



ANNUAL REPORT



2019



SOCIAL JUSTICE & EQUALITY FOR ALL

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Moonee Valley Legal Service acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which our service stands. We recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past, present and emerging.

Moonee Valley Legal Service
provides free legal advice,
information and referrals to
anyone who lives, works or studies
within the City of Moonee Valley.



Main Office

13A Wingate Ave
Ascot Vale
VIC 3032

Outreach locations



**Avondale Heights
Library**

69-79 Military Rd,
Avondale Heights
VIC 3034



**Broadmeadows
Family Relationship
Center**

L1 1/1100 Pascoe Vale Rd
Broadmeadows VIC 3047



**Flemington
Community Centre**

25 Mt Alexander Rd,
Flemington VIC 3031



Niddrie Library

483 Keilor Rd,
Niddrie VIC 3042



CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT



HELENE MCNAMARA
CHAIRPERSON

"There
is an extremely positive
relationship between
Wingate Avenue
Community Centre
and the legal service...to
work in partnership and
share resources."

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK, 2018

The Moonee Valley Legal Service has enjoyed a successful year, maintaining its focus on achieving positive outcomes for those most in need across our diverse community, working in partnership with local services to strengthen the difference we make for clients and educating the community to improve understanding of the law.

In line with our strategic plan, key initiatives of the Board include:

- a renewed focus upon the needs of people with disabilities to ensure they access our service and the legal supports they need.
- reviewing the opportunities to grow our valued relationship with Wingate Avenue Community Centre in the context of the re-development of the housing estate.
- exploring new opportunities to grow and leverage existing innovations, including our successful FineFixer web-tool.

This year we were delighted to welcome new Board members, John Foley, Kirsty McIntyre and Tim Jeffrie, who bring valued skills and a keen willingness to support the activities required of a volunteer Board.

Prasanth Seetharaman and Karen Jordan stepped down and we thank them both for their valuable input and commitment over the past 2 years.

Our longer-term Board members including Ben Wyatt (Deputy Chair), Alexandra Lawrence, Anna Martin and Emmanuel Kefalas (Secretary) have continued to sustain and improve the service and provided support and mentoring to newer Board members with a generosity of spirit, whilst always striving to excellence in governance standards.

Jacki Holland, Manager, our new Principal Solicitor, Joanne have provided excellent leadership and stability for our talented team staff. One of the many great achievements has been collaborating with Council to

establish the Moonee Valley Family Violence Network of local services, a key adjunct to our Safe from Harm (Family Violence) project.

We affirm and acknowledge the support of Wingate Avenue Community Centre and the Moonee Valley City Council in a great variety of projects and initiatives. We also thank Gadens Lawyers for their exemplary pro bono assistance with our Tenancy Clinic and various new projects.

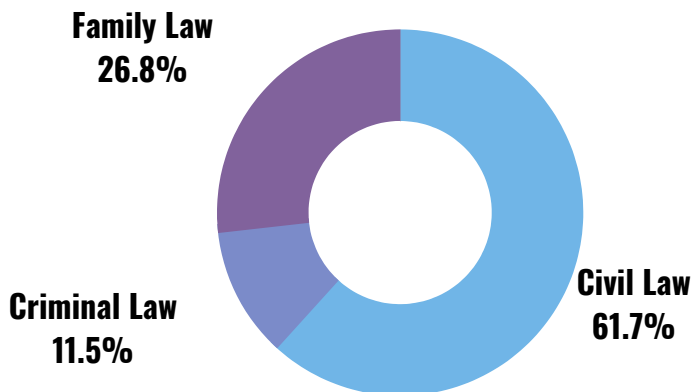
Thanks to local Members of Parliament, Danny Pearson the Hon. Ben Carroll and the Hon. Bill Shorten for their continuing support.

In summary, the Moonee Valley Legal Service is progressing and developing in an environment full of challenges in the areas of funding, service demand from across the municipality, known unmet need and emerging needs of our local community.

The Board and staff will continue to refine and extend our services to the most disadvantaged in our Moonee Valley municipality.

OUR SERVICES

LEGAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED (TOTAL SERVICES) FY 2018-2019



TOP LEGAL PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY OUR CLIENTS:



FAMILY VIOLENCE

185 MATTERS
133 ADVICES, 52 CASES



PARENTING ARRANGEMENTS

181 MATTERS
151 ADVICES, 30 CASES



HOUSING

117 MATTERS
63 ADVICES, 54 CASES



SEPARATION & DIVORCE

113 MATTERS
96 ADVICES, 17 CASES



CREDIT & DEBT

97 MATTERS
74 ADVICES, 23 CASES

CLIENTS EXPERIENCING; OR AT RISK OF FAMILY VIOLENCE ACCOUNTED FOR:



OUR CLIENTS

958

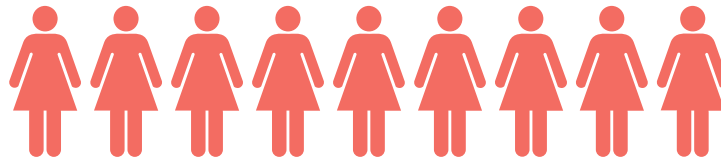
TOTAL CLIENTS



49%



50%



1%



595

NEW CLIENTS

87%

CLIENTS EXPERIENCING
FINANCIAL HARDSHIP
OR DISADVANTAGE

15%

CLIENTS
IDENTIFIED AS
HAVING A
DISABILITY
(INCLUDING MENTAL
ILL HEALTH)

5%

EXPERIENCING
OR AT RISK OF
HOMELESSNESS

38%

CLIENTS MAIN
LANGUAGE AT
HOME IS NOT
ENGLISH

59%

CLIENTS BORN
OVERSEAS

CASE STUDY

TENANCY

ASSISTING AND EMPOWERING



Twenty-three year old Gretel* attended MVLS in distress, having received notice advising a VCAT hearing was scheduled in three days. The community housing landlord was seeking to evict the family (Gretel, her mother and two young adult siblings) from the home.

Gretel's family had accumulated a \$20,000 rent arrears debt. Gretel was not registered as a tenant of the property. The tenancy was in her mother's name, but her mother had travelled overseas to spend time with her very sick, elderly parent, and to assist her brother who had been in a car accident. Whilst overseas Gretel's mother's own health had deteriorated preventing her from returning to Australia for the time being. In her absence the mother's Centrelink payments had been suspended, causing direct debit of rental payments to cease. Gretel's mother was not easily contactable as she was in a remote area.

The landlord was refusing to discuss the tenancy with Gretel as a non-tenant. Gretel and her siblings had not initially realised the rent was not being paid and misunderstood their responsibilities. The Notice to Vacate was a catalyst for seeking assistance from our service. We provided Gretel with advice about tenants responsibilities and assisted her to apply to be joined to the VCAT proceedings as an interested party. An adjournment allowed time for a payment plan to be negotiated with the landlord and a rental rebate accurately assessed.

With our help, Gretel satisfied VCAT that she held significant ties to the residence, was capable of paying rent, being a good tenant and repaying the arrears. Gretel and her siblings were able to stay in the home, she became a co-tenant, and her mother had a home to return to.

MVLS has developed a "Going Overseas?" postcard (right) to remind tenants to tell their landlord, Centrelink, and utility providers that they will be away. The postcard encourages tenants to nominate a trusted friend or family member to act on their behalf in their absence to avoid returning to homelessness or debt. The postcards were produced in English, Arabic and Vietnamese.



*Name changed to protect our client's confidentiality

OUR BOARD & STAFF



MVLS Board (Emmanuel Kefalas & Kirsty McIntyre absent)

OUR BOARD

Helene McNamara - Chairperson
Ben Wyatt - Deputy Chairperson
Emmanuel Kefalas - Secretary
John Foley - Treasurer
Anna Martin - Board Member
Alexandra Lawrence - Board Member
Kirsty McIntyre - Board Member
Tim Jeffrie - Board Member

OUR STAFF

Jacki Holland - Manager
Joanne Carlton - Principal Lawyer
Anita Khodher - Lawyer
Brian Burton - Lawyer
Joseph Ishow - Lawyer
Jeremie Nguyen - Admin and Volunteer Coordinator
Olivia Blair - Lawyer
Gary Sullivan - Lawyer



MVLS Staff (Jan Thorpe & Jeremie Nguyen absent)

MANAGER'S REPORT



JACKI HOLLAND
MANAGER

We are pleased to celebrate the 2018-2019 year and share highlights of our achievements and performance. It is wonderful to work in an environment where all members of the team demonstrate daily their dedication to the work of the service and to achieving the best possible outcomes for our clients.

Staff strive to maximise professional development opportunities across the course of the year, drawing upon their learnings for positive benefit and impact in the community. We are ever grateful to our enthusiastic and skilled base of volunteers and students who warmly support our day and Monday night services. These individuals remain an invaluable attribute to the service and our clients.



L to R: Brian, Olivia, Jeremie, Joanne, Gary, Jacki

We extend much gratitude to pro bono partner Gadens whose support and assistance throughout the year on numerous activities has been outstanding - we look forward to continuing this partnership in the coming year. Our association with Deakin University and with Women's Health West have continued. We have been fortunate to also foster new relationships, extending our outreach services to ARION Prevention and Recovery Centre, working with Anika Legal on an exciting new online platform for tenancy and rental advice, increasing

services at the Family Relationship Centre in Broadmeadows, whilst continuing to assist clients via outreach at Flemington Community Centre and Niddrie and Avondale Heights libraries. Melbourne Law School also worked with us to design a new tool to support efficiencies in intake for our Monday Night Service.

We have met with hundreds of community members at events throughout the year, including at the Westfield Community Safety Event in October and via our highly successful Lawyers in Libraries pop-ups during Law Week events in May.

We have enjoyed another strong year in our ongoing relationship with Wingate Avenue Community Centre (WACC), working together with a shared focus on community needs, education and development. We know and hear regularly from residents that they appreciate and benefit significantly from our local presence and co-location, mutual commitment to the community and cooperative approach to local issues.

Across the year MVLS assisted members of the Moonee Valley community in over 1400 legal matters on a wide range of issues including civil and criminal matters, consumer law, family law, family violence, fines and infringements and tenancy. We worked closely with WACC educators to tailor community legal education for our shared clients, particularly through our Tenancy and Safe from Harm projects. We delivered 48 community legal education sessions in total across the municipality reaching over 1300 individuals.

With our established programs, existing strong relationships in place and many new ideas bubbling up through the team we look forward to what 2019-2020 promises.



JOANNE CARLTON

PRINCIPAL LAWYER

MVLS has a wonderful team of lawyers with both general and particular skills, enabling us to assist a broad range of people. We offer generalist, family law, criminal and family violence specific services at our day and night services at Ascot Vale, at outreaches in local libraries, at community centres, and via clinics and community legal education sessions across the municipality. Whilst it is not possible to assist everyone, we do seek to give initial information and advice wherever possible, referring out to appropriate agencies or private lawyers as required.

Our client's legal issues are varied and at times complex. Often they are intertwined with other social and financial stresses. Areas of law for which we encounter high demand include family law and family violence, parenting issues, fines (some matters involving tens of thousands of dollars), neighbourhood disputes, motor vehicle accident claims, and debt.

Many of our clients are overwhelmed with some experiencing mental ill-health, addiction issues, and social isolation. The majority of those who seek our help have financial difficulties. Whilst technology has made information easily available through the internet, many of our clients do not have the skills to access self-help.

During the past financial year we have operated a number of projects including our State Government funded Tenancy Assistance Project (in partnership with Gadens) and Safe from Harm Project. We've partnered with Victoria Legal Aid and several other legal centres and health services in Streamlinefines. And we are working with Anika Legal on a Pick My Project funded activity to assist in the provision of tenancy advice via an online platform.

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT



Conducting Legal Health Checks for Law Week

FineFixer continues to be a practical and useful tool for those seeking online guidance in dealing with fines. Our collaboration with the Family Relationship Centre in respect to lawyer assisted mediation has grown and MVLS hopes to assist with legal education offerings in this space in the upcoming year.

The Courts are increasingly utilising digital systems and, responding to need in connection with divorce applications, we now offer periodic computer based classes to assist clients to apply for their own divorces via the online system.

MVLS's participation in Law Week 2019 was well received by local community members visiting us at pop-up clinics and stalls at Moonee Valley Libraries. Across the week we were also pleased to have Lynne Haultain, CEO of the Victorian Law Foundation, the Hon Ben Carroll MP and Danny Person MP spend time with us at these sessions.

It has been a wonderful year getting to better know the MVLS service, team, students, volunteers and community. I look forward to a rewarding 2019-2020.

CASE STUDY

DEBT

ASSISTING AND PREVENTING

Due to difficult financial circumstances, Henry had been late with a series of payments on his motor vehicle loan and then had missed a payment entirely. His finance company had responded by repossessing the vehicle and demanding he repay the full amount of \$20,000 in a lump sum. Failure to do so, they led him to understand, would result in the vehicle being sold to recover the monies owed.*

Requiring the vehicle for work and transport of his seven year old daughter to school, Henry had attempted to negotiate with the company. These negotiations had failed, and the finance company refused to accept Henry's offer. Henry then arranged an appointment to speak to a lawyer at our Niddrie library outreach service. We agreed to liaise with the finance company on Henry's behalf.

We were able to negotiate for Henry to pay a month in advance and have the financing contract reinstated. With payment of the first instalment, Henry the keys were made available for Henry and he could collect the vehicle.



We regularly work with other service providers to assist clients. As well as making referrals, we also receive referrals from financial counsellors and other community service providers.

**Name changed to protect our client's confidentiality*

CASE STUDY



FAMILY VIOLENCE AND VICTIMS OF CRIME

MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR SURVIVORS

Lisandra was referred to MVLS by her Family Violence Worker.***

Lisandra sought assistance with an intervention order to protect her and her daughter from allegations of violence by her husband, the child's father.

Lisandra spoke limited English, was without any other family in Australia and was reliant solely upon Centrelink benefits for her income, leaving her with some financial dependence upon her husband. Lisandra had suffered physical and psychological injuries as a consequence of the violence, significantly impacting her quality of life.

We arranged for Lisandra to engage with a psychologist and negotiated a deferral their fees until an application for assistance to the Victims of Crime and Advocacy Tribunal (VOCAT) could be processed. This enabled Lisandra to get the help she needed immediately.

Lisandra's application was ultimately successful - she received an award in her favour which has helped to facilitate her recovery.

Lisandra now intends to enrol in a course to improve her employability, become more financially independent and support her daughter who next year begins school.

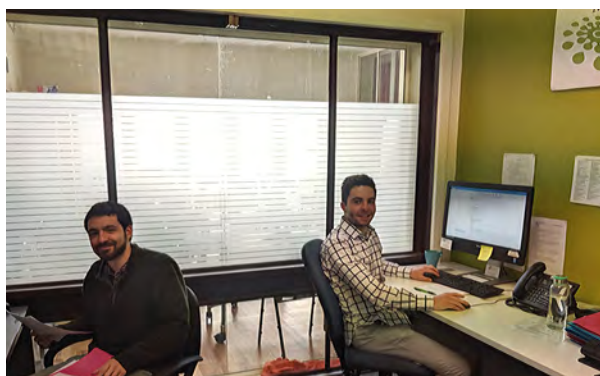
**Name changed to protect our client's confidentiality*

***MVLS hosts outreach services from Women's Health West and receives referrals from this and other local services.*

OUR VOLUNTEERS



JEREMIE NGUYEN
**OFFICE & VOLUNTEER
COORDINATOR**



Moonee Valley Legal Service relies heavily on the hard work and dedication of our volunteers and students on placement. I feel privileged and thankful for the amazing work that these wonderful people contribute to the service.

MVLS volunteers allow us to deliver priority casework to the most vulnerable people in our community.

Who are our volunteers?

Due to our capacity and limited office real estate, we prioritise volunteers who are either studying law (LLB, JD or GDLP), or hold a current practising certificate. Our volunteers come from many different cultural backgrounds and universities.

Through our volunteers, I have learned a lot about different cultures; and in turn I have shared a lot about my own cultural background in the hopes of creating an environment of learning and understanding. I am proud to be part of an organisation which values and respects diversity in the workplace and in working with our community.

Our volunteer lawyers possess strong experience in a wide range of topics. Although my work hours mean I often am not personally in attendance at our night service, on those occasions where I am, I have observed a great dynamic of mentoring and support (it kind of makes me want to hang around after work!).

There are quite a few volunteer lawyers at our night service who began volunteering as students, which tells me that we have gotten something right!

It is no understatement to say that without our volunteers, our service would not at all be what it is.

Our volunteers are excellent examples of commitment to community and their hard work is greatly appreciated, always.

Thank You!

OUR VOLUNTEERS HAVE THIS YEAR CONTRIBUTED

3 9 5 2

HOURS OF DAY SERVICE VOLUNTEERING

7 8 0

HOURS OF NIGHT SERVICE VOLUNTEERING



FY18-19 VOLUNTEERS

LAYWERS

Allan Zabrdac
Ally Vrdolijak
Anita Raj
Asmaa Hasanein
Catherine Farres
Daniel Bellissimo
Emmanuel Kelafas
Greg Doran
Ilsa Kuiper
Indya McMahon
Jacqui Paterson
Jade Saunders
Jon Hourigan
Leticia Rodriguez
Martin Stirling
Rachel Yard
Tugba Gocmen
Turgut Ozcitti
Zoe Chan

LEGAL ASSISTANTS

Alex Cox
Alex La Rocca
Alex Modelski
Ben Haber
Ben Hall
Benjamin Scaramozzino
Carla Giaquinta
Cez Ozturk
Daniel Cashmore
Daniel Conti
Delena Dang
Dominique Harriss
Evan Chaimalas
Furkan Onal
Kelly Bray
Matthew Ilgoutz
Olivia Brown
Pat Hossack
Rayan Hajj
Reid Haddaway
Shenika Fernando
Taryn Parkinson
Tracey Ha

thank
you



OUR PROJECTS

SAFE FROM HARM

The Safe from Harm Family Violence Project, which was supported by the State Government of Victoria, has continued to face significant demand and represent a central feature of our service. In partnership with Flemington Kensington Community Legal Centre, across the FY1819 period the project assisted in excess of 100 clients from Flemington, Kensington and the Moonee Valley area who were at risk of, or experiencing family violence. This year MVLS' Safe from Harm lawyer has provided advice to over 40 clients, opened 12 cases and resolved 23 matters. Legal education sessions and forums have reached over 100 community members. Since its inception in 2013 approximately 500 clients have received advice via this project, and educational sessions on the topics of family violence, adolescent family violence, and economic and elder abuse have been delivered to in excess of 650 individuals.

Clients of the Safe from Harm project experiencing relationship breakdown have also, where appropriate, been provided with assistance in negotiating positive outcomes in connection with parenting and other arrangements courtesy of our partnership with the Broadmeadows Family Relationship Centre.



TENANCY ADVOCACY PROJECT

The Tenancy practice continues to value its strong partnership with Gadens lawyers. Every Friday two lawyers visit the MVLS offices to provide advice and assistance to local public housing residents. The most common issues addressed are maintenance requests, arrears matters, and excessively high utility bills.

gadens

The partnership enables Gadens graduates to practise their skills receiving instructions and giving advice on a variety of matters, the nature of which often means that they are able to resolve the issues for the client within the hour long appointment.

In 2018-2019 demand for the Tenancy Advocacy Project was high, with 38 advices provided and 40 cases opened.

COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

Community Legal Education is an opportunity for MVLS to engage in earlier intervention and raise awareness of legal rights and responsibilities in the community. Over the past year MVLS has re-evaluated how we design and deliver educational sessions to the community. We have been extremely grateful to teaching staff at Wingate Avenue Community Centre (WACC) for giving us their valuable time and feedback on educational materials linked to our projects, particularly the Tenancy Advocacy Project.

MVLS has worked closely with WACC's Adult Migrant English Program teachers to develop better ways of presenting legal information to students by taking into account that they may not only be learning a new language, but also navigating the challenges of day living in a new country with unfamiliar laws.

Feedback from students and teachers has been extremely positive, and the lawyers have reported a greater sense of connection with their audiences which has been extremely encouraging. We look forward to continuing and developing this partnership next year.

MVLS Community Legal Education sessions typically have four main goals:

- 1** Highlight a legal issue pertinent to the audience
- 2** Identify simple ways to mitigate potential legal issues before they escalate
- 3** Inform the audience of where to get further legal assistance should they need it
- 4** Give community members opportunity to voice questions or concerns about other legal issues facing their communities in a relaxed environment.

STREAMLINE FINES

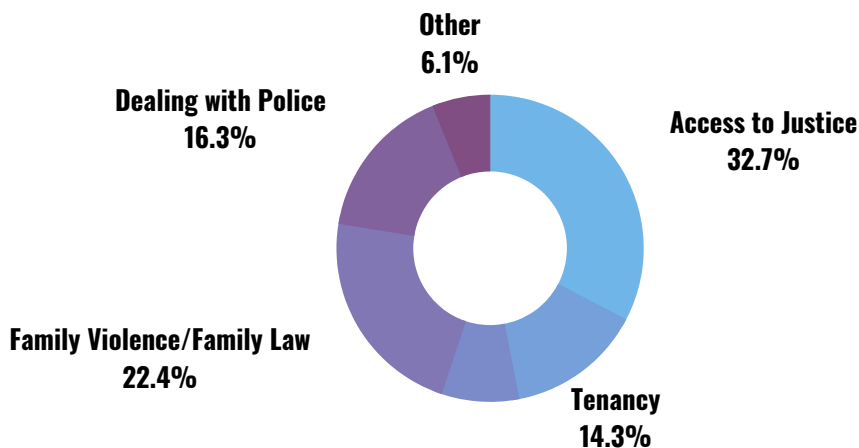
Throughout the year MVLS worked with Victoria Legal Aid, Westjustice and Peninsula Community Legal Centre on the Streamline fines pilot – a health justice partnership that saw us providing weekly outreach to clients at CoHealth's Arion PARC. Made possible through State Government of Victoria funding, the pilot involved the development of an online tool to assist legal practitioner to help clients with 'special circumstances' to apply for a review of their fines. An evaluation of the project is currently being compiled.

OUR COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION (CLE) 2018-2019



LEGAL TOPICS



Staff have really enjoyed working with the tenancy lawyer during the forums and the students responded very positively to the sessions.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW,
2018

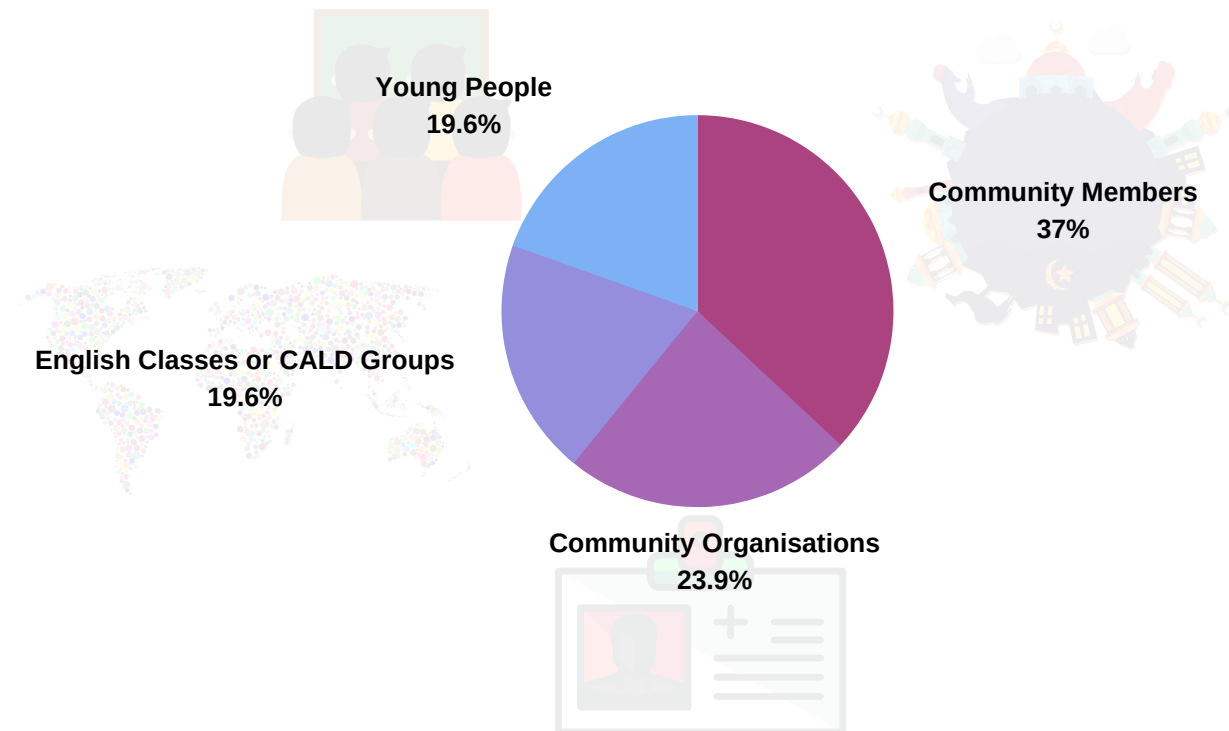
COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION LOCATIONS

"It's great to be able to work together and provide wrap around services"

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW,
2018



COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION AUDIENCES



1400+

PEOPLE ENGAGED
WITH VIA
COMMUNITY LEGAL
EDUCATION
ACTIVITIES

40+

ACTIVITIES DELIVERED
TO COMMUNITY GROUPS

20+

COMMUNITY GROUPS
COLLABORATED WITH IN
THE DELIVERY OF
COMMUNITY LEGAL
EDUCATION

TREASURER'S REPORT*



JOHN FOLEY
TREASURER

Moonee Valley Legal Service's financial position is sound, with our results for the 2018/2019 financial year showing a surplus of \$12,963 and closing retained earnings of \$162,875.

Whilst the core of our funding remains from the Commonwealth Government and Victorian State Government totalling \$419,596 for the year ending June 2019, our reliance on this stream of income reduced slightly over the course of the financial year (61% of total income this year, against 68% of total income last year).

The remainder of funding accounted for grants, donations and other income totalling \$264,017 (\$179,096 in 2017/18). Victorian Legal Aid has confirmed funding for 2019/20 and revenue is forecasted to be in line with 2018/19 funding.

MVLS is in a stable financial position, and is well placed to remain so into the future.



Finance Officer Jan Thorpe

"[MVLS] is responding strategically and creatively to the challenge of maintaining financial strength moving forward, in an environment of limited funding resources and structural changes to the legal marketplace."

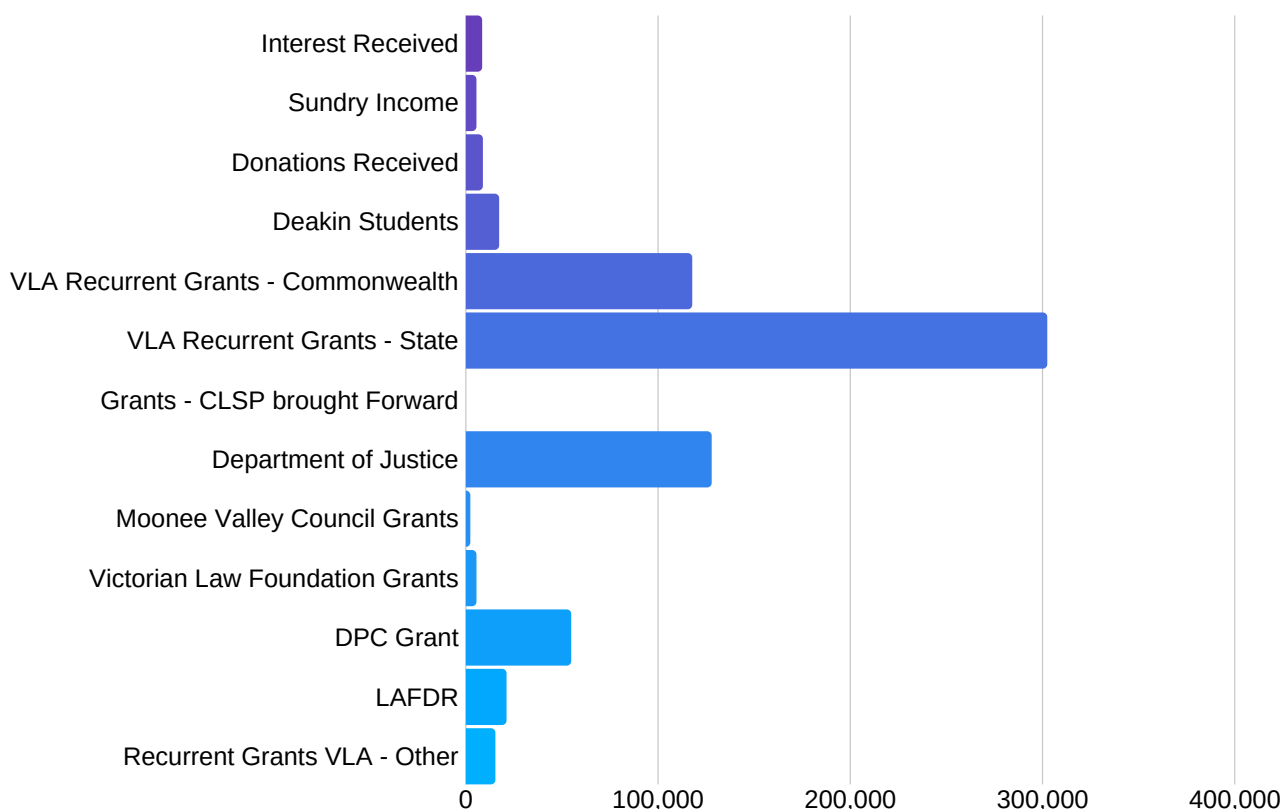
The service is responding strategically and creatively to the challenge of maintaining financial strength moving forward, in an environment of limited funding resources and structural changes to the legal marketplace.

Traditional funding from State and Commonwealth Government grants are becoming more limited and restrictive, with funding targeted at areas of particular legal need in the community. To respond to this trend, MVLS has embarked on new, innovative partnerships during the course of the year, and is actively exploring exciting new options to expand and refine our services to meet emerging community needs (for example, in response to the introduction of the National Insurance Disability Scheme) throughout the course of next year.

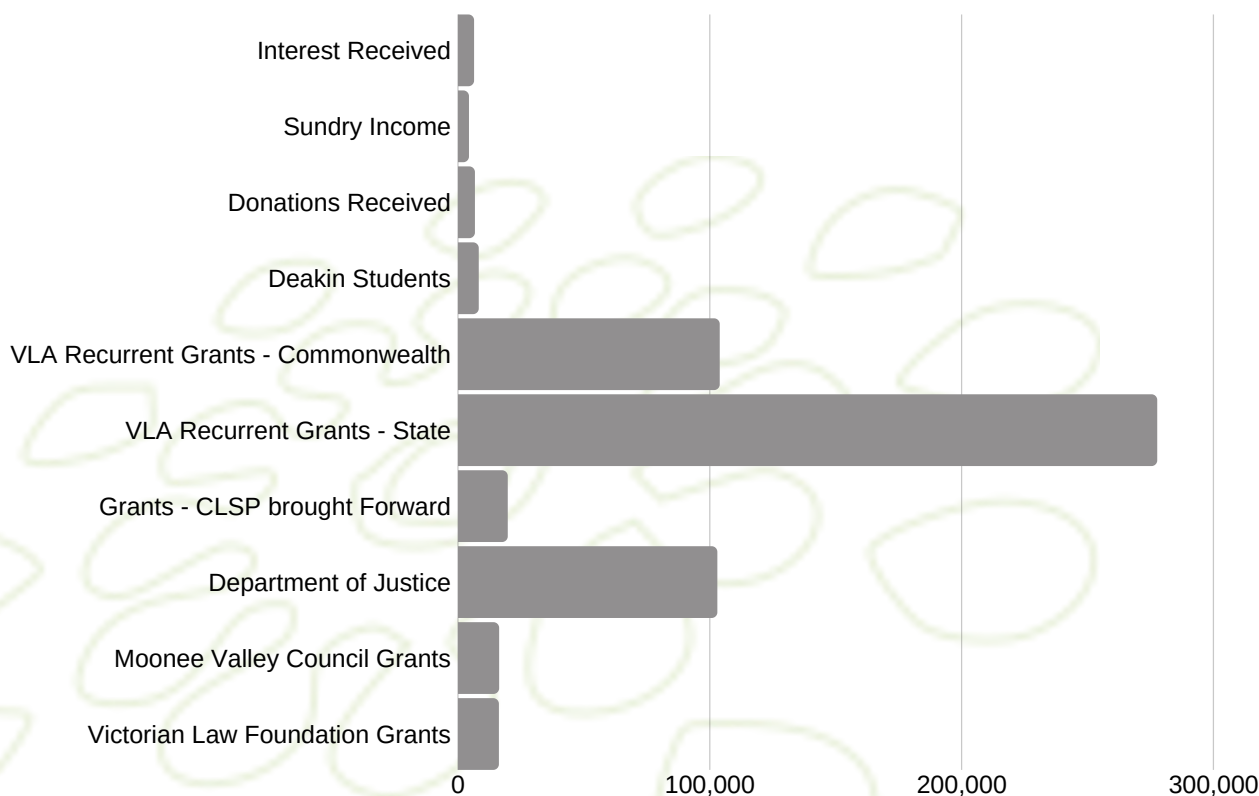
I look forward to another successful year ahead.

**Full financial statements may be found in the 2019 Moonee Valley Legal Service Final Audit*

FINANCIAL INCOME STATEMENT*



Total Income 2019: \$683,613



Total Income 2018: \$560,228

*Full financial statements may be found in the 2019 Moonee Valley Legal Service Final Audit

CASE STUDY

FAMILY VIOLENCE

HELPING GEMMA*

Police attended Gemma's home after a report of a family violence incident.*

We learned from Gemma's that she had been assaulted by her husband and was in shock when police arrived. Due to the incident, she had not been able to effectively speak with the police – her husband had taken control of the conversation and provided an explanation of what had happened. As a consequence police served Gemma with a Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO) and later sent her a summons to answer criminal assault charges.

The order named Gemma's husband and her four year old son as the Affected Family Members (AFM). The order excluded her from the family home. The order meant Gemma, as primary care giver to the child, could no longer provide for his day to day care.

MVLS helped Gemma to vary the FVIO to remove her son, enabling her to continue to have contact with him.

We requested that the court order the police to conduct a risk assessment noting that we did not believe Gemma's husband to be at risk of harm. Once the risk assessment was conducted the police withdrew their criminal case against Gemma.



**Name changed to protect our client's confidentiality*

OUR FUNDERS AND PARTNERS





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Ascot Vale VIC 3032
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www.mvls.org.au
03 9376 7929