

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



Westjustice

Werribee

Level 1/8 Watton Street,
Werribee VIC 3030
Tel: + 61 3 9749 7720
Email: admin@westjustice.org.au

Sunshine

Visy Cares Hub,
80B Harvester Road,
Sunshine VIC 3020
Tel: + 61 3 9749 7720
Email: admin@westjustice.org.au

Sunshine

Level 7/12 Clarke Street,
Sunshine VIC 3020
Tel: + 61 3 9749 7720
Email: admin@westjustice.org.au



2024

Caitlin, Sheri and Andrew at a community engagement event.





Westjustice with Minister Williams and Katie Hall MP.

Westjustice provides free legal, financial counselling and social work help to people in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne. We help with advice, representation and systemic advocacy for a broad range of everyday problems.

Please call (03) 9749 7720 to find out more about our services or to make an appointment.

© Westjustice Western Community Legal Centre 2024

Westjustice acknowledges the Peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters of our region. We acknowledge their ongoing connection to Country, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present. As we work to achieve a just and fair society, we acknowledge the fundamental role of First Peoples in the life of this region, as Custodians of the world's oldest living Culture.

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Executive Summary

This year has seen significant changes and important developments across Westjustice and Our Team.

We launched our new [Strategy 2024-27](#) which aims to deepen our impact and measure the life outcomes of our clients. Our five new Impact Areas are:

1. Women and Diverse Gender People's Rights
2. Children and Young People's Rights
3. Economic and Housing Rights
4. Workers' Rights
5. Our Team

Our [Strategy 2024-27](#) also includes a deep commitment to our climate and our First Nations communities. Whilst we service a small proportion of the First Nations communities, we know that there is a significant unmet need. We are acutely aware that the most appropriate services are those that are self-determined and community led. Therefore, we are excited to welcome Victoria Aboriginal Legal Services (VALS) to our Watton Street, Werribee office, so they can lead placed based support for First Nations people in the Western Suburbs.

Our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) aims to build on our Reflect RAP to ensure that we are well connected to our First Nations communities, and a culturally safe and inclusive organisation. This is also more broadly reflected in our commitment to ensuring that we are an anti-racist organisation and that we create a safe place for all our clients and communities including our children and young people. We are grateful to the members of Our Team who have kept our focus on these important initiatives.

Here are some further highlights:

- Implemented our new case management system, Actionstep.
- Signed the Community Legal Centres (CLC) Multi enterprise agreement and new employment contracts.
- Developed our first subsidiary, Mortgage Stress Victoria (MSV), and created a separate standalone community legal centre (company limited by guarantee) with ACNC registration and charitable status.
- Launched our new Clarke Street Sunshine Office.
- Provided multiple submissions to state and federal government inquiries including the Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership Agreement and campaigned for more equitable distribution of funding for CLCs.
- Conducted our largest community engagement project involving over 500 members of the Western Suburbs communities across multiple diasporas and language groups.

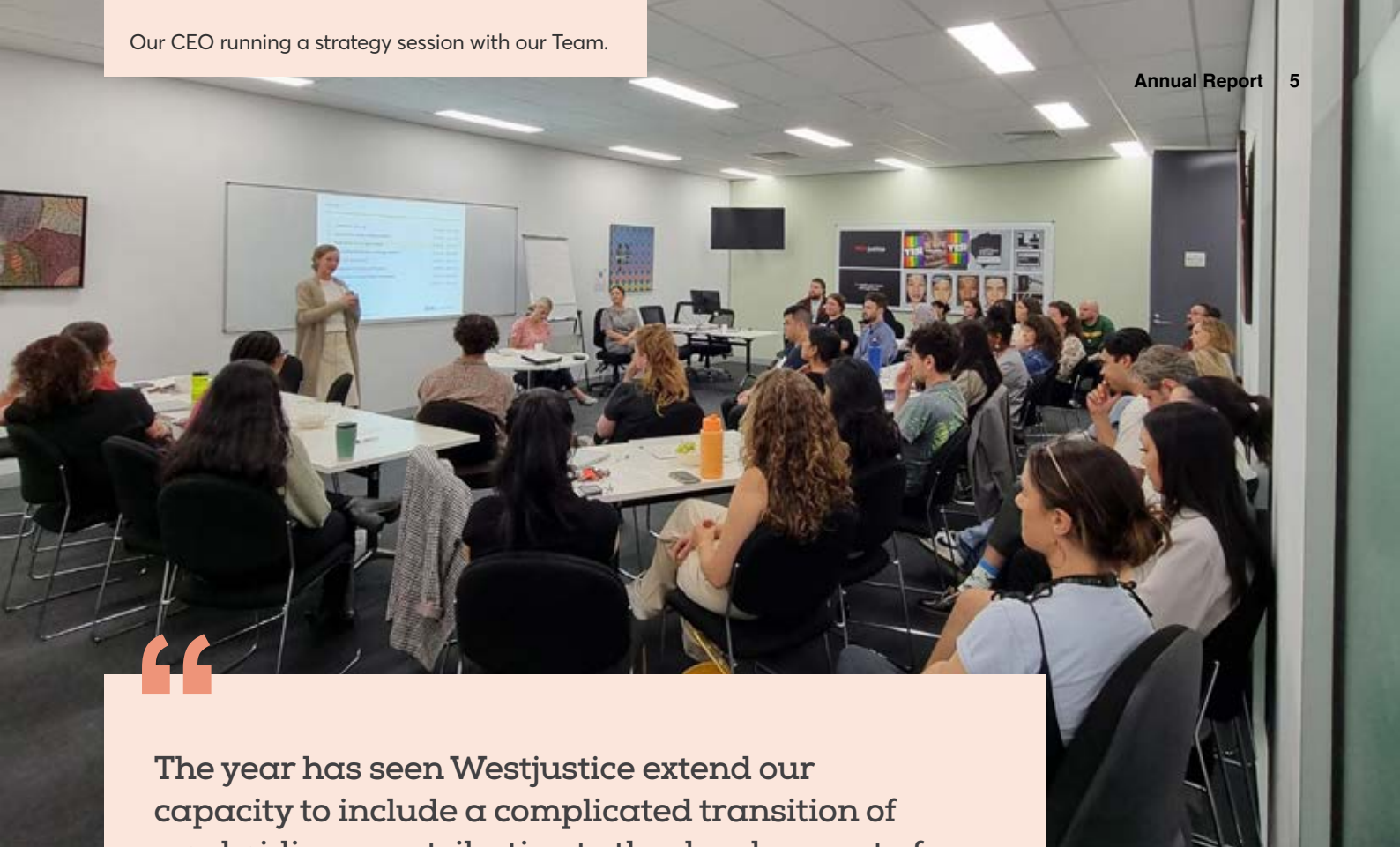
This report details many of these milestones and developments and spotlights the exceptional work of each of Our Teams.

**80%
STAFF**

on ongoing
contracts

\$250k

worth of pro bono
support



“

The year has seen Westjustice extend our capacity to include a complicated transition of a subsidiary, contribution to the development of an unprecedented Multi-enterprise Agreement, launch of our new office, new Strategy 2024-7, and new RAP. Throughout it all Our Team have been outstanding in their support and commitment to the work, organisation and our communities.

Melissa Hardham, CEO.



Westjustice with Minister Stitt



“

We are implementing an ambitious strategy which will hold us accountable in a manner, and to an extent, we have never experienced before. We will be 100% accountable to our client's life outcomes. This is a very exciting and necessary period, and it is critical we get this right.

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Message from the Chair and CEO



Our Chair, Dana Nelson

Our Vision

Fairness, safety, and justice in Melbourne's West.

Our Purpose

We deliver targeted services and drive meaningful change.

What we have achieved to date

This past 12 months will be remembered for several significant and unprecedented events. Overall, it has been a successful and seminal year. Having said that, change has been the constant throughout, so we acknowledge the incredible support and loyalty from the Westjustice Team. For some change is exciting, for others it is daunting. Yet Our Team has adapted and continued to deliver high quality and impactful services within our communities throughout this evolution.

The transformation of Westjustice to one of the larger CLCs in Victoria, commenced in 2019 and hasn't really paused since. With one of the fastest growing populations and significant underfunding of community services in the West, we have a responsibility to work smarter, and in the most impactful manner, to ensure that we reach those who need our services the most.

Over the years we have rebuilt the Board, which now comprises of an extraordinary cross section of talent, expertise, lived experience, and community representation. This will continue to evolve over the coming months to ensure that our organisation is best positioned to deliver our impact centric strategy, whilst also reflecting the communities that we serve. Our recent recruitment of Cindy Penrose, Sarah Wood, and Marie Pewhairangi over the past 12 months will enhance our capacity to ensure that our people and communities are well represented whilst also enabling exploration of long-term sustainable funding. It is time to farewell Stuart Brown and Trish Crossin (see tribute at page 12) and we acknowledge and thank them for their significant contributions.

The evolution of our Senior Leadership Team is now complete with the recruitment of our two final roles, Emma Probert (Director of People and Culture) and Aaron Osborne (Director of Operations, Practice, and Finance). They join our Directors of Policy, Impact and Engagement, and Learning and Development to ensure that Our Team have all the critical enablers to support the programs, services and systemic reform agendas led by our four Legal Directors. These eight leaders create a powerful and highly experienced collection of talent which is critical for ensuring that our communities are serviced to the best of our ability with limited resources.



We acknowledge Social Venture Australia for leading the first part of our strategy development.

Future focus

We are excited to commence delivering our new Strategy 2024-7, which was developed with the assistance of Social Venture Australia. Our Impact Areas illustrate a shift from a deficit service delivery model to a rights-based approach measured by impact.

We have included Our Team as an Impact Area because we must strive to reflect the same high standards internally that we expect of the external systems that we advocate for and against. This is why our new office space at Clarke Street Sunshine, and our colocation with Victoria Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) at our Watton Street Werribee Office, are important developments. We know that places of work can affect people's wellbeing. Therefore, through consultation we have created spaces that reflect the needs and values of Our Team and provide an inclusive and safe space for our communities.

Acknowledgement and thanks

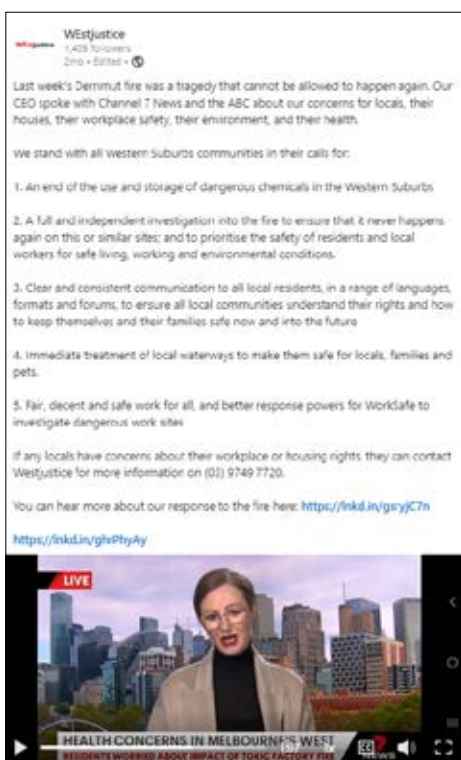
This past 12 months has been extraordinary and are well placed for an impactful future. We thank all Our Team, our Board, our Funders, our Partners, and our Communities and Clients. Special thanks to our Executive Assistant, Sarah Breen, for her support to the CEO function and Senior Leadership Team and our Company Secretary, Geoff Gedge for his support to the Wesjustice Board.



Dana Nelson
Chair of the Board



Melissa Hardham
Chief Executive Officer



Sarah and Melissa at one of her many thespian performances

Board Members



1 Dana Nelson
Chairperson, Director

2 Sarah Strapps
Director

3 Meseret Abebe
Director

4 Stuart Brown
Director

5 Melissa Hardham
CEO and Director

6 Greg Levine OAM
Director

7 Patricia Crossin AM
Director

8 Susie King
Director

9 Annamarie Rooding
Director

10 Dharmini Sivananthan
Director

Welcome to the Board



Cindy Penrose – Director

Qualifications: MAICD, MLaws, Grad Dip Legal Prac, BLaws, BComm

Cindy Penrose is the Chief Executive Officer of Yoorrook Justice Commission, Victoria's truth telling process looking into injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria in all areas of life since colonisation. Cindy is a nationally recognised leader and advocate who is driven by a commitment to make a difference to the lives of the most vulnerable people and communities. She currently serves as a Non-Executive Director on the Boards of community social justice organisation Westjustice, Streetwork and the social enterprise, Down The Track, as well as the NSW Government's Anti-slavery Advisory Panel.

With experience in delivering major change initiatives in complex political, social and organisational environments, some of Cindy's previous roles include Chief Operating Officer of one of the world's largest philanthropic organisations, the Paul Ramsay Foundation, where she led a range of initiatives including the creation of Australia's first philanthropic precinct and award-winning 'Yirranma Place', and \$100m+ investments in justice reform.

Cindy was also the first female Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Bar Association and the Assistant Director of the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce regarding sexual abuse in the Australian Defence Forces. Cindy has practised as a criminal lawyer, and has lectured in criminal law at Western Sydney University.



Marie Pewhairangi – Director

Qualifications: Advanced Diploma in Community Management Sector, Dip of Teaching

Marie is an established and respected community leader demonstrating over 20 years of service to her community. She has extensive knowledge, practical experience and training, building relationships with government and non-government agencies, community organisations, community leaders and community members. Marie's experience working in the youth sector engaging with and advocating on behalf of young people and their families spans over three decades.



Sarah Wood - Director

Qualifications: FCPHR, GAICD, Postgrad Dip HR Management, BA Hons, Dip Bus Mgmt

Sarah is an experienced consultant, coach and facilitator in organisational development focusing on workforce behaviours, capabilities, engagement and professional development. As a certified Human Resources practitioner with both in-house and consulting experience, Sarah effectively partners with Executive and Boards across a range of sectors to deliver best practice in leadership, change, capability and culture. She has developed and implemented a number of workforce strategies, organisational change programs and cultural transformations, and designs and delivers programs to optimise the effectiveness of leadership and employee teams.

Farewell to our Board Members



Trish Crossin

Trish has made a significant contribution to our risk and compliance functions during her 6-year tenure. Trish was a founding member of our Finance Risk and Audit Committee (FRAC) and had a key role in influencing our risk management systems. Trish also dedicated a significant amount of time to shaping our policy and procedure review processes to ensure we had a robust compliance framework. We are grateful for Trish's contribution to Westjustice and the support of the CEO function. We wish Trish all the best in her next ventures.

Stuart Brown

During his 6 years on the Board, Stuart's financial expertise was instrumental in the creation and leadership of the FRAC where he was the founding Chair. Stuart was seminal in how we responded to, and managed, the financial challenge of Westjustice during the pandemic. Stuart also led the organisation through the transformation of our financial management system which revolutionised a key part of how we operate. We are grateful for Stuart's contribution to Westjustice, and the legacy he has left.



Sarah Strapps

Sarah has served on the Westjustice Board since its inception in 2015. Prior to this, she was a Board Director of one of our 3 amalgamated centres, Footscray Community Legal Centre, for 7 years. During this extraordinary tenure, Sarah has held the role of Board Secretary and brought a large amount of skills and expertise across many areas of our governance and strategic direction. Sarah was a founding member of our People Culture and Nominations Committee (PCNC), and Chair from 2020-2023. We deeply appreciate Sarah's long-standing commitment to Westjustice and the Western Suburbs community.



Our Chair, Dana Nelson, and our outgoing Board Member, Trish Crossin



Our Westjustice Board, Greg, Dharmini, Sarah, Annamarie, Stuart, Dana, Meseret, Trish and Geoff

IMPACT AND ENGAGEMENT

Our new Strategy transforms the way we measure our success. It is now based on the stories of our clients and how they report the impact on their lives - through their eyes and through their words.



The Victorian Attorney General Jaclyn Symes, Minister Suleyman, Sarah Connolly MP, Mathew Hilakari MP, Melissa Hardham and Anoushka Jeronimus

IMPACT AND ENGAGEMENT

Our Impact 2023-24

The Restoring Financial Safety
Program waived and recovered



\$1,078,944

for our clients

Consumer & Settlement Justice
programs created



\$392,181

in financial benefits
for clients



Workers' Rights Program recovered

\$171,520

in unpaid wages, entitlements,
waived debts and compensation.

Children and Young People's
Rights waived



\$154,389



in fines for
young people.



Women and Gender Diverse Peoples Rights
Program achieved

\$737,760

in property settlements and **\$165,000** in recovered superannuation.

TOTALLING \$2,699,795 FOR CLIENTS

CLIENTS AGED 25 YEARS AND UNDER



Delivered

1759

Civil Law legal
services to

459 clients



The **Children and Young Peoples'**
provided legal services to a total of

457

young people

Disclaimer: Please note Westjustice transferred to a new practice management and record keeping system from January 2024. The figures above reflect data collected in both the new and previous systems.



Delivered

513

Criminal Law legal
services to
232 clients

We provided

1232

duty lawyer
services in

**family violence
intervention order
hearings**

at the Sunshine and
Werribee Magistrates
Courts



We provided services to

835 clients



through our Family
Violence Early Resolution
Service.

WESTJUSTICE PROVIDED

over **102** Community Legal
Education sessions



TO

4696 attendees



**3040
clients**

assisted with legal and
financial issues



We assisted

967

people with family
violence issues



We assisted

958

people to address
housing insecurity



We hosted

16 Victoria University
students
2 PLT students



We assisted

165

people to address
job insecurity



Instagram
follower count
increased by almost

300

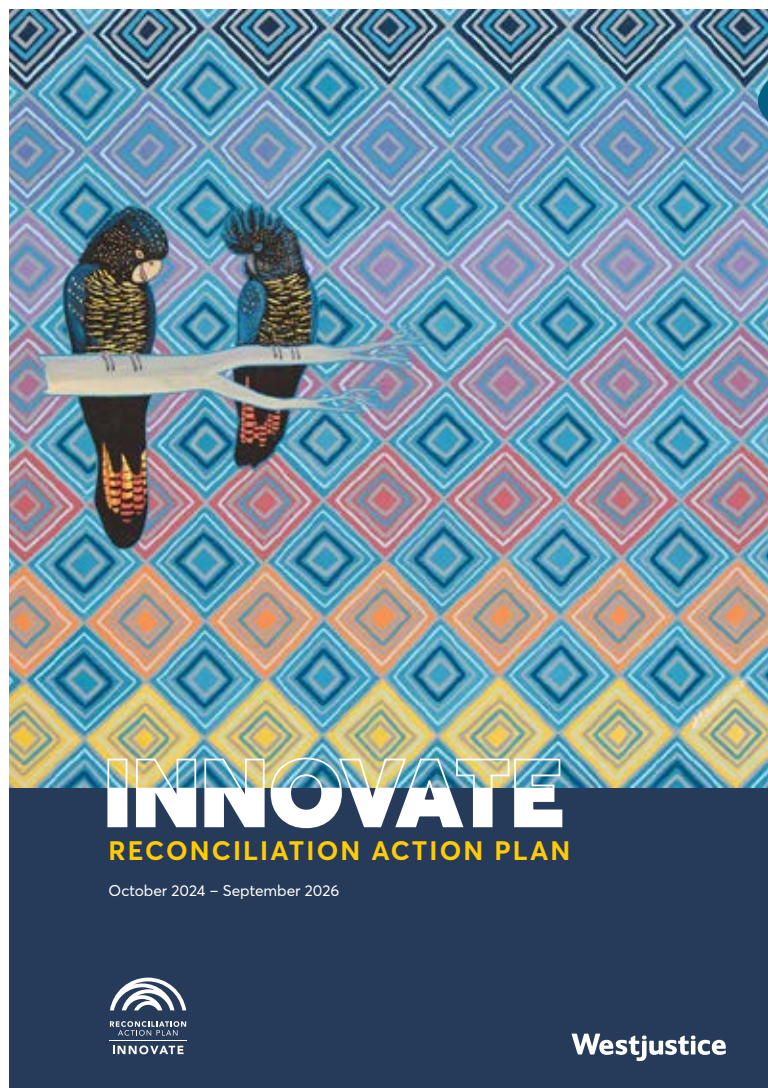
in the past year

Mortgage Stress Victoria
prevented repossession at least

163 times



and supported
654 individual clients.



Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2024-6

This year we are launching our new Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2024-6. Our plan creates the framework to deepen our impact through strategic partnering, innovative projects and ongoing learning and development.

Our vision for reconciliation is where First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination, culture, and land, are celebrated and respected throughout Australia. We are committed to contributing to a future in which First Nations people have equal access to the law and legal services to uphold their rights, and in which our colonial legal system's violent history of oppressing, dispossessing, and

harming First Nations peoples is acknowledged and addressed. We recognise that the law has been a crucial element of the matrix of government control to which First Nations people have been subjected and remain subject. We work towards a future where First Nations people can harness the law for their own advancement. Further, we support the Victorian Treaty and Truth telling processes. We will continue to provide support and advocacy when appropriate.

Inclusion and Respect

Westjustice has committed to ensuring that we are an anti-racist and child safe organisation, both internally and externally. We are developing our Anti-racism Implementation Plan and we have commenced implementing our Child Safe Standards

Improvement Action Plan (see Table 1). These plans will compliment our RAP 2024-6 and our WISED UP Strategy (see People & Culture Report).

Table 1 - Child Safe Standards Improvement Action Plan

Child Safe Standard 1	Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.	
Child Safe Standard 2	Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance, and culture.	
Child Safe Standard 3	Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.	
Child Safe Standard 4	Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.	
Child Safe Standard 5	Equity is upheld, and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.	
Child Safe Standard 6	People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.	
Child Safe Standard 7	Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused.	
Child Safe Standard 8	Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.	
Child Safe Standard 9	Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.	
Child Safe Standard 10	Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved	
Child Safe Standard 11	Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.	

This year, we launched our Strategy 2024-27.

We formed a Strategy Working Group of Melissa Hardham, Caitlin Caruana, and Emma Probert, and brought in Social Ventures Australia to lead review of our first Strategy and to help us define our new one. Our first Strategy 2020-23, helped us come a long way as an organisation. Our new Strategy builds on this success, and is aimed at broadening our multidisciplinary service delivery, building on our human rights focus, sharpening how we tell our client story, and broadening our impact in Melbourne's West.

Over many months, we refined our new Strategy with a new Vision and Purpose (formerly Mission). We also determined five impact areas of:

- **Children and Young People's Rights**
- **Women and Gender Diverse People's Rights**
- **Worker's Rights**
- **Economic and Housing Rights, and**
- **Our Team**

These new impact areas will help us break down silos internally, and the inclusion of Our Team helps us to 'practice what we preach' in that the standards we advocate for our team are the same ones that we advocate for our clients.

We also developed the same priority outcomes for each impact area, and are refining how we measure and report on this impact.

Finally, we've determined enablers that will help us maximise our impact for our clients and our staff. This will mean continuing to refine our client-centred approach, strengthening our financial sustainability, and transforming our data capability and measurement capacity.

We launched this Strategy with the State Attorney General, Jaclyn Symes, and over 100 guests from across the political, community, legal and other sectors. It was a phenomenal event and testament to the reputation we have built as a fearless advocate for fairness, safety and justice for Melbourne's West.

We conducted
5 STRATEGY SESSIONS
with Our Team
and **2** with
the Board.

October 2023

Strategy Working Group Formed
First meeting with SVA

November 2023

Review of 2020-23 Strategy
with SVA

December 2023 - March 2024

3 All Staff Consultation Session
2 SLT Consultation Sessions
2 Board Consultation sessions

March 2024 – Strategy Finalised

April 2024 – Board approves Strategy

July 2024 – Graphic design

August 2024 – Strategy Launched



Westjustice Strategy

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Our Vision

Fairness, safety,
and justice for
Melbourne's West.

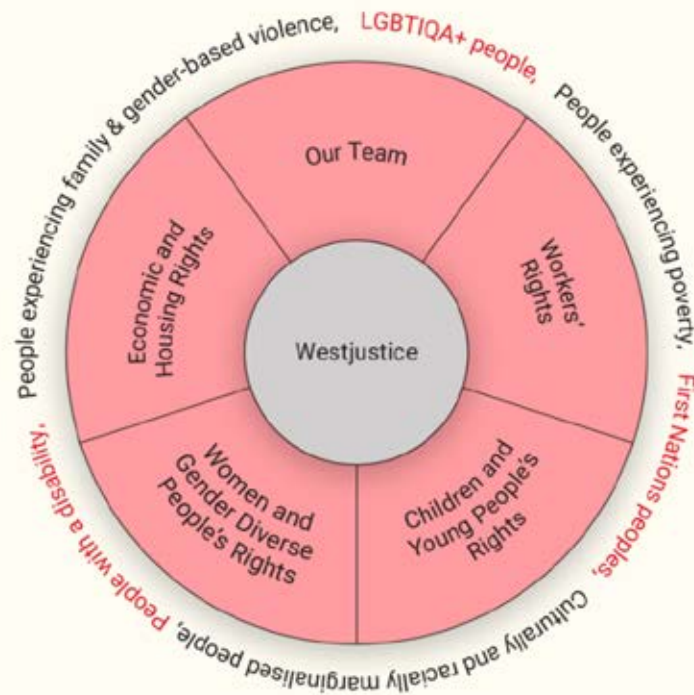
Our Purpose

We deliver targeted
services and drive
meaningful change.

24-27 Strategy

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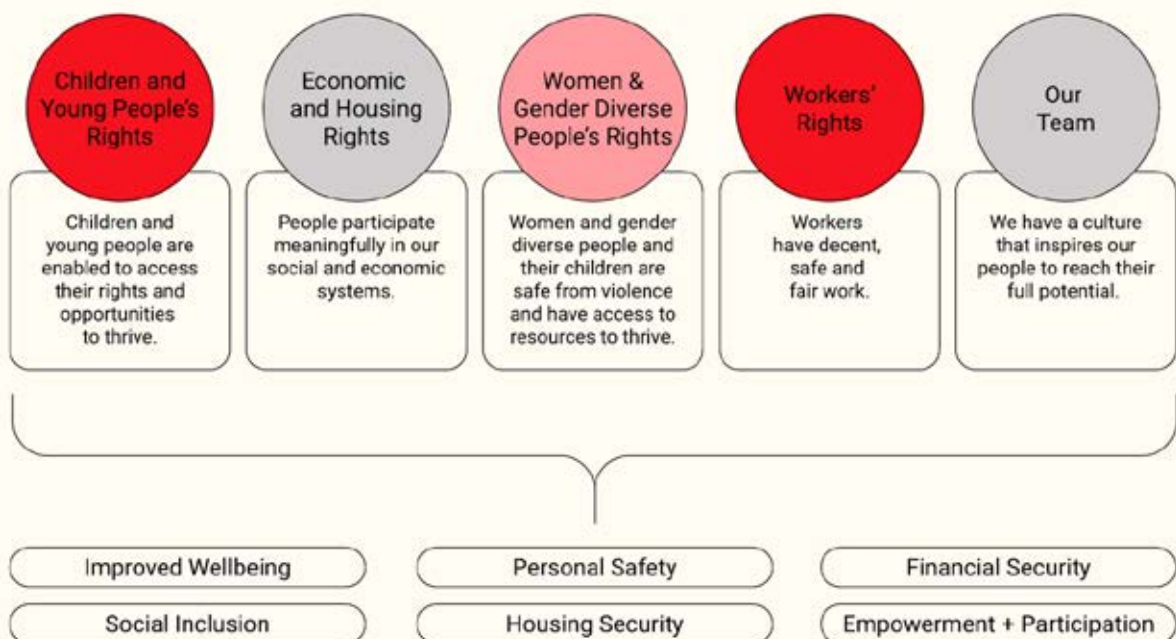
Our Priority Cohorts



24-27 Strategy

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Our Priority Outcomes



Westjustice parents, Annie and April



THE WESTJUSTICE TEAM

THE WESTJUSTICE TEAM



Our Senior Leadership Team Retreat 2024



Joseph and Rebecca working with our partners

Economic and Housing Rights Program

Year that was

The Economic and Housing Rights Team's vision is a Western Melbourne community in which people can participate meaningfully in its social and economic systems. We have three teams:

- Consumer & Settlement Justice (working with recently-arrived people and other areas of disadvantage to ensure fairer market access to essential goods and services).
- Financial Safety (working with women and families escaping family violence to overcome the legal and financial repercussions of economic abuse).
- Tenancy (working across Westjustice's key cohorts to avert homelessness or unsafe rental housing situations, and fight for renter rights with legal and social work interventions).

We also work closely with the Burmese Financial Counseling Clinic which seeks to address financial and legal problems across specific community groups.

This year, we welcomed lawyer Jyoti and financial counsellor Julie into the team, and we were supported by Ha while staff took well-deserved long service leave.

Our team continued to develop its expertise, with a rising cohort of team members (Alex, Mary and Caitlin) being appointed as Senior Lawyers.

Significant outcomes for our clients included:

- Advice, assistance and representation to over 430 renters, with a focus on preventing evictions, obtaining urgent repairs, and assisting family violence victim-survivors with complex tenancy issues.
- Our Consumer and Settlement Justice programs assisted 130 individuals for a total of \$392,181 in financial benefit.
- Our Restoring Financial Safety project assisted 117 people for \$577,306 of financial benefit.
- Our Motor Vehicle Accident Clinic, which is part of the Financial Safety team, helped 88 individuals to resolve complex insurance and Magistrates' Court matters.
- Together with the Burmese Financial Counseling Clinic, intercepted scams infiltrating community groups.

Our systemic advocacy and highlights included:

- An extension in funding to our Tenancy Stress Victoria model (pairing a client in rental stress with a lawyer and social worker).
- Meaningful legislative progress in scams reform and the regulation of Buy Now Pay Later as a form of credit through our casework advocacy.
- Our Program Manager of Financial Safety appearing before a Senate Inquiry into the interaction of financial services and family violence.

Future Focus

We are rebranding from Economic Justice to Economic and Housing Rights. We will contribute to the delivery of our new Strategy 2024-7 to ensure we maximise opportunities for our communities to obtain and maintain housing and financial security. In addition, we will continue to advocate for better and fairer systems.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our funders the Department of Justice and Community Safety, Consumer Affairs Victoria, the Department of Skills, Jobs, Industry and Regions, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and the Ecstra Foundation. We would also like to thank our partners Consumer Action Law Centre, Tenants Victoria, Wyndham Community & Education Centre, Thriving Communities Australia, MiCare, McAuley Community Services for Women, and Study Melbourne, as well as volunteers and staff for their ongoing commitment and support.

117 WOMEN

experiencing economic
abuse gained a collective
financial benefit of

\$577,306

Our Consumer
& Settlement Justice
programs assisted

\$392,181

in financial
benefit.

Advice,
assistance &
representation
to over

430

renters



Joseph and Tess presenting on our Settlement Justice Partnerships



Women and Gender Diverse People's Rights Program

Year that was

We have diversified our legal practice further to better respond to clustered legal problems resulting from family violence. This has significantly increased our impact in representing victim survivors with complex intersectional legal problems which has directly contributed to their recovery and healing.

We assisted 844 clients, who contacted us directly for help or were referred by Sunshine Specialist Family Violence Court, Werribee Magistrates Court, Victoria Police, Orange Door, McAuley Community Services for Women, our Health Justice Support for Families (HJSF), GenWest, Tweddle, Caroline Chisholm Society, WestCASA and Community Leaders.

Importantly:

- 97% of our clients were directly impacted by intimate partner violence.
- 92% identified as female.
- 71% had children in their care.
- 76% experienced financial disadvantage with 62% receiving Centrelink.
- 23% reported a disability.
- 15% required an interpreter.
- 15% were homeless or at risk.
- 3% identified as First Nations people.

We doubled our community legal education impact from the previous year. Our HJSF's three-way partnership with Werribee Mercy Hospital and Wyndham Enhanced Maternal Child Health team, which assists antenatal women, has also grown with more referrals and complex casework being undertaken.

We met with key Ministers and local MPs about family violence, family law and child protection issues. We prepared submissions to the Victorian FV Rolling Action Plan 2024-2027, National Inquiry into Family Violence Orders and advocated to the Victorian Law Reform Commission to increase the durations for intervention orders and shift the burden of victim-survivors having to apply to extend orders.

We hosted volunteer interns and expanded our Practical Legal Training program, offering two intern placements every 10 weeks.

We joined the Walk Against Family Violence in support of the 16 days of activism, and our Legal Director was invited to speak on ABC radio and at VLA's Family Law Access Evaluation Panel.

92%
identified as
female



The Team enjoying a wellbeing event



97%

were directly
impacted by
intimate partner
violence

76%

experienced financial
disadvantage with

62%

receiving
Centrelink

Future Focus

We aim to increase our funding and impact for victim-survivors in our HJSF Program and grow our practice in child protection due to the increase of referrals and in anticipation for Wyndham Court opening.

We also look forward to leading Westjustice's work supporting women and gender diverse people through our Strategy 2024-7 and building more lived experience into our methodology of practice through the creation of community led advisory groups.

We assisted

844

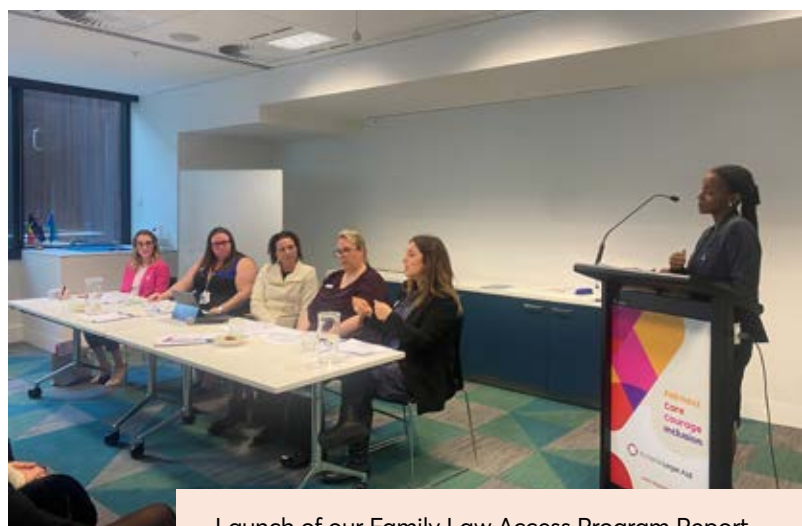
clients

71%

had children in
their care

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the State and Commonwealth Governments. Victoria Legal Aid, Werribee Mercy Hospital, Wyndham Enhanced Maternal Child Health, Wyndham Child and Family Hub, The Orange Door, Victoria Police, Western Integrated Family Violence Committee, Sunshine Specialist Family Violence Court, Werribee Magistrates Court, Wyndham Family Violence Network, GenWest, IndianCare, Federation of Community Legal Centres, Justice at Home Advisory Committee, Caroline Chisholm Society, Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, WestCASA, Cohealth, SUDD Foundation and Junubi.



Launch of our Family Law Access Program Report



Aaron with members of the Administration Team

Operations, Practice and Finance

Our new workspa

Year that was

This year the Operations, Practice and Finance (OPF) has gone through a number of significant changes, as well as worked on a large scope of projects to improve the delivery of services to our clients and optimize our systems for use by our team members.

We finalised our office relocation to our new space at 12 Clarke St in Sunshine, we celebrated this with a Launch event, which was very well attended by staff, clients, partners, community leaders and local, state and federal politicians. It was a great opportunity to celebrate the work of Westjustice and a fantastic new working environment for our team and clients.

In an effort to continue to refine the makeup of our administration support functions, Legal Administrators have been allocated to each of the Legal Directorates, and a core support staff of Receptionists and an Office Manager have been appointed across our office locations.

During this period of transition and across the new working spaces, we welcomed Rebecca Zivic, Emanuel Getahun and Naomi Hanna as Legal Administrators, with Habibah Kassar and Larina Abary joining us in the Office Manager and Receptionist roles respectfully. Aaron Osborne has also joined the team as Director of OPF to lead the function across the organization.

We farewelled Marina, Yasmin, Brett, and Michelle from the Administration Team, and thank them for their combined many years of committed service to Westjustice. We acknowledge the incredible impact they have had on both the clients we serve and communities in which we work. We also said goodbye to Francesca (Frankie), who has moved into a role with the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, and thank her for all her support during our transition to a new Digital Management System, and many years of service to the Employment and Equality Law Team and Westjustice generally.

Future Focus

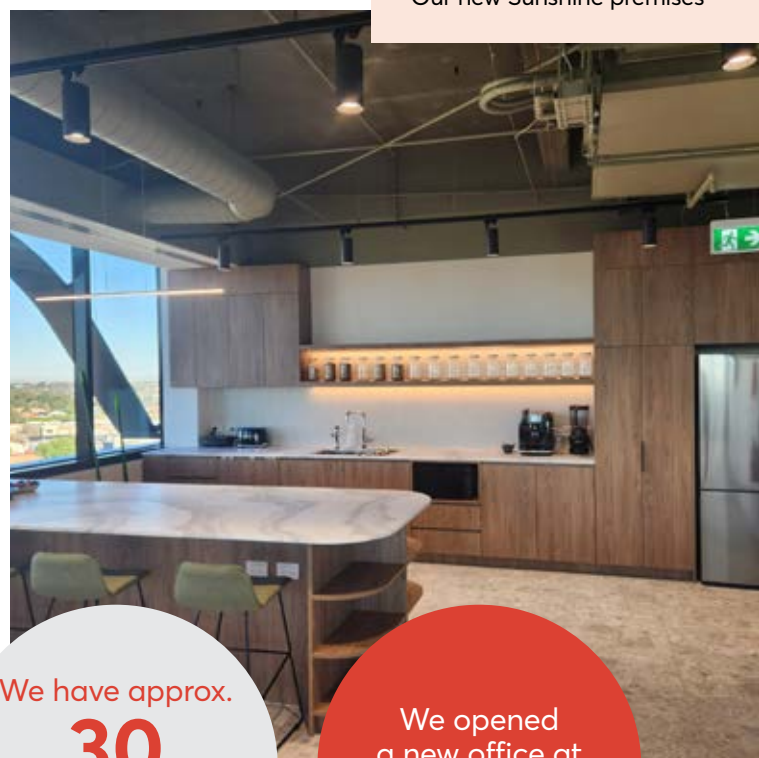
With the structural updates to the Operations Team finalised, we will now turn our attention to improving our systems and processes. With a vision to provide more effective and accessible services to clients we will be focusing on an update and improvements to our Triage and Telephony systems, and our website. This would not have been possible without the generosity of the Collier Charitable Fund for providing a three-year grant to fund this work.

Similarly, we will continue to work on improving our digital management and IT systems functionality to improve efficiency and support the work of our team members. Work on these projects is already underway, and we look forward to continuing to improve and reflect across the next 12 months.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the William Buckland Foundation, Collier Charitable Fund, Good Financials and HumanIT. We also acknowledge Jarrah Catering for assisting us with catering and event services.

Our new Sunshine premises



We have approx.
30
Programs and
Services

We opened
a new office at
12 Clarke Street
Sunshine

We collocated
with VALS

We finalised
our office
relocation to
our new space



Our new workspace

Children and Young People's Rights Program

Year that was

We welcomed April's baby Carmen and Angus' baby Isla. Thea stepped in whilst April was on parental leave, and we have two new lawyers Katie and Martin. We said goodbye to Phoebe and Brett and were proud to support Zara's admission to legal practice!

Youth law clinics (YLC)

We continue to offer appointments across two youth hubs for a range of civil and criminal matters. We also run a drop-in clinic once a week at Sunshine, enabling provision of urgent assistance to young people.

Putting families first (PFF)

Under this Department of Families Fairness and Housing initiative, we work with a range of services to provide holistic support to families facing complex issues. Support spans across health, justice, and social services.

Youth crime prevention and early intervention program (YCPEIP)

YCPEIP maximises opportunities for diversionary options for young people engaged in criminal behaviour. The evaluation evidences a reduction in re-offending rates of over 20% and cost savings of over \$8 million annually. The project received a silver award through the Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Awards.

TARGET ZERO (T0)

T0 has gone from strength to strength, moving closer to our 10-year goal to end the criminalisation and over-representation of young people in the criminal justice system from Brimbank, Wyndham and Melton. We secured a further \$7.5 million over 5 years from the Paul Ramsay Foundation in addition to ongoing funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commission. The coalition of partners is currently at 27.

School Lawyer Program (SLP)

Our SLP is embedded at Wyndham Central College, Hester Hornbrook Academy, Parkville College and The Grange P12 College. We work closely with the wellbeing team to provide outreach legal services to the students. The formal evaluation report is being finalised.

Out Of Home Care Legal Clinic (OOHCLC)

Our OOHCLC supports young people living in Anglicare Residential Care Homes. The outreach clinic assists young people to identify legal problems and get help early. This project has been formally evaluated and the report is now available.

Smart Justice for Young People (SJ4YP)

Working Together was officially launched, SJ4YP's Action Plan to end over-representation of five key cohorts of young people across Victoria in the criminal justice system. Westjustice continues to co-convene the coalition with Youthlaw and the Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ).





TARGET ZERO
secured a further
**\$7.5
million**
over 5 years from
the Paul Ramsay
Foundation

**20%
reduction**
in youth offending
through YCPEIP =
\$8 million
in cost savings
to Vic Govt

Assisted
457
children and
young people

27
TARGET ZERO
partners

Future Focus

Over the next 12 months we will continue to advocate fiercely for justice, safety and fairness for children and young people in Melbourne's west in alignment with Westjustice Strategy 2024-27.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge our funders Noel & Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation, Victorian Legal Service Board & Commission, Paul Ramsay Foundation, Newsboys, The Kimberley Foundation, Brian M Davis Charitable Foundation, The Ross Trust, Reid Malley Foundation, Jack Brockhoff Foundation, Department of Families Fairness & Housing, Department of Justice & Community Safety (Vic), Melbourne City Mission, The Grange P-12, Wyndham Central College, Parkville College.

Westjustice
1,409 followers
3mo • Edited •

We are delighted to announce that, together with [Centre for Multicultural Youth](#), the [Paul Ramsay Foundation](#) is committing \$7.5 million over five years to our groundbreaking partnership - TARGET ZERO - to prevent young people in Melbourne's West from being caught up in the criminal justice system. This funding will enable a coalition of partners to work together to ensure young people and their families are thriving, and able to achieve their full potential. This funding builds on funding from PRF and from the [Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner](#).

We are very excited to continue our collaborative efforts with CMY, PRF and our TARGET ZERO partners - [Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service](#), [Melbourne City Mission \(MCM\)](#), [Victoria University](#), [Charis Mentoring \(AU NZ\)](#), [Jesuit Social Services](#), [Junubi Wyndham](#), [Brimbank City Council](#), [Melton City Council](#), [Youthlaw | Young People's Legal Rights Inc](#), [Victoria Legal Aid](#), [Anglicare Victoria](#), [Foundation House](#), [cohealth](#), [Comm Unity Plus Services Ltd \(commUnity+\)](#), [Australian African Foundation for Retention and Opportunity \(AAFRO\)](#), [The Youth Junction Inc](#), [Orygen](#).

Westjustice cmym TARGET ZERO
Groundbreaking Project to
End the Criminal Justice Cycle
for Young People in
Melbourne's West

Over the next 12 months we will continue to advocate fiercely for justice, safety and fairness for children and young people in Melbourne's west in alignment with Westjustice Strategy 2024-27.

"TARGET ZERO is an ambitious program but its goals can now be realised through the generous support of the Paul Ramsay Foundation, who are vital partners in closing the revolving door that Victoria's criminal justice system becomes for too many young people. Young people in Melbourne's West should be in schools and in jobs, not jail."

Carmel Guerra, CEO Centre for Multicultural Youth, welcomed that sentiment.

"We know from our work with multicultural young people and communities that a new game plan is needed, to effectively tackle the criminalisation and over-representation of particular cohorts of young people in our justice system. The Paul Ramsay Foundation funding will enable TARGET ZERO to create the meaningful change that young people need."

For more information, please contact Anoushka Ikononidis, Director Youth Law Program Westlaw on (03) 9749 7720 or [Ikononidis.A@vls.vic.gov.au](#) Executive Manager - Programs and Services CMY on (03) 8940 9796.

TARGET ZERO is supported by:



Emma Probert CPHR and 157 others

19 comments • 10 reposts

Worker's Rights Program

Year that was

In 2023-24, the Employment and Equality Program (EELP) delivered specialist, intensive and tailored employment law advice and representation to disadvantaged workers in the West.

Key outcomes in 2023-24 across our six legal programs:

- 271 legal services to 165 workers.
- \$171,520 in unpaid wages and compensation.
- 64 Community Legal Education sessions to approx. 1590 participants.
- 19 social media posts teaching young people about discrimination, sexual harassment and workplace safety.
- 7 outreach information stalls for our Equality Law Service at Sunshine Library.
- 2 student expos engaging with 94 individuals.
- 57 teachers across Victoria provided with our "WRS Teacher's Pack".
- Equality Law Service Report published.

We advocated for systemic change and law reform, making 4 submissions on Fair Work Act and Modern Award reforms, justice responses to sexual violence, attending a Federal Treasury Roundtable on restraints of trade, and regularly engaging with the Department of Home Affairs on co-design of migrant worker visa reforms. We were engaged by Sir Zelman Cowen Centre as a subject matter expert as part of the "Work Well Respect Network". We also led and participated in sector networking and capacity building efforts.

We welcomed Joseph, Morgan and Naomi. Morgan and Briana were promoted to Senior Lawyer and Rachel was promoted to Program Manager. Vicki worked on our VLF research. Thea took a six-month secondment to the Youth Law Program, and Darren assisted in her absence. We farewelled Francesca, Nilanka and Veronika.



Recovered
\$171,520
in unpaid wages
and compensation.

Delivered
64
Community Legal Education
sessions to approx.
1590
participants

57
teachers and
education staff have
downloaded our
employment law
content



Future Focus

In the next 12 months EELP will continue to deliver our tailored integrated legal services, with a focus on:

- Engaging our clients and their communities in legal education and outreach.
- Strengthening our co-located equality law service with Co-health in Footscray.
- Completing our VLF research on the legal capability of migrant communities in the western suburbs and publishing our findings.
- Launching the Working Women's Centre Victoria.

Acknowledgements

A warm thank you to:

- Our funders: the National Legal Assistance Partnership and the Victorian Government, specifically the Department of Justice and Community Safety, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, Industrial Relations Victoria, and Department of Families Fairness and Housing; Ecstra Foundation, and the Victorian Law Foundation.
- Our pro bono partners: Slater and Gordon, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Maddocks, Clayton Utz, Maurice Blackburn, Vialto Partners, and volunteer Imogen Szmer.
- Our pro bono counsel: Siobhan Kelly, Joel Fetter and Declan Murphy.
- Our workers compensation referral firms: Gordon Legal, Zaparas Lawyers and Shine Lawyers.
- Our project partners: Dr Adriana Orifici, Monash University; Human Rights Education Associates; Study Melbourne Hub; MiCare and WCEC; The Orange Door Western Metropolitan and McAuley Community Services for Women; and Brimbank Council for hosting our ELS stalls.



Rosie's Story

Rosie came to Westjustice to deal with the financial impacts of severe family violence. Rosie's employment was a crucial lifeline of financial support during a difficult time in her life. However, Rosie faced unfair dismissal from two separate employers within the space of a year, both incidents stemming from her disclosure of family violence and temporary absences from work to cope with the physical and psychological impacts of family violence.

In the first instance, Rosie was dismissed after explaining to her employer that her unplanned absences had been due to family violence.

The second workplace presented another financial and mental challenge for Rosie. Exercising her rights to family violence leave and sick leave due to the severe family violence she endured, Rosie's employment was terminated without proper reason.

Westjustice helped Rosie with two separate unfair dismissal claims, lodging submissions with the Fair Work Commission, and ultimately settling her matter for financial compensation.

Policy, Impact and Engagement Program

Year that was

The Policy, Impact and Engagement (formerly the Policy and Innovation) team has had a huge year, with two new roles in the team and a team name change to match. We welcomed Andrew Thies, Senior Policy Officer, to the team while Annie is on parental leave, and welcomed our Data & Impact Program Manager, Monika Bognar, and our Community Development and Engagement Program Manager, Sheri Shwe.

Political advocacy

We continue to have strong engagement across local, state and federal government and have had advocacy wins in the youth, tenancy, family violence and employment spaces. Following our biggest ever budget advocacy campaign, we received funding for most of our lapsing programs in 2024-25 budget. Our level of influence and access is strong, as is our reputation for being a fearless advocate for Melbourne's West.

Wyndham Hub Business Case

We have been working with Ernst and Young to prepare a business case for a standalone community services Hub to support the new Wyndham Courts and the broader community. To support Hub design, we conducted the largest ever community consultation of its kind, reaching over 500 people in Melbourne's West. The outcomes have been fed into the business case and ensure that from the beginning, the services for Court users have been designed by and for the people who will use them.

Media and Social Media

We've also had a big year in the media on our key work, and as a voice for Melbourne's Western Suburbs. Instagram continues to get our strongest engagement online with LinkedIn not far behind. We completed Instagram series on a variety of CLE topics, and we now have almost 1000 followers, an increase of 300 in one year alone.



Community members and leaders.

One of our many community consultations



Provided
evidence at
4
Inquiries

We made
18
submissions
to state and federal
governments

Future Focus

Over the next year, we will take a leading role in supporting teams to implement the Strategy, across their advocacy, community engagement, measurement, and more. To support this, the team are preparing Westjustice's new Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, our Community Engagement Framework and the development of Community Advisory Groups for each impact area.

We received a grant from the Department of Treasury and Finance's Empowerment Fund to do this work, which will be a game changer for our data use and will enable us to tell our client stories much more efficiently and effectively.

14
Community
engagement
sessions with over
500
attendees

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks to the Helen McPherson Smith Trust, the Paul Ramsay Foundation, the Wyndham City Council, the Department of Treasury and Finance, Wood Marsh Architects and all the political offices who deal with us with patience and good faith.





Learning & Development Program

Commenced our
**new Practical
Legal Training
Program**

9
targeted
organisation wide
education and
development
sessions

Over
500
hours of PLT
contribution to
our Team

Year that was

Victoria University Clinical Placement Program

In February 2024 our contract with Victoria University (VU) ended and we said farewell to our last group of VU students. In the financial year, we placed 16 VU students in our Westjustice Teams. These placements were supervised by at least 21 staff members. Not only did students benefit from the program, it also gave staff opportunities to grow their supervision skills.

As one staff member reflected, "[supervising] provided me with the opportunity to enhance my mentoring and coaching skills. I learned how to effectively provide guidance and support to someone ... tailoring my approach to meet her individual needs and learning style."

We thank our funder VU for their long-standing support of this program spanning over 6 years.

Volunteer Awards

In April 2024 we sponsored two VU awards to recognise exceptional student contribution. The award recipients were:

- Agassi Tomeldan - Victoria University College Award for Leader in the Community
- Abigail Ferreira - Cindy Farran Book Award

Our own Westjustice Skye Hawkins Annual Volunteer Award was presented to Margaret Arevalo.

Practical Legal Training Program

After a period of development and growing new relationships, in April 2024 we launched our new 10-week Practical Legal Training (PLT) program pilot with two students in the Family Violence & Family Law Program. The pilot is being rolled out across the organisation.

One student, Emanuel, reflects "...I have had great exposure to different practice areas of law and have met such amazing people along the way. It has been a pleasure learning from not just the lawyers but everyone within Westjustice. I have felt as though all my contributions have been valued..."



Not only will the PLT program provide opportunities for students to learn about the work of Westjustice, but we also anticipate that we will find talented future staff members from amongst the alumni of this program.



Learning together about trauma informed practice

Learning and Development

We continue to strengthen our cultural safety and inclusiveness through our organisation-wide training program. This year training was focused on deepening our skills in working with people from First Nations communities, growing our skills in LGBTQIA+ inclusive practice, developing our trauma-informed practice skills, developing our knowledge of how to support autism and neurodiversity in the workplace and growing our communication skills.

Future Focus

We will assist with the implementation of the new Strategy 2024-7. We will refine and expand our Learning and Development Program and we will secure a new university to partner with to ensure that we create effective pathways into Westjustice and the Community Legal Centre Sector more broadly.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all students and staff for their contributions. In particular, thank you to Sarah Breen for reshaping and delivering the new PLT program.

People & Culture

Year that was

It has been a year of transformation and consolidation within the People & Culture team. With the Strong Foundations grant from the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, we have been able to launch and build our WISED UP methodology of practice. This will ensure that we are providing all Westjustice employees with a workplace culture that promotes Wellbeing, Inclusion, Safety, Equity and Diversity (WISED) which, in turn, will increase job satisfaction, retention, and performance and enable us to better support communities in the western suburbs of Melbourne.

Some key achievements are:

- Implementation of a new payroll platform.
- Signing and adopting a competitive Multi Enterprise Agreement which provides excellent conditions of employment for our employees.
- Bi-monthly training to support our Program Managers with in continual development of their people management skills
- Increasing the employment security of our employees – we are incredibly proud that 74% of our team on ongoing employment agreements.

Future Focus

We aim to increase our funding and impact for Future Focus.

Under the 2024-2027 strategy 'Our Team' is now a strategic impact area. Within this, we will design a plan which will deliver improvements in several key areas including wellbeing, career pathways, performance processes, leadership capability and general organisational culture. We will continue to embed the WISED UP framework across all aspects of the organisation and look forward to measuring the impact of this work in the future. Plans are underway to implement a new HR information system which will streamline people processes and supercharge our capacity to capture meaningful data. Recently, we implemented Culture Amp's performance software which has both simplified and increased the accessibility of our existing performance process as well as providing us with valuable aggregated insights into the strengths and opportunities of our team members that we can distil and focus on throughout FY25 and beyond.

We are also excited to collaborate closely with Learning & Development to build an engaging, comprehensive, career aligned learning and development framework to continue to bolster Our Team's knowledge, capability and confidence in diversity, inclusion, cultural safety and so much more.

The screenshot shows a video conference interface. On the left, a presentation slide titled "WISED UP People Strategy" is displayed. The slide content includes:

- Two boxes at the top, both labeled "2024-2027 Organisational Strategy".
- A central oval containing five red boxes labeled: wellbeing, inclusion, safety, equity, and diversity.
- Below the oval, a box labeled "Values: Courage, Community Led, Real Impact, Respect, Kindness, Trust".
- At the bottom, a box with the Westjustice logo and the text "The Westjustice Way".

On the right side of the video conference, a participant is visible in a small window. The main window shows the presentation slide. The video conference interface includes standard controls at the top (Retire, React, More, Camera, Mic, Share) and a bottom bar showing "Slide 3 of 22".



**16
centres**

signed onto the
Vic CLC
Multi-enterprise
Agreement

Our 2023
Engagement Survey
showed that

98%

of Our Team were
proud to work for
Westjustice!

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the generosity of the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commission for funding our WISED UP.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed the people and culture space over the past year through your completion of surveys, engagement in staff sessions and working groups – it is important and valuable work. Special thanks to Theresa Mai who has supported through a period of incredible change and pace.

Nearly

80%

of our staff have
ongoing contracts



Finance Report Summary

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

	2024	2023
Revenue and other income	\$	\$
Revenue from contracts with customers	10,346,850	9,244,892
Other revenue	112,433	34,806
	10,459,283	9,279,698
Less: expenses	2024	2023
	\$	\$
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(210,690)	(203,399)
Employee benefits expense	(9,120,622)	(6,964,590)
Occupancy expense	(283,683)	(220,757)
Lease expense	(47,646)	23,606
Organisational expenses	(254,982)	(409,313)
Employment expenses	(91,171)	(80,930)
Other expenses	(494,731)	(461,253)
	(10,503,525)	(8,316,636)
(Deficit)/Surplus before income tax expense	(44,242)	963,062
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	-
Total comprehensive income	(44,242)	963,062

BALANCE SHEET

Current assets	2024 \$	2023 \$
Cash and cash equivalents	5,238,845	5,826,896
Receivables	82,772	108,918
Other assets	235,981	190,480
Total current assets	5,557,598	6,126,294
Non current assets	2024 \$	2023 \$
Lease assets	1,422,761	486,311
Property, plant and equipment	1,097,568	183,328
Total non current assets	2,520,329	669,639
Total assets	8,077,927	6,795,933
Current liabilities	2024 \$	2023 \$
Payables	751,097	955,636
Lease liabilities	231,387	142,515
Provisions	722,011	692,297
Other liabilities	2,178,990	2,004,829
Total current liabilities	3,883,485	3,795,277
Non current liabilities	2024 \$	2023 \$
Lease liabilities	1,631,108	373,947
Provisions	122,241	141,374
Total non current liabilities	1,753,349	515,321
Total liabilities	5,636,834	4,310,598
Net Assets	2,441,093	2,485,335
Equity		
Reserves	250,000	425,356
Accumulated Surplus	2,191,093	2,059,979
Total equity	2,441,093	2,485,335



We dedicate this report to our clients and communities who have been brave enough to come forward and fight for their rights to be safer, more secure, and more visible to the systems in which they live. If it wasn't for them, we would not have the evidence to advocate for a better society, to hold governments accountable and reflect on our own role in making sure that we are not just doing bad a bit better. Because of them, we are more effective and because of them, we will be unrelenting in our pursuit for life outcomes that illustrate the advantages in justice reinvestment. If not now, when? If not us, who?

Westjustice

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Tuesday 13 August 2024

Legislative Assembly

2803

Australia's greenest suburb. The trend underscores the global shift towards renewable energy, contrasting starkly with nuclear power's decline in the Northern Hemisphere.

Recently I also had the benefit of visiting RayGen's factory in Hawthorn as well as their power plant in Curwara just near Mildura, which is the world's largest next-generation, long-duration energy storage project. RayGen's power plant integrates multiple technologies to supply large industry as well as feeding distribution into the grid.

Westjustice

Sarah CONNOLLY (Lavenox) (13:58): It was a pleasure to be out in Sunshine last week with the Attorney-General for the official opening of Westjustice's new offices. As many in this chamber know, Westjustice is one of the leading community legal centres operating in Melbourne's west, and as a member in this place I have had the pleasure of interacting with them and their amazing CEO Melissa Hardham for many, many years now. Mel and her team do a fantastic job of assisting people in our community. Whether it is initiatives like their school lawyer program, working with young people through schools to educate them about the legal system and their rights, including at Hester Hornbrook Academy in Sunshine, or assisting vulnerable folks suffering from mortgage stress, the work that Westjustice is doing is literally saving and improving lives across the western suburbs. Their new offices are located in the same building as Victoria Legal Aid, providing a necessary connection to low-cost and affordable legal services. In addition to their new offices, we were also there for the launch of Westjustice's new strategy for 2024 through to 2027, which focuses on helping vulnerable communities receive the targeted legal assistance they need, including financial counselling and social work services – services which are delivered in a way that is culturally safe, trauma informed and inclusive. Not only that, but it also places a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention so that people do not experience these legal issues in the first place. So I am very happy to welcome Mel and her team at Westjustice to their new digs in Sunshine, and I look forward to continuing to work with Westjustice.

Eureka electorate volunteers

Michael SETTLE (Eureka) (13:59): I am here to give a big shout-out to the community bank of Bacchus Marsh and the Darley sports –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time has come for me to interrupt business for question time.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Westjustice
1,408 followers
11m

Thank you to **Dr Daniel Mulino** for this beautiful coverage of our work. It is a privilege to work alongside you and our other Federal Members to support people all over Melbourne's Western Suburbs.

Dr Daniel Mulino • 1st
Member for the Federal seat of Fraser, Chair of Standing Committee on Economic...
1y

In a speech to Parliament I thanked the team at Westjustice, a community legal centre that operates across Melbourne's west, for its advocacy for some of the most vulnerable people. Westjustice also has a proud record of innovative and rigorous policy work: its team of lawyers, financial counsellors, policy advocates and social and community development workers works across four key areas: culturally and linguistically diverse communities; people experiencing gender-based violence; people experiencing economic injustice; and young people. Congratulations to the leadership team of Melissa Hardham, Jennifer Li, Caitlin Canavan, Joe Kunze, Anoushka Jeyaraj, Cliona Feuring, Matthew Martin, Nadia Harrison, and all their dedicated staff. For a more comprehensive read on the great work of Westjustice: <https://fraser.in.gov.au/DSW16>

