

Annual Report 2016-2017



Western Sydney
COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE



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Acknowledgement of Country

Western Sydney Community Legal Centre (WSCLC) would like to acknowledge the Darug people who are the traditional custodians of the land on which all our offices are located and where we conduct our work. We acknowledge and pay respects to Elders, past and present, who have given us time, knowledge and guidance. We appreciate the rich contribution and resilience that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and youth provide to WSCLC and the community.

WSCLC continues to work together with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and our non-Aboriginal staff, to better our understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the ongoing connection to the land, waters and seas. We are committed to creating a genuine appreciation for the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their contribution to the workplace and community, and in turn, we are working towards reconciliation.

Always was, always will be Aboriginal Land.



WSCLC Stall at the Burramatta NAIDOC 2017 event, Barry Wilde Bridge, Parramatta River.



Where WSCLC has come from

Bringing together the strengths and wisdom of our past

AMALGAMATION

WSCLC was formed following the amalgamation of:

- Hawkesbury Nepean Community Legal Centre
- Macquarie Legal Centre
- Mt Druitt and Area Community Legal Centre

The amalgamation happened in June 2016.



*WSCLC Management Team and Legal Aid Project Coordinators
at the WSCLC Annual General Meeting in July 2016*

BRIEF HISTORY OF EACH ORGANISATION

Hawkesbury Nepean Community Legal Centre started as a service of Richmond Community Services in November 1993. Over time the Centre became independent, changed its name to Hawkesbury Nepean CLC and moved to Windsor. HNCLC had a long history of auspicing projects and working in partnership with a range of other services. The population base for the service is small but the geographic area is significant.

Students from Macquarie University established the **Macquarie Legal Centre** in 1978 to deliver legal services to those who felt excluded from the legal system. Money was raised through 'chook' raffles, street stalls, sales of the Redfern Legal Centre Handbook and a harbour cruise. Students and staff who worked voluntarily through the week were rewarded only by the comradeship, achievement and fun of their efforts.

Mt Druitt and Area Community Legal Centre was established in 1996. Establishment of the service was spearheaded by Coral McLean who was the Education Director at the Holy Family Church Emerton and she was known as the 'Mother of Mt Druitt'. The Centre focused on providing legal services to Blacktown and the East ward of Penrith. The organisation had a long relationship with Ashurst (then Blake Dawson Waldron) – for more than five years, they provided the service with a full time solicitor on six month rotation and after this they provided funding for a part time solicitor for another five years.

WSCLC brings together the strengths and wisdom of our past to work to provide justice for all across Western Sydney.



Where WSCLC is going

VISION: *No Less Than Justice For All.*

STRATEGIC GOALS

Legal Services

Our goal is to provide legal advice, information and representation to the most poor and disadvantaged in our communities.

Financial and Corporate Management

Our goal is financial strength and accountability through effective corporate governance.

Community Engagement

Our goal is to participate, reach out and inform our communities.

Community Support

Our goal is to empower community members to engage effectively with the law.

People

Our goal is a loyal, high performing and enthusiastic workforce, built on mutual respect and support.

VALUES

Our values:	Demonstrated by our behaviours:
Respectful – of each other, our communities and our stakeholders.	Appreciating our colleagues' role and our work environment. Accepting and celebrating difference. Recognising and celebrating histories of communities and their CLCs.
Supporting – empowering each other to achieve our vision and purpose.	Fostering an inclusive environment. Showing empathy and care. Offering trust in each other to achieve the best outcome.
People First – communities and clients come first.	Demonstrating commitment to others. Demonstrating a team first approach. Sharing credit and responsibility.
Accountable – in our thinking, attitudes and actions.	Energetic pursuit of ideas. Always seeking best solutions. Taking responsibility for one's own actions.
Dynamic – in pursuit of excellence.	Committed to the pursuit of excellence. Refusing to settle for second best. Continually searching for a better way.



President's report

Gayle Barbagallo

WSCLC formed in July 2016 following the amalgamation of Hawkesbury Nepean Community Legal Centre, Mt Druitt and Area Community Legal Centre and Macquarie Legal Centre. Each centre has a long history in its own right and the decision to amalgamate was a difficult one for all. The work involved in preparing for amalgamation and then setting up the new organisation has been significant and the committee and staff continue to work on this ongoing project.

The amalgamation was largely in response to a proposed 30% funding cut to the Community Legal Centre sector, anticipated to occur in June 2017. The funding cut did not occur thankfully but the need for additional funding to meet community need continues to be an issue.

Following amalgamation, WSCLC conducted an organisational review resulting in a restructure of the organisation. The organisation now operates two 'arms', The Legal practice arm operates across three sites – Parramatta, Rooty Hill and Windsor and the Community Programs arm operates across Western Sydney. The work of the organisation is outlined later in the report and I would encourage you to read about our stellar work in the community.

This year, the committee has worked with staff to develop a Strategic Plan and Organisational Plan which will guide the work of the organisation in the coming years. These documents are currently being finalised and the committee looks forward to these documents providing guidance for the future direction of the organisation.

It has been a challenging year for WSCLC. I would like to thank the staff for their commitment to the organisation and their work. Despite the change and uncertainty of the past year both internally and externally, staff have continued to provide great service to the clients and communities they work in.



Doreen O'Grady (Vice President) and Gayle Barbagallo (President), at the first WSCLC AGM

I would also like to thank the Management Committee for the hours and hours of volunteer work that they have contributed to WSCLC. Establishing a new organisation is a challenging and frequently thankless job. I thank you for the unstinting support you have given me and consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with you all.

We look forward to the coming year at WSCLC. Funding continues to be something that we watch with some anxiety. The community need for our services continues to increase in Western Sydney as the population of the area continues to grow. We must never lose sight of the fact that WSCLC exists to provide the best possible service to the most vulnerable in our community.

Gayle Barbagallo
President



How WSCLC works

GOVERNANCE

WSCLC is an Incorporated Association, established under the Associations Incorporation Act 2009. We have a constitution which defines our objectives (what we aim to achieve), membership, how our committee works and other details including some information about how we manage our money.

WSCLC is overseen by a volunteer Management Committee, including a President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary and at least three ordinary committee members. The Committee meets monthly and delegates day to day management of the organisation to the Director. The Management Committee do not receive any payment for their work on the committee or payment for any connected work with WSCLC. The WSCLC Constitution can only be changed by a vote of members. This structure ensures that the organisation is community focused.

NSW Fair Trading have asked WSCLC to change registration from an Incorporated Association

to a Company Limited by Guarantee under the Corporations Act 2001, in 2018. This change will increase the accountability requirements that WSCLC will need to meet and is appropriate for the financial size of WSCLC. The organisation will continue to have members and be governed by a constitution. The work to change will be done in the coming months and will be put to a vote of members.

FINANCES

2016-2017 was the first financial year of WSCLC. We have undertaken the difficult task of amalgamating the finances of our three centres. We continue to work to streamline the accounts and accounting processes across the organisation.

WSCLC has had an independent auditor – William Buck – audit the accounts.

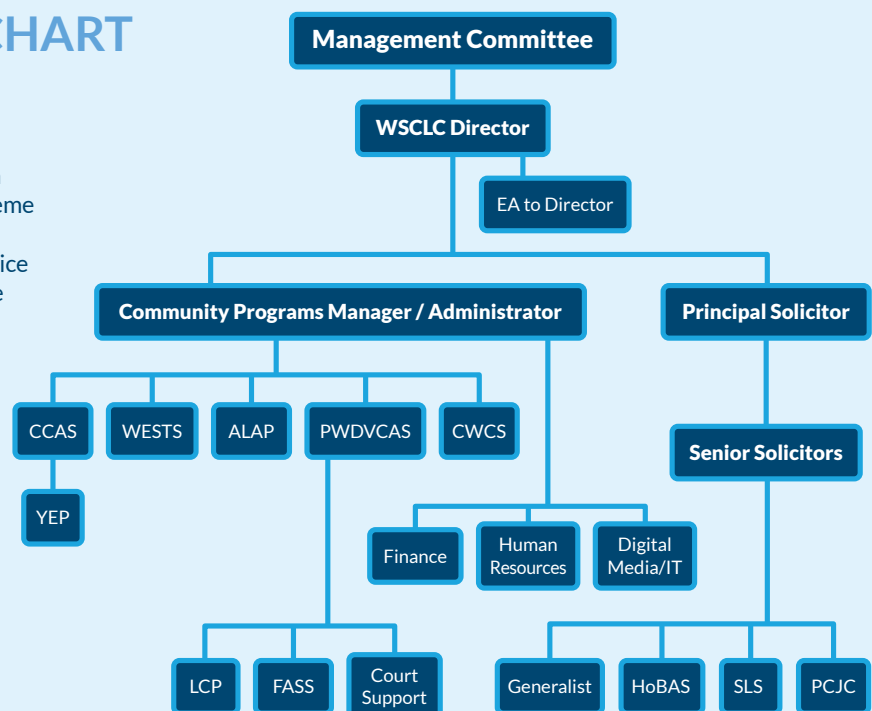
A copy of the audited accounts is available on request by contacting WSCLC Parramatta Office.

ORGANISATIONAL CHART

Key

ALAP:	Aboriginal Legal Access Program
CCAS:	Children's Court Assistance Scheme
CWCS:	Central West Contact Service
FASS:	Family Advocacy & Support Service
HoBAS:	Home Building Advocacy Service
PCJC:	Parramatta Community Justice Clinic
PWDVCAS:	Parramatta Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service
LCP:	Local Coordination Point
SLS:	Student Legal Service
WESTS:	Western Sydney Tenants' Advice & Advocacy Service
YEP:	Youth Education Project

Note: Not all roles are represented.



What WSCLC does

LEGAL PRACTICE

Through our offices in Parramatta, Rooty Hill, Windsor, and a range of outreach sites across Western Sydney, the Legal Practice of WSCLC works in the following areas of law:

- Family (excluding family property disputes)
- Minor criminal – assault, drug offences
- Employment
- Victims' Rights
- Contracts and consumer law including personal credit and debt matters
- Discrimination
- Motor Vehicle offences including accidents and fines
- Neighbourhood disputes including dogs, fences, noise and trees
- Home building and renovation – a specialist service covering NSW

WSCLC provides the following legal services:

- Legal information and advice – either over the phone, face to face or at an outreach site
- Strategic case work – assisting in the preparation of materials for court and on occasion appearing at court. This work is focused on cases where people face significant barriers in their access to the law or where the case may result in law reform or precedent
- Community Legal Education – information sessions to community groups at a range of locations, on a range of legal topics
- Law reform and legal policy work – submissions and proposals on proposed legislation and regulation changes

WSCLC runs a number of specialist programs including:

- Parramatta Community Justice Clinic (PCJC) – provides advice, representation and referrals at Parramatta Local Court on a daily basis
- Student Legal Service (SLS) – supports and assists students at Western Sydney University
- Home Building Advice Service (HoBAS) – provides legal advice and support specifically to home builders and renovators across NSW
- Education and support of law students at both Macquarie University and Western Sydney University, providing students with practical knowledge and experience in the law in a community context
- Care and Protection Legal Service – provides legal advice and support to parents who are at risk of having their child or children taken into care by the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS)



Zaky Orya (Student Legal Service Solicitor) and Susannah Coles (Parramatta Community Justice Clinic Solicitor).

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

WSCLC Community Programs provide a range of supports:

- Information and referral to legal services and other support services
- Court support, information and referral to other services for young people engaged in the criminal system at the Children's Court through the Children's Court Assistance Scheme (CCAS)
- Court support, advocacy, information and referral for women experiencing domestic violence at a number of local courts and the Family court through the Parramatta Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (PWDVCAS), Local Coordination Point (LCP) and Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS)
- Family supports for families experiencing breakdown – the Central West Contact Service (CWCS) provides a safe place for children to spend time with the parent they are not living with
- For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people particularly in Windsor area assistance to access legal information and services through the Aboriginal Legal Access Program (ALAP)
- Information, advice and advocacy for tenants across Western Sydney through the Western Sydney Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service (WESTS)
- Information on legal matters specifically for young people through the Youth Education Project (YEP)



At the FASS launch in May 2017. From left: Michelle Jones (Manager Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program – WDVCA, Legal Aid) Oloa Savaiinaea (Coordinator – WSCLC PWDVCAS), Tala Goshe (FASS worker), Hayley Kennedy (FASS Project Officer, WDVCA, Legal Aid), Tehei Rakoia-Marsters (FASS worker).



The Western Sydney Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service with their Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Program Awards.

Who WSCLC works with

WSCLC works across Western Sydney, with some of our programs having smaller areas of focus and/or particular communities of focus.

Western Sydney has a population of nearly two million people and higher levels of disadvantage than other areas of Sydney – higher levels of unemployment, lower income and a significant population of people who speak a language other than English at home.

Generally, WSCLC works across the following Local Government Areas:

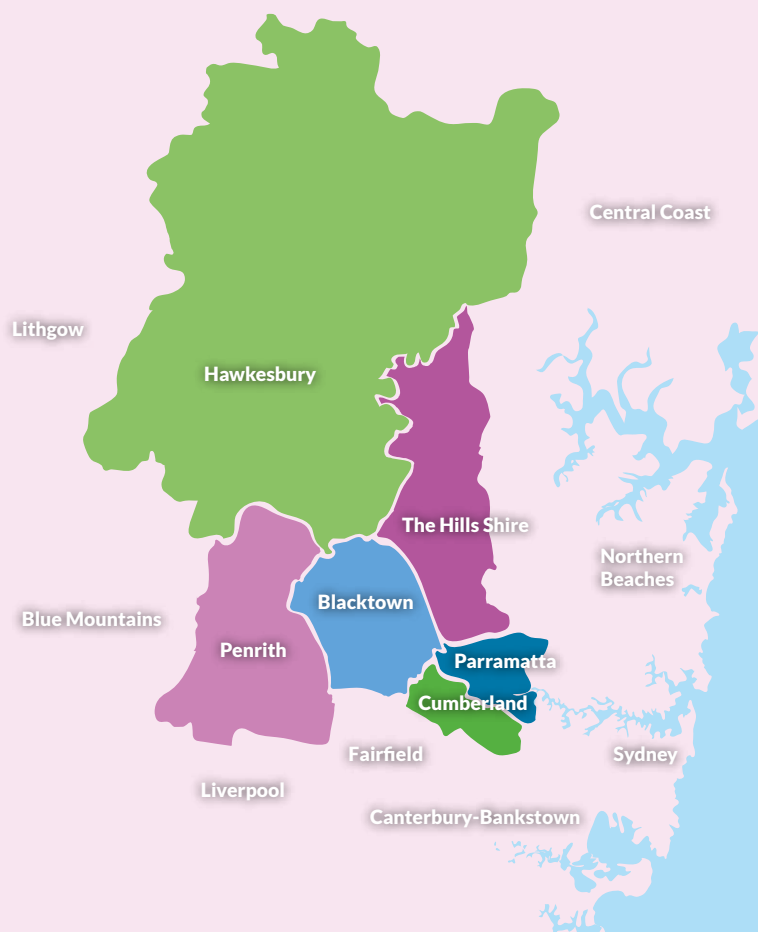
- Parramatta
- Cumberland
- Blacktown
- Penrith
- Hawkesbury
- The Hills Shire

Our Home Building Advocacy Service operates across NSW.

Our target communities are people who are experiencing barriers to accessing legal and support services. We focus on working with:

- Aboriginal people
- People who speak a language other than English
- People with a disability
- Women at risk of or experiencing domestic violence
- Young people who are involved with the criminal justice system
- Young parents
- Tenants including people living in Residential Parks, Boarding houses and in Social and Community housing
- Parents at risk of or who have experienced having their children removed by the Department of Family and Community Services
- Families experiencing breakdown

Local Government Areas where WSCLC works



[illegible]

The campaign was eventually successful – thanks to the hard work of CLCs, bolstered with support from community organisations, the legal sector, and MPs from across the political spectrum. We offer thanks to all our allies, and give special mention to tireless advocate Rosie Batty, the Law Society of NSW, WSU Law Dean Michael Adams, and Western Sydney MPs Julie Owens and Susan Templeman.

A group photograph of approximately 20 people, including students and staff, posing in a room with bookshelves in the background. The group is arranged in two rows, with some individuals seated or kneeling in the front and others standing behind them. They are dressed in a variety of casual and semi-formal attire. The background features a wall with several colorful posters and a bookshelf filled with books. The overall atmosphere is professional yet friendly.



WSCLC highlights

INTERNATIONAL DELEGATIONS

WSCLC welcomed three international delegations during 2016-2017:

- A delegation from the University of Political Science and Law, China, who visited to learn about the legal programs WSCLC offers, community legal centres, and the legal system
- 19 Judges from Guizhou, China, who met with staff from the Parramatta Community Justice Clinic and Student Legal Service, to learn about student involvement in legal processes
- A group of prosecutors and senior officials from the People's Procuratorate of Heilongjian Province, China, who wished to learn about WSCLC operations and community legal services in Australia



University of Political Science and Law, China, delegation at WSCLC



Judges from Guizhou, China, with WSCLC Solicitors and WSU students

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

WSCLC participated in many community events in 2016-2017, such as NAIDOC and Homeless Connect. We also launched our new website, wsclc.org.au.

Community Legal Education

The WSCLC General Legal Practice provided 29 instances of Community Legal Education.

Western Sydney University School of Law

WSCLC Student Legal Services (SLS) provided information at the WSU School of Law bootcamp, where students learned about legal services available and talked to solicitors from other firms.

Western Sydney University Magazine

SLS published three articles in *W'SUP* – the Western Sydney University student magazine.

Clinical Legal Education

WSCLC delivered 905 hours of legal education to Law students from Macquarie University in Generalist and Family Law.

Submissions and policy work

The WSCLC Home Building Advocacy Service made a submission to the review, *Justice for everyday problems – Civil Justice in NSW*.

Western Sydney Tenants' Service (WESTS) was recognised for significant contributions to the policy work of the Tenants' Union of NSW on 'no-grounds' evictions, rent collection & repairs in social housing.

LAUNCH OF FASS

The new Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS) was launched in May 2017. The program is funded by the Federal Government and administered by the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (WDVCAS) program in NSW. WSCLC employed three additional domestic violence support workers to make up our FASS team. In the first two months of operation of the program, over 100 clients were supported via phone and face to face.



SERVICE PROVISION

In 2016-2017, WSCLC provided more than 20,000 occasions of service.

Legal Practice	
Legal information	4,331
Face to face appointments	646
Telephone advice	3,159
Legal Practice Community Legal Education sessions	29
Student Legal Service outreaches	28
Total occasions of service	7,490

Central West Contact Service (CWCS)	
Occasions of change-over between parents	523
Supervised contact sessions	664
Total occasions of service	1,187

Children's Court Assistance Scheme (CCAS)	
Total number of young people assisted	3,764
Total family / friends / support people assisted	1,804

Home Building Advocacy Service (HoBAS)	
Total occasions of service	849

Western Sydney Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service (WESTS)	
Hours of service	Almost 6,000 hours
Number of cases	463
Information	1,468
Phone Advice	1,592
Total occasions of service	3,060

Parramatta Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy (PWDVCAS)	
Total number of clients serviced	1,205
Number of referrals made	3,988



WSCLC highlights

Continued

NOMINATION FOR THE JUSTICE MEDAL

The Law and Justice Foundation's annual Justice Awards recognise the contributions that individuals and organisations have made to improving access to justice in NSW, particularly for socially and economically disadvantaged people.

In 2016, Veselko Cuic (then Supervising Solicitor at WSCLC Rooty Hill Office), was nominated for the Justice Medal. Veselko was nominated by Ed Husic MP, Federal Member for Chifley. The text of the nomination is to the right.



At the 2016 Justice Awards, pictured from left: Merleen Millson (WSCLC Treasurer), Kate Barbagallo (WSCLC Rooty Hill Office Assistant), Veselko Cuic (then Supervising Solicitor at WSCLC Rooty Hill Office), Rosemary Davies (WSCLC Regional Coordinator), and Nicholas Comino (WSCLC Rooty Hill Branch Solicitor).

*“Veselko Cuic has dedicated his career to improving access to justice for the socially and economically disadvantaged members of his community. He grew up in Mt Druitt and has spent the last ten years working at the Mt Druitt and Area Community Legal Centre. Featured in the SBS documentary series *Struggle Street* last year, Mt Druitt has a large migrant population with 37.5% of people speaking a language other than English at home.*”

Considered a local hero by many, Veselko completes case work, delivers community legal education sessions at the local TAFE and surrounding schools, leads and delivers outreach programs to Indigenous people and regularly participates in legal information days hosted by local councils and community organisations. Examples of his work include successfully reducing fines from \$73,000 to \$3,000 for a low income truck driver client and overturning driver licence suspensions for a number of low income clients, many of whom would otherwise have lost their jobs.”

– Ed Husic MP, Member for Chifley



Children's Court Assistant Scheme case study

Rodney [name has been changed] (16) had been referred to Youth Koori Court due to three charges including aggravated break and enter.

Rodney was removed at a young age and placed into the care of the Minister due to his exposure to family violence and alcohol misuse. Rodney was later diagnosed with a hearing impairment and a moderate intellectual disability. Rodney returned to his mother's care when an interim order expired. To date Rodney has attended two days at school in 2014 and has not returned since. At the Youth Koori Court intake, Rodney's mother told CCAS that they were having extreme financial difficulties and were currently living out of a car.

CCAS was asked by the Aboriginal Legal Service to assist Rodney with referrals in the community to help his current homelessness and also contribute to his Youth Koori Court plan. CCAS was able to bring together funding from a range of sources to help.

CCAS workers understand the factors in the area which can lead to young people committing offences, such as lack of public transport and lack of access to a range of services. CCAS was able to use our network of partner organisations including brokerage services to help Rodney and his family.

Rodney and his family moved into their private rental property approximately four days after court. A large part of being able to move quickly was the advocacy and support provided for Rodney by CCAS. CCAS helped Rodney get furniture for his new home and we were able to further work with Rodney on completing the set tasks on his Youth Koori Court plan. This included registering Rodney's birth, gaining a birth certificate, opening a bank account and Centrelink payments to support living, TAFE enrolments and disability support for Rodney who had been living with a disability without any supports for sixteen years.

Rodney and his mother were very grateful for the assistance that CCAS was able to provide.

NRL JOINT PROGRAM

In 2017, the WSCLC Children's Court Assistance Scheme (CCAS) worked with Mt Druitt TAFE and the National Rugby League on a program to support local Koori kids.

The program began when WSCLC was approached by a group of students at Mt Druitt TAFE, who were NRL players studying Certificate IV in Youth Work. They were keen to put their skills into practice, and connect with Koori kids in need in the local area.

WSCLC CCAS worked with the NRL players to organise a series of sessions at Emerton Leisure Centre in Mt Druitt, which is run by Blacktown City Council. At each session around 20 Koori young people participated, along with Aboriginal Elders and other Aboriginal services in the area. There were workshops, fun and games and it was a great time for everyone. 50 free NRL match tickets along with signed footballs and other materials were also donated to the program by Parramatta Eels Club.

The Blacktown area has the largest urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in NSW so it is a great area for this sort of program. There is much interest in future collaborations.



Aboriginal young people and NRL Players brought together through the CCAS – Mt Druitt TAFE program



Case Studies

Stories and feedback from WSCLC clients

“You have given me my life back.”

Victims' support

WSCLC acted for a client who was a victim of a serious physical assault. The client was particularly vulnerable and would have difficulty dealing with Victims Services by himself.

The client was assaulted by two men who were unknown to him while he was walking home one night. The assault was caught on CCTV. Police arrested and charged the offenders with assault occasioning actual bodily harm while in company and reckless wounding in company.

WSCLC completed and lodged an application for victims' support for the client. We obtained and submitted the relevant documents in support of his application, (including police documents and the client's medical records) and prepared submissions for Victims Services.

The District Court found both offenders guilty and sentenced them to a term of imprisonment.

Victims Services awarded the client a Category C Recognition Payment of \$5,000 – the maximum amount that can be awarded under this category.

“Just a happy note to advise you that the defendant has repaid money owed a few days ago. I would like to say a big THANK YOU to you and all your staff for helping me win this case. I know without your help, I wouldn't have got this far.”

Domestic Violence Court Advocacy

A woman contacted WSCLC Parramatta Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (PWDVCAS) panicking as her partner had taken out an ADVO against her and she was not sure of what to do. The client stated that she was actually the victim but her husband called police and gave an alternative version of the incident.

We advised her to attend court and speak to a PWDVCAS worker. She was then referred to the Duty Solicitor who represented her at court. The matter was dismissed and the client felt relieved as she was very nervous and upset when she attended court in the morning.

“You have helped me through my case to get the result. I would like to thank you for everything and your great support.”

Home Building

WSCLC Home Building Advocacy Service (HoBAS) assisted a client who was from a culturally and linguistically diverse background and had trusted a builder from the same background, entering into a Home Building Contract. The work was defective and incomplete. The Solicitor advised the client to obtain an expert report to support her claim and drafted the chronology and points of claim. The Solicitor also represented the client at the Tribunal. Our client claimed \$13,312 for rectification to the flooring under s 60 Australian Consumer Law (as this work is excluded under the Home Building Act) and \$44,720 for rectification of the other defects under the Home Building Act. The Tribunal ordered the builder to pay our client the sum of \$58,032. Our client is now seeking to enforce this order.



“Thank you so much for the gift of personal safety. I’m grateful for the protocols in place which prompted you to reach out to me. I’ve been critical of the police but realize the difficult position they are in.

Fear has ruled my life for so long. I’m inspired to fight back with all the resources available to me. I realized that living in fear is a slow death. Even though my exchange with the police left me hopeless, your contact gave me the inspiration to fight.

‘Thank you’ seems inadequate. You reminded me that I am a formidable woman with a right to joy and freedom. I am back in the fight... fear and isolation no longer dominate my day. I just wanted you to know that you really do make an impact on women’s lives.”

Victims’ support

WSCLC assisted a client who had been assaulted by another prisoner while incarcerated. We assisted the client in obtaining medical records showing the multiple injuries she suffered, including temporary impairment to her sight. WSCLC assisted the client to use this as evidence. In July 2016, our client was awarded a \$5,000 recognition payment from Victims Services. When we delivered the good news to the client she was very appreciative of the work we had done, and explained that it wasn’t the money she was most grateful for but finally gaining recognition for what was done to her.

“The advice you gave me was very timely, very useful and it really helped resolve the situation. I just want to say that it’s really great that a free service like you is available.”

Motor vehicle accident

A client approached the WSCLC Parramatta Community Justice Clinic (PCJC) after being involved in a car accident. She had very limited English skills and no prior experience with the legal system. Our client was turning right into a driveway when the driver behind attempted to overtake her on the right, colliding with our client’s vehicle. The other party refused to admit fault, arguing that our client was too far over the left hand side of the road when turning right. We negotiated on our client’s behalf with the other party’s insurer, claiming that the other party was liable because they had overtaken when it was not safe to do so. The insurance company refused to accept our client’s claim that the other party was liable. We escalated the matter and made submissions to the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) which after investigating the matter found in favour of our client. The Insurance company agreed to accept the decision of FOS and held their client liable for the accident. Our client received \$5,000 from the insurance company as compensation for the damage sustained in the accident. She was extremely thankful for the assistance she obtained at the PCJC.

“I would like to sincerely thank you for your hard work & support that you gave me over the past three months. You impressed me with your knowledge, professionalism & work ethics. I am truly grateful.”



Case Study

“Sometimes you need help to get on the right track”

Raymond Morris is a public housing tenant who is very active in his community – he has mentored and supported hundreds of people in recovery from drug & alcohol addiction. He helps people in jail as well as in the broader community. Last year, Raymond put up a carport at his place to secure his car. However Housing NSW informed him that it was an illegal structure, ordered him to take it down, and also served him with an eviction notice. Raymond got advice from the Western Sydney Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service (WESTS) and went to the Tribunal. He was able to get a good outcome, which allowed him to keep his home and the carport.

“For me to get where I am, I’ve worked hard. I made lots of mistakes and it’s taken me 43 years to get here, but it was a journey I had to take. I’ve got no regrets, because I’m here to tell the tale today. I’ll always be an alcoholic, but I haven’t had a drink for 11 years.

Drug and alcohol addiction is a terrible thing. A person can get into a bad cycle, become violent. If you’ve never been addicted you can’t understand the pull. It’s a horrible situation to be in, a disaster. And you need help to get out of it.

You might end up in jail. I’ve worked with a lot of men in jail – running AA meetings in Silverwater and other jails, all voluntary. Unfortunately that program has now been stopped. When the men get out they often feel like they can’t cope. Too many people have the attitude that ‘there’s nothing we can do for them.’

It can be really hard for some people to get on the right track. These people need help. Community workers are so important to pull a person out of a bad cycle.

I almost died when I was homeless. I was drinking methylated spirits and living on the streets. The community worker who helped me then is the only reason I’m here today.

I couldn’t do anything. I was in a boarding house for a long time, living in a tiny room. I’ll never forget the day my support worker said ‘There’s a letter here for you from Housing.’ She said they had a place for me at Dundas. I ended up taking it and I never regretted it. It’s a lovely place. I’ve been there for 10 years now.

I’ve got the ability to go home now and switch off. I’ve got Bluey (my ginger cat) and a lovely garden with ferns and everything. I know everybody in the complex. There are about 15 houses – all over 55s.

Now I do volunteer work in the community everyday. I run AA meetings and I’ve volunteered with Exodus Foundation and Sydney Recovery. I’ve helped men who were in prison to get back on the right track, like I did.

People say to me ‘I want what you’ve got.’ I say to them, you’ve got to have hope. And you have to take action. I remember in the 1960s I was in the call-up for the Vietnam War. But the mothers all got together and we had the Moratorium Marches to stop the war. You’ve got to be willing to take action.

What helps me to keep going everyday is that I’ve got a higher power in my life now. You can find peace anywhere – look at those birds. It’s a lovely day – start from there. But you can’t do it on your own, you’ve got to have help.

My old car got stolen, but I need a car to get to the different places I do community work. So my daughter agreed to sell me her second-hand car for a good price. She’d seen that I had been sober for a long time, and she wanted to support me (I’m so proud of her – she’s a manager for Qantas at the airport).

Anyway, my new car was sitting around in the common car park, but it wasn’t secure. A few times the petrol got stolen out of it, and I was worried that the car would get stolen too. So I put up a carport. It’s a temporary structure, but built properly to Australian standards. It was there for 12 months and no-one minded.



Raymond Morris with Franya Repolusk (WESTS Coordinator)



But then Housing found out about it and said 'pull it down – you've got six weeks.' They also gave me a termination notice.

So I went to see my local MP Geoff Lee. He suggested I go and see the team at WESTS. I went in and I spoke to the Tenant Advocates. They told me, 'We don't like your chances but we'll try.'

With the help of WESTS, I wrote letters to Housing and tried to negotiate back and forth. I can't believe how hard the Advocates fought for me!

Eventually we had to go to the Tribunal. The Tribunal Member asked Housing why the carport shouldn't be approved, and they couldn't say why. The Member also commented that Housing had been uncooperative. In the end, the Tribunal Member made an order that the carport be removed, but only in five years time. That was a victory for me! In five years I probably won't be driving any more anyway.

I was crying on the day. I can't even explain how I felt. It was overwhelming, very challenging and emotional. In the Tribunal I kept thinking, 'God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can't change, and the courage to change the things I can.' Having that faith, and that courage really paid off in the end.

WESTS was really wonderful. Their service is terrific. They help people and don't even want anything in return – the service doesn't cost anything. It's great to be able to get that sort of help. I try to give back what's freely been given to me – it helps me to understand why we're here.

It's a wonderful thing that services like WESTS exist. At the Tribunal, my case was judged on the evidence – not on how I look or anything like that. Without the help from the WESTS, I don't think I would have got justice at the Tribunal. But thanks to the Tenant Advocates I got a fair outcome."





Western Sydney
COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

WSCLC's purpose is to deliver legal services and support to disadvantaged people in the community who may otherwise not have equitable access to the legal system.

We offer our thanks to everyone who has contributed to this purpose and look forward to continuing our work in the future.