

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 Youthlaw helped...

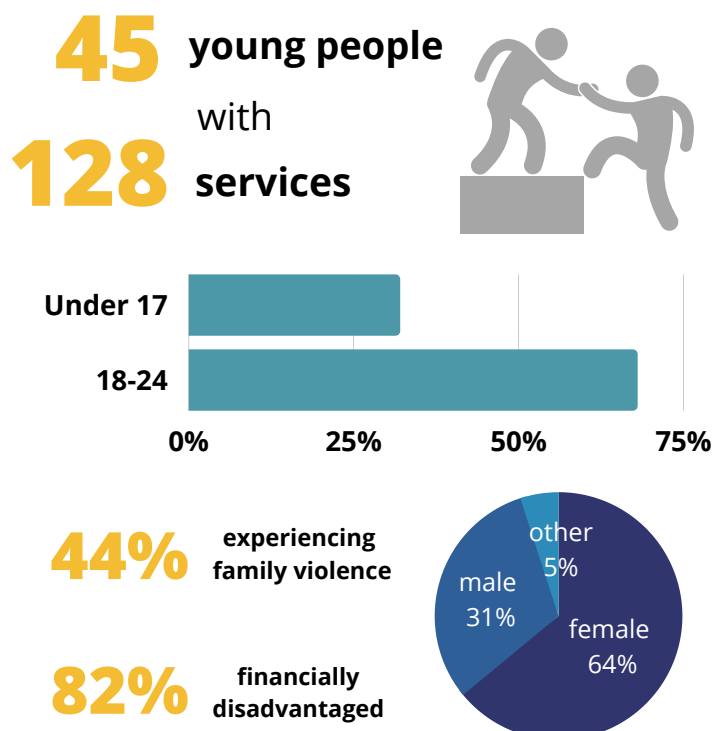


Image: Ballarat community forum, Youthlaw lawyers Katrina, centre and Sophie Ellis, far right)



Image: Canva

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."