



"Where community and law meet."



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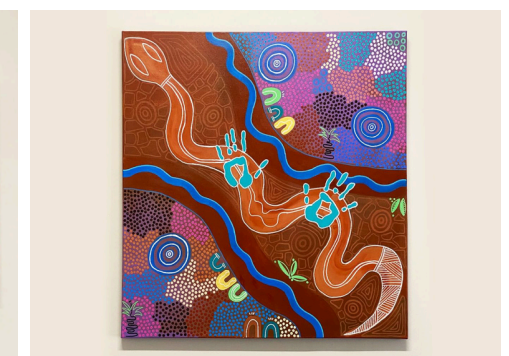
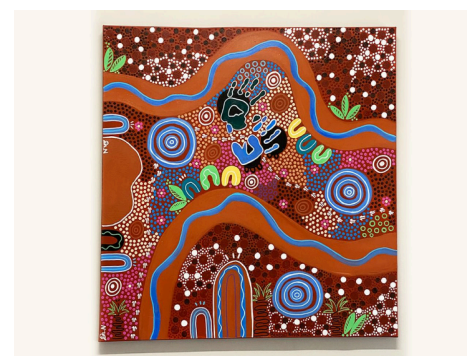
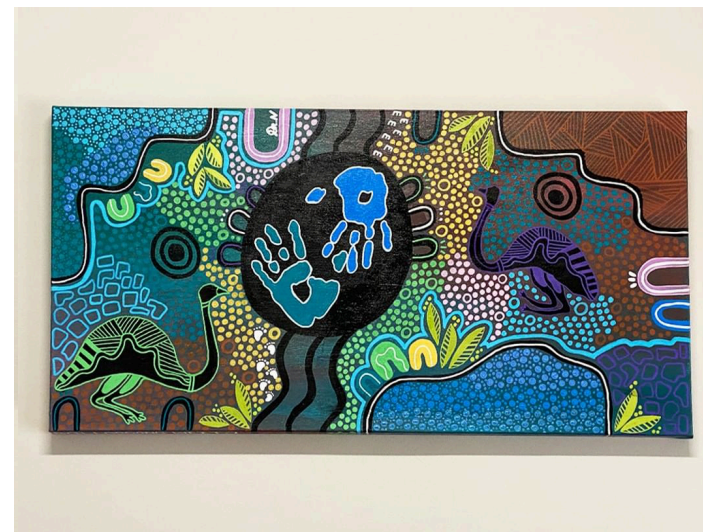
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

WCLC acknowledges Aboriginal Peoples as the traditional and current custodians of the land upon which we work. We pay our respect to Elders past and present and emerging. We celebrate the strength, culture, connection to Country, incredible resilience and contribution of Aboriginal Peoples to our whole community.

We are grateful for the knowledge and wisdom so many Aboriginal people have shared with us and we look forward to working together in the years ahead.



"Ballardong Weitg", "Ballardong Boodja", "Ballardong Bilya", "Ballardong Yongka", & "Ballardong Wargyl" by Duana Nickels, Artist

"This artwork symbolises and represents the beauty in our Ballardong country and land. Ballardong Boodja meaning land. Ballardong Bilya meaning river. Ballardong Weitj meaning emu. Ballardong Yongka meaning kangaroo and Ballardong Wargyl meaning snake.

When I think of Northam and my cultural relationship to home these 5 things come to my mind and expressing this through art has given me the ability to create such beautiful art work."
– Duana Nickels

Left: "Ballardong Bilya" by Duana Nickels,

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

As Chair, I'm pleased to present this report for the 2023/24 Financial Year.

Looking back on this year, I want to extend a huge thank you to our team for their hard work and commitment. Their resilience and compassion have made a real difference to those we serve, and it is inspiring to see the positive impact of their efforts. Each team member has played an essential role in moving our mission forward, and it is thanks to their dedication that we have been able to keep supporting our community. Thank you all for what you have done, and I look forward to seeing what you'll achieve in the coming year.

I am also pleased to welcome Shabnum Rashid as our new Principal Solicitor, taking over from Robyn Lord, whose dedication to this role has been outstanding leading the team from strength to strength for over 10 years.

I want to acknowledge and thank my fellow volunteer Board members for their hard work and commitment. Your ongoing efforts are invaluable, and I look forward to everything we will continue to achieve together.

As a lawyer, it is easy to take for granted my understanding of legal rights and the steps to take when things go wrong, or at least knowing where to seek answers. However, many people in our community do not have this knowledge or confidence. That is why it is so rewarding to see the team's efforts in delivering so many Community Legal Education sessions across the Wheatbelt this year. These sessions have equipped the community with valuable knowledge and reassurance that Australia's legal system exists to support and protect them.

The team's hands-on approach, going with clients to court rather than just giving them advice, goes to the heart of our vision to provide comprehensive legal assistance to the Wheatbelt community. I want to thank the team for their dedication to not just handing over advice on a piece of paper that clients might struggle to read or know how to act on, but for going that extra step. Venturing out of the office and standing beside the client in the community shows the true spirit of what we're all about, your efforts make a real difference.

On behalf of the Board, I would also like to recognise the tremendous support Gosnells Community Legal Centre and Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre have provided during a challenging year. Their backing has had a real impact, offering us stability and strength when it was needed most, and leaving us well-prepared for the 24/25 year. Thank you.

In the 2024/25 year, we will continue collaborating with our fellow community legal centres to optimise the CLC sector, with a genuine focus on leveraging the economies of scale this collaboration provides.

Our work would not be possible without funding. I am very grateful to everyone who made private donations to WCLC in 2023/24. Special thanks to our main funders – the Department of Justice, Commonwealth Attorney – General and the WA Government Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety – for their commitment to supporting those doing it tough in our region.

Aaron Dewse
Chairperson

MANAGING LAWYER'S REPORT

I am proud to present a summary of WCLC's work over 2023/2024 in this year's Annual Report.

As ever, the challenges facing regional community legal centres are many and WCLC is no different. The demand for legal assistance outstrips the capacity of the Centre to provide a service to all those who require it. Accordingly, a constant challenge is how to make the most of the scarce resources and how best to spread those resources in the best, most efficient and fair way possible.

The issues that further impact on the Centres capacity include limited workspaces in the current office premises. This remains a current issue as the minimal commercial real estate in Northam remains tightly held. However, the Board are continuing their efforts to address this issue as they recognise the hinderance small office space has on the ability of the organisation to grow.

Ensuring the ongoing viability of the Centre is always at the forefront in Board decisions and forms a key part of strategic planning. This year the Board have had to consider various opportunities and critically assess the factors that impact on the future of the Centre. This work is not taken lightly and requires a large amount of due consideration and deliberation. I want to acknowledge their time, experience and passion that they bring to the organisation and the manner in which they guide and govern in these uncertain times.

The day-to-day operations continue to prioritise excellent client service delivery and community engagements. This year we undertook a comprehensive and targeted marketing plan to increase awareness of the Centre through social media, community networking and stakeholder collaboration.

Another key aspect is the implementation of a Case Management System (ActionStep) to extract maximum value from the funding and to ensure that our data requirements under NLAP are met. It is anticipated that with more efficient data capture, we are better placed to assess community trends and legal need. This financial year we saw 100 more clients than the previous year, and opened 30% more files, requiring either court/tribunal representation or other representation services.

Unfortunately we also turned away more clients than ever before, up to 255 from 186 in last financial year, a clear sign that the demand for legal services is not slowing. A point of difference for Community Legal Centres is the holistic approach which takes a comprehensive view of the whole client, and attempts to provide many solutions, not just legal. We are proud to work alongside our Wheatbelt colleagues in the community in order to assist our client as best as we can. In that regard we recognise and thank them for their support and look forward to working together in the future.

A few highlights for this year – WCLC instigated a collection drive and asked the community to donate items such as toiletries, sanitary items, blankets, and non-perishable food. We placed a box in the Centre and then made gift packs to giveaway at the homeless week events. We also provided a CLE to the Mooditj Youth Foundation Aboriginal Corp to provide insight and empower through knowledge of father's rights and family court processes.

We also took part in the Community Services Morning Tea at Merredin showcasing our service and networked to improve the coordination and delivery of services. This was followed this up with ongoing participation at community network meetings. We also continued our engagements with local CRC's with a number of sessions held at various towns on a range of legal issues together with legal clinics for those requiring individual advice.

This year we were also greatly assisted by our staff volunteer Tahla Bahktar who contributed over 200 hours of research, and file management. WCLC also benefited from securing our administration assistant a traineeship with Directions. We were able to support Michelle as she completed her Business Administration and Leadership qualifications. Unfortunately, we said goodbye to 2 lawyers, Brielle and Wayde who have moved onto a different chapter in their legal careers. Our team have shown immense resilience through the challenges that our Centre faces.

Thank you to each of you and the role you played to ensure we continued to adapt, to grow and to provide the best possible assistance to our clients.

Robyn Lord
Managing Lawyer

WHO WE ARE

Wheatbelt CLC is an incorporated association and constituted as a not-for-profit organisation that delivers legal services to the Wheatbelt community with a focus on those experiencing mental health challenges, disabilities, people experiencing financial hardship, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people and those experiencing domestic violence and/or homelessness.

Wheatbelt CLC provides free, accessible and holistic legal services in areas of family law, family violence, child protection, criminal injuries compensation and minor civil matters.

Services can take the form of information, advice, assistance, referral, representation, community legal education, housing support as well as participation in advocacy for law and policy reform. and in that regard, WCLC occupies a key role in the delivery of legal assistance to those who need it most.

Like all CLC's, WCLC is independently governed by a Board which enables the Centre to make governance and operational changes necessary and pivot as appropriate to meet the needs of its community.

Vision statement:

1. To be the leading and preferred provider of comprehensive legal assistance in the Wheatbelt.
2. To empower and educate the community to participate in the decisions and the circumstances that affect their lives.
3. To comprehensively and professionally assist people who would otherwise be denied access to justice, due to social or economic disadvantage, to exercise their legal rights.
4. To be an essential and intrinsic part of the social and local networks at grassroots level.

Mission statement:

To be a highly respected legal advice and advocacy service throughout the Wheatbelt. We offer our holistic services to vulnerable people in environments that are accessible and client friendly and delivered by staff who are skilled and inspired.



OUR TEAM

BOARD

- Chair:** Aaron Dewse
Deputy: Attila Mencshelyi
Treasurer: Emily Onn
Member: Kate Turtley-Chappel
Member: Samantha Cornthwaite

STAFF

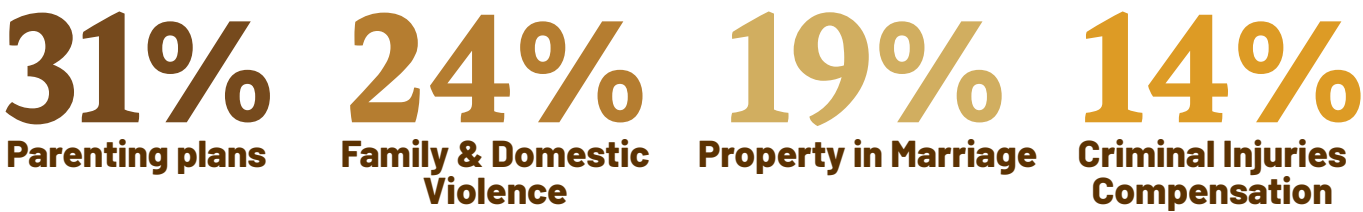
- Managing Lawyer:** Robyn Lord
Senior Lawyer: Jessie Yeow
Lawyer: Wayde Newton
Lawyer: Brielle Jowle-Gill
Lawyer: Georgia Cole
Tenancy Advocate: Paul Collier
Administration: Michelle Tee
Volunteer: Tahla Bahktar

HIGHLIGHTS

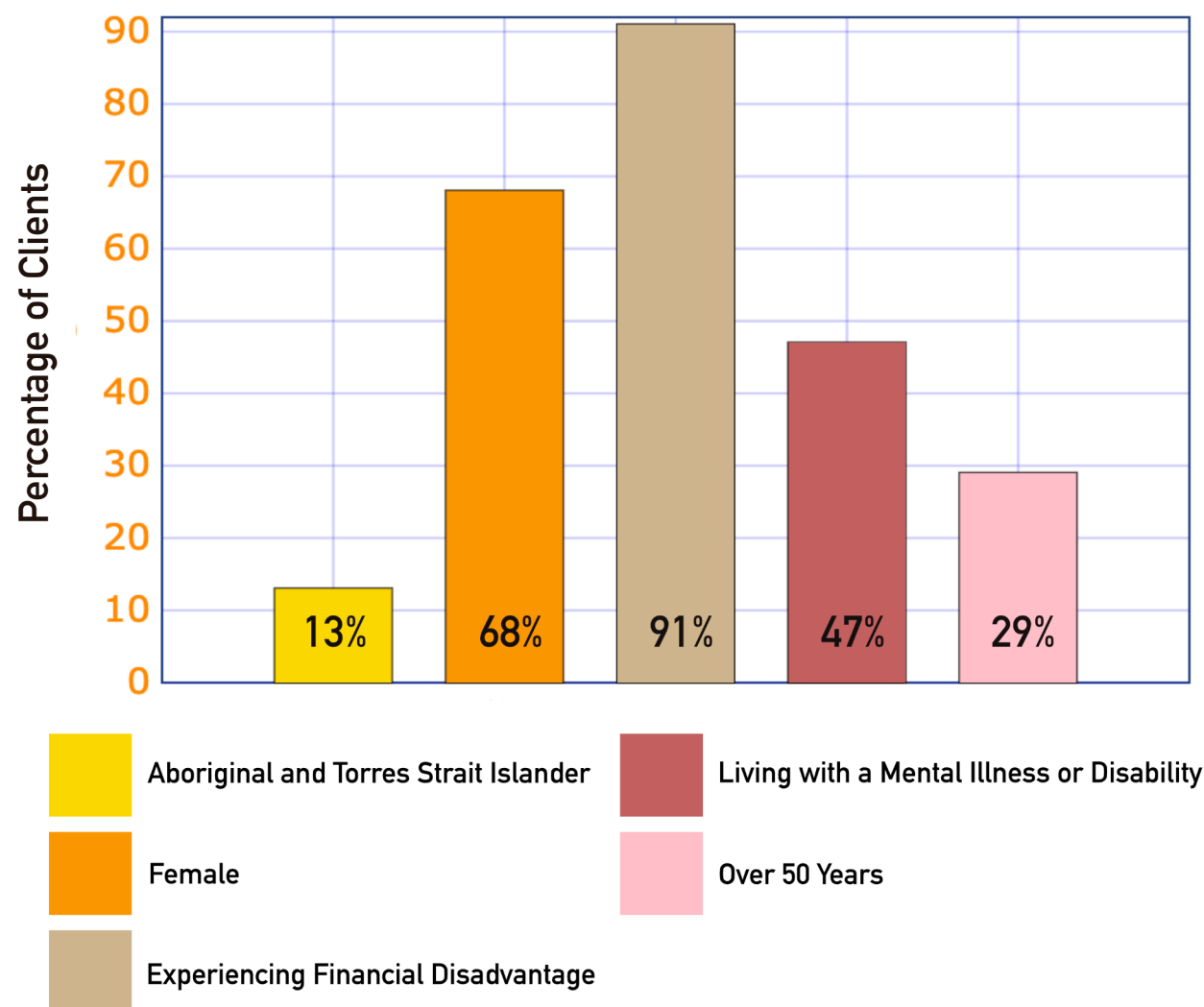


*Sessions are visits to the website that end after 30 minutes of inactivity.
*Main reasons for Turnaways: Conflict of interest/ WCLC does not offer service requires / unable to assist in timeframes required.

Most common legal issues



DEMOGRAPHICS



Current tracking of demographics shows that 87% of people who use WCLC's services are financially disadvantaged (on Centrelink). Data also shows that all the majority of these clients have some form of vulnerability – mental health illness, disability, indigenous, low literacy, or experiencing domestic violence or homelessness or both.

Many of these clients are also living in areas away from towns/hubs and the isolation of clients can mean difficulty accessing assistance and issues escalate rapidly as a result.

Typically those who live in geographical isolation have the most complex of legal need.

CLIENT SERVICE

All current clients were surveyed regarding their experience with receiving assistance with WCLC. **Over 90%** agreed or strongly agreed that their experience has been positive. Specifically clients reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that:

- A) It was easy to contact WCLC when you first needed help.
- B) The service listened to your problem.
- C) The service helped you understand how to deal with your legal problem.
- D) You know where to get help if you have another legal problem in the future.
- E) Overall, you would recommend this service to other people.

CLIENT REVIEWS

Here are some words our lovely clients would like to share about their experiences in working with us:

"I was provided 100% legal assistance & service to me in this matter. Thank you for all your help."

"WCLC has helped me more than any legal service close to home. The 2 hour drive one way is nothing compared to the help I received. Thank you."

"The Lawyer was very helpful and answered all my queries and went over and above to help me. I am very satisfied with the service provided to me today."

"The Lawyer was excellent in tending to all matters and helping me to get a better insight/understanding of my issues at hand. Highly recommend."

"Thank you, I would be lost in the process if not for you!"

"[Lawyer] is very knowledgeable and was able to assist me greatly. I have recommended others to her."

"Very thorough and made [every] thing very clear to understand."

CASE STUDIES

Case Study (A)

Tess was a young, overseas resident on a working holiday in WA attempted to purchase a motor vehicle. Tess signed the registration papers and handed over the cash. However, the car did not start and Tess demanded her money back. The seller returned the cash but Tess forgot about the registration papers she had signed.

Subsequently the client received numerous fines for speeding. It turned out that the seller of the car, submitted the transfer papers so that Tess was now the legal owner of a car that she never took possession of. The seller proceeded to rack up hundreds of dollars of speeding fines, that were sent to Tess.

Tess was fearful as did not know how to stop these infringements. Also she was returning to her home country and did not wish these fines to go to court uncontested.

WCLC advocated on her behalf and drafted appropriate documents and correspondence to the relevant authorities to have the infringements successfully withdrawn. Tess was very relieved and happy that this nightmare was over.

Case Study (B)

When Irena attended our office for an appointment, she was facing homelessness. Her landlord had provided her notice that her lease, which was due to expire shortly, would not be renewed. Furthermore, her landlord stated that his decision was final. Irena was very stressed as she had been a long-term tenant and required life support equipment due to significant, and permanent health issues. Her relatives did not have capacity to accommodate her, and she was fearful of how she would survive if she was homeless.

Further, Irena did not read or write very well and had difficulty in communicating, which compounded the issues with her landlord.

We wrote to the landlord on Irena's behalf and addressed all the relevant issues together with a proposal that might be suitable to resolve the issues between the parties.

As a result, her landlord had a change of heart and Irena continues to live peacefully at the property.

Case Study (C)

Fiona was a single mother of young children who initially came to WCLC for advice on separation, but it became very apparent that she was experiencing significant family violence and the children were also being exposed to these incidences of violence. We guided Fiona through her options and linked her in with local support services to assist her process her situation and decide on the best way forward for her and her children to ensure that she protected them from the trauma of family violence.

Subsequently WCLC represented Fiona before the Magistrates Court in her application for a restraining order and then again when the other party objected, to negotiate a conduct agreement order. Fiona also received assistance to develop a parenting plan that was suitable and workable for everyone.

WCLC was mindful of her struggles with anxiety and depression and took care to ensure that she did not feel overwhelmed during the consultations, but instead felt empowered to take the next steps towards a more positive future.

Case Study (D)

Josie, living alone, was victim of aggravated burglary in her home causing immediate physical and ongoing psychological injury. Her financial situation compounded the trauma by preventing her from accessing medical and psychological supports. Josie had attempted to complete an application for criminal injuries on her own but the task was very triggering for her and her mental health was being impacted.

WCLC referred Josie to a local psychologist who liaised with her GP for a mental health care plan. In the meantime WCLC progressed her case and subsequently submitted an application for interim payment for a psych report to accompany her CIC application. With this additional legal and psychological support, Josie started to feel stronger and better.

When the news came that her application had been successful Josie was very happy that her counselling could continue and was optimistic that her mental health would improve. It also meant that she now had the funds to pay for more sophisticated treatment for her physical injuries and scars.

Case Study (E)

Bob, who lives in a Department of Communities house, was confused because his water bill showed a credit balance. This was strange because the Department has a policy where they pay the tenant's water consumption charges which are later reimbursed by the tenant.

Therefore, a credit balance should not occur. Bob also claimed that Centrelink was deducting funds for water consumption from his Centrelink payments. It turned out that Bob had previously completed a form (Rent Reduction Scheme Arrangement) authorizing Centrelink to pay a small fortnightly amount towards his water bill. Over time, this had built up to around \$100.

We subsequently contacted the Department of Communities on Bob's behalf. Accordingly, Bob was advised to complete a refund form for the Department to transfer the credit into his bank account. He was also advised to cancel his Rent Reduction Scheme Arrangement with Centrelink.

Case Study (F)

WCLC represented Greg at an ADR conference for parenting matters. **"The fact I had someone there with me, in person, helped enormously. I was much more calm that I otherwise would have been."** With support from their lawyer, the client was able to keep remembering to put the child's best interests foremost in their mind and this in turn facilitated discussions to ensure that they were child focused.

When the other party saw how flexible the client was being, in order to prioritise the needs of the child, the other party was also more willing to accommodate. As a result, the parties were able to come to an initial agreement as to child contact.

****All names have been changed to protect identities**



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS, COMMUNITY EVENTS & EDUCATION

This year we can report we have participated in 41 + 33 different Community Legal Education sessions and stakeholder engagement meetings and events. Most of these centred on building collaborative relationships across various service providers in the Wheatbelt, as well as education sessions to individuals and groups on a variety of legal issues. Here is a snapshot of just some of our highlights over the past 12 months:

2023	
July	Connected with DOJ Victim Support services and Child witness services to discuss referral pathways for criminal injuries compensation and other eligible matters.
August	Community Legal Education session– “What to consider when making an application for FVRO” Northam.
September	Stall at Homelessness Event held at Bilya & Food Festival showcasing the various assistance provided by the CLC sector in general and WCLC in particular.
October	Community Legal Education – “Neighbours don’t always make good friends” Bridgeley Centre Northam.
November	Community Legal Education – “Seniors and the Law” hosted by Jurien Bay CRC.
December	Community Legal Education to Moorditj Youth Foundation Aboriginal Corporation Inc. Knowledge and Rights of fathers in Family Court Processes.
2024	
January	Curtin law school clinic meeting for collaborative discussion on innovative ideas to bolster legal support in the Wheatbelt.
February	Developed information kits / flyers for long stay caravan park residents regarding their tenancies.
March	Law reform. Engaged in feedback to proposed modifications to the Residential Tenancies Act.
April	Community Legal Education – “Criminalizing coercive control in Australia” information distributed to local community services and agencies.
May	Attended Community Services morning Tea in Merredin.
June	Collaborative session with Zonta House Refuge Association and discussed referral pathways.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2023 – 2024

Operating Expenses	\$	Income	\$
Admin Expenses	133,128	Commonwealth	349,576.42
Audit & Accounting	18,527	Department of Mines, IRS*	187,263
Human Resources	696,252	Donations	1890
Office Expenses	6,406	Income from Reserves	15,883
Premises Expenses	55,384	Interest	8501
Staff Training & Development	14,909	State	444,854.58
Total:	926,567	Total:	1,007,968

*Industry Regulation and Safety



Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following for their ongoing support and funding:
Australian Government Attorney General’s Department, Government of Western Australia Department of Justice, The Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety (DMIRS), Consumer Protection Division.

