
MHLC Annual Report 2020/21



2020/2021

MHLC

Authored by: MHLC

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Chairpersons Report

MHLC had the opportunity to work with KPMG late in 2019/2020. In consultation with the Board, KPMG undertook an in-depth review of MHLC organizational structures. The final report and recommendations provided by KPMG were used to develop a detailed implementation strategy. This strategy has been the focus of much of MHLC internal organizational work for 2020/2021.

The KPMG review considered MHLC and Centre of Innovative Justice (CIJ) partnership. The partnership supported student placements within a multi-disciplinary framework and had seen MHLC co-located with CIJ. Given the size of MHLC staff group, the projected growth and the physical office space requirements of a COVID safe workspace, a decision was made that MHLC would seek alternative accommodation. In reviewing the partnership both organizations decided to pursue different ways of seeking justice within a multi-disciplinary practice framework. MHLC would acknowledge the support offered by CIJ over our 7 year partnership.

While MHLC was busy planning, we (like everyone else) were then faced with a whole new series of challenges brought about by the COVID pandemic. As a Board, we have sought to support and strengthen the team throughout this time and this has been both challenging and rewarding. In finding and designing a new office for the team, we were able to ensure that it would meet the requirements of a COVID safe workspace. However, as we have moved in and out of “lock downs” work undertaken in changing and developing our IT responses has enable staff to effectively work from home. The staff has also taken the opportunity to drive the building of a practice framework internally while working on many factors externally including the Royal Commissions. As reflected in this Annual Report MHLC has been busy.

The Board would like to acknowledge and commend the flexibility and dedication of MHLC staff in what has been immensely challenging times.

The Board wishes to formally thank Charlotte Jones our CEO, for her leadership, her commitment to MHLC, the communities we serve and the staff of MHLC. Collectively the MHLC staff group and the Board continue to seek justice for people who far too often struggle to have their voices heard and their service needs addressed.

As ever I owe a huge thanks to the entire Board who have worked hard throughout these challenging times to ensure that the MHLC has had clear and strong direction. Working on and completing the KPMG review saw individual Board members take on significant pieces of work. Work that ensures MHLC has a strong, robust organizational structure to support its work into the future.

We would also like to acknowledge the work of the members of the team who left during this year Ann Jorgensen Principal Lawyer, Cristiana Tomasino VOCAT/IA lawyer and Vanda Hamilton Day Service Coordinator alongside Isabel Nesbit who supported the team over the Christmas period.

We have been fortunate to welcome Julie Brinkler a former RMIT student into our financial counselling team, Alana Ray a former RMIT student back to the team in Cristiana's role and Rebecca Grouios has taken the role of Principal Lawyer. Rebecca's experience in the CLC sector at both Brimbank and VALS was of particular importance to the Board, her knowledge and experience working in DPFC alongside her experiences in Queensland's sector made her an excellent fit for MHLC.

We have also been fortunate to welcome our Principal Social Worker Sarah Joyce who comes with a wealth of knowledge and experience to support our growing interdisciplinary practice. Sarah also previously worked at RMIT and Port Philip with experience across homelessness issues.

MHLC has undergone a great deal of change in the past year but as ever continues to evolve. MHLC has a strong commitment to embedding evaluation within all its projects. Of note this year two five year reviews were completed for Inside Access and our Bolton Clarke Project both of which demonstrated the remarkable ability of these projects to grow and respond to client need. I would take this opportunity to thank Nadu Dove for her work in preparing such detailed reviews and analysis of work undertaken by MHLC and service outcomes achieved for clients.

CEO Report

It has been one of the most challenging years at the MHLC. As all people who work and have caring responsibilities know the impact of the pandemic on home and work have been extraordinary.

I would like to start by thanking my family for their patience and tolerance as it was hard for them to navigate the shifting dynamics at home, as work and home life blurred as never before. My husband and I both worked from home and throughout this, our children showed remarkable resilience and were able to navigate very effectively how to open the biscuit cupboard!

As ever the team at the MHLC marched on as call volumes doubled, we came under increasing pressure from so many areas to respond to need and demand it was hard to work out where the priorities were at points. By mid-November, we were able to get back to the office to begin working through all our files and then preparing to move.

This was the fifth move in seven years and as such, we have signed a lease that will ensure that this will not happen again for quite some time. I would like to thank Myer for their support, as throughout this we were able to ensure that we have the funds. It has been a period of tremendous change and every person who worked at MHLC during the year made an invaluable contribution to how we moved and shifted the programs, the expectations, the delivery and then found new ways to support the clients so that we could ensure that we could meet the changing demands.

I would also like to thank Ann Jorgensen who I worked with for many years and whose work on the Royal Commission who was able to give voice and shine a light on the many issues faced by our consumers. I would also like to thank all our funders and the support that was given by the Attorney General during COVID, which enabled us to continue with the Health Justice Partnership and maintain the day service throughout that time.

MHLC was able to create two junior lawyer roles this year. I have been very proud to watch our law students grow into fully fledged lawyers developing and moving on to the next phase of their careers. My goal is that they will stay in the sector but it is so important that the MHLC continue to grow and develop lawyers across the sector who understand and are able to work effectively with consumers who may be experiencing periods of intense personal challenge.

The expansion of the MHLC never ceases and to complement our work we are supporting financial counselling for women on remand at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. We have also expanded the social work team with Nicole Blazinovic taking a permanent role with us and developing our Disability Support Pension Clinic which will complement the work of our Health Justice Partnership in Frankston supporting residents of the 92 rooming housings and those most at risk. Bonnie Maher also joined the team helping to support this project.

As we have all witnessed the impact of the pandemic is far-reaching and ongoing so I am hopeful that we will be able to continue to develop our services and work with our clients to ensure that we are able to meet the needs that they are presenting as we move through this rapidly changing time.

One of the matters that we were able to help with was providing vital supports to the community. Clients without support were a grave cause for concern. We were able to ensure that rent was paid, phones charged and credit applied alongside delivering food and vouchers. This work is ongoing and we are extremely grateful to Jane Tewson and the team at Igniting Change for helping to achieve these outcomes in basic support.

We have also been extremely grateful to Lander & Rogers and Gadens for their outstanding support throughout the year in helping with training and supporting our staff, alongside the work into Royal Commissions reports, supporting training activities. Pro Bono support helps drive the engine across the sector.

Projects and Outcomes

Ravenhall – Inside Access Program

Ravenhall delivery proved ever more complex during the lockdowns but Clare, Rory and John battled on with Jamie providing support as ever Pam held all the data together.

Accessing prisons is always complex especially for programs that are delivered within the services. The challenges faced in accessing the prison in lockdown were compounded by the need for priority access to bail and ongoing legal supports in criminal matters. With over 1300 beds, this is a much more complex provision of service. However, the team at GEO worked tirelessly to facilitate contact where possible and the clients always attended.

We were however able to continue to deal with over 245 individual clients in our general legal clinic , 60 fines matters were dealt with and 229 men attended our education sessions which provided valuable insight into the current needs of the prisoners.

Alongside this we delivered services to 142 men through the NDIS clinic and alongside this address the needs of an additional 40 men through The Bridge who have been released from Ravenhall.

This means that in total throughout 2020/2021 we still serviced over 487 clients and delivered education to 229 men through the determined efforts of the Ravenhall team.

Stories from Ravenhall – these illustrate the complexities and challenges of our clients:

Mosh* is a 40 year old Aboriginal man who was referred into the NDIS Clinic. Mosh had been removed from the care of his parents at a young age and placed into foster care. It was here that Mosh was assaulted by having his head closed in a door, resulting in an acquired brain injury (ABI). Mosh felt let down by the system and described having multiple workers in the past who he felt never helped him and therefore had little hope for actually becoming a NDIS participant. Inside Access worked to ensure that Mosh understood, what the NDIS was and how they could support him to become a participant. Despite Mosh being eligible for the NDIS for some time, this was the first time someone had supported him through the application process. This was a key step in linking Mosh with appropriate disability support services that he would be able to access once he re-entered the community.

Working together with his care team and the Justice Liaison Officer, MHLC was able to support Mosh to successfully become an NDIS participant. He is now living in the community with appropriate choice based supports.

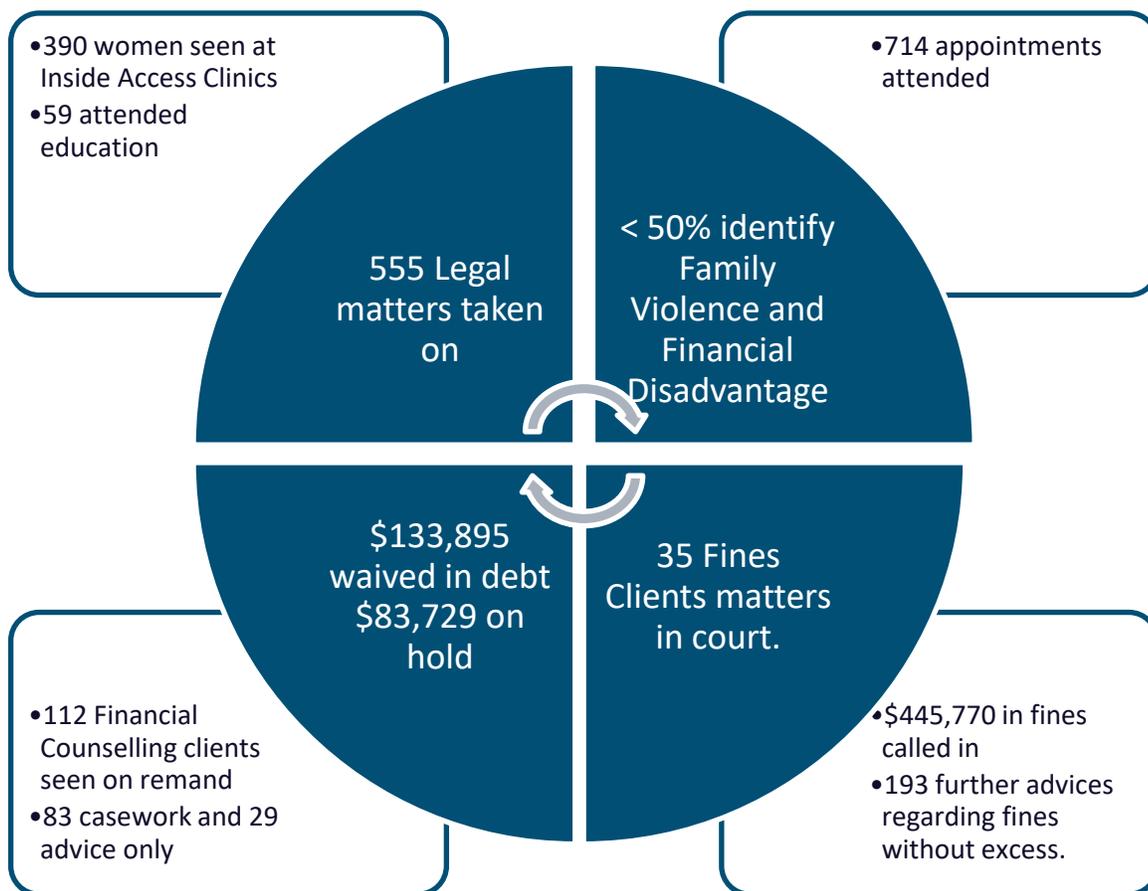
Sean* is an Aboriginal man who was in custody for the first time at Ravenhall when he attended the Inside Access Legal Clinic. Sean had been living in his family home with his partner and their young son, who was only a baby at the time when Sean was arrested. There was no history of any family violence or child abuse and child protection services had no concerns for the child. On the contrary, Sean has very close ties and connection to his family. However, against the wishes of both parents, the police had taken out an Intervention Order preventing Sean from having any contact with his son. The lack of child contact severely affected Sean's mental health, as well as that of the son who kept asking his mother for his father. We assisted Sean by representing him in an Application to Vary an Intervention Order which the police contested. After multiple court appearances, we were able to have the Order varied to allow child contact during Sean's term of imprisonment. This had a significant and positive effect on Sean's mental health. He became happier, his sleep and appetite improved, he became more engaged in prison programs and more hopeful about his future after prison. Further, we were successful in varying the Order so that upon his release, Sean can return to live in his family home with his partner and their son. The over policing of First Nations' communities is a systemic issue in Victoria that is illustrated by the disproportionate numbers of prisoners who are Aboriginal. We aim to advocate for those clients

through our Inside Access Programs. Sean and his family were very grateful for our assistance.

Projects and Outcomes

Inside Access at DPFC

The remarkable project team of Kristina, Cristiana, Margot, Andre and Alana have ensured that with each change service delivery has continued. This work is supported by Julie in Financial Counselling working with women held on remand. The remarkable efforts by the team within DPFC programs to ensure access has resulted in remarkable outputs and stories from this project this year.



This overview illustrates how we see over 500 women in a year at DPFC and that this work continues to grow and develop to support women across this service. We have

included some case studies to give an overview of the work we undertake on behalf of the women.

*Penny

Penny is a long-term IA client who has a complex background of trauma and addiction that colours her criminal history, mostly comprised of petty, acquisitive and drug-related offences. Penny moved to Melbourne in 2010 to be with her (then) partner, leaving her family supports and established life behind. Unfortunately, Penny's partner became abusive early on in their relationship and she began using ice and heroin to self-medicate and deal with the violence. Penny's life quickly spiraled out of control, and her drug use developed into a chronic, insidious addiction. She became entrenched in a world of violence, drug use and crime, and has struggled ever since to find the mental fortitude or the financial means to return to her hometown and family.

IA met with Penny again in 2019. At the first appointment, Penny was visibly mentally unwell and struggled to provide her instructions. Penny also has an ABI. After several appointments and telephone conversations, we built rapport with Penny and she began to open up about what she had been through. Penny soon became comfortable with her lawyer and we were able to work together to pursue a VOCAT Application for Assistance in relation to the most recent violence she had experienced at the hands of her ex-partner, Scott*.

Throughout the year, Penny exited and re-entered DPFC on a number of occasions. Fortunately, IA was linked in with her caseworker at RHED and was able to maintain contact with Penny and work together to progress her VOCAT Application.

A further complicating factor was Penny's housing in the community; she lived in public housing where all the 'bad influences' in her life knew to find her, and also her violent ex-partners. When Penny was released on one occasion, she returned to her house to find that it had been ransacked by Scott and boarded up by the police. Despite the attempts of numerous support services, including IA, Penny has not yet been approved for a housing transfer to another geographical location. Each time she is released from custody, she is released back into the same, high-risk environment that causes her to offend and use drugs.

Accordingly, IA sought an award for relocation costs as part of her VOCAT Application.

In July 2020, we received a Section 33 Offer from VOCAT, indicating a number of awards the Tribunal Member was willing to make without having to go to a hearing. Penny was awarded \$1, 100 as a lump sum of money, counselling sessions, reimbursement for destroyed clothing, dental costs and medical costs relating to a rhinoplasty to cosmetically repair her previously broken nose.

Most notably, Penny was awarded costs for a flight to Sydney and rental assistance to permit her to relocate back home. Penny was over the moon when IA gave her the good news and said that she finally felt like she had a chance to break away from all that had marred her life for the last decade. We hope that with the assistance provided through VOCAT, Penny will be able to re-build her life in Sydney.

**Patricia first spoke with IA's Child Protection Lawyer in relation to the care of her children. During the conversation, a history of family violence surfaced. Patricia expressed great fear of her recent ex-partner, **Troy, who was also the co-accused to her criminal matters. Patricia explained that she and Troy had only now broken up as a result of their incarceration, as she was unable to flee his violence or leave him due to the risk of reprisal. Patricia was concerned about applying for a Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIVO), as she knew that Troy has been subject to and breached many orders in the past, across his previous relationships. IA's Child Protection Lawyer suggested that Patricia speak with IA's Family Violence Lawyer to discuss the possibility of applying for an FVIVO.

The breadth of the violence was expanded upon in further conversations with Patricia, who detailed attacks with knives and threats against her and her children's lives. Patricia was concerned that Troy would manipulate her into falling back into his traps once she returned to the community, and was worried about what might happen to her if she was released on bail.

After much discussion, Patricia decided to apply for an FVIVO to protect herself and her children from future harm by Troy. She conceded that the legal protection might help to keep Troy away from her and mitigate the risk of further violence.

We explained to Patricia that traditionally, we have been unsuccessful in applying for FVIVO's on behalf of incarcerated women. The Courts have refused IA's Applications in the past due to a formality, which requires the applicants to sign the application before a Court Registrar, amongst other practical difficulties stemming from their incarcerated status.

However, with the introduction of remote facilities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, IA identified an opportunity to test the waters. We determined that Patricia was a good candidate, as she was anticipated to be released on bail in the coming month and was in need of immediate protection in the community. As such, we arranged several telephone calls and videoconferences with Patricia to confirm her instructions and complete the FVIVO Application together. IA then submitted the Application through the online portal with the Dandenong Magistrates' Court on her behalf.

A hearing of the matter was listed in December 2020. IA's Family Violence Lawyer appeared on Patricia's behalf at the hearing, which took place via WebEx. We also arranged for Patricia to appear at the hearing via video link, however she was unable to attend due to a clash with her criminal proceedings. In any event, the presiding Magistrate determined there was enough evidence on the papers to illustrate that Patricia and her daughters were in need of protection. Accordingly, the Magistrate granted a final, no contact FVIVO for a length of 5 years, accounting for the time that Patricia may still yet spend in custody and also cognisant of Troy's eventual release date. Patricia breathed an audible sigh of relief when IA informed her of the news, and expressed that she felt like she could return home safely upon her release from custody.

Belinda* contacted Inside Access seeking assistance in relation to her impounded vehicle. Belinda's vehicle was impounded upon her arrest. As a result, Belinda did not receive any correspondence from the Impoundment Unit in relation to what to do about her impounded vehicle.

Belinda initially sought advice from Inside Access in relation to lodging an exceptional hardship application for the vehicle to be released. As Belinda did not have a driver's license upon her arrest, Inside Access advised Belinda that this would hinder any application due to the public safety and public interest considerations under the *Road Safety Act 1986* (Vic). In light of this, Inside Access advised Belinda about what her available options were. In particular, Inside Access advised Belinda that she could authorise a third party to collect the vehicle on her behalf. Belinda was agreeable to this.

Inside Access contacted the Impoundment Unit who confirmed that the vehicle was in their possession and advised of the end date, at which point the vehicle would become

property of Victoria Police. The Impoundment Unit also noted that the release costs would amount to \$1,572.00 if the vehicle were to be collected on its end date. Inside Access then enquired with the Impoundment Unit as to whether a fee reduction could be made due to Belinda's circumstances. Thankfully, the Impoundment Unit was agreeable to reducing the total collection fee to \$1,005.00 and extended the end date to allow Belinda extra time to nominate a third party to collect her vehicle. The Impoundment Unit provided Inside Access with the necessary forms which Belinda was able to sign and express post to her nominated third party. Belinda was also able to contact a support service who were willing to pay for the collection fee of the vehicle. Belinda was very grateful for the assistance of Inside Access in facilitating the collection of her vehicle and for negotiating the fee reduction. This ensured that Belinda still had a vehicle to get around in upon her release from custody.

******Jasmine contacted the Inside Access (IA) Fines Clinic seeking assistance in relation to calling in her fines. IA reviewed Jasmine's fines, which totaled over \$38,000.00, and determined that the length of Jasmine's sentence did not cover all of her fines. Accordingly, IA determined that Jasmine had an excess of approximately \$24,000.00. Jasmine was originally fearful that her excess application would result in extra days of imprisonment. As such, Jasmine sought the assistance of IA.

IA was able to obtain supporting material determining that Jasmine had a history of mental health issues dating back to her traumatic adolescence. Jasmine's mental health concerns were further exacerbated by family violence perpetrated against her during her early life and adulthood. Jasmine would also often self-medicate her mental health issues with drugs and other methamphetamines. Jasmine additionally experienced periods of homelessness throughout the time in which her fines were incurred, including periods of homelessness lasting up to three years.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Jasmine's hearing proceeded on the papers. After collecting a range of supporting materials on behalf of Jasmine, IA submitted written submissions to the Melbourne Magistrates' Court, advocating that Jasmine was experiencing mental health issues, family violence, drug addiction and homelessness at the time her infringements were incurred.

Fortunately, the Magistrate determined that Jasmine had special circumstances, and agreed to waive Jasmine's excess fines in full. Jasmine was not in a position to pay off the fines, and if they were not waived, imprisonment would have been a possibility. Fines are now one less issue Jasmine needs to worry about as she re-enters the community.

Molly* was on remand for 9 months, had a mortgage and a home robbery shortly after entering custody.

There is a hidden cost of imprisonment and the double punishment that people in custody face. They often leave custody with substantial debts due to having had no income while they are held in custody and therefore no ability to cover ongoing expenses such as mortgage, utility, car loan and credit card payments.

Molly had paid her mortgage for 17 years prior to incarceration and was up to date with payments when she was taken into custody. On release, the mortgage payments were 9 months in arrears and the bank was threatening to repossess the property. The break in meant she could not rent the property out to assist with the mortgage payments while she was in custody and although she had insurance cover, the insurers were refusing to pay out.

We liaised with the mortgage provider on Molly's behalf and the mortgage was placed on hold until Molly was back in the community. We also worked with the insurance company to address their concerns. The claim has now been accepted and repairs have commenced which provided some relief for Molly.

While Molly was in custody, her credit card and utility debts continued to increase. We advised her on grants that are available to assist in paying the utility debts and how to organise affordable payment arrangements with her creditors once she is back in the community. Liaising with creditors on Molly's behalf was difficult as there was no release date, many creditors cannot comprehend the remand system and court dates kept being rescheduled.

Molly also had fines that she was unable to call in and work off while she was at DPFC as she was on remand for the whole time she was in custody (fines can only be called in once clients are sentenced).

Molly still cannot return to her property as it requires repairs from the robbery and has to rely on the good will of family members for a place to stay, she is feeling overwhelmed by her situation.

We continue to support Molly as she transitions back into the community.

Projects and Outcomes

Partners in the Community

Bolton Clarke Homeless Persons Program

The unprecedented level of demand on this project last year meant that we were already working extra hard to achieve outcomes for complex clients in even more complex situations. Lucy, Rory along with Sarah and Tracy worked to stem the flow of work but this continued throughout the year. Julie and Nicole also provided additional supports. This project continues to go from strength to strength and we continued our focus. As ever the work just kept coming with 114 clients with 296 matters in the past year. This is the sixth year of this project and the work which continues to flow is quite remarkable.

During this we have also established some other facts, including that not one client who has been represented by Lucy has returned to jail. Lucy did an incredible amount of work regarding Intervention Orders and saw a 300% increase in these matters this year.

Stories from the Health Justice Partnership

Becky*, a young woman early 20s, entered homelessness after leaving her family home due to drug and alcohol issues she was using to self-medicate her mental health distress. Becky struggled more with her bi-polar and PTSD, developing anxiety and depression. After eventually becoming street homeless and in a relationship featuring partner family violence Becky came to the attention to the BC HPP nurses whilst staying at the Union crisis accommodation. When she met with our HJP lawyer, Becky

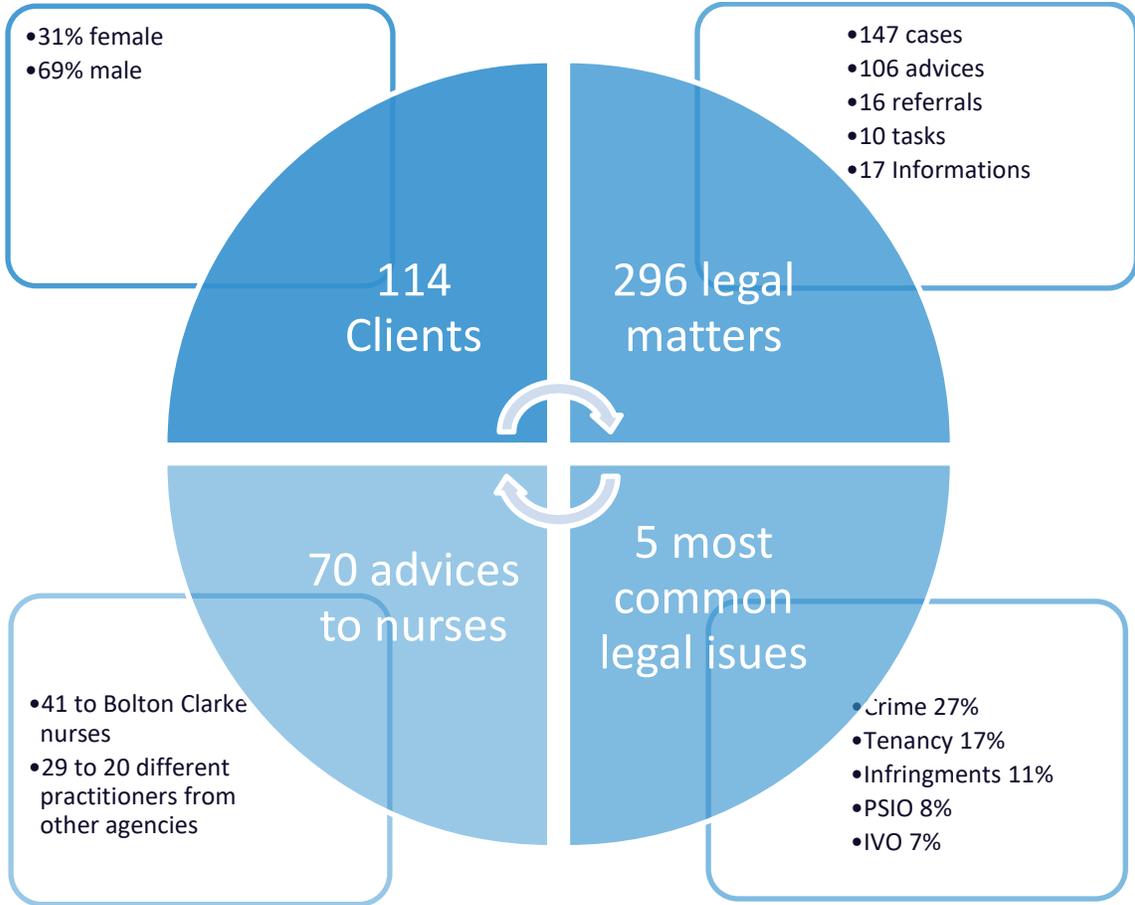
had not taken drugs or alcohol for 10 months. Through this process they were able to connect with housing, but it looked in danger of unravelling as multiple legal issues from being homeless began emerging including charges relating to alcohol and a theft matter. Our HJP lawyer negotiated with the informant for the theft matters thereby averting criminal records and any imprisonment. Currently there are negotiations with other matters, which have resolved debts and avoided criminal charges.

Partners in Community has meant that for Becky she can continue with her childcare course, is maintaining her stable accommodation and has the supports in place to manage her mental health & wellbeing.

Sam* had lived at her current address for approximately five years, a block of flats that consisted of community housing flats and private rentals. Although she generally kept to herself, she was on friendly terms with her neighbours. However, this changed when over a 7-day period, on three occasions; Sam broke windows of neighbouring flats. After this Sam's landlord issued her with a Notice to Vacate (NTV) on the grounds of danger. She was given 5 days to vacate. Sam had a history of mental illness and a neurological condition. She was well connected to a number of support services in the local area. All these services expressed concern about Sam's erratic behaviour that was seen as out of character for her. Sam did not vacate by the vacation date and the landlord issued proceedings at VCAT to have Sam evicted. MHLC briefed a barrister to attend the hearing, which was heard approximately a month after Sam last broke a window. The barrister successfully argued that the three incidents should be seen as one episode of "danger" that was no longer continuing. The landlord's application was dismissed.

Prior to the VCAT hearing Sam had been interviewed by the police, who subsequently charged her with criminal damage in relation to the broken windows. MHLC represented Sam at this hearing, requesting that the matter be dealt with by way of diversion, which would allow Sam to avoid a criminal record. The magistrate agreed and Sam was put on a diversion plan.

Partners in Community help Sam maintained her tenancy and avoided a criminal record.



Partners and Outcomes

Day Service

Due to the impact of the pandemic having volunteers on site and supporting them effectively, proved very difficult. As such, we did not operate the night service in 2020/2021. Instead, the formidable phone team adapted structures and methods to build and support clients through our available resources. This was a major undertaking by senior and junior lawyers who all worked hard to support as many clients as possible. This involved developing new systems and structures which was led by Sarah and Vanda supported by John Lynne and Bonnie along with Rory and Andre. Nicole and Jamie were also instrumental in ensuring that the wider needs were met.

We were also supporting clients before the MHT and due to the phone hearings we had periods where we were able to support and then periods where we were struggling to find supports in the very short time frames available. To ensure that we had the supporters to meet demand we organized a full training session and we extend our grateful thanks to Landers & Rogers for providing the venue and to Maggie Toko for leading the training and ensuring that we maintained that consumers were at the heart at the day. We are also grateful to the members of the Mental Health Tribunal for providing their expertise and support Professor Penny Weller, Helen Versey and Dr Sue Carey.

As a result we are now training our new recruits and this will expand our capacity to work with and support consumers across the mental health system. In 2020/2021 we have 25 active pro bono lawyers excluding the MHLC team.

The needs of clients during the pandemic has changed in relation to some projects but the issues on which clients remain focused are those of the Mental Health Tribunal. What we did recognize was that we need to be able to support a large number of clients who needs extended far beyond the obvious. The expertise provided by our

team across administration and social work was evident and this enabled clients to be supported to access services, which were able to meet their needs.

To our dedicated team of Pro Bono Lawyers who continued hearings throughout thank you it has been an incredibly tough year.

The MHLC received



The delivery of this level of work across these teams represents a numerical value to the thousands of man hours and supports which were given by the MHLC across the Victorian Community this year.

These numbers do not represent the care, time and thoughtfulness, which surrounded every interaction. The complexity and difficulty in trying to connect and resolve matters remotely.

To achieve the outcomes demonstrated which statistics cannot provide we have illustrated this with the journeys of our clients highlighted through our social work team.

The staff within MHLC have all expressed the complexities of working remotely, the challenges of being separated by 5 or 15,000kms the imprint of lockdown has marked the team and despite this they have continued to deliver an unprecedented level of service to clients and supports which we could never have anticipated. They have all worked tirelessly to maintain connections to each other and the complex, vulnerable clients they work with.

Advance Statements/Disability Support Pension (DSP) Clinic

The last section goes to our internal social work team - especially Nicole, who has faced many challenges in the past year. Nicole has always supported clients who have nowhere else to turn. She has driven forward two clinics and has worked with clients to support and empower their voice being heard throughout their mental health treatment. Alongside this, Nicole has also been assisting clients to access DSP payments, and review claims that have been rejected by Centrelink.

During the pandemic, Nicole has been dealing with clients in highly complex situations. One of these being a client trying to flee her current housing due to family violence during a stage 4 lockdown. The client told Nicole no service had a record of her application on file, despite her submitting it years ago. Nicole, in conjunction with the client's housing support worker, successfully managed to backdate her Office of Housing application by 25 years. The client has recently been housed in a safe space.

Another client contacted MHLC to assist with advocacy and finding appropriate services concerning her reproductive healthcare. The client was unsure of her options

and rights to accessing an abortion, as she was young and socially isolated. Nicole ensured that the client was able to make informed choices while supporting her to self-advocate for her rights.

Nicole is able to support clients from all lifestyles while ensuring they maintain agency and autonomy; a remarkable achievement in an ever-changing world.

Strategic Planning

MHLC will now look to embark on a period of reflection and review to determine how best to move forwards and support our consumers in the coming year. This will include all the lessons we have learnt in the past 18 months reflecting changing working practices alongside the changing needs and dynamics of the Court and Tribunal systems we work within. We will look forward to the continued support of our funders and the amazing team of pro bono supports we work with alongside our sector supports with thanks to(in no particular order) :

Equity Trustees
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Lord Mayors Charitable Foundation
The Myer Foundation and the Sydney Myer Fund
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Igniting Change
VMIAC
Mental Health Victoria
Federation of Community Legal Centre's
Victoria Legal Aid
Attorney Generals Office

GEO Group
Department of Justice and Community Safety
Department of Health
Deakin University

Our Pro Bono Partners

Gadens
Landers & Rogers
Sparke Helmore
HWL Ebsworth
Ashursts
Berrill Watson

.... And not forgetting all the Pro Bono Lawyers and Students – to those who left we offer our thanks and to all who remain we and our clients are indebted to your support.

TREASURER'S REPORT 2021

Income for the year totalled \$2,048,979 (\$1,321,843 in 2019/20) and Expenditure totalled \$1,518,753 (\$1,123,095 in 2019/20). This resulted in a net surplus of \$530,226 for the year. It's important to note that while that surplus appears as profit that the organisation retains, that is the result of treatment of those funds in accordance with accounting standards, and the bulk of that surplus is committed for use on the programs for which the funds were provided.

Much of our revenue has come from grants from the Victorian Government, including the Attorney General, and other Justice Department grants and from the former Department of Health and Human Services, and we are grateful for their continuing support. MHLC has also been successful in raising funds from many other sources during the year, contributing to its current strong financial position.

Managing expenditure carefully has been very important in this transition period when the Centre was establishing its own premises, and it is a credit to the organisation that

we have successfully managed this transition along with the challenges of the current pandemic and remained financially stable and secure.

The Finance, Audit and Risk sub-committee, which oversees all matters in relation to its title, has again met monthly throughout the financial year. The committee continues to work effectively and performs its role as part of the necessary structure to ensure good financial governance of the organisation. The sub-committee reports monthly to the full Board. My thanks to the sub-committee members for their regular attendance at meetings.

The budget for the upcoming financial year forecasts a relatively modest surplus and is predicated on some funding not yet confirmed from the Victorian Government, but remains financially conservative and ensures the ongoing viability of the MHLC.

I would finally like to record my thanks to the Board, the Management and the Staff of the Mental Health Legal Centre for their contributions to the organisation's financial management, it is a privilege to serve the organisation and to work with such dedicated and talented people.

Geoff Southwell
Treasurer