebsworth

John O'Connell, HWL Ebsworth

Dhurrawang Volunteers/Secondees

Kate Wang

Khashif Jadwat, Maddocks

Disability Law Volunteers/Secondees

Fred Fernandes

Stuart Bryson, Moray and Agnew

Kate Lee, Moray and Agnew

Alex Wilbur

Charlotte Swinnen

Social Security Law Volunteers

Philip Finley

Counsel

Sarah Baker-Goldsmith

ANU Clinical Students

In partnership with the Australian National University, CCL runs the Community Law Clinic and the Indigenous Community Legal Clinic where students spend one day per week in the Centre during the Semester working with an allocated CCL solicitor supervisor to undertake paralegal tasks. Students also attend a 2-day orientation and a weekly tutorial and reflective practice sessions.

Semester 2, 2023

Megale Melani

Chloe Marks

Beiqi Zhang

Kevin Wu

Farhat Sheikh

Diva Coudhary

Carlos Terbio

Diana Muayeva

Matteo Di Genua Lannan

Max Farinazzo

Shebani Jeyakumar

Sarah Samuell

ANU Course Convenor: Professor Vivien Holmes

Semester 1, 2024

Clare Guthleben

Siyi Liu

Alyssa Davis

Lucy Chubb

Dhiiren Moganaraju

Jonathan Challis

Laura Fox

Shane Macdonald

Ruizhe (Roger) Shi

Olivia Ferrer

Neeve O'Hara

Jessica Taylor

ANU Course Convenor: Professor Vivien Holmes

Volunteer Paralegal Program

During the reporting period, our Volunteer Paralegal Administration Program had three intake groups:

- ANU Law Students
- Internship placement through the University of Canberra Business, Government and Law faculty
- In 2024, CCL introduced our first student volunteer through the Australian Defence Force Transition Program

Volunteer paralegals contribute to the day-to-day operations of CCL through practical support, assisting our front office staff and solicitors across CCL programs.

ANU

Rhea Chopra

Orietta Fitzsimmons

Lottie Frohmader

Clara Ho

Kathleen Hoare

Eden Inglis

Elena Khoury

Claire Oberdorfer

Ysobel O'Brien

Emily Peng

Iris Pu

Charlotte Swinnen

UC

Muhayed Ahmed

Brendan Barry

Indiah Crouch

Aiden Giberti

Bailey Harvey

Henrietta Khaisum

Amanda Mitchell

ADF

Skye Kim

Appendix: Auditor's Report

Canberra Community Law

Level 5, 10 Rudd Street, Canberra City 2601

Postal Address:

PO Box 547 Canberra ACT 2601

canberracommunitylaw.org.au

