



ANNUAL REPORT

2019-2020



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Daniel Fawcett | Youthlaw Chair



Notwithstanding the past year's challenges, Youthlaw continues to do what a community legal centre does best: identifying unmet legal need in the community, finding innovative ways to deliver important services, and advocating for justice for all.

Vulnerable young people with legal needs are at high risk of not seeking help or asserting their legal rights.

They often have little knowledge of the law and the costs of obtaining private legal services are prohibitively expensive. The justice system can be arcane, complex and intimidating at the best of times.

Youthlaw puts our clients' needs front and centre, taking a holistic approach that can address multifaceted problems.

All Youthlaw services are multidisciplinary or integrated with frontline youth services.

I want to highlight several of our achievements over 2019/20:

We delivered core legal services in partnerships with frontline youth services throughout Victoria.

These include:

- Frontyard Youth Services in Melbourne CBD,
- 6 Headspace centres,
- 3 youth centres and
- a youth drug and alcohol service.

All these services provide an integrated response to legal and non-legal issues.

We contributed to important research on adolescent violence in the home conducted by the Centre for Innovative Justice.

We collaborated with Melbourne Children's Court and Merri Health to design a user-centred legal and court response for adolescents engaging in violence.

We were successful in obtaining \$365,000 in funding to provide a pre-court pilot program in Sunshine to be launched in 2021.

Our Legal Pod Program continued to grow.

A greater number of firms and private lawyers kindly volunteered time to provide long-term, wrap-around legal assistance.

Our student legal service at RMIT also continued to grow and innovate. This year saw a successful integration of the legal service into other student services and with the RMIT hub.

We joined the Centre for Innovative Justice at the RMIT Innovation Hub in December 2019, with other co-located legal services.

We're in a better position to put innovative justice into action than ever before.

Youthlaw goes from strength to strength.

This success is a credit to the hard work and dedication of our CEO, staff, volunteers and board members.

It is also a reflection of the significant and valuable support we receive from partner organisations, law firms, private donors and government.

I am sincerely grateful to all.

- Daniel Fawcett, Chair

CEO REPORT

The year in review | Ariel Couchman, CEO



Throughout 2019-20, we've continued to be a fearless voice for young people.

State election and law and order

Following the election of the Andrews' government for a second term in November 2019 we advocated for greater investment and focus on early intervention and prevention rather than law and order, and prison.

In its first term the Victorian government introduced some of the harshest bail and parole laws in Australia. These blunt one-size-fits-all measures were highly detrimental to young people and resulted in increasing numbers of young people and young adults in remand and prison.

In 2019-20 Youthlaw provided

2,587

legal services to

1,603

young people

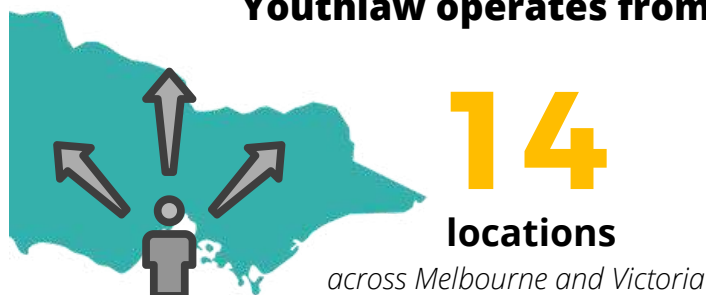


In 2020 we welcomed the announcement of reduced prison beds in the new Cherry Creek youth facility and increasing attention to socio-economic disadvantage, reducing remand numbers and diverting early from the criminal justice system.

The harsh bail laws remain and if unchanged will continue to drive vulnerable Victorians into the criminal justice system.

We welcomed state government work on a new Youth Justice Strategy, new Youth Justice Act and a Crime Prevention Strategy.

Youthlaw operates from



Youthlaw contributed to these developments by bringing to the table an independent voice representing the interests of young people.

An inadequate service system

Diverting young people from the criminal justice system will only be achieved with substantial investment in the service system. There are still too many gaps leaving young people unsupported in childhood and their teenage years.

There's an urgent need for attention to family violence experienced by young people, free, accessible and high quality mental health services and much greater investment in specialist services such as drug and alcohol treatment.

There also needs to be much greater attention to early assessment of disability and mental health.

Inadequate oversight of police

Youthlaw continues to advocate for independent investigations of police and PSO misconduct in Victoria and the implementation of the recommendations of the IBAC Parliamentary Committee's 2018 Inquiry into the external oversight of police corruption and misconduct in Victoria.

Despite increased police numbers and powers over past years there has been no progress on the recommendations. Few young people and adults will complain about police mistreatment until they are confident their complaint will be investigated fairly and independently (cont.)

CEO REPORT

Advocacy highlights

This year we advocated for embedding justice reinvestment across government, greater investment in diversion, bail reform and raising the age of criminal responsibility.

We submitted our clients' experiences to a number of inquiries including the Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health, a Parliamentary Committee inquiry into spent convictions, an evaluation by the Fines Reform Advisory Board of the Fines Reform Act 2014 and the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria.

We continued to co-ordinate and resource the advocacy coalition Smart Justice for Young People. As always none of our work would be of such a high standard and delivered with such commitment without the great Youthlaw team, our volunteers and the Board.

Ariel Couchman, CEO

In 2019-20:

350

secondary consultations to
community workers and lawyers
assisting young people



\$40,000

estimated total value of unfair fines that
we assisted vulnerable young people to
have withdrawn



307

court appearances



Image: Canva

WE'VE BEEN BUSY...

TOP 10 ACHIEVEMENTS 2019-20

1. MOVED HOUSE

Moved to our new office in Pelham St Carlton, joining Centre for Innovative Justice and two community legal centres to become a justice innovation hub, supported by RMIT.

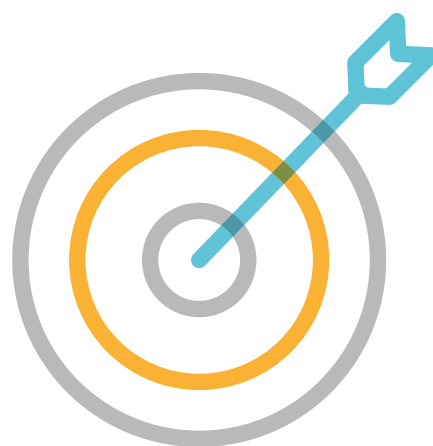


2. COVID SUPPORT

Received \$321,500 from the Federal and State Attorneys-General to assist us to meet the needs of young people impacted by COVID-19.

3. ADVOCACY WIN

After years of advocacy by many, including Youthlaw, the Victorian Government introduced Spent Convictions law in Victoria. This will wipe criminal records that impact young people for the rest of their lives.



Victorian Legal Services
BOARD + COMMISSIONER

4. NEW GRANT FUNDING

Secured \$365, 000 from the Victorian Legal Services Board to pilot an innovative pre-court service for adolescents using or experiencing violence in the home.

5. CONTRACTS EXTENDED

Two-year extension of our RMIT Legal Service contract and three year funding extension from the state government for our Family Violence Program



WE'VE BEEN BUSY...

TOP 10 ACHIEVEMENTS 2019-20



6. FUNDRAISING

Over 100 members of the Melbourne Ashurst office raised \$10,440 at the annual Youthlaw Trivia Night. Ashurst also pounded the pavement in Run Melbourne in July 2019 to raise \$6,000.



8. WENT REMOTE

Successfully transitioned to remote operation due to COVID-19 restrictions and responded to spikes in demand due to the impacts of the pandemic on young people.

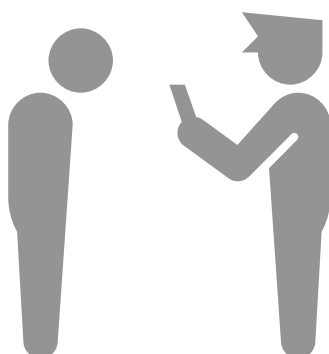


7. NEW PRO BONO PARTNERS

Six new law firms joined the Legal Pod program providing 25 pro bono lawyers for young people who have been in state care.

9. SMART JUSTICE 4 YOUNG PEOPLE

Led the Smart Justice for Young People Coalition which has driven the campaign for increasing the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 in Victoria.

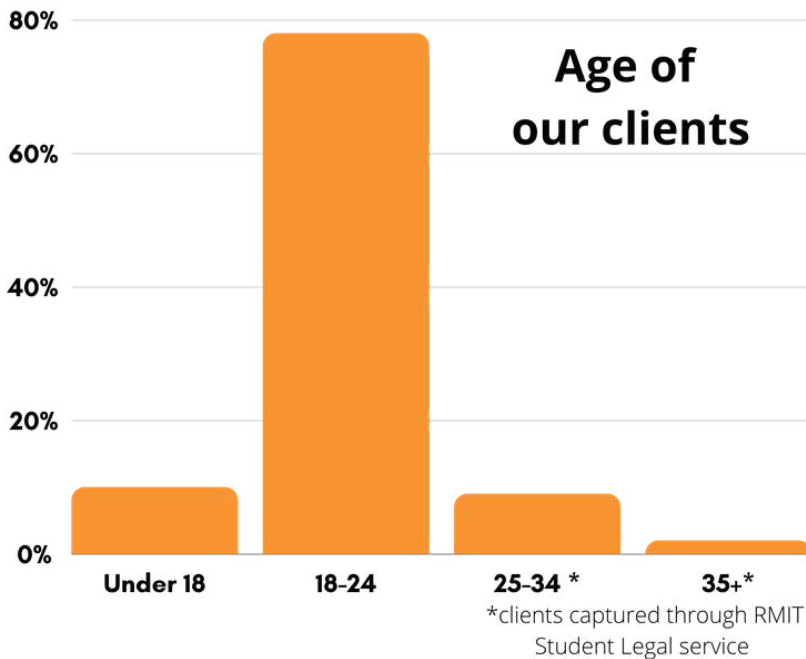


10. COVID ADVOCACY

Fought for greater transparency and accountability around COVID-19 fines issued to vulnerable young people.

WHO DID WE HELP IN 2019-20?

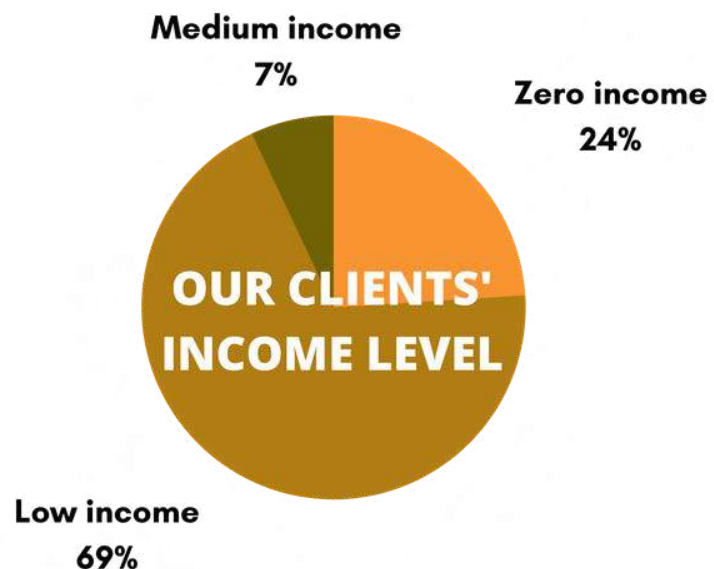
A BIT ABOUT OUR CLIENTS...



30% of our clients have



**DISABILITIES
AND/OR
MENTAL HEALTH
PROBLEMS**



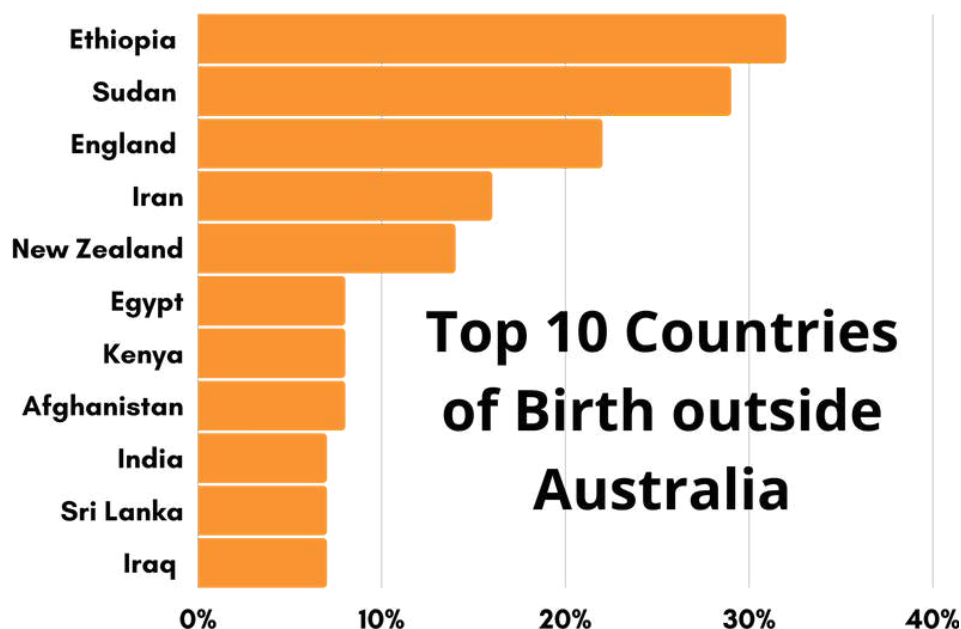
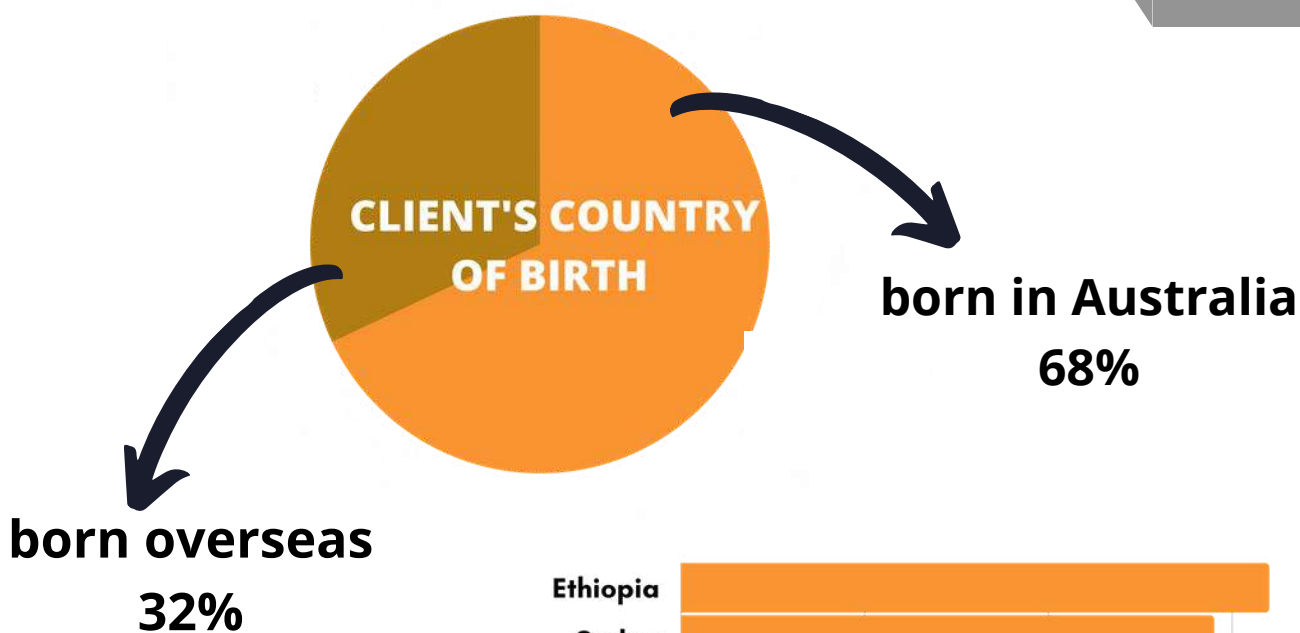
WHO DID WE HELP IN 2019-20?

A BIT ABOUT OUR CLIENTS...



Top 10
languages
spoken at
home

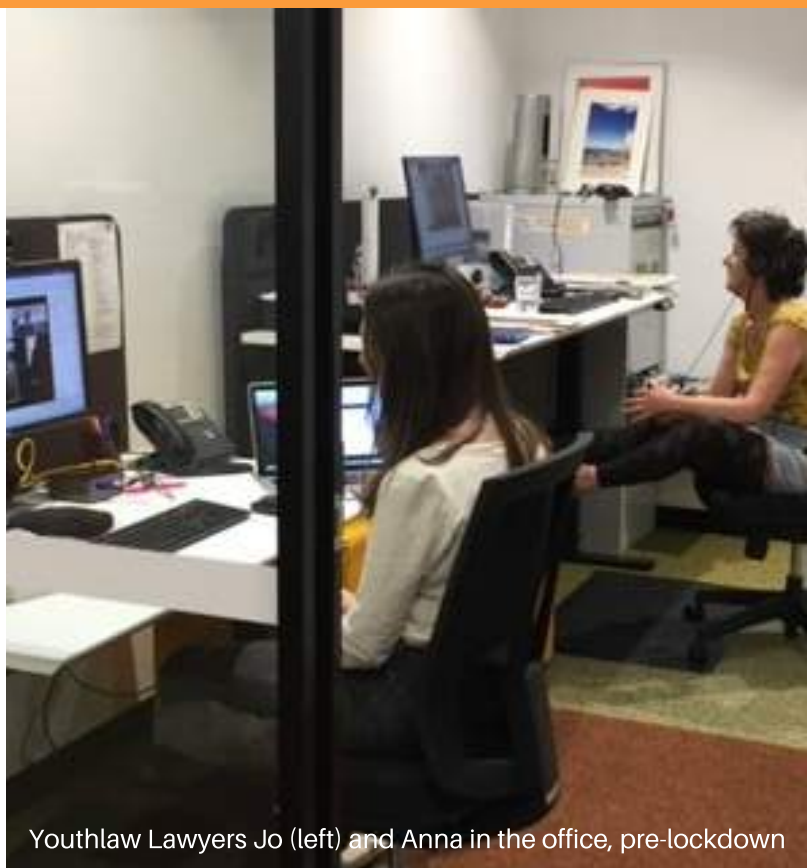
(other than
English)



Free phone and email legal advice

The Legal Help Line continues to be an essential service for young people, particularly for those who can't attend in person due to location, lack of transport or safety concerns due to family violence.

Our lawyers provide clear and prompt legal information via phone and email so young people can work out what to do and where to get further help.



Youthlaw Lawyers Jo (left) and Anna in the office, pre-lockdown

I'm in Year 12 and a guy over 18 in my year level keeps asking me out, even though I've said no. He edited my profile pic to look pornographic and sent it to people.

Rachel, 17

A company has been promising me a refund for months but are now ignoring my emails. They have declared bankruptcy. Is their word legally binding? ***Trent, 22***

I lent money to a mate, and he promised to pay me back, but he hasn't. He's now deleted me on all social media. I need the money to pay my tuition. What can I do?

Mohammed, 21

"Youthlaw speaking, how can I help?"

Sometimes our lawyers pick up the phone to a young person currently being questioned by police who wants to know their rights, other times they are answering emails from a child who is being abused at home.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the legal service answered lots of questions about people's rights during lockdown. All of the calls and emails are treated with the priority, sensitivity and compassion.

I need information on independent living. I am currently living with my parents, but it is not good for my mental health to stay. Can I finish school if I leave home? Can I get my learners permit? **Laura, 17**

I went to a party yesterday and got caught in the neighbour's yard as I jumped a fence. I was told that I was trespassing. The police asked me for my details. What will happen to me? **Vinh, 19**

My boss is behind on my pay. He says he won't pay my JobKeeper salary until the government pays him first. I'm worried he will fire me if I complain. What can I do? **Jasmine, 22**

Our specialist youth lawyers responded to

800



email and phone legal queries in 2019-20

YOUTHLAW | FAMILY VIOLENCE PROGRAM

With incidents of family violence increasing dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, the work of Youthlaw's Family Violence program has never been more important.

This year the Family Violence team comprised two part-time lawyers, Steph Pashias and Jo Ellis; a specialist Youth Practitioner, Hilary Glaisher; and a program co-ordinator, Tiffany Overall. They offer integrated support and assistance to young people who were experiencing violence or using violence in the home.

Later in 2020 we welcomed Caitlin Lester (Youth Practitioner) and Carmel Lohan to the team.

"Despite 10 per cent of family violence incidents involving adolescents using violence in the home, there is still a one-size-fits all legal response which treats adolescent and adults in the same way," said Steph, Youthlaw Family Violence Lawyer.

"Having a multidisciplinary Family Violence team means we can offer holistic and flexible support throughout the legal journey," Steph said.

"In many cases the young people we work with are both using violence and a victim of violence in the home."

The Family Violence program includes:

Initial safety assessment and safety plan

Referral to counselling and wellbeing programs

One-to-one legal advice from our Family Violence Lawyer as required

Our lawyer attending Melbourne Children's Court weekly to assist children seeking or responding to a FV Intervention order

Early intervention pilot project for AVITH

In November Youthlaw's Family Violence program received a grant from Victorian Legal Services Board to initiate an early intervention pilot project for adolescents who use violence in the home (AVITH).

The pilot aims to provide an integrated response to these young people when they first come into contact with services, and then link them into supports to divert them out of the legal system.

The project kicked off early in 2020 with work commencing on the service model design and location, and establishing new partnerships with stakeholder for early referrals. The Centre for Innovative Justice at RMIT is conducting ongoing evaluation.



35

young people assisted at Melbourne Children's Court

84

legal consultations with youth workers and family violence lawyers assisting young people





Image: Canva

MEET JOSEPH, 16

Joseph, 16, Family Violence program client

Joseph has been living with his mum since his parents separated a year ago. Joseph suffers from anxiety and depression. He has dropped out of school and isn't working.

During lockdown Joseph and his mum were fighting a lot.

During one argument, Joseph became angry and shoved his mum.

Joseph kept yelling and started kicking the wall, so his mum rang the police.

The police obtained an interim intervention order excluding Joseph from his family home. Immediately after the incident Joseph attempted suicide and was hospitalized for a few days.

After release, Joseph went to live with his Dad and has been doing much better.

Joseph connected with the Youthlaw Family Violence program at Melbourne Children's Court when he appeared to respond to the interim order against him.

It was his first time in court and he was very anxious. Joseph told our lawyer that he was happy living with his dad for now, but missed his brother.

Over the adjournment period the youth practitioner linked Joseph in with Orygen Youth Mental Health Service and an employment service.

“ I didn't want to go back and live with Mum, but I wanted to be able to see my little brother. The Family Violence lawyer negotiated with the police to change the interim intervention order so that I could meet my brother at the local park without getting in trouble.”

Meanwhile, with Joseph's consent, our youth practitioner had provided information to Joseph's dad about support available to him, regarding young people with mental health crisis.

Over two more court dates, the Youthlaw lawyer convinced Police Prosecution to withdraw the IVO.

Our youth practitioner continues to have contact with Joseph, and is helping him to make plans to return to school and gain employment.

MEET RACHEL, 19

Rachel, 19, Family Violence program client

"When I found out I was pregnant, I knew I had to leave my partner. The violence was getting worse and I was scared what might happen next.

I was couchsurfing at a friend's place, but I was constantly worrying that my ex would find out I was there and come looking for me.

I haven't had contact with any of my family since I left home at 16. I was diagnosed with a mild intellectual disability at school, and I dropped out in Year 10.

My housing worker at Frontyard Youth Services linked me in with the Youthlaw Family violence Program.

One of the first things the Youthlaw lawyer did was help me apply for an intervention order against my ex.

The family violence youth practitioner sat with me and we developed a safety plan, and then shared it with the housing team at Frontyard so that everyone knew what the plans were to keep me safe.

The Youthlaw Family Violence youth worker contacted Safe Steps, which is a 24 hour family violence crisis support, who found me a safe place to stay so I wasn't couchsurfing.

Over the next few weeks the youth worker helped me re-connect with my old NDIS worker.

I also got referred to a young women's case management team who gave me advice about how to stay healthy during pregnancy, and preparing for the when the baby comes.

The thing that made a difference was that Youthlaw stayed in contact with my workers from other services - NDIS, Frontyard and the women's case management service.

So everyone was on the same page, and working towards the same goal.

I finally got my own place - a public housing unit - and moved in last month. My baby is due at the end of the year."



Image: Canva

YOUTHLAW | FRONTYARD SERVICE

Legal help for young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness

Frontyard Youth Services in King St, Melbourne, is a co-location of youth services under one roof in the heart of the CBD.

Frontyard is a one-stop shop where homeless and vulnerable young people can obtain assistance.

Youthlaw has drop-in legal clinics at Frontyard twice a week. Many people referred by phone, and Frontyard clients also attend our Pelham St office and our fines clinics.

Youthlaw has been co-located with Frontyard for 19 years so our relationships with youth workers and other support workers are very strong.

We work in an integrated way that suits young people needing our help.

We have also set up our Pelham St clinic at our office once a week for screened-in young people that most need our help.

Some are Frontyard clients, other come through other youth services and some directly contact us.

Attending lawyers at Frontyard and Pelham St clinic this year were Anna and Amala, and our Ashurst secondee lawyers Rebecca and Emily.

Their work included connecting with non-legal support and court work. Common legal issues experienced are significant fines, debts, criminal charges and family violence

We thank all the youth services who take the time to pick up legal problems and guide young people to us.





MEET BABENI, 22

Babeni, originally from Congo, first sought assistance from Frontyard in 2016 with fines and family difficulties, and continued to seek regular help. In 2019, he had been homeless, spending short periods of time in support accommodation, couch surfing and sleeping in his car. In this period, he had his licence suspended and was charged with driving while suspended.

A Frontyard youth worker provided a letter of support outlining his ongoing housing instability and support needs.

Youthlaw was able to finalise Babeni's charge ensuring that no conviction was recorded and that his licence was not impacted. This was the best possible outcome for Babeni, who didn't want to lose his car and licence.

MEET JOHN, 21

John first came into Frontyard last year. He had to leave home due to mental health issues he was experiencing that were contributing to breakdown of his family relationships. His poor mental health left him unable to work, so he had no source of income.

John's GP referred him to a psychologist. Since being homeless his mental health had spiralled out of control and outstanding fines were contributing to the decline. John had a number of myki fines. He could not afford to pay for a myki or pay for a fine, but had to travel on the trains to get to friends' houses to sleep.

Youthlaw helped John to have the fines withdrawn. As a result, he was able to focus on his mental health and is in the process of getting back on his feet.

YOUTHLAW | LEGAL POD PROGRAM

Targeted support for vulnerable care leavers

Young people leaving out-of-home care are among some of our most vulnerable citizens. Our unique Legal Pod program is helping to empower them and make a fresh start.

Martin was 10 when he was removed from his family in regional Victoria. He was the oldest of five kids and his mum was in the grips of an ice addiction, leaving her unable to care for him.

Martin was placed in a residential (resi) care facility, but he frequently ran away in an attempt to return to his mother. When he was 13, Martin was sexually abused by an older boy in the group home. He told his carers but he doesn't recall if a report was made to police.

Now aged 19, Martin is a client of Youthlaw's Legal Pod program, which provides intensive, ongoing legal support for young people exiting state care.

Through the Legal Pod, Martin is being supported by three pro bono lawyers to identify and overcome legal issues preventing him from moving on with his life.

In addition to tackling legal problems related to his addiction and debts, the Pod lawyers are helping Martin to access his care records.

Martin wants to understand what happened to him while he was in resi care.

Accessing care records is just one of the many matters with which Legal Pod clients are assisted.

- Each young person in the program has an average of seven legal issues when they enter the program, and others may arise during the three years they are engaged.

This is not surprising, given that young people leaving out-of-home care experience high rates of homelessness, mental health issues, substance use and family violence, and more frequent interactions with the criminal justice system.

The Youthlaw managing lawyers this year were Fleur Hopkins and Paula Hughes.

The firms currently participating in program are Baker McKenzie, DLA Piper, Colin Biggers & Paisley, Gilbert + Tobin, Holding Redlich, PwC, Russell Kennedy and Wisewould Mahony.

Since its inception in 2018, the Legal Pod program has assisted 53 care leavers. The program is entering the final year of its pilot, funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board.

Youthlaw is currently seeking further funding to continue the program.



Image: Ben Den Engelsens, Unsplash

MEET CHELSEA, 22

Chelsea was referred to the Legal Pod program by her housing support worker. At the time, she was living in transitional housing and receiving a Centrelink income.

Chelsea had been in out-of-home care since the age of 11 and as a result her social support network was almost non-existent, and she was struggling with poor mental health.

She also experienced ongoing family violence at the hands of her partner Jackson.

Jackson had incurred thousands of dollars in traffic fines and forced Chelsea to nominate as the driver.

After connecting with the Legal Pod, pro bono lawyers from Baker McKenzie helped Chelsea to have these fines reviewed under Fines Victoria's Family Violence Scheme.

The Pod of lawyers also helped her to connect with Youthlaw's specialist family violence social worker.

This was the first family violence support that Chelsea had successfully accessed.

The Legal Pod program continues to help Chelsea, most recently to apply for work permits and negotiate to end her lease agreement,



Image: Jeffrey Wegrzyn on Unsplash

In 2019-20, Legal Pod accomplished:



9

law firms

17

legal pods



34

young people
assisted

10

new clients
referred

70

workers
trained

YOUTHLAW | FRIDAY FINES CLINIC

The burden of fines for young people

We have a drop-in Fines clinic every Friday. Many of the young people we see have trouble dealing with fines. Young people can incur fines due to experiencing homelessness, poor mental health, substance abuse or family violence. They often have no means to pay for fines that easily snowball. It becomes extremely hard and stressful for the young person to deal with their fines.

Our Friday Fines clinic helps vulnerable young people navigate the complicated fines system. We support clients each step of the way – from an initial check for fines, to making applications to withdraw fines, to representing them in court.

A dedicated group of law student volunteers undertake most of the fines work. The fantastic team comes in every Friday (during non-COVID times) and have been trained to conduct interviews with clients and manage multiple client files. They are supervised by our wonderful and ever passionate lawyer Amala Ramarathinam.

Youthlaw also engages in extensive policy work to advocate for systemic change of the fines system to efficiently exit vulnerable young people from the system.

Friday Fines ceased operating in person from mid-March 2020, but clinic continued remotely via phone and email.

Our remote Fines Clinic was working so well that, due to the increased demand for our services caused by COVID-19 fines, we were able to induct new volunteers in 2020.

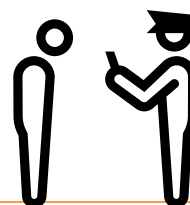
We now have 10 infringements paralegals working in our remotely run Fines Clinic.

Systemic efforts to address the impact of fines on young people included:

- Direct engagement with police to advocate them to stop issuing COVID-19 fines to children, especially children in care
- Advocating with police to properly and fairly consider applications for review
- Bringing together a coalition of community legal centres to form a COVID-19 fines and Young People Working Group, to exchange practice and advocacy strategies
- Developing practice materials and precedents for CLC lawyers who are assisting clients with COVID-19 fines.

\$3,000 average value of fines per client

All Friday Fines clients had special circumstances including homelessness, mental ill-health or substance abuse



Common fines include:
- public transport fines (\$250)
- parking fines (\$200)
- carrying a knife (\$1,000)
- COVID fine (\$1600)

average number of fines per client: **5**



24%
of our clients have no income



Image: Canva



MEET DAMIEN, 22

"I was told I had ADHD when I was 6. It was the first of many diagnoses over the years including an anxiety disorder and autism.

I drink a lot as a way of coping, and I've been fined three or four times for being drunk in public. I also was fined for damaging public property after I smashed a bus shelter one night during a mental health episode.

But Victoria Police refused to withdraw the fines. I still didn't have the money to pay them, so the fines moved to the enforcement stage. It was so stressful. It felt like a giant weight on my chest.

The Paralegals submitted an application to Fines Victoria with the same request to cancel the fines. I was so grateful; they just never gave up trying.

"The fines added up to over \$2,000 and I barely have enough money to pay the rent. The police didn't know that I was struggling with mental health. It doesn't excuse the way I behaved, but maybe it helps explain it?"

My support worker referred me to the Friday Fines Clinic. A team of paralegals looked at my fines, with supervision of a lawyer.

The fines added up to over \$2,000 and I barely have enough money to pay the rent.

The police didn't know that I was struggling with mental illness. It doesn't excuse the way I behaved, but it helps explain it.

The paralegals contacted my doctors, parents and supporter workers to get the paperwork and evidence to prove that my mental illness is a special circumstance and the fines should be withdrawn.

While the application with Fines Victoria was being processed, the State Government announced that they will decriminalise being found drunk in public places!

Fines Victoria accepted the application, and Victoria Police later withdrew all of my fines.

It was a huge relief not to have that hanging over my head.

Now I can focus on trying to stay well, and getting routine in my day. "

YOUTHLAW | OUTREACH PROGRAM

Legal help paves way to mental health recovery

Our Outreach legal program continues to proactively connect with young people through ten different partner sites; six Headspace centres, three youth spaces in outer urban and regional Victoria and a detox unit.

During 2019-20, 158 young people were assisted with legal advice, court appearances and ongoing cases through the outreach program via site visits, phone and email.

Integrating with existing youth mental health services allows Youthlaw to engage with people whose mental health may be contributing to their legal problems, or their legal problems exacerbating their mental health issues.



"A lot of the time the young people that we connect with through these sites are focussed on getting on top of their mental health," said Lisa Nguyen, Outreach lawyer.

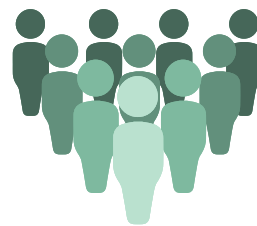
"My job is to be part of that recovery process by ensuring their legal issues aren't snowballing and hopefully to lighten some of that mental burden."

"Many of their legal issues flow from a time when they weren't coping and didn't have a grasp on their mental health," she said.

The rotating monthly appointments give Lisa the opportunity to meet face-to-face with young people as well as deliver secondary consultations with workers who may have questions about the young people they are working with, or their own legal responsibilities in relation to clients.

"We also provide training to staff at our partner sites so they are able to identify legal issues and refer young people to our service," said Lisa.

"A lot of community legal centres have low numbers of young clients, because typically young people don't know the services exist, or they don't realise that they have a legal problem. That's why doing outreach is so essential," she said.



158

young people helped through Youthlaw outreach

3

 legal training sessions for 37 workers

7

 legal education sessions for 196 young people

Youthlaw outreach operates at..

6

 Headspace locations

3

 regional and outer urban youth spaces

1

 detox unit



Image: Brad Neathery, Unsplash

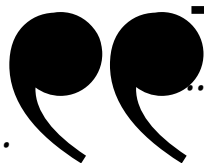
MEET NASEEM, 19

"Growing up, things were always tense in our house. My dad was unpredictable, and would fly off the handle at the smallest things, and he'd tell me I was useless, because I was diagnosed with schizophrenia when I was 15.

I'd been getting support for my mental health from Headspace for about three months.

I was charged with possessing cannabis and stealing a bottle of juice. I didn't go to court for hearing, because I was scared. I felt like no-one was on my side.

I had no idea what to do, as I had no money, and I'd never been in trouble with the law before. I went to see a private lawyer and they quoted me \$2,000 to represent me in court.



I was charged with possessing cannabis and stealing a bottle of juice. I didn't go to court for hearing, because I was scared. I felt like no-one was on my side."

They helped me find the courage to leave home to escape my abusive father.

But then things took a turn for the worse. I was living in transitional housing, and smoking pot to manage my anxiety.

I had finally landed an apprenticeship when my anxiety got really bad, and I dropped out.

I was depressed and smoking a lot of marijuana to cope.

Headspace referred me to Youthlaw, who negotiated for a diversion program with police.

Youthlaw represented me in court, and the Magistrate agreed to place me on diversion, so I didn't have that on my criminal record. It was such a relief.

I'm still seeing the counsellor at Headspace. I'm now at a place where I can finish my apprenticeship and I'm really grateful for it."

YOUTHLAW | RMIT LEGAL SERVICE

COVID drives surge

Our student legal service based at RMIT has seen the greatest surge in demand this year, due in most part to the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on students, who've lost casual work and are struggling to get by.

Our contract with RMIT sees us delivering legal services through online, email, phone as well as face-to-face appointments.

At the beginning of lockdown, housing problems, credit and debt assistance and employment issues made up the bulk of enquiries from students.

Our student legal service helped 788 students in 2019-20, and provided 1,215 legal services, including 640 instances of legal advice.

Considering that students were not on-campus for a portion of the year, these numbers tell a powerful story of young people in the pandemic.

Youthlaw lawyer, James Tresise, says that international students made up the vast majority of clients supported by the student legal service.

"International students have been in a dire situation because their casual jobs dried up due to COVID, and they are not eligible for any government support."

"They're far from home and family, and have no idea about their legal rights in relation to landlords or employers," said James

"Our student legal service has been a lifeline for them. Some of these students are on the precipice of homelessness when we see them," he said.



788

students
assisted through
RMIT legal service

1,215

legal services
provided to
RMIT students

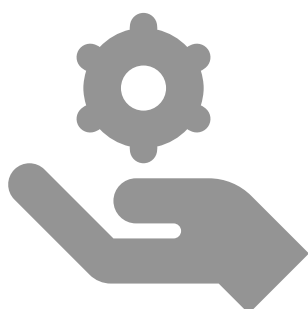


Image: Canva

YOUTHLAW | BALLARAT

Central Highlands Health Justice partnership

In 2017, Youthlaw joined with partners Federation University and Ballarat Community Health to deliver a health justice partnership based at Ballarat Community Health and connecting with health workers across the region.

This paired specialist youth legal expertise with a range of complementary youth health and social support services.

The Central Highlands region has a high youth population with a significant number experiencing high disadvantage. The young people we assist are overwhelmingly disadvantaged.

The issues they are dealing with are often the result of difficulties in their early life. Common issues are mental health issues, substance abuse, disengagement from school, unemployment, housing instability and family violence.

Their legal problems rarely exist in isolation, so integrating health and social services with legal services has been highly successful.

Evidence shows that young people seek assistance from those they trust and are more likely to present to health and other support services than lawyers.

Health care providers are often aware of other issues troubling their clients (including legal) but they often lack knowledge, tools or resources to confidently respond to them.

Our Health Justice Partnership plays a critical role in bridging this gap; providing training to health and community workers so they can confidently identify legal issues and refer young people to the legal service.

The health workers and lawyer work together with young people to support them and to address legal and associated health and social issues.

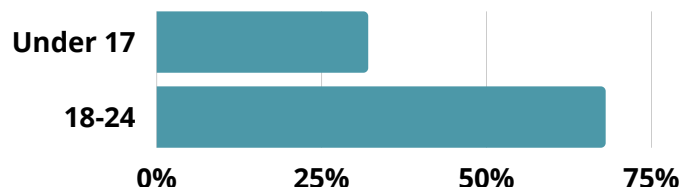
Our lawyer, Katrina Fanning, provides responsive and flexible phone, online and in-person advice and support to young people in the Central Highlands, as well as training and secondary consultations to health and support workers from over 30 community organisations in the Central Highlands region.

In 2019, with one-off project funding from the Victorian Law Foundation, an additional part-time lawyer was employed for 12 months.

Sophie Ellis, also a local, has enhanced the service by provided training and secondary consultations to support workers in the region.

In 2019-20 Ballarat Youthlaw helped...

45 young people
with
128 services



44% experiencing family violence

82% financially disadvantaged

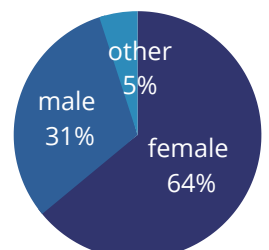


Image:
Ballarat community forum, Youthlaw lawyers Katrina,
centre and Sophie Ellis, far right)



MEET ELYSE, 15

Elyse, 15, Youthlaw Ballarat

"Mum grew up in foster care and was pretty traumatised by things that happened to her, and often took her anger out on me, and sometimes was violent.

I moved in with Nan, but mum kept coming over and the arguments kept happening. I had no idea how I could escape the situation.

Katrina always stays in touch. Every time I've needed help, I've sent her a text and she gets back to me straight away.

When I needed to extend the intervention order, Katrina helped. She also helped connect me with Medicare and to apply for a healthcare card.

I found a flier for Youthlaw at the police station. Katrina explained all my options and helped me apply for an intervention order. She made it easy for Nan and I to understand. When the day came, Katrina came to court with me."

A few months later I wanted to apply for a passport, but didn't know how to get one without mum's signature.

When COVID is over, Nan and I want to go to Italy. She's always wanted to go. But without a passport, I couldn't make any plans.

Katrina helped me find a way to get one without a parent signature.

When I first had contact with Youthlaw, I was snapping out at teachers and getting in a lot of trouble.

I think I just had so much stuff bottled up. Since I met Katrina, I'm a lot calmer. She really helped me get my life back on track.

I'm even running for school captain. I want to be a social worker one day."

This year our advocacy continued to focus on addressing unfair practices and laws that are failing young Victorians.

Of critical concern is the continued overrepresentation in the criminal justice system of certain cohorts of young people, including African & Pacific Islands background young people, Aboriginal young people and young people with a child protection background.

We contributed to the national Review on Age of Criminal Responsibility by the Commonwealth of Attorney Generals (CAG).

We have been lobbying various Victorian Ministers and building our campaign support base. Around 120,000 people have now signed the national petition.

The SJ4YP Raise the Age Working Group, led by Human Rights Law Centre, is playing a critical role leading Victoria's contribution to the national Raise the Age campaign.

“ This year our advocacy continued to focus on addressing unfair practices and laws that are failing young Victorians.

Leading the Smart Justice for Young People (SJ4YP) Coalition, we have collectively advocated to influence the government and Victoria Police to address these issues through progressive reform underway in the youth justice and crime prevention spaces, including:

- the development of a ten year Youth Justice strategic plan
- the development of a new Youth Justice Act
- Victoria's whole-of-government Crime Prevention Strategy

As part of this reform package, SJ4YP has consistently called on the Victorian Government to raise the age of legal responsibility to 14.

Despite a groundswell of media leading up to the July CAG meeting they deferred making a decision while more research is done into the alternative to a welfare response.

With other jurisdictions like ACT committing to Raising the Age we feel confident that we'll see movement on this issue here.

COVID-19 advocacy

While the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the progress of some of this reform, it has also heightened the need for it.

During 2020, a stark picture was revealed of a legal system weighed down by systemic bias; discriminatory policing practices, inadequacies of an unfair fines review system and a youth justice system that can fail the most vulnerable of our children and young people.

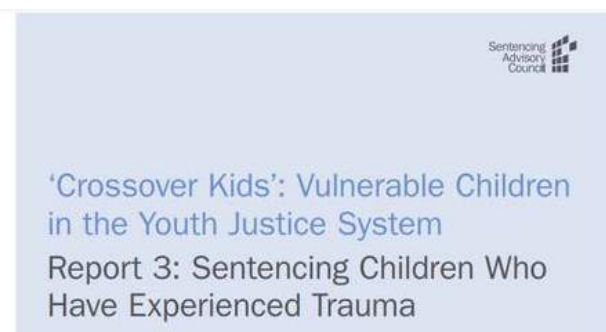
We have monitored and advocated around the impacts of COVID 19 on young people particularly in relation to fines and youth detention.



While Youth Justice has managed youth detention safely and endeavoured to have more young people exit into the community on bail, we are acutely aware that too many of the most vulnerable end up in the system even during a pandemic.

We have strengthened our calls to prevent the criminalisation of children with Out of Home Care experiences, reform our bail support and legislate child specific reform to our bail laws to keep more young people out of prison.

These calls are backed by research from important reports published this year by the Sentencing Advisory Council on *Crossover Kids and Children held in remand in Victoria* documenting the high number of vulnerable children who are un-sentenced on remand in prison.



Police practice and accountability

Under the Victorian Government's COVID response we have seen expanded reach and powers of police.

This has concerning consequences for already over-policed cohorts of young people Victorians.

We have raised community consciousness about the expanding police numbers and expanding reach of Protective Service Officers (PSOs) and the blurred scope of Youth Specialist Officers (YSOs) especially in out-of-home care settings.



COVID fines

Youthlaw has been advocating to Victoria Police in regard to the issuing of COVID-19 fines, the inappropriateness of fining children, and the inadequacy of current reviews by Victoria Police.

Too many COVID fines were issued for 'breaches' that failed the common sense test. We are contributing to an initiative of Drummond Street services to develop a COVID card which vulnerable young people can use to flag their circumstances during interactions with police.

In partnership with other community lawyers, Youthlaw is monitoring young people being fined under COVID 19 offences, the reasonableness of the fine and testing the adequacy of Fines Victoria's system of reviewing any unfair fines.

Youthlaw continues to work persistently to improve the fines review system generally. This year we contributed to submissions to the Fines Reform Advisory Board and a Statutory review of the family violence scheme being conducted by Fines Victoria.

Smart Justice for Young People

SJ4YP formed a media working group convened by YACVic in 2019, which has been predominantly coordinating media work for the campaign.

The group is made up of communications and media folk from member organisations. They have developed a shared media strategy, responses, messages, social media tiles, a case study bank, and have been using these resources as part of the media work predominantly for the Raise the Age campaign.

Ballarat police, support agencies say early intervention needed on youth crime

Alex Ford and Greg Gliddon

Latest News

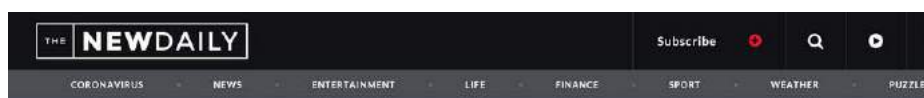


The dramatic crimes committed by teenagers in Ballarat this week highlights the need for early intervention and accessible resources, support agencies and police say.

And our passionate community lawyer Sophie Ellis kept the community abreast of expansion of police numbers and reach, and penned a brilliant editorial about the expansion of police powers in Victoria.

Talk's cheap but Andrews is walking to the same old beat

Sophie Ellis Jun 19 - 4 min read



Locked up for a food fight: Government under pressure to 'raise the age' of kids in prison



6:00am, Jul 27, 2020 Updated: 9:02pm

NEWS

Social media

Youthlaw's social media work during the year was supported by volunteer Chelsey Tattersall from September 2019 to February 2020.

In July, Lanie Harris came on board, bringing a renewed focus on social media engagement that has been successful in lifting Youthlaw's social media profile. A new content planner and a staff social media roster and calendar have been implemented to boost Facebook and Twitter activity.

Ballarat Youthlaw program helping young people

Alex Ford

Latest News

f t e A A A



Here to help: Youthlaw's Katrina Fanning said early intervention is key to keeping vulnerable young people out of trouble. Picture: Lachlan Bence

A first-year uni student driving a borrowed car nicks an object, and causes minimal damage - but the claim is for \$8500, more than they've had in their life.

Government funding

We receive core funding from the Commonwealth Government and the Victorian state government through their joint Community Legal Service Program (CLSP).

In addition, both the federal and state governments provided one-off grants:

- COVID-19 funding assistance (joint federal and state)
- Since 2016 three grants per year from the Victorian Government to enhance our Family violence response and contribute to our frontline clinics.

Non-government funding

We derive over half of our annual income from philanthropic and private sector sources as well as fundraising, donations and self-generated income.

Funders this year were:

- Legal Service Board of Victoria (for the Legal Pod and pre-court family violence pilots)
- Victoria Law Foundation (grant for civil legal training in Ballarat)
- Kimberley Foundation (for Smart Justice advocacy)

- RE Ross Trust (family violence program evaluation and co-ordination)
- Streetsmart (for legal assistance to youth experiencing homelessness)

Donations included:

- Individual donations through the Give Now platform
- Ashurst law firm annual trivia night
- End of Financial Year donations



In-kind support

Youthlaw has many in-kind contributors. These contributions are invaluable and crucial to maintaining our office and delivering our services across Victoria.

Over the past year this includes:

- *RMIT and Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ)*

From December 2019 the University and CIJ welcomed Youthlaw to their Social Innovation Hub at 147-155 Pelham St Carlton. This includes a rent free office, access to events' facilities and co-ordination of placement students.

- CIJ through staff Kate Ottery, Katherine Ogilvie and Mi-Lin Chen Yi Mei student providing placement support and expertise in integrated practice that enables us to host so many placements & develop our multi-disciplinary practice.

- *Melbourne City Mission (MCM) and Frontyard Youth Services*

Youthlaw has a long association with MCM and Frontyard having been co-located for 19 years.

Due to their growth and redevelopment Youthlaw has physically re-located away from Frontyard but will still maintain a close relationship providing outreach to Frontyard twice a week and taking referrals.

MCM has generously supported Youthlaw in many ways. Currently this includes providing desks and investing in integration of Youthlaw into the Frontyard service delivery.

- *Ballarat Community Health (BCH), Federation University of Australia and region community and health services.*

In Ballarat, our partnership to deliver a legal service to young people in the region has only been possible with substantial in kind support from the partners and agencies working with us to refer young people.

BCH hosts staff, FUA provides evaluation, Headspace hosts an outreach clinic & over 30 community organisations invest in integration with the service to facilitate referral.

- *Six Headspace centres and three youth centres in outer urban and regional Victoria host our outreach clinics and invest in integration of Youthlaw into their service delivery.*
- *The Youth Support Advocacy Service (YSAS) hosts our outreach to their youth drug detox centre*
- *Konica Minolta – has twice donated high quality second hand multiplex printers to Youthlaw*
- *RMIT University (re our student legal service) – Office space and management contribution to integrate our service with other student services.*
- *KPMG - Donation of headsets (very useful during COVID)*



YOUTHLAW | TEAM

Staff

- **Director** – Ariel Couchman
- **Principal Lawyer (Criminal)** – Anna Radonic
- **Principal Lawyer (Civil)** – Joanne Ellis
- **Senior Lawyer** – Amala Ramarathinam
- **Outreach lawyer** – Lisa Nguyen
- **Policy Officer & Family Violence Coordinator** – Tiffany Overall
- **Legal Pod Managing Lawyer** – Fleur Hopkins & Paula Hughes
- **RMIT Lawyer** – James Tresise
- **Family Violence Lawyer** – Stephanie Pashias
- **Family Violence Practitioner** – Hilary Glaisher
- **Secondee Lawyers** – Rebecca Lew & Emily Smith
- **Youthlaw Ballarat Lawyers** – Katrina Fanning & Sophie Ellis
- **Finance Officer** – Noha Ghobrial
- **Admin & volunteer co-ordination** – Chloe Stapleton
- **Locum lawyer** – Cameron Horn
- **Fines Clinic co-ordinator (locum)** – Etty Philosofof
- **External & staff group supervision** – Abbey Newman & Radhika Santhanam-Martin

Board

- **Daniel Fawcett** (Chair)
- **Kathleen Sutton** (Chair until 25-11-19)
- **Charlie Bell** (Treasurer)
- **Shelley Hemmings** (Secretary)
- **Lynette Dong** (Secretary)
- **Helen Thomas**
- **Joanna Lawrence**
- **Erica Contini**
- **Monika Pilekic**
- **Erin Byrt**
- **Scott Myers**
- **Monique Hurley**
- **Rebecca Lew**
- **Jake Cripps** (Until 25-11-19)
- **Shannon Jenkins** (until 25-11-19)



YOUTHLAW | PROBONO LAW PARTNERS

Our work is strengthened by the contribution of our pro bono partners and their lawyers.

We provided support and guidance to all these lawyers, ensuring that their pro bono hours were as valuable to them as they were to us.

In 2019-20, our pro bono partners were:

Legal Pod program:

- Baker McKenzie
- Colin Biggers
- Paisley
- DLA Piper
- Gilbert + Tobin
- Holding Redlich
- PwC
- Russell Kennedy
- Wisewould Mahony

In addition:

- Ashurst
- K&L Gates



Ashurst lawyers participated in Run Melbourne to raise money for Youthlaw, 2019

YOUTHLAW VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers:

Sarah Abell • Masie Adams • Sarah Ajlouni • Walinda Bonne • Rachel Chew • Jakob Cobby • Amy Cooper • Leanne Cousinery • Tim Cronin • Harrison Gay • Caitlynn Gibbs • Romy Griffin • Amelia Grossi • Amy Hartfield • Sienna Hilson • Ashleigh Hudson • Caitlin Jane • Safia Kamal Eddin • Maheshi Kapilaratna • Cassie Knight-Grull • Storm Logan • Naomi Lizak • Leda Ly • Sassy McKenzie • Sam Moodie • Nimaashaa Nimalachandran • Adele Palfreeman • Ashira Paraskevas • Alice Parsons • Steph Perrott • Sophie Pinkus • Rashini Perera • Chelsey Tattersall • Laura Stirling • Sarah Sullivan • Amelia Watters • Annabelle Weinberg • Janine Wilson • Maggie Wright • Evangeline Yong • Indigo York

Friday Fines Clinic volunteers:

Michelle Bazarskaya • Renee Black • Jennifer Diaz • Daniel Gouthro-Dowling • Constance Iliadis • Justine Jaramillo • Chris John • Matthew Kearns • Olivia Moll • Masa Tawalbeh • Erin Thompson

MIT student placements:

• Samantha Devaney (legal) • Shraeya Edison (social work) • Kenne Uki (legal)

PLT placements: • Daniel Badov



Left: Youthlaw's Friday Fines' Volunteers enjoying a Friday night together.

YOUTHLAW | FINANCIALS

YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEGAL RIGHTS CENTRE INC ABN 12 794 935 230 DETAILED INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2020

INCOME	2020	2019
	\$	\$
CLC Recurrent Grant Funding		
Community Legal Centre (CLC) Recurrent - Commonwealth	179,732	174,284
Community Legal Centre (CLC) Recurrent - State Community Legal Centre (CLC)	208,463	196,664
Recurrent - Other VLA	-	-
	<u>388,195</u>	<u>370,948</u>
Grants - Non-Recurrent		
Kimberley Foundation	15,000	15,000
Ballarat Health Justice Partnership	41,384	44,500
Victorian Department of Justice & CS - Duty Lawyer	68,278	51,183
Victorian Department of Justice & CS - Family Violence	53,021	51,183
Victorian Department of Justice & CS - CLC Assist	60,478	51,183
Victorian Legal Services Board Grant - Legal Pod Project	66,667	125,000
Community Legal Service Program - COVID-19 Funding	80,000	-
RE Ross Trust	26,667	20,000
RMIT	88,645	83,636
Street Smart	7,500	-
Victoria Law Foundation	12,000	21,000
Other grants	1,000	1,700
	<u>520,640</u>	<u>464,385</u>
Donations		
COVID-19 Government Assistance Payments		
ATO Cash Flow Boost Stimulus Payment	50,000	-
JobKeeper Assistance Payments	<u>117,000</u>	-
	<u>167,000</u>	-
Interest Received		9,537
Other income		
Community legal education	1,150	3,182
Costs recovery and retained	3,405	8,993
Deakin placements	1,000	3,000
Fundraising	9,911	2,635
Management fees	7,768	-
Miscellaneous income	-	713
	<u>23,234</u>	<u>18,523</u>
TOTAL INCOME	<u>1,111,958</u>	<u>877,526</u>

YOUTHLAW | FINANCIALS

YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEGAL RIGHTS CENTRE INC ABN 12 794 935 230 DETAILED INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2020

EXPENDITURE	2020	2019
	\$	\$
Staff Salaries, Wages and On-costs		
Salaries and wages	798,875	700,743
Salaries and wages - JobKeeper top up payments	8,307	-
Superannuation contributions	76,626	68,623
Employee leave entitlements - annual leave	34,473	18,008
Employee leave entitlements - long service leave	(3,407)	29,384
Portable long service benefits scheme levies	13,323	-
WorkCover	1,804	-
	<u>930,001</u>	<u>816,758</u>
Premises Expenses		
Rent	48,090	44,208
Amenities	2,451	1,929
Meetings	-	47
	<u>52,608</u>	<u>46,488</u>
Staff Related Expenses		
Conference fees	2,469	2,020
Staff training	204	648
Staff recruitment	260	-
	<u>2,933</u>	<u>2,668</u>
Communications Expenses		
Internet (ISP & website)	-	8,552
IT Support	8,304	-
Mobile phones	3,998	2,843
Landline telephones	1,201	856
	<u>13,503</u>	<u>12,251</u>
Office Overhead		
Expenses	-	500
Donations General expenses	1,700	-
Office equipment maintenance	39	-
Office equipment maintenance: IT support	22,113	9,729
Postage	524	421
Small equipment purchases	3,109	527
Stationery and photocopying	1,469	1,477
	<u>28,954</u>	<u>12,654</u>
Insurance	3,039	3,027
Finance, Audit and Accounting Fees		
Accounting fees	28,949	28,106
Audit fees	2,775	2,250
Bank charges	267	223
Lodgement fees	185	-
	<u>32,176</u>	<u>30,579</u>

YOUTHLAW | FINANCIALS

YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEGAL RIGHTS CENTRE INC ABN 12 794 935 230
DETAILED INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2020

EXPENDITURE (CONT.)	2020	2019
	\$	\$
Library, resources and subscriptions		
Library	385	381
Memberships & subscriptions	10,425	8,517
Practising certificates	1,860	314
	<u>12,670</u>	<u>9,212</u>
 Programming and Planning		
Travel	2,392	3,936
Printing	2,029	3,613
Publicity	632	-
Strategic planning	-	298
Consultants	1,830	8,400
Evaluation	33,409	-
Other expenses	-	1,644
	<u>40,292</u>	<u>17,891</u>
 Depreciation and Amortisation Expenses	5,969	3,255
 TOTAL EXPENDITURE	<u>1,122,145</u>	<u>954,783</u>
NET SURPLUS/ (DEFICIT) ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE ASSOCIATION	<u>(10,187)</u>	<u>(77,257)</u>