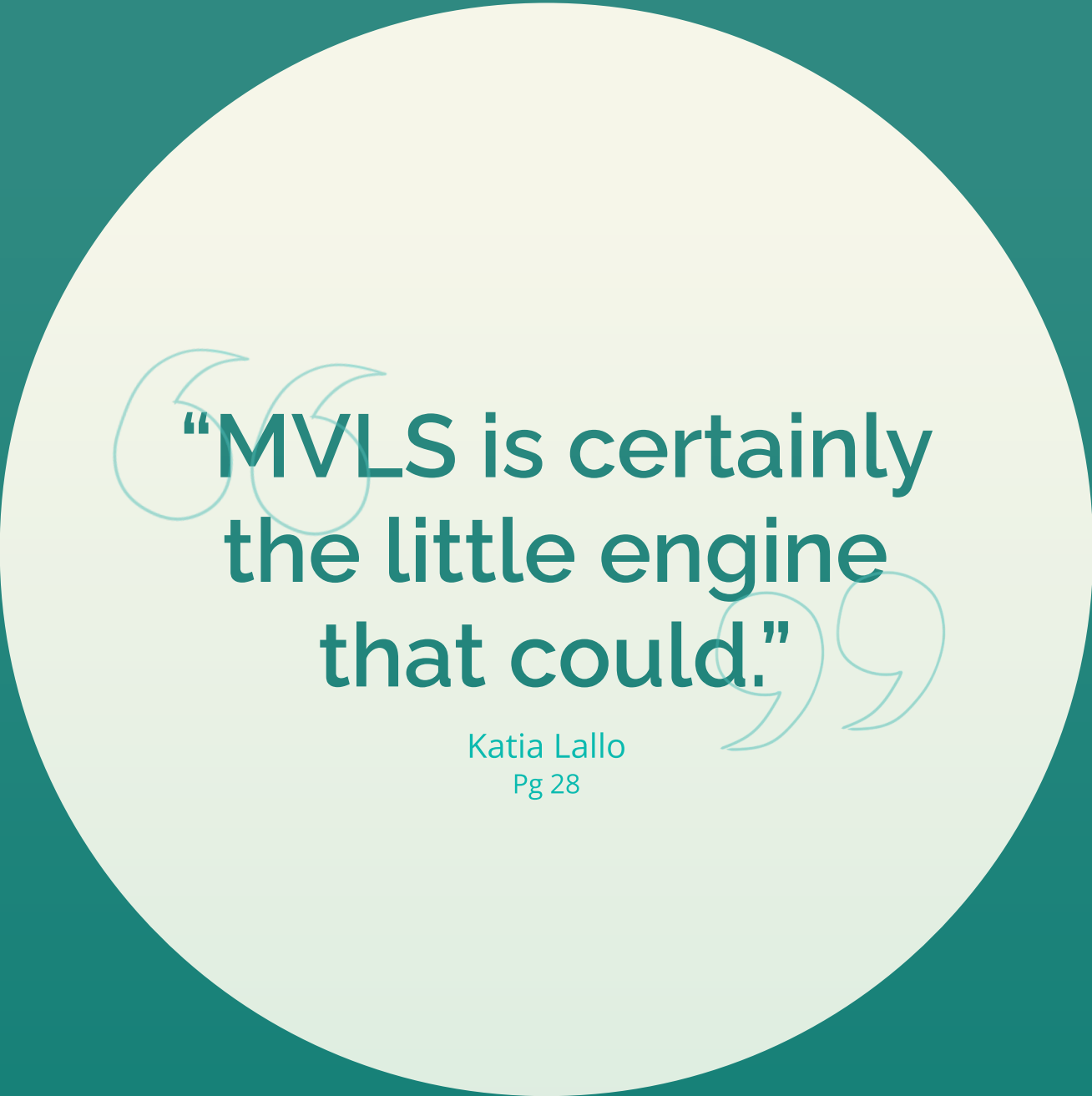


2024

# ANNUAL REPORT

Moonee Valley Legal Service



**“MVLS is certainly  
the little engine  
that could.”**

Katia Lallo  
Pg 28



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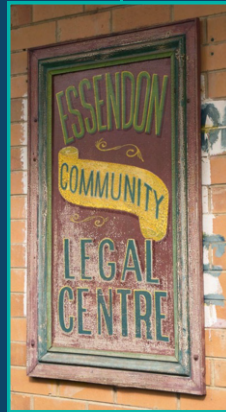


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# ABOUT US

## 1984

In early 1984, a working group of local residents and Essendon City Council workers established the Essendon Community Legal Centre.



## 1985

By July 1985, they elected a management committee, and the service officially opened its doors, offering free legal advice and referral services to the Essendon community.

## 1989

Simultaneously, the committee began efforts to secure funding, submitting its first proposal to the Legal Aid Commission of Victoria (LACV) in 1985.

After years of persistent letters, postcard campaigns, submissions, and advocacy, they successfully obtained funding in 1989.

## 2009

In 2009, the service wanted to improve its representation of the catchment and the broader community. It expanded and became known as Moonee Valley Legal Service.

## 2024

As Moonee Valley Legal Service approaches our 40th anniversary of supporting the Moonee Valley community, we reflect on the previous financial year and the positive impact the service has achieved.

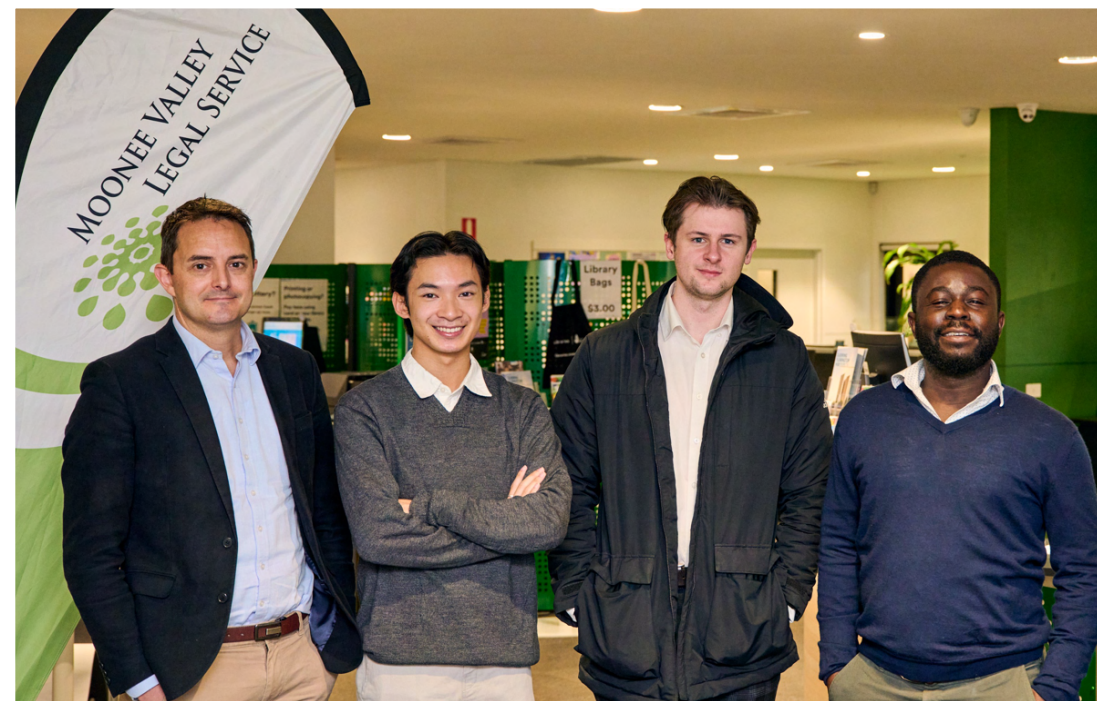




Moonee Valley Legal Service acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we serve. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present.



Our organisation is dedicated to offering safe and inclusive services for individuals of all backgrounds, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, and cultures.





# LOCATION & HOURS



13a Wingate Avenue  
Ascot Vale VIC, 3032

P 03 9376 7929

[admin@mvls.org.au](mailto:admin@mvls.org.au)

F 03 9376 9748

[www.mvls.org.au](http://www.mvls.org.au)



ASCOT VALE

## DAY SERVICE

By appointment  
Monday - Friday  
9.00am - 5.00pm



## NIGHT SERVICE

Drop-in clinic  
Mondays  
6.30pm - 8.30pm

MVLS provides services to the entire City of Moonee Valley:



MVLS provides place-based outreach legal advice services to these key areas of Moonee Valley that experience high disadvantage:

- Flemington Housing Outreach
- Flemington Library Outreach
- Avondale Heights Library -Generalist
- Niddrie Library Service -Generalist
- Cohealth Older persons high rise Kensington & Flemington
- Travancore Prevention and Recovery

# CHAIRPERSON REPORT

I wrote in last year's report that 2023 had been a year of change. Thankfully, this year was consolidation and consistency. This is my second year as Chair of the Board of Moonee Valley Legal Service (MVLS), and while it has been a steep learning curve, I am more confident than ever in our ability to continue to deliver legal services to the community.

## STAFF

We have had the great fortune to have appointed Brett Morton as our new Manager. Brett started at MVLS in August 2023 and he has brought a calm and level-headed approach to the role. He has implemented a number of internal processes and programs that have meant staff have been able to focus on performing their roles to the best of their ability.

We have had the great pleasure of Erin Buckley acting as interim Principal Lawyer this year, backfilling the role while Joanne Carlton has been on long service leave. Erin has been an incredible addition to the Service and managed to oversee an expansion of our night service, along with supervising an exuberant cohort of junior lawyers. She has managed the role with both care and incredible enthusiasm. I want to thank her for the work.

Our new funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board for the Bi-Cultural Program has meant we have been able to hire a Community Lead, Ilo Diaz who is overseeing the program. This funding has

meant we have been able to reinvigorate our previous and highly successful legal concierge program.

## FUNDING

As I noted last year, the Service continues to face funding challenges. The joint Commonwealth and state-funded Community Legal Services Program (CLSP) confirmed the allocation to MVLS in June 2023 up until June 2025. That funding is still too low, not properly accounting for both wage indexation and the substantial unmet needs of our community.

We continue to face funding uncertainty in the long term and continue to look for more sustainable funding sources, including fundraising. We hope to update the community soon with some new and exciting opportunities.

## BOARD CHANGES

The Board has experienced a year of stability. We welcomed a new Board member, Fiona Rothville. Fiona's previous legal roles and her current role in strategic advisory means she brings valuable skills



and insight. This year, we farewelled Karen Fogarty as a Board Member. I want to thank her for her commitment to the Board.

The Board continues to look for new members. We acknowledge the importance of having a Board with a variety of different skill sets, as well as geographical and social diversity.

## STAFF AND SERVICES

The team continues to provide various legal and community services to the community, both from our headquarters at Wingate Avenue and through various outreach services throughout the municipality. This includes community legal education presentations at local libraries, schools and community groups.

I want to thank our lawyers, including our volunteers, who work tirelessly - Yuka Nishikawi, Luci Williams, Alanna Doolan and the team of law students and paralegals. The night service is still a primary part of our work, ensuring we stay connected to the community and the local solicitors who volunteer their time. In Victoria, the night service is a relatively unique offering in the community legal service space. Recently, we added a second night - that shows both the services' success and the demand in the community.

The Board knows that we must provide a service to the community that addresses our clients' immediate legal issues but also seeks to deal with the underlying causes (the ones that often lead our clients into contact with the justice system). As such, the service works closely with various health and justice

partners to provide wrap-around services. This work was overseen for much of the year by Erin Lockington, who has done an amazing job working with our partners and overseeing our social work students.

Our Finance Officer, Jan Thorpe, has provided continuing support and stability this year. The Board is grateful for her dedicated assistance in helping the Board understand the finances and the challenges we face in ensuring sustainable funding. One more vote of thanks to Daniel Cashmore, our Volunteer and Office Coordinator, who staff find very efficient and capable and a friendly face for clients at the front desk. He also supports the volunteers, usually law students.

## PARTNERSHIPS

Wingate Avenue Community Centre staff have assisted MVLS with making space available when needed, and this partnership continues to be highly valued. We thank the staff and management of Wingate for their ongoing support and collaboration.

Once again, thank you to the Councillors and staff at the Moonee Valley City Council for their support and local connections with our service.

Gadens Law Firm has provided ongoing pro-bono assistance to MVLS, supplying offices for our staff professional development days and offering the Board advice on policies and procedures. We are also grateful for the pro bono assistance of law firm Russell Kennedy this year.



As always, we are grateful to our local Members of Parliament for their long-term commitment, support and encouragement, including:

- The Hon. Danny Pearson, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and Minister for Worksafe and TAC.
- The Hon. Ben Carroll, Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Minister for Medical Research.
- The Hon. Bill Shorten, Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Minister for Government Services.

**In summary, despite the challenges and workload ahead, the service continues to thrive. The staff and Board continue to deliver a range of essential supports and services to those most in need. This work relies on sustaining a sound governance structure to ensure compliance, performance and high standards.**



**Tim Jeffrie**  
Chairperson



# FUNDER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

MVLS would not be able to achieve its outcomes without the generous funding and support from the following key partners:



## Australian Government

for funding provided through the National Legal Assistance Partnership.



## City of Moonee Valley

for their continued support of MVLS's Integrated Services approach.



for generalist legal assistance funding and grants supporting residents in Public Housing with their legal issues.

## VictoriaLaw Foundation

for providing a grant to develop the Sex and the Law training module in partnership with GenWest.

## gadens

for their ongoing pro bono support and the donation of laptops to the service.

## Victorian Legal Services BOARD + COMMISSIONER

for supporting our Bicultural Worker program.



## Maddocks

for assistance developing and implementing the Victorian Community Legal Centres Multi-Enterprise Agreement 2024 – 2027.

“Our success is a reflection of the collaborative effort of these valued partners.”



# MANAGER REPORT

The past year at Moonee Valley Legal Service (MVLS) has been a time of growth, challenge, and success. As Manager, I have had the privilege of leading an enthusiastic team through exciting yet challenging times. Despite broader economic pressures and funding constraints at the state and federal levels, we have responded with resilience, flexibility, and an unwavering commitment to our clients.

In the 2023-24 financial year, MVLS has proudly continued to provide vital services to those who need them most, including older adults, women, individuals with disabilities or mental illnesses, and clients from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Our outreach to

public housing residents has remained a cornerstone of our work, ensuring vulnerable community members receive the support they deserve.

MVLS has reviewed and are implementing our new Strategic Plan, a bold and visionary framework that will guide Moonee Valley Legal Service until 2028. This plan reflects our commitment to fostering a more inclusive, accessible, and just community. Through collaborative partnerships, innovative service delivery, and a focus on advocacy and empowerment, we aim to expand our impact and respond to the evolving needs of the community.



## OUR VISION

**Equity and justice for all.**



## OUR PURPOSE

**Provide free, accessible, holistic wrap-around legal and support services in our community to enhance wellbeing, fairness, equity and justice.**

**Empower our clients to improve their legal outcomes.**

**Drive positive change to address injustice and inequality in systems and laws.**

**Connect people to and promote understanding of the law.**

### COMMUNITY

Our community are at the core of what we do. We listen to the voice of our vibrant and diverse community. We promote empowerment and respect for all.



### COLLABORATION

We work in partnership with others to empower our community, so no one is left behind by walking alongside and building the voice of our community.

### INNOVATION

We are innovative and creative in all that we do, always striving to create more effective ways of delivering services and meeting the needs of our community.

## OUR VALUES

### BEST PRACTICE

Our practice strives to promote wellbeing, continual improvement, and seek the best possible outcomes for all.

MVLS would not be the service it is without the dedication of its staff. After two years of dedicated negotiation, this year saw the successful introduction of the Victorian Community Legal Centres Multi-Enterprise Agreement 2024-2027 (MEA), replacing the previous agreement (2006-2009). The updated MEA acknowledges and celebrates the exceptional contributions of MVLS staff and includes enhanced benefits, from additional leave entitlements to superannuation payments for employees on unpaid parental leave, provisions for cultural leave and gender-affirming care leave.

While we have faced challenges, including staff turnover and unexpected funding adjustments, MVLS has shown remarkable adaptability. Despite not

receiving the expected \$100,000 in funding, quick action and sound financial management reduced the anticipated deficit to \$120,017. Our team's proactive approach ensured that we maintained our high standard of service delivery while navigating these obstacles.

This year also saw significant staff turnover, including the departure of Anita Kodher, who concluded her remarkable six-year tenure with MVLS. During her time with us, Anita demonstrated unwavering compassion for our clients and outstanding leadership. Her dedication and contributions have been instrumental to our success, and her work has made a lasting, positive impact on the lives of many.

On behalf of the service, we extend a heartfelt thanks to Katia Lallo. Our outgoing Interim Manager and Community Partnerships Lead will be leaving an enduring impact on MVLS and the people we serve. Katia's contributions have been truly invaluable. From her unwavering dedication to her passion for the local community and remarkable leadership - Katia will be fondly remembered.

MVLS wishes to express deep appreciation to Sabrina Adem, our Community Development worker, for her incredible commitment and hard work in supporting MVLS. Both Katia and Sabrina have played pivotal roles in the success of our Legal Concierge program, and their efforts have made a lasting difference.

MVLS would like to acknowledge the exceptional leadership of Erin Buckley during her tenure as Acting Principal Lawyer. Erin's passion for our clients, her tenacity, and her steadfast dedication to the values of MVLS have kept our community at the heart of our work. Under her guidance, we implemented processes promoting best practices for both, our community and staff. Erin's leadership strengthened key partnerships, fostered continued

Innovation and was a driving force in the advancement of Fine Fixer 2.0.

Looking forward at 2024 - 2025, we are excited to expand our legally assisted family dispute resolution (LAFDR) services. Our new partnership with Relationship Australia Victoria's Sunshine Family Relationship Centre is designed to enhance the delivery of family law support and aims to optimise service provision in family law matters. The LAFDR service follows non-adversarial and interest-based negotiation principles to focus on the best interests of the children. Clients get referred to MVLS based on meeting the eligibility criteria, including, but not limited to, factors of family violence, significant power imbalances, cognitive impairment, mental illness, or other barriers that hinder access to family law processes.

Overall, despite a year of challenges, MVLS continues to thrive as a community cornerstone that provides essential and accessible legal services to those most in need. Looking ahead, we remain committed to evolving and growing, always striving to deliver the highest quality legal support to the Moonee Valley community.



**Brett Morton**  
Manager



# PRINCIPAL LAWYER REPORT

**I firmly believe that community law is the most exciting, dynamic and impactful form of legal practice. Ideologically, it is a powerful place to be an advocate. It's been an honour and privilege to serve as the acting principal this year for Moonee Valley Legal Service. I am genuinely thankful and express my gratitude for the incredible staff, volunteers, and community members who make this place so special.**

## STRONGER TOGETHER

Whenever we reflect on community law, it's important to reflect on its origin story and the radical, creative force of that story. Community law emerged from strong community members advocating for their rights. For a life where legal rights are not only 'formal' or 'rights on paper' but ones they can exercise.

It comes from a place where communities stood up to powerful interests and demanded more equity and justice. In doing so, they created rights that did not previously exist. It is an origin story of do-it-yourself ethics, partnerships, and solidarity. Idealistic students, generous volunteers and fiercely determined community members working together to create legal, social and political change.

It has been a wonderful year for MVLS. While it has been a year of plenty of challenges, it has also been full of enthusiasm, energy, new faces, new ideas, patience, kindness, care and thoughtfulness.

## STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

A community legal service is only as strong as its links with the community it serves and the communities it builds around itself. The local communities making up our catchment are the primary communities we serve at MVLS. We are extremely lucky to have a community with such a strong sense of ownership over the legal service and one that trusts and supports us.

We are also extremely fortunate to be situated in the heart of the Wingate Avenue Community Centre, making it so easy to build relationships with people coming to the centre for language classes, parent groups, food bank, or the childcare centre. The joy of children playing in reception while parents and carers access necessary legal advice - a rare phenomenon in the legal services sector.

We're lucky to have both - the relationship of trust in our community and the physical layout that makes this possible at MVLS.

## NIGHT SERVICE

Building structure into our night service and watching it flourish has been a joy this year. Free one-off advice from volunteer lawyers has been a staple of the community legal service sector since its inception. This year, we doubled the appointments available to community members and tripled the number of volunteers participating in our night service. Night service aims to build a community of practice around the community legal centre and provide a service to community members.

By mentoring younger lawyers and paralegals and building relationships with the centre, we create an expanding community and a future community of people with strong relationships with MVLS. These relationships of education, mentoring and collaboration create peer groups and networks for social justice lawyering both at MVLS and wherever these volunteers go in the future.

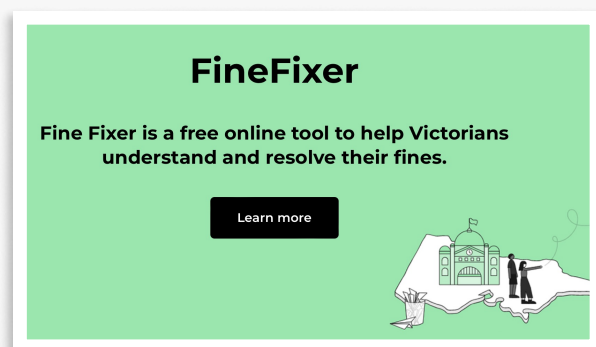


## LAW APPS AND FINE FIXER 2.0

We are very proud of creating Fine Fixer 2.0. Special thanks go to Yuka Nishikawa,

our tenancy lawyer who put so much time into the project, the Law Apps students, Gary Cazelet of the University of Melbourne, Josef, Jay, and The University of Melbourne Law School for their generous support, and innovative approach to legal education that enabled this project.

We are grateful for the forethought and ingenuity of previous staff at MVLS who came up with Fine Fixer's first iteration. Looking forward, we are excited about future iterations of the application and continuing the relationships with Law Apps, Josef and The University of Melbourne. Thanks also to ARC Justice in Shepparton for their generous support in trialling the app and providing feedback.



## WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICE MENTORING AND TRAINING

We are very grateful for the generous mentoring and training Women's Legal Service has given our service. For building up our confidence and skill sets in providing family law advice and their support in gaining VLA panel approval will be wonderful for our local community and help bridge an enormous gap in the legal services landscape.

## PRO BONO PARTNERS

Thanks to the generous support of Gadens Law Firm in their continued assistance to MVLS. We are grateful for the expertise and generosity with which you approach your engagements and requests from us. Thanks also to Justice Connect, Stary Norten Halphin, Doogue and George for your generous pro bono assistance for our clients this year.

## STAFF AND INTEGRATED SERVICES

Huge thanks to all of the wonderful staff at MVLS. The empathetic and careful triage that happens at reception, the thoughtful work of lawyers and volunteers, and the strength of our integrated social work team make this a very special place to work. A place specifically equipped to hold our clients through their legal and 'law-adjacent' needs.

The things lawyers can do are often only a fraction of the services our clients present with. Being able to respond to their needs effectively is something we can do only as a team. We're grateful to have

such a diverse and generous team of volunteers and staff members who work together to support our clients and create the change they need.

**Thinking about the future** - be it future staffing, projects, law reform or litigation - is an critical part of social change and justice work. The legal world we inhabit now was imagined by someone else, sometime in the past. The good parts and the parts that are dystopic were both imagined and then set in motion to be created. To build the legal world we want in the future, first, we need to imagine it. Thank you for the honour of imagining and doing with you this year MVLS.



**Erin Buckley**  
Acting Principal Lawyer





# OUR SERVICE

Moonee Valley Legal Service, located within the Wingate Avenue Community Centre in Ascot Vale, services the entire City of Moonee Valley community. Wingate, situated within the grounds of the Ascot Vale Public Housing Estate (the Ascot Vale Estate), has approximately 1,710 residents. This estate covers a large area bounded by Ascot Vale Road, Union Road, Epsom Road and Wingate Avenue.

The Moonee Valley Local Government Area (LGA) presents a complex picture, where areas of affluence coexist with concentrated pockets of people experiencing high disadvantage. While an examination of the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) reveals an overall rating of 1041 for the catchment area, importantly, within the municipality, eight of the twenty-four most socio-economically disadvantaged small areas within Victoria are located here.

Analysing individual suburbs, the most notable levels of disadvantage are found in Flemington (rating of 896), Ascot Vale

(1015), Avondale Heights (1008), and Airport West (1026). Zooming further into the statistical local areas, even more concentrated pockets of disadvantage emerge. Of particular note is the Ascot Vale Public Housing estate, registering as low as 267 to 335 on the SEIFA index. The Flemington Public Housing Estate shows areas with index ratings ranging from 384 to 438.

Moonee Valley houses around 2600 public housing dwellings, the third largest proportion in Victoria. These dwellings are primarily in significant estates in Ascot Vale and Flemington. Our service data at MVLS indicates that these diverse public housing clients face significant barriers when accessing legal assistance. Barriers include language barriers, lack of interpreters, cultural support, stigma, mistrust of government agencies, and isolation.





## Moonee Valley Legal Service offers a range of generalist legal support services.



### **FAMILY LAW**

Separation, divorce, parenting arrangements, mediation, and child protection.



### **VOCAT APPLICATIONS**

Assess eligibility and provide support for Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) applications for financial aid to cover costs like counselling, medical, and clothing.



### **FAMILY VIOLENCE**

Building on the Safe from Harm Project, we support those experiencing family violence with intervention orders, parenting arrangements, and referrals to relevant services.



### **FINES**

Manage outstanding fines (toll road, parking, and public transport) through access to payment arrangements, internal/enforcement reviews and special circumstances applications.



### **TENANCY**

Issues with repairs, evictions, rental arrears and Housing Victoria.

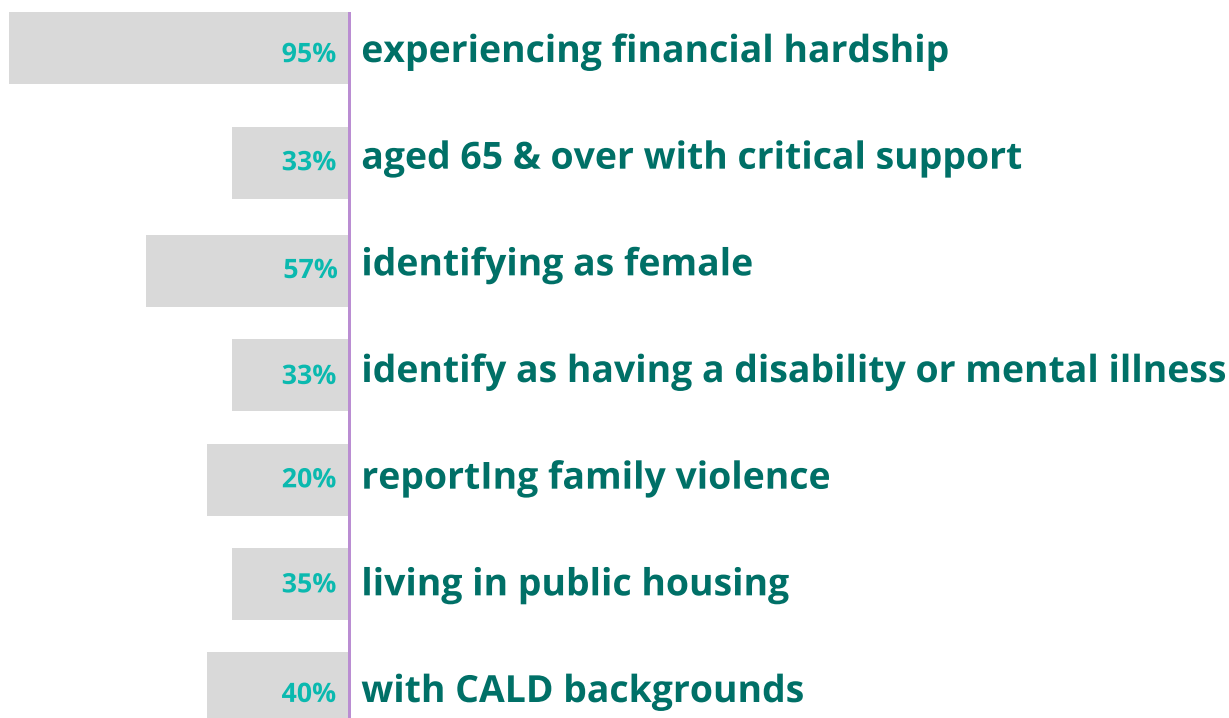


### **GENERALIST LEGAL ADVICE**

One-off legal advice to clients on a wide range of issues.

# OUR IMPACT

## We assisted clients...



1164

Legal advice sessions delivered



314

instances during  
Monday & Tuesday  
night services

# Client Cases



SEX &  
CONSENT



TENANCY



SCAMS

## 152

Community legal  
education sessions



WILLS



FAMILY LAW  
FAMILY VIOLENCE



FINES  
& COURT



UTILITIES

23-24 impact  
\*exceeding our  
targets and  
expectations.\*

# OUR TEAM

## BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

### Chairperson

Tim Jeffrie

### Treasurer

Roy Burrows

### Deputy Chair

Helene McNamara

### Secretary

Margaret Gannon

Marita Dunbar

Karen Fogarty

Stephen Fodrocy

Fiona Rothville

Jan Thorpe  
Finance

Jen Keene-McCann  
Grants

Sabrina Adem  
Community  
Engagement

Alanna Doolan  
Administration



## LEADERSHIP



Brett Morton  
Manager



Katia Lallo  
Interim Manager  
+ Community  
& Partnerships Lead



Erin Buckley  
Acting Principal  
Lawyer



Erin Lockington  
Integrated Services  
Lead



Daniel Cashmore  
Volunteer & Office  
Coordinator



39 years  
(and counting!)  
of community  
service

## LAWYERS

Luci Williams  
2023-2024

Esdra Sicari  
Oct 23-Mar24

Yuka  
Nishikawa  
2023-2024

Darren Boon  
Jul-Aug 23

Anita Khoder  
Jul-Sept 23

Anthony  
Graham  
Jul23-Mar24



# FAMILY LAW FAMILY VIOLENCE

**As I write this annual report, I am finishing up two years being the family violence and family law lawyer at MVLS. What a rewarding role it has been.**

This year, the service has continued to provide meaningful and empowering advice sessions to both victim-survivors of family violence and family law matters. There has been a big trend of Victims of Crime Assistance in matters this year. I am pleased to report many positive financial determinations made to clients I have assisted.

As a service, our relationships continue to strengthen. Better Places, Safe Steps, The Orange Door, Cohealth, Genwest and CASA House - I have delivered community legal education presentations to these partner organisations on several occasions, and we have continued to receive great feedback.

A highlight of my work has been completing regular Legally Assisted Dispute Resolution sessions (LAFDRS). These mediation sessions, run in partnership with Broadmeadows and Sunshine Family Relationship Centres, have resulted in many positive parenting plans and decreased the number of matters that would have otherwise ended up in Family Court.

An important feature, and update of the year, is the Victim of Crime Assistances Tribunal moving to a new model called the Financial Assistance Scheme. This change will come into effect on the 1st of December 2024 and is a crucial update in streamlining support and assistance for victim-survivors of family violence, sexual assault and other violent crimes.

**Luci Williams**  
Lawyer



# TENANCY

## HOUSING

With the ongoing housing shortage in Victoria and increasing caseload, our Integrated Service team, in conjunction with Wingate Avenue Community Centre's social work students, has been able to arrange a weekly Forms Clinic. The clinic, originating to assist residents in completing their housing transfer forms, has grown to assist residents with various other complex forms. It has been very successful and has provided lots of opportunities for MVLS to focus on clients the most in need.

Since starting at MVLS, various limitations have always meant that tenancy issues have inconsistent outcomes. These limitations include the current rental market, our caseload and capacity. Although we do not always achieve the most desired outcomes, we are often successful in achieving the best possible outcomes given the clients' situations.

However, this year has been extra difficult for us and extremely distressing to residents of the public housing estates in Flemington, who are fighting the upcoming demolitions. In addition, due to the market rate rising again, there have been significant increases to residents' rent. We

are currently trying to mitigate further damage resulting from this.

## FINES

Fines are a predominant issue that MVLS assists our community with each year - this wider and systemic issue is constantly being brought to attention by the infringement working group. With my casework being overwhelmed with fines matters, this is an ongoing issue we are trying to resolve.

As infringement and fine matters are brought to us by the most of our clients, Erin Buckley and the University of Melbourne gave me the amazing opportunity to revamp our current FineFixer. We worked closely with students who put so much effort and dedication into the app that I could not be happier with how it turned out. We are hoping that the revamped FineFixer can empower and encourage users to try resolving the issues themselves first.

## OUTREACHES

The library has been a wonderful outreach location for clients to access assistance for general legal and tenancy issues. It's a welcoming place, and we have received good feedback from clients who

attend this outreach location. The library management and staff have also been happy with our attendance - we have rebooked for 2025!

My time at the service has been very rewarding, and I cannot wait to achieve more in the upcoming year.

**Yuka Nishkawa**  
Lawyer

## CASE STUDY

A client, a resident in a public housing property leased by her mother, had been charged the full market rent due to her previous employment. However, due to ongoing family violence by her former partner and perpetrator, she was unable to access Centrelink right away. With no income, she was falling into arrears, which in turn had led to a possession order hearing against her mother.

When we spoke to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), they stated that the client could not apply for a rental rebate due to internal DFFH policies and that they must proceed with the Victorian Civil and Administrative

policies and that they must proceed with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) hearing. With the advocacy and negotiations by our office and Wombat Housing, DFFH engaged with their policies team to apply the rental rebate. This resulted in the VCAT application getting withdrawn and the client's rental arrears turning into credit. She was grateful and relieved not to owe any rent for a few weeks.

Not only has the outcome assisted the client, but the precedent makes it easier for us to negotiate with DFFH for similar issues moving forward.



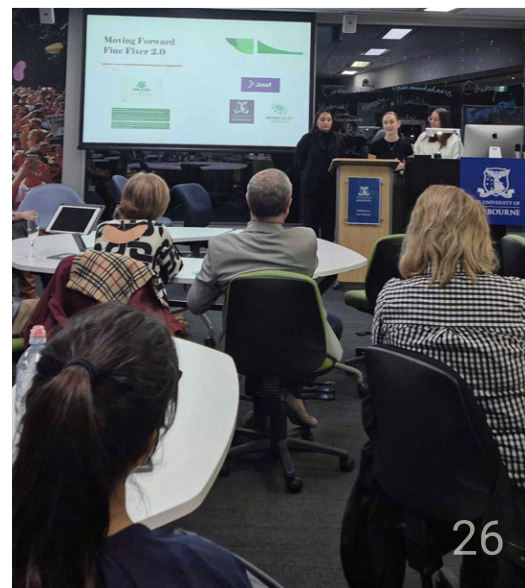
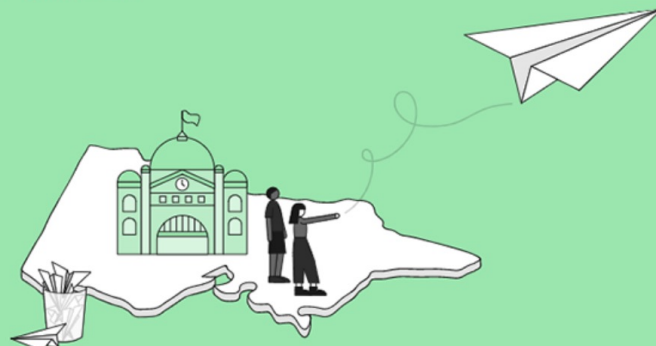


# FineFixer

**Fine Fixer is a free online tool to help Victorians understand and resolve their fines.**

Ready for  
the new  
financial  
year

[Learn more](#)





# ADMINISTRATION & VOLUNTEERS

The list of volunteers this year seems to be the largest yet! The expansion of our night service to two days a week (initiated and supported by our Principal, Erin Buckley) has led to our service having even more capacity for volunteer assistance.

As well as so many new volunteers, we are fortunate to have experienced lawyers and paralegals. Especially our night service lawyers, who might work in a firm during the day and then come to volunteer at MVLS during the night. Greg Doran and Ilsa Kuiper deserve a special long service mention (Ilsa has been volunteering since 2008!). Night service has also commenced having lawyers paired with volunteer law students – for students to assist the lawyers and the students to learn from our lawyers. Quite often, this is a path for our volunteers (and even employed lawyers) who commence as inexperienced students through to graduating as confident and capable lawyers.

We especially resource the day service through volunteer student interns. Our partnership with Deakin University has been ongoing for a decade now. As part of their internship, students spend a minimum of 15 days (minimum) to gain benefit from practical legal experience and greatly assist our service, clients and lawyers, and myself. Students help with events with appointments, intake, letters

and emails, data entry, outreaches, and legal research.

As well as interns, students from various universities and often from the Moonee Valley locality volunteer with us. We must especially thank James Vu. After over two years of dedicated weekly volunteering, he is off to a graduate role.

In the Office Coordination role, the primary change for this year has been the rollout of Actionstep - a new Case Management System. Actionstep is a system used throughout the legal world, especially private practice, and has replaced our outdated mix of systems. We continued to operate and see clients throughout the transition. Moving forward, we continue to improve this system and the service we provide to the community.

Many clients visit our office, even to make inquiries, and for those who we cannot assist, we always try to refer them to an appropriate service. In dealing with all the client inquiries received, we had the very able assistance of Alanna Doolan from the admin team. It has been a team effort, and our volunteers have been a fundamental part of the MVLS team.



**Daniel Cashmore**  
Volunteer & Office  
Coordinator

# COMMUNITY AND PARTNERSHIP LEAD

Writing this report on my last day as Community and Partnership Lead is bittersweet. I am so grateful and humbled to have worked with such a dynamic and bright team in a vibrant and resilient community.

**MVLS certainly is ‘the little engine that could’.**

Reflecting on my time here, I feel proud of what we have achieved together. As a service, we increased engagement with some of our most disadvantaged communities, led innovative new programs that increased community representation, created health-focused education and training, revamped our legal practice to align with best practice file management, built strong interdisciplinary practices between social workers, health justice partners and lawyers, and built partnerships that enabled MVLS to be at the table when important decisions about our clients get made.

We did all this with limited financial resources but endless human resourcefulness.

This past financial year, we have been busy! Together, our team delivered or collaborated on over 150 community legal education and engagement events

and projects.

We commenced our 18-month-long project, ‘Developing good practice for a responsive, bi-cultural community legal workforce,’ funded by the Victorian Legal Service Board. The project is an extension of our Legal Concierge model, hiring young people directly from public housing communities to deliver culturally appropriate information and support. To continue to lead and build this program, we welcome Ilo Diaz, who brings his incredible expertise from years of human rights observing, advocacy and community development.

Esset Kahsay (former Legal Concierge) and I travelled to Los Angeles, in the United States of America, to present our learning from the Bicultural worker program at the International Access to Justice Forum. While there, we visited the Youth Justice Coalition in South Compton and met amazing young people and community workers transforming justice in their community.

We collaborated with GenWest on a module for all Victorian sex educators and legal education lawyers exploring sex and the law through a pleasure lens. The project, to be launched in late 2024, was funded by the Victoria Law Foundation.

We partnered with service providers, community members and funders to build the first-ever collective impact agreement. The agreement aims to improve social and economic outcomes for Flemington public housing residents.

We mentored grassroots groups from Flemington and North Melbourne public housing estates to build small social justice initiatives that serve their communities.

Finally, my warm thank you to the Board, the funny, whacky and excellent staff

team, the hardworking volunteers that keep us on track, and the brilliant community who inspire us all every day to battle for what is fair and just.

Last but definitely not least, here's an extra special thanks to Sabrina Adem and Erin Lockington, who both hold so much of the community work we do with exceptional grace and thoughtfulness.



**Katia Lallo**  
Community &  
Partnerships Lead



# INTEGRATED SERVICES

MVLS form clinics, delivered in partnership with Wingate Avenue Community Centre, have assisted approximately 75 clients with non-legal case management support to complete forms. Additionally, we have provided one-on-one non-legal support in 49 instances.

MVLS works collaboratively with the Moonee Valley Family Violence Network, convening monthly meetings to ensure ongoing communication and coordination among member organisations.

In the 2023-2024 financial year, MVLS has co-located with several essential services to enhance support for the community. These services include:

- **Latitude**
- **Better Place Australia Elder Abuse Prevention**
- **Better Place Australia Financial Counselling**
- **Good Shepherd Financial Independence Hub**
- **Brotherhood of St Laurence NDIS**
- **Centrelink**



Brett Morton on behalf of  
Erin Lockington  
Integrated Services Lead  
July 23 - May 24

## PARTNERSHIPS CASE STUDY

MVLS, in partnership with Moonee Valley City Council (MVCC), Good Shepherd, Better Place Australia, and the County Womens Association, hosted the Live Well, Age Well celebration at coHealth Niddrie. This event centred around World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, brought together older community members to learn essential information about ageing well.

MVLS presented a community legal education session on wills and the legal aspects of growing older. MVCC and Good Shepherd shared information about their services and support available to older individuals. The event was organised primarily by one of our placement students, who did an exceptional job engaging services and the community for the event.

At the end of the session, community members had the chance to engage with the services and each other. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many community members discussing their needs and experiences with MVLS and other services and seizing the opportunity to make new friends and connections.

**Good Shepherd praised it as the best World Elder Abuse Awareness Day event they had attended** and all services left with enhanced connections to the community.







# OUR VOLUNTEERS

## LAWYERS

27

Rowan Beh  
Alexia Karvounis  
Jacqui Paterson  
Janna Baggio  
Alex La Roca  
Molly Lynch  
Turgut Ozcitti  
Rachel Yard  
Ilsa Kuiper  
Quiyi Zhang  
Darren Boon  
Michael Aoun  
Anne Salt  
Istiaz Hossain  
Gary Sullivan  
Olivia Blair  
Morgan Carabott  
Nikola Miskovic  
Michael Doelbeit  
Greg Doran  
Alexandra Walker  
Stephen Fodrocy  
Tom Carmody  
Richard Buhagiar  
Melissa Arsov  
Adam Jones  
Stephen O'Connell

## PARALEGALS

44

Yasmine Taha  
Corrina Cariaga  
James Vu  
An Jiang  
Heidi Benkhauser  
Esdra Sicari  
Matt Spargo  
Tran Nguyen  
Molly Quinlan  
Elly Jorgensen  
Jason Krowitz  
Chelsea Todd  
Andrew Huynh  
Don Pham  
Sara Todorovic  
Rebecca Bragaglia  
Giulia Cafari  
Giulia Pieri  
Bianca Geraci  
Marli Klaumanns Moller  
Kyle Dowsett  
Alanna Doolan

Ronan Lopez-Kos  
Razan Balla  
Natasha Ceranic  
Jaynaya Dwyer  
Khoa Tran  
Sophie Ryall  
Rebecca Kennedy  
Dijana Veljanovska  
Edie McAsey  
Yuri Kozaki  
Chloe Davis  
Jarred Armitage  
Amelia Liu  
Bronte Smith  
Zoe Millett  
Heaven Mulugeta  
Mahi Konduru  
Fynn Groves  
Janelle Allan  
Jay Atkins  
Danielle Di Stefano  
Isabella Bettoso



# VOLUNTEER PARALEGAL REFLECTION

I'm James. I have been volunteering as a paralegal with MVLS for two years now. My experience volunteering here has been incredibly invaluable and positive. During my time here, I have had the opportunity to learn about many different areas of law, such as fines and tenancy with Yuka, family violence and family law with Luci, criminal law and employment law.

I have been able to interact with clients and support them with non-legal matters, such as assisting with payment arrangements. This experience has allowed me to build my skills in interacting with clients and will have a profound value when I pursue my career in the legal profession.

MVLS has provided me with great opportunities to engage with the most vulnerable people in the Moonee Valley community, regardless of socioeconomic status, religion, cultural or linguistic background. It has allowed me to enhance my interpersonal skills and interacting with everyone in a professional and empathetic manner. As an example, when I encounter a client or community member who is neurodivergent, I make sure the person is feeling comfortable in their environment and that the information

getting relayed to them is understood. This more positive and adaptive approach to facilitating has ensured more open and comfortable environments to discuss legal matters, enabling us to give the best possible assistance.

I have also had the wonderful opportunity to work closely with the Vietnamese community of Moonee Valley, engaging with clients and community members to promote our services and assist those who require legal advice. The smiles and compliments of community members, who appreciate all the amazing work we do here at MVLS, has been a hugely rewarding part of my experience here.

Overall, my time volunteering at MVLS has been insightful and terrific. The work environment here is vibrant and positive. Everyone is nothing but accommodating and kind. Working in the office is lots of fun. The tremendous work of all our staff and volunteers is always acknowledged and celebrated, which is why I love volunteering at MVLS.

James Vu

# VOLUNTEER LAWYER REFLECTION

The end of the financial year marks three years since I started volunteering at Moonee Valley Legal Service and three months since I commenced volunteering as a lawyer here. I have enjoyed every moment at the service, being grateful for the invaluable learning opportunities that have come my way. And particularly over the past four months, where I have been exposed to and provided advice on a wide range of civil matters, including family law, family violence, and criminal law.

MVLS has been supporting me in developing my skills in an area of interest, family law and family violence. I have had the opportunity to shadow Luci Williams,

our family law/ family violence lawyer, in client interviews - a great learning experience whereby I have developed the confidence and knowledge necessary to deal with vulnerable clients.

My enrolment into the Women's Legal Service Family Law capacity building program has been an excellent resource and opportunity for further insight into the family law sector. I look forward to providing our clients with more valuable and varied legal advice and continuing this incredibly rewarding work.

Alanna Doolan





# TREASURER REPORT

At the end of the year, we are still in a positive financial position despite not receiving the expected funding of \$100,000. This result is thanks to the leadership and careful financial management of our current Manager, Brett Morton, Interim Manager, Katia Lallo, and the thoroughness and dedication of our Finance Officer, Jan Thorpe.

The year ended with a \$120,017,00 deficit due to the above funding not being received.

At the end of the Financial Year, we had a remaining term deposit of \$80,000, plus a notional amount of \$40,000 that we had transferred to our operating account to allow for cash flow contingencies. Given this, we are able to meet our ongoing financial responsibilities and have the ability to support our current programs and future initiatives.

Finally, we continue to be grateful for the support we receive from our core funding sources, administered by the Community Legal Services Program (CLSP) on behalf of the Commonwealth and State Governments, plus the City of Moonee Valley, the Federal Office of Bill Shorten MP, the State Office of Danny Pearson MLA, the State Office of Ben Carroll, Deputy Premier, and Victoria Legal Aid (VLA).

Roy Burrows  
**TREASURER**

# FINANCE REPORTS

## Moonee Valley Legal Service Inc Statement of changes in equity For the year ended 30 June 2024

	RETAINED PROFITS \$	TOTAL EQUITY \$
Balance at 1 July 2022	247,052	247,052
Surplus after income tax expense for the year	6,895	6,895
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	6,895	6,895
<b>Balance at 30 June 2023</b>	<b>253,947</b>	<b>253,947</b>
	RETAINED PROFITS \$	TOTAL EQUITY \$
Balance at 1 July 2023	253,947	253,947
Deficit after income tax expense for the year	(120,017)	(120,017)
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	(120,017)	(120,017)
<b>Balance at 30 June 2024</b>	<b>133,930</b>	<b>133,930</b>

**Moonee Valley Legal Service Inc**  
**Statement of cash flows**  
**For the year ended 30 June 2024**

	<b>NOTE</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>
		<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>			
Receipts from customers		1,085,670	1274.583
Payments to suppliers		(1,246,628)	(1,385,914)
		(160,958)	(111,330)
Interest received		10,965	4,394
Net cash used in operating activities		(149,993)	(106,936)
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES</b>			
Payments for property, plant and equipment		-	(8,320)
Payments for term deposits		-	(5,440)
Proceeds from release of term deposits		144,898	-
Net cash from (used in) investing activities		144,898	(13,760)
Net cash from financing activities		-	-
Net decrease in cash and cash equivalents		(5,095)	(120,696)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the financial year		200,052	320,748
<b>Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the financial year</b>		<b>194,957.</b>	<b>200,052</b>

# OUR PARTNERS





# OUR PARTNERS



Our extended family of partners helps us champion the community, fight for fairness, uphold justice and empower a better future.



Moonee Valley Legal Service dedicates care and resources to providing critical legal assistance to those most in need.

To stand by our community and support their needs, safety and livelihood, we rely on the kindness and generosity of our partners, supporters and stakeholders - the wider MVLS family.

# THANK YOU

## JOIN OUR CAUSE

CONSIDER CONTRIBUTING A  
TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION...

Your support, no matter how small,  
contributes to big impact.

**DONATE HERE**  
[mvls.org.au/get-involved](https://mvls.org.au/get-involved)