





South West Sydney Legal Centre acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. Our head office is located on the unceded land of the Cabrogal Clan of the Darug nation. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and future and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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This is the annual report of South West Sydney Legal Centre. South West Sydney Legal Centre is a member of Community Legal Centres NSW and is accredited as a community legal centre by Community Legal Centres Australia. The organisation is a registered charity with DGR1 status and meets core governance standards provided by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.



Message from the President and CEO



Naushee Rahman
President

Yvette Vignando
CEO

The people our centre serves have been hit especially hard by the global pandemic.

Our legal service clients live in local government areas with the lowest median household incomes in Sydney and where there have been some of the highest rates of COVID-19 infection in the state. Clients of our domestic and family violence services have found themselves struggling to access essential supports while feeling trapped in homes with their abusers. And women who reported increased financial stress during the pandemic were almost twice as likely to experience family violence for the first time.¹

In response, our program teams and other professional staff have found ways to keep our services available, using creativity, technology and a compassionate determination to provide essential support. We were helped by our colleagues at the Department of Communities and Justice and at Legal Aid, who manage most of our programs' funding and have provided a steady flow of supportive information during the pandemic.

Our Centre exists to provide equitable and accessible legal services and to empower women and children to break the cycle of domestic and family violence (DFV) – a global pandemic was never going to be a roadblock for our dedicated staff, who are absolutely committed to making a difference in the community.

In 2020–21, the number of referrals of women experiencing DFV to our legal service grew by 20%. And compared to the previous year, our legal service experienced an **83% spike in the number of legal services completed for clients**. Our Sydney Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service that covers central Sydney, Inner West and the Eastern Suburbs had a 20% increase in client numbers compared to

the year before and our same service in South West Sydney saw a 28% increase in client numbers. During the year, our DFV casework services experienced a spike in referrals each time pandemic restrictions eased, suggesting that lockdowns limited women's capacity to seek help.

Demand for our legal and DFV services has increased every year. And, while governments have provided temporary increased funding during the pandemic, that additional funding is set to end. So, we are grateful to know that the generosity and vision of philanthropists, donors and foundations can still **help us work towards a future in which there is equality of access to justice, and women and children are free from DFV.**

Finding new ways to support our clients, we have established a financial counselling service for women impacted by domestic abuse thanks to a grant from the Financial Counselling Foundation. The new service has empowered women to reclaim some financial strength, with remarkable results. **In its first year of operation, our financial counselling service has saved clients a total of over \$69,000** through debt waivers and reductions in charges.

After **adopting our new strategic plan towards the end of 2020**, we are making good progress in the areas of our five key strategic pillars. We are progressing towards development of a theory of change for the organisation, we have created two new roles – Communications Manager and Fundraising Manager – articulated our organisational values and introduced a cloud-based HR system. With the support of the leadership team and the Board, there has also been a strong focus on strengthening our governance documentation and processes and further developing our finance systems.

On behalf of the leadership team and the Board, our warmest gratitude to all our dedicated staff for continuing our services, while managing their own challenges with the pandemic and lockdowns. **Our thanks to the donors, pro bono partners, funding bodies, peak bodies and the many partners** who work alongside the Centre and believe in our vision for an even better future – we are determined to keep working towards that vision with your collaboration and support.

Naushee Rahman
President

Yvette Vignando
CEO

¹ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2021). *The impact of financial stress, time at home and social isolation on the likelihood of women experiencing physical and sexual forms of domestic violence during COVID-19* [Fact sheet]. ANROWS.

About us

South West Sydney Legal Centre is a not-for-profit community legal centre dedicated to equitable access to justice and empowering women and children to break the cycle of family and domestic violence.

We provide free legal advice, advocacy and representation in court to people who may not be able to access it otherwise – from helping workers understand their rights, to helping parents navigate the family law system.

We have expertise in working with victim-survivors of domestic and family violence and have built the partnerships needed to offer wrap-around services that match their needs. **We empower our clients to break the cycle of violence, obtain legal protection from the courts and achieve their goals.**

When we first opened in 1986, our services reached throughout Liverpool, Fairfield and Bankstown. Since then, we have expanded to Central Sydney, the Inner West and the Eastern Suburbs to become **among the largest domestic and family violence frontline service providers in NSW.**

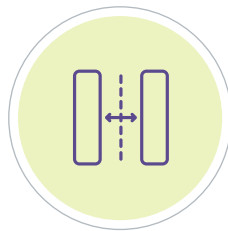


How we make a difference



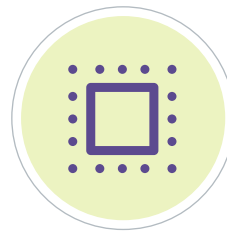
We help people navigate the system

We empower people to understand and claim their legal rights and access services they may not know are available to them. We empower our clients to engage with the courts, the police and services so they can keep themselves and their families safe, housed and meet their living costs.



We fill the gaps

The partnerships we have developed with local community organisations and government services enable us to understand where service gaps are and meet client needs in these areas. We collaborate with local partners to ensure that people seeking support have somewhere to go.



We provide holistic services

We understand that our clients, particularly those experiencing domestic abuse, may have very complex needs and require support in different areas. We take a whole-of-person approach and work across our different programs and with our partners to get our clients the right support.



We prioritise safety

Many organisations that support women experiencing domestic abuse and that support people who need legal services are struggling to meet demand. We focus on helping a person in crisis get the support they need, putting their safety first.

Our leadership team



Yvette Vignando
Chief Executive Officer



Peter Multari
Principal Solicitor



Effi Vassiliadis
Operations Manager



Farah Assafiri
Manager, South West Sydney
Women's Domestic Violence Court
Advocacy Service



Janice Waring
Manager, Sydney Women's
Domestic Violence Court Advocacy
Service



Elly Raffo
Manager, Domestic and Family
Violence Casework Services

Our services

Legal service

(Liverpool, Fairfield, Canterbury-Bankstown)

We offer free legal advice and court representation to people who may not be able to access Legal Aid or afford private representation. Through our legal education sessions, we empower community members and build the capabilities of local practitioners.

South West Sydney Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service

(Liverpool, Fairfield, Bankstown courts)

Sydney Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service

(Sydney, Newtown, Waverley courts)

We support women and children through the court system who have been affected by domestic and family violence. We advocate on their behalf, support them to obtain legal protection and connect them to services that match their needs. We convene Safety Action Meetings to increase the safety of women at serious risk of harm.

Bankstown Domestic Violence Service

Staying Home Leaving Violence (Liverpool and Fairfield)

Domestic and Family Violence Financial Counselling

We connect women and children affected by domestic abuse to services tailored to their needs. We prioritise safety planning, and coordinate referrals to match our clients' needs, such as housing, education, compensation, legal advice and financial counselling.

Our vision

A future in which there is equality of access to justice, and women and children are free from domestic and family violence.

Our purpose

Providing equitable and accessible legal services to our community and empowering women and children to break the cycle of domestic and family violence.

Our values



Respect

We value everyone's individual experiences and perspectives



Safety

We prioritise physical, psychological and cultural safety



Empowerment

We focus on giving people knowledge, clarity and choice

Our 2021–2024 strategic pillars



Increase our capacity to meet demand for legal services



Strengthen our domestic and family violence programs



Make SWSLC an even better place to work



Increase revenue and in-kind support to deliver services to more people



Define our clients' key needs and measure our impact.



A new service empowering women financially

Family and domestic violence can have significant financial impacts for women. Many women who return to an abusive relationship identify their financial situation as a major contributing factor.

Our new **financial counselling service**, funded by the Financial Counselling Foundation and launched in 2020, empowers women who have been in an abusive relationship to free themselves from unfair debt, learn skills to manage their finances and move towards economic security.

Financially empowering women helps them leave violence. Often their abuser has complete control over the family finances and they have no access to cash, bank accounts or credit cards. Many of our clients have at least one dependent child, are not employed outside the home and possess no property that is solely theirs. In some cases, they are facing debts after being forced to take out a bank loan to fund their partner's drug or gambling habits. We work with clients to overcome these barriers.

“ I have tears of joy right now and my mother is even crying. ”

Client assisted to have a \$14,000 debt waived.

This service gives women the skills for financial independence. Some of our clients may never have dealt with the household finances before or built the skills to manage money without support. They may have come from a household that had a high income and now are learning how to manage on a Centrelink income or single wage. Our Financial Counsellor works with clients to build these skills.

“ Thank you for speaking with me, it is like speaking with a friend who is here to support me. ”

Financial counselling client

How do we assist our clients?



Who are our clients?



84%

of the women accessing this service were **caring for children**.



Around one in five (22%)

were living on less than \$600 a week. **The poverty line in Australia sits at around \$720** for a single parent with two children.



Nearly half (43%)

speak a **language other than English**.

The Domestic and Family Violence Financial Counselling service is funded by the Financial Counselling Foundation

The impact in our first year

Already, our financial counselling service has had a big impact, **saving our clients a total of over \$69,230** through debt waivers and reduction in utilities charges.

In the first nine months of this service, our Financial Counsellor has acted as an advocate for clients to clear them of unfair debts, refer them to necessary support and help them identify simple changes in their finances to give them more economic security.

Our Financial Counsellor ensured that this service remained accessible throughout lockdowns – through phone calls to clients who can't access IT, after-hours support for clients with work commitments and translation services where needed.

“*THANK YOU. I can't believe it, I slept differently last night. It's still hitting me, the weight and relief, it's a new chance and I'm so grateful.*”

Financial counselling client



Thank you to our partners

In this first year of the program, we took a collaborative approach, using partnerships to expand and reach more women:

- We partnered with **KARI**, a local Aboriginal community support service, to provide group education and one-on-one financial counselling support to their clients.
- We trained **Centrelink** staff in Fairfield and Cabramatta, so they know how and when to refer women to us.



Case Study

Clearing Amy of a \$40,000 debt

Amy* came to us through one of our court advocacy programs for women experiencing domestic and family violence. She had a \$40,000 debt owing to the bank, was on Job Seeker payments and had no means to repay the debt.

She initially took out the loan to pay off a credit card and repair her car. Once the credit card had been paid off with funds from the bank, **Amy's partner forced her to use her card to withdraw cash to fund his gambling and drug habits.** Her partner also forced her to take drugs with him and Amy suffered from drug addiction and physical abuse during the relationship. Hospital records showed a pattern of this abuse.

Our Financial Counsellor worked with Amy to gather enough evidence from her transaction history, Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) and hospital records to petition the bank to waive the \$40,000 debt. Amy was extremely grateful for the outcome and her mother contacted us to thank our Financial Counsellor for the care we showed towards her daughter.

We also helped Amy with budgeting, and she is now able to manage her money effectively.

**Identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality*

“*Wow, I am so thankful my sweetheart Amy is so happy with tears of joy. Thank you so much for being there through this horrific ordeal, we will never forget what you have done to help us in this time of need.*”

Amy's mother

Legal services

We provide free legal advice, casework and representation services for community members in South West Sydney. This key service plays a crucial role in filling the gap where people may not be eligible for Legal Aid and may not have the financial capability to seek legal advice.

All people should be able to exercise their legal rights and access the support they need. Our role is to empower people to understand their legal rights and access services they may not know are available to them.

We do this by providing our clients with legal advice and representation, helping them engage with the courts and police, providing community education, casework services and connecting them with services that can keep them and their families safe, housed and help them meet their living costs.

The need for our service in South West Sydney is significant compared to other areas in NSW. **In South West Sydney, nearly 1 in 5 people (18.6%) are likely to need legal assistance from a community legal centre if they were to experience a legal problem.** This is the second highest rate and number in NSW, after Western Sydney.

In 2020–21 we provided legal services to 2,574 clients, including free legal advice, casework and legal representation on:

- » Criminal law
- » Family law
- » Employment law
- » Driving and traffic offences
- » Domestic violence
- » Victims of crime support claims
- » Consumer rights
- » Credit and debt
- » Motor vehicle property damage disputes
- » Neighbour disputes
- » Other areas of civil law

“ I was very nervous and anxious because I do not know what to expect, your nice smile and the way you spoke to me made me feel at ease and gave me a bit of hope. ”

Legal services client

Funded by the Community Legal Centres Program administered by Legal Aid NSW



Who are our legal service clients?

Typically, our clients live or work in Liverpool, Fairfield and Canterbury-Bankstown and are experiencing financial disadvantage that would hinder them seeking private legal advice. More than half of the community within our catchment area have a personal income of less than \$52,000.

We aim to give people fair access to justice. One of the strengths of South West Sydney is its cultural diversity and around **60% of all of our clients speak a main language other than English**. Many clients face language barriers when they try to navigate the Australian legal system and advocate for themselves. Additionally, **nearly 1 in 4 of our clients (23%) are people with disability or experiencing a mental health issue**. Like other community legal centres, we play a crucial role in ensuring everyone can access clear legal advice and the necessary tools (such as translation services) to claim their legal rights.



Did you know

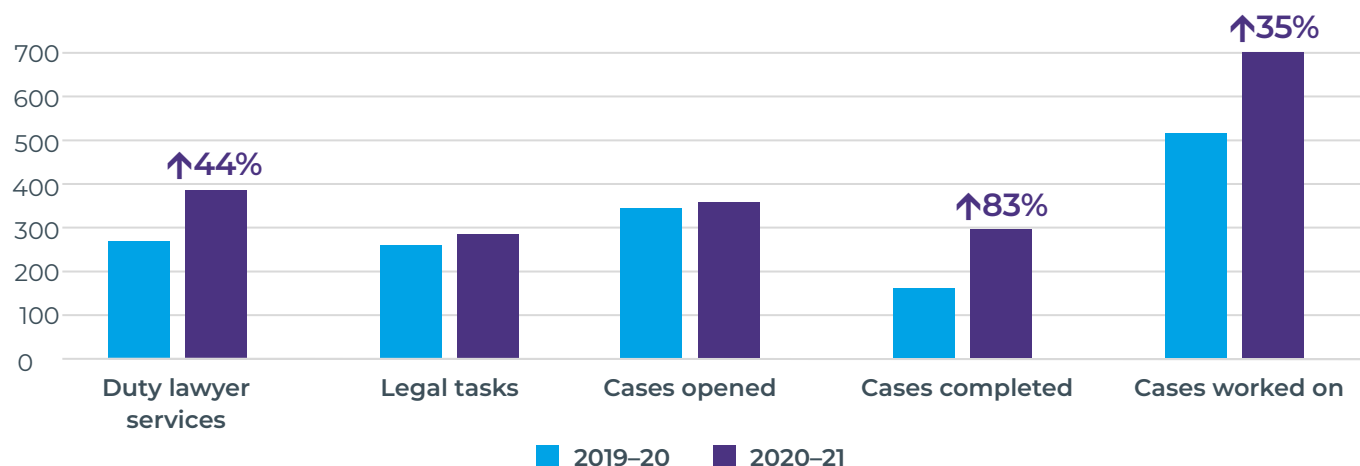
Supporting migrant communities

Did you know that about two-thirds of humanitarian entrants and refugees arriving in NSW live in South West Sydney? And about half of those live in Fairfield?

By maintaining strong partnerships with local community groups and support services, we are able to provide our local clients with accessible, culturally appropriate services and maintain their trust. This includes working with Migrant Resource Centres, Family Relationship Centres, other domestic and family support services and health providers.

Supporting clients during lockdown

We saw an increase in demand in 2020–21



During the pandemic, we have seen an increase in the complexity of issues facing our clients. While COVID-19 conditions meant we assisted fewer clients in person than expected and have had to suspend many of our face-to-face services, by adapting our services we actually increased the number of cases we worked on and completed (up by 83% and 35% respectively).

Many of our clients faced barriers to accessing services remotely – for example, clients with language barriers and older clients. Our staff have worked hard to adapt our services and keep them as accessible as possible.

Over the year, our solicitors provided more than 2,760 legal advices over the phone. While our duty lawyers were limited in their capacity to represent clients at court, they managed to increase the number of services they provided to clients by 44% by providing phone, email and audio-visual services.



A focus on domestic and family violence

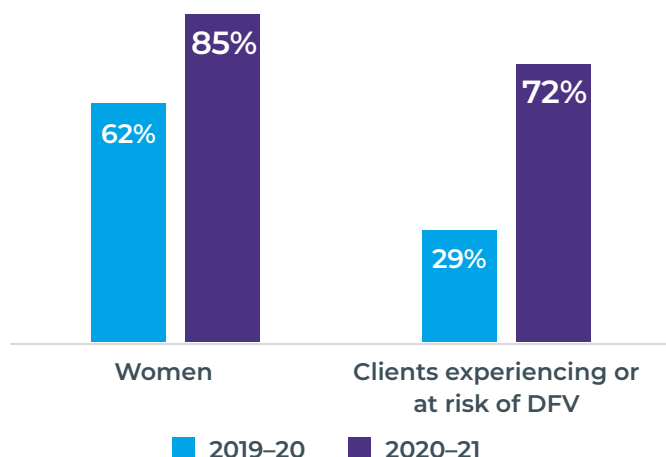
In 2020–21, we saw an **increase in demand for representation services from women experiencing or at risk of domestic and family violence (DFV)**. We have had to redirect staff capacity to meet this demand.

We provide representation services to clients who may need more in-depth legal support, such as representation in court. This year, 72% of our representation services went to clients experiencing or at risk of DFV, compared to 29% the year before.

Of the clients we supported with representation services:

- » 97% were financially disadvantaged
- » 56% were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- » 52% were single parents with dependent children. Of these, 3 in 5 came to us with family law issues and were impacted by DFV.

Who we supported with representation services



During the pandemic, our legal service received additional funding from government to support the complex legal needs of clients experiencing domestic abuse. We experienced a 20% increase in referrals of these clients.

Many of these referrals came from our own DFV support services, demonstrating the need our clients have for collaborative, wrap-around services to respond in a crisis. More than just a legal centre, we act as a key referral point, where clients can be sure they will be directed to the right support.



Case Study

Meera had a daily reminder of her abuse

Meera suffered extreme violence from her husband for many years. **She was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and required considerable dental work due to injuries to her face from the abuse.** She cares for her children who, like her, needed extensive therapy to recover from their abuse.

Working with our Staying Home Leaving Violence team, we helped Meera apply for financial assistance from NSW Victims Services to cover some therapy costs. However, they refused to cover Meera's dental work, as they were not satisfied that Meera's dental problems resulted from the violence.

Meera's dental injuries significantly deteriorated and would cost over \$11,000 to fix.

The injuries were a daily reminder of the abuse and impacted her ability to care for her children.

We knew Meera was fast approaching the five-year statutory deadline for accessing the Victims Services Support scheme. When Meera's application was rejected, we worked quickly to seek an internal review and appeal the decision. We worked with Meera, her psychologist, doctor and caseworker to gather evidence and navigate the lengthy and complex Victims Services process.

With our help, Meera was granted the total costs of her dental work. Meera was relieved she could now have her teeth fixed and reduce the impact of the violence on herself and her children.

** Identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality.*



Family law

 **549 clients assisted**
with family law matters

 **1,266 services were provided**

Family law matters can be traumatic for clients, particularly if there has been family violence. These matters can extend over long periods, have significant implications for the safety of children, and involve negotiation over parenting responsibilities and division of assets for clients facing financial hardship.

1 in 4 
of our legal services
clients (25%)
came to us with family law matters.

Family law matters increased in complexity during the pandemic. For example, border closures and fears of contracting COVID-19 created issues with clients meeting shared-parenting responsibilities in line with court orders. Additionally, strains on government services made it more difficult to arrange supervised

face-to-face visits or attend parenting and anger-management courses.

We maintain strong working relationships with Family Relationship Centres (in Bankstown, Fairfield, Campbelltown, Parramatta and Sydney) to ensure our clients receive integrated and consistent support. These centres specialise in providing joint Family Dispute Resolution mediation sessions to help clients agree on parenting arrangements. We also work with these organisations to host **community education sessions, to help us empower more people** with a better understanding of their legal rights.

Over the course of 2020–21 **we have expanded our partnerships** in the family law area to ensure clients have a greater chance of accessing support. We now share a digital portal with other Community Legal Centres to ensure their clients can be directed to us when other centres don't have capacity to assist or can't because of a conflict of interest. We have also commenced a partnership with two city law firms to take on DFV matters and are in the process of developing partnerships involving pro bono law firms performing casework for SWSLC clients under our supervision. These partnerships are crucial, as there remains significant demand in the community.



Criminal law

 **606 clients assisted**
with criminal law matters

 **3 in 5**
(62%) spoke a main language other than English

 **14%**
were people with disability

Around 1 in 4 of our clients seeking legal advice (24%) required assistance with a criminal law matter.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, in 2020–21 more than half of these clients were supported through our duty lawyer service, representing and assisting them through the court system. This year, many clients (particularly those caring for children) were asking for alternatives to in-person court appearances. We adapted our services, and while we reduced our in-person support at court appearances **our duty lawyers managed to assist 91 more clients than the year before.**



Case Study

Mental health and the criminal justice system

Riley* is a young man diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder. He has been prescribed strong anti-psychotic medication with distressing side effects. In a desperate attempt to self-medicate and relieve these symptoms, Riley resorted to getting drugs without a prescription.

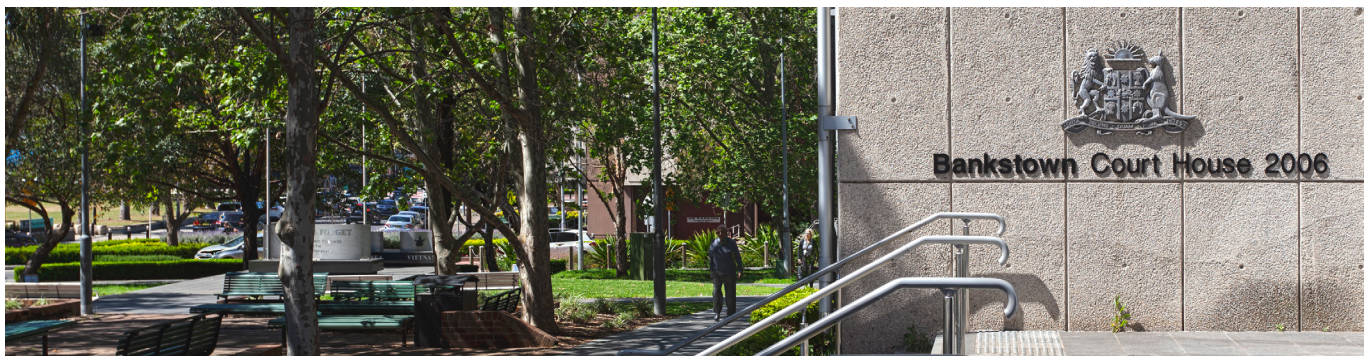
Riley was caught by police and charged with possession of an illegal drug, a serious offence that would result in a criminal conviction and possible gaol time. It was his first ever offence.

Riley came to us extremely distressed. We immediately applied for his matter to be discharged

by way of a section 32 mental health order, so that Riley could be **connected to an appropriate treatment plan, rather than be directed into the criminal justice system** where his psychiatric condition would worsen.


We worked closely with Riley's psychologist to provide a solid medical report and comprehensive treatment plan. Knowing his fragile mental state, our lawyer represented him at court and successfully had the matter discharged without conviction. Riley was placed under the care of his psychologist and is determined to work with his psychologist to improve his condition.

** Identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality.*



Employment law

 **245 clients assisted**
with employment law issues

 **123 clients assisted through the phone outreach service**
we provide as part of the Fair Work Commission's Work Advisory Service

 We partnered with Migrant Resource Centres on **5 Community Legal Education sessions** dedicated to employment law for culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

In our catchment area, there is a **significant gap in accessible legal services for workers with employment law and related discrimination problems.**

A relatively high proportion of our catchment's workforce is employed in low-skilled and unskilled occupations. For example, compared to Greater Sydney, Fairfield has more than double the percentage of operators and drivers, and almost double the percentage of labourers. At the same time, the area has low union density and there is limited eligibility for locals to access Legal Aid for employment law matters.

We help to fill this gap by providing legal advice, casework and legal representation. Through the Workplace Advisory Service (an assistance service coordinated by the Fair Work Commission) we assist self-represented employees in the Fair Work Commission.

Over 2020–21, we saw the **impact of the pandemic** on people's livelihoods, as many were stood down from work or unsure about how their work would be impacted by restrictions. We also saw an increase in the percentage of clients seeking employment law advice who were experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Compared to the previous period, this went up from 1 in 5 (20%) to nearly **1 in 3 (31%) of these clients experiencing or at risk of homelessness.**



Case Study

Coco was unfairly dismissed after taking sick leave

Coco* came to Australia as a refugee, lives alone and works hard to provide for herself. Coco was dedicated to her job. Although she was only a casual employee, she worked full-time hours.

When Coco suddenly fell ill and required medical treatment from a specialist, her supervisor approved three weeks of unpaid sick leave. Upon her return to work, Coco was shocked when her manager terminated her employment, stating it was due to a shortage of work. Coco was also very confused as she knew that **her employer hired five new employees while she was on sick leave.**

Without many savings, limited English, no family support in Sydney and limited job opportunities, Coco had no idea how to pay for her rent and other basic needs.

We helped Coco lodge an unfair dismissal claim with the Fair Work Commission. Knowing that Coco would struggle to represent herself, we represented her throughout the conciliation process with her previous employer. We successfully negotiated a favourable outcome for Coco that included compensation and a statement of service. Coco was very happy with the result. She now had money to survive until she found more work, and the statement of service increased her prospects of finding a new job.

** Identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality.*

We assisted

245 clients

with employment law issues

Driving and traffic offences

 **386 clients assisted**
with driving and traffic offence issues

 **7 Community Legal
Educations sessions**
delivered on driving and traffic law



For many of our clients, a valid driver's licence is a critical requirement for maintaining secure employment. Fines for driving offences for clients already experiencing financial disadvantage can have a significant impact on their welfare and the welfare of their family.

The availability of Legal Aid for driving offences is limited. We fill this gap by providing free legal advice and, if necessary, providing representation in court for clients in need.

During the pandemic, clients have been telling us that the risk of being infected on public transport heightens their need to keep their licence, particularly among vulnerable clients who have medical appointments to attend.

Of those we provided representation services for driving or traffic offences, 1 in 10 (11%) required an interpreter and 14% were people with disability or experiencing a mental health issue.



Case Study

Saving the family car

Brian* is a hard-working single father. Having a few drinks after work, Brian believed he was under the limit, but was charged with drink driving. His licence was immediately suspended. **Without a licence, Brian lost his job**, putting at risk his ability to provide for his child.

Brian dipped into his savings for a lawyer to represent him. After the court disqualified his licence for one month, the process was complicated when Service NSW applied to the court for a longer disqualification. During this delay and prolonged uncertainty, Brian could not use his car for essential family needs and medical care, and his job opportunities were highly restricted. Having used his savings, he could not afford another lawyer.

When Brian came to us, he had already been prevented from driving for almost three months. The court process could extend this for at least another two months with no licence and no job.

Our lawyer gathered evidence from the police facts to dispute Service NSW's claim that there was no record of the period Brian had already been prevented from driving. The court agreed and disqualified Brian's licence for three months, backdated to the offence date. This meant Brian could start driving again in only a few days. Brian was extremely relieved and grateful to be better able to provide for his family.

** Identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality.*



We assisted

386 clients

with driving and traffic offence issues

Community legal education

Empowering clients and upskilling our partners

In 2020–21, we delivered **34 Community Legal Education sessions** to our clients and partner organisations. These sessions allow us to build the capability of our partner services and empower clients directly to understand their legal rights.

We tailor our education sessions on a needs basis, working flexibly with local organisations to identify the issues that are most relevant to clients and fellow practitioners. In this way we can **address the areas where we are seeing the most gaps in knowledge** – from questions about COVID-19 restrictions to those on family law. By training community workers in other organisations, we extend our reach and ensure that more people can access the support they need, regardless of who their first point of contact is.

“*One of the best overview training [sessions] I've been to during COVID.*”

Civil outreach lawyer

We draw on the knowledge of local experts to make the sessions as accessible as possible. For example, over the year we partnered with Migrant Resource Centres to provide Community Legal Education sessions on employment law, family law and driving and traffic offences for culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

“*Succinct and easy to understand information, without all of the legal jargon.*”

Service provider



Helping the community navigate changing legislation

During the pandemic, community education sessions helped us respond to confusion in our client base about ever-changing restrictions and the impact on their legal rights. We were pleased to take part in the ‘**COVID-19: Ask an Expert**’ sessions hosted by NAVITAS, Core Community Services and the Department of Communities and Justice. These weekly sessions ran from October to December 2020, with different organisations (such as NSW Police, Centrelink and Multicultural NSW) presenting to the community on relevant topics.

In July 2020, **changes to NSW Victims Services procedures** put a greater burden on victim-survivors to compile their own evidence of domestic abuse when applying for financial compensation and other support. Recognising that clients would require a new level of support to meet these new conditions, we launched sessions with the staff at STARTTS and the Canterbury Bankstown Domestic Violence Liaison Committee to explain the implications of these changes and prepare them to support clients in new ways.



Case Study

Building the capabilities of community workers in South West Sydney

In 2020, we partnered with the Immigration Advice and Rights Centre (IARC) and Legal Aid NSW to deliver sessions on **Domestic Violence and Visas**, exploring the intersection between safety needs, family law needs and visa needs of victim-survivors. This responded to a general concern circulating among domestic violence services and child and family services about how to best support clients on partner visas, especially where clients had received threats from abusive partners about having them deported out of Australia without their Australian-born children.

We reached 175 community workers across two sessions, with IARC and Legal Aid NSW providing their expertise on visa issues. These sessions were so relevant to the needs of community workers at the time that Services Australia asked us to present for their community engagement officers and multicultural officers across South West Sydney.

Advocating for law reform

Working with our clients, we see the real-life impact laws and legislative change have on their lives. We advocate for law reform where we see that social justice outcomes can be improved for our clients, in partnership with other legal centres and peak bodies.

Our advocacy on coercive control legislation

In January 2021, our legal service and DFV service teams collaborated on a submission to the NSW Government's Joint Select Committee on **Coercive Control**. We advised the Committee against the rapid creation of a new, stand-alone coercive control offence in New South Wales without first implementing an in-depth reform program of cultural and procedural changes.

Coercive control is a well-documented facet of domestic abuse. However, **punitive legislation without sufficient consultation and without extensive work to improve the criminal justice system risks being reactionary and ineffective**. One unintended consequence is likely to be an increase in the number of women, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds, being misidentified as the perpetrator and charged under these proposed laws.

In our submission we:

- submitted that there are many cultural and procedural changes that are required before further criminalisation of coercive control should be considered
- advocated against rapid change without proper consultation and empirical study
- proposed a definition of coercive control
- raised the issue of misidentification of female perpetrators, highlighting a concern that women, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, will bear any unintended consequences of criminalisation
- suggested amendments to existing offences in NSW
- suggested non-legal avenues for reform.

The NSW Government's response to the Joint Select Committee's final report is due in December 2021.



Throughout 2020–21, we supported our partners and peak bodies in their advocacy efforts on a number of fronts. We:



joined key organisations across the country, led by Fair Agenda, to call for 12 actions from the **Women's Safety Summit**, including increased investment in specialist support services and long-term funding to support effective programs



signed a joint statement to the Joint Select Committee on the Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Religious Freedoms and Equality) Bill 2020 opposing the **One Nation's NSW Religious Discrimination Bill** which would create double standards in the law and would not provide fair and equal discrimination laws



signed a joint statement to the Commissioner of Victims Rights in response to the announcement of **changes to Victims Support** proceeding, calling for a comprehensive victim-survivor led review of the changes



signed a Community Legal Centres NSW statement and call for urgent government action to end **Aboriginal deaths in custody** on the 30th anniversary of the report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Domestic and family violence services

Our domestic and family violence services provide court advocacy and casework services to women and children experiencing family and domestic violence:

- » **South West Sydney Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (SWSWDVCAS)**
- » **Sydney WDV CAS**
- » **Bankstown Domestic Violence Service**
- » **Staying Home Leaving Violence (operating in Liverpool and Fairfield)**

Since expanding our services in 2018, our Centre is now one of the larger domestic and family violence frontline service providers in NSW.

Trauma-informed care

In December 2020, we launched an internal services practice manual for our DFV teams, which was developed in collaboration with the Blue Knot Foundation. The aim of the manual is to create a standard way of working that is based on trauma-informed principles:



Empowerment



Trustworthiness



Choice



Safety



Collaboration

The manual is full of practical examples of how staff may manage situations and tasks and was developed in consultation with our DFV casework teams and WDV CAS teams. It guides the work we do and enables us to better support clients.



Trauma-informed, holistic support and advocacy for women through the criminal justice system

Our two **Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services** (South West Sydney and Sydney) provide women experiencing domestic and family violence with threat assessment and safety planning; case coordination; information; and court advocacy.

These services **support women to navigate and understand the criminal justice process** and obtain appropriate Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVOs). We work collaboratively to **empower women to keep safe** with these orders and to access welfare services to meet their immediate needs.

We work closely with other agencies to provide the best possible support for women. This support can include safety assessment and safety planning, court support, legal advice, secure housing, referrals to counselling or practical support such as health/wellness bags and vouchers for groceries. All of our DFV Specialist Workers follow a trauma-informed practice model that empowers recovery and builds the resilience of women through choice and collaboration.

South West Sydney WDV CAS supports women in Liverpool, Fairfield and Bankstown, and Sydney WDV CAS supports women in Central Sydney, the Inner West and the Eastern Suburbs.

- » **We advocate:** Our DFV Specialist Workers will liaise with police, Police Prosecutors, court staff and solicitors to make sure each client's wishes and needs are put forward. We provide women at court with a safe room, and access to free legal advice and representation when required.
- » **We provide holistic support.** We refer women based on their needs and their choices, to services like counselling, crisis accommodation, financial support services as well as legal support. In this way, we support them beyond the court process.
- » **We coordinate:** We work side-by-side with partner services, to ensure our clients get the best outcomes. Our Safety Action Meeting Coordinators meet regularly with police and other government agencies and non-government organisations (housing, education and child protection services, correctional services and local health districts), to develop safety action plans for women assessed as being at serious threat of injury or death due to domestic or family violence.



Thank you

from a South West Sydney WDV CAS client

"I moved to Sydney a few years ago from Queensland after leaving a highly violent and toxic relationship. I came to Sydney on my own having no family or friends in NSW. In the last few years my ex-partner has moved to Sydney to find me and has on several occasions continued to be violent against me and continued to stalk and intimidate me.

"I honestly can't thank the team enough for their help and understanding throughout the last few years. They have gone far and beyond to help me with linking me to services, helping with all my matters and keeping me safe from my ex-partner.

"The worker has been **always there for me when I needed her**. She's been so understanding when listening to me and my concerns and her caring nature has always made me feel safe and comfortable by constantly touching base to keep me informed on all my matters, as well as calling just to check in to see how I'm doing.

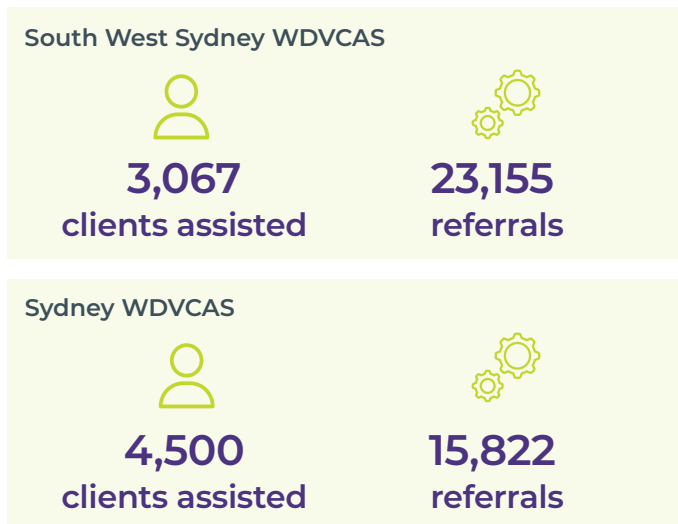
"I'm sincerely grateful for all the help they have provided for me and the lengths they have gone to keep me safe."



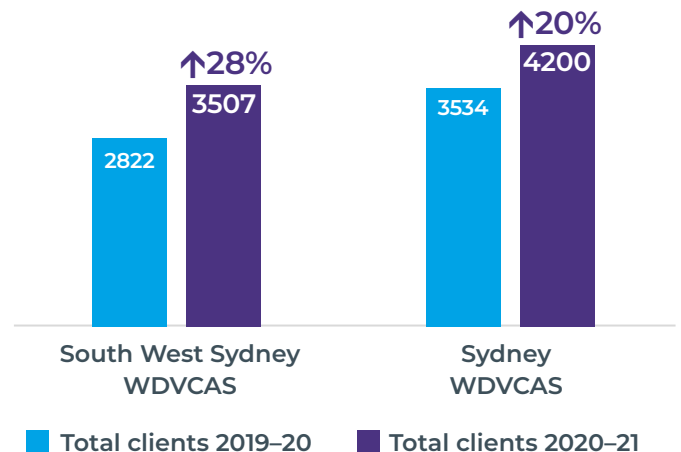
Our WDV CAS services are funded by the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program run by Legal Aid NSW and funded by the NSW Government

Our WDV CAS services saw a spike in demand during the pandemic

In 2020–21, South West Sydney WDV CAS had a **28% increase** in the number of women referred to the service compared to the year before. Sydney WDV CAS saw a **20% increase**.



An increasing number of women need our support



South West Sydney WDV CAS also had an increase in self-referrals from women who were past clients, had been given our number by health services, or had heard of our services through word of mouth. These women generally sought our advice about their situation and did not necessarily engage with the police. As the majority of our referrals come from police, this **new stream of clients** has allowed us to provide advice to women who may not have reached us in the past.

While fewer women were attending court during the pandemic (police were actively advising women against attending court mentions) we have adapted our services to ensure they receive the advice and support they need. Our team displayed resilience, adaptability, commitment and passion during these unprecedented times.

Many of the women who contacted these services were mothers. In supporting them we hope to have indirectly supported more than **4,000 children** under the age of 16 (nearly 1,800 via Sydney WDV CAS and more than 2,500 via South West Sydney WDV CAS).



The impacts of the pandemic for our clients

Alongside this spike in demand, we have seen how the pandemic has impacted our clients. Many of our clients were facing increased financial stress, having lost casual employment, and were finding it harder to access services.

Some women told us they were unable to access mental health care or support from their GP because they were not comfortable accessing care online or **it was not safe to speak on telehealth when other family members or their partner was around.** Additionally, there is an ongoing gap in the availability of domestic violence counselling, which has increased during the pandemic, and **women are facing long wait times to receive counselling support during a crisis.**

For some, the **return of adult children to the family home** has led to an escalation in domestic and family violence incidents and the need for support services. Adult children may return to their family home after losing work during the pandemic and may require support for drug or alcohol abuse issues. In Central Sydney, the Inner West and Eastern Suburbs, we saw a gap in services for clients who are having difficulties with their near-adult or adult child.

Supporting women from multicultural backgrounds

Language barriers and visa status can put many women at greater risk, as they can stand in the way of their reporting abuse and accessing support services. Our **DFV Multicultural Specialist Workers** are there to make our service more accessible to these clients.

South West Sydney WDV CAS



60% of women assisted were from a multicultural background.



Around **8%** of these clients were on a temporary visa



Our **Multicultural Specialist Workers** speak Spanish, Greek, Vietnamese, Arabic, Assyrian, Farsi, Bengali and Italian.

Sydney WDV CAS



30% of women assisted were from a multicultural background.



Around **1 in 10 (11%)** of these clients were on a temporary visa



Our **Multicultural Specialist Worker** speaks Thai and French and we are fortunate to have two Spanish speakers in our team.

Helping more female defendants

Increasingly, our WDV CAS teams are assisting female defendants in ADVO and related charge matters. We have seen a **worrying increase in the number of women who are reporting to us that they have been misidentified by the police** as the perpetrator in a domestic abuse matter or find themselves the defendant in a cross application once police have made an application for an ADVO to protect them.

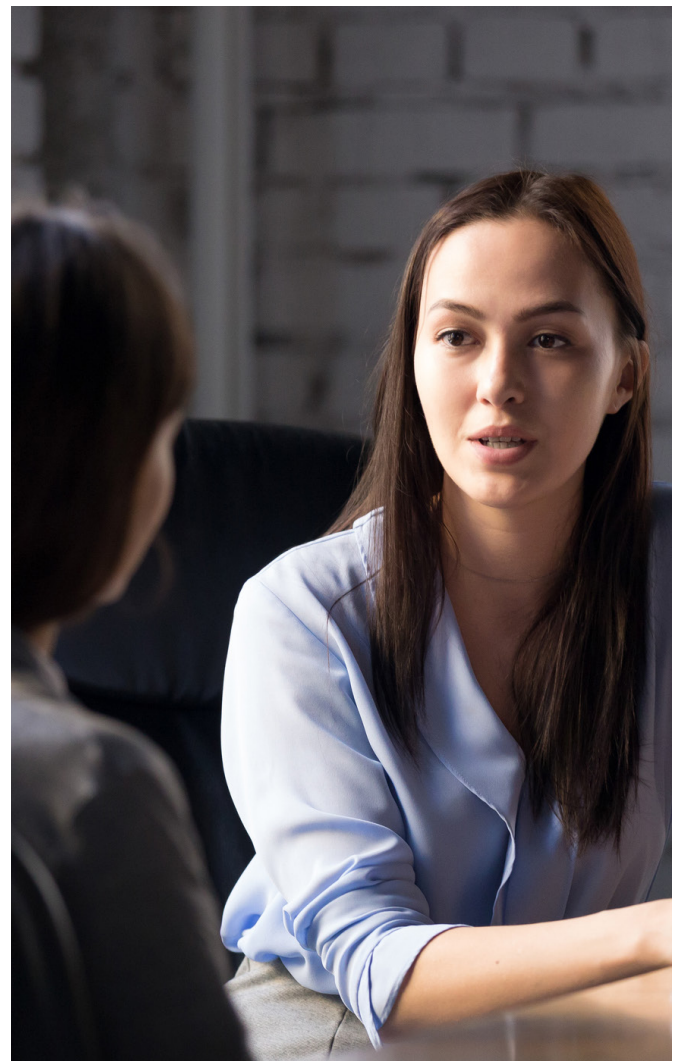
In 2020–21, Sydney WDV CAS supported

47

more female defendants than the year before – a **27% increase**

In some cases, these women were being asked to spend vast amounts of money for legal support (often in excess of \$10,000) and were unsure if they were eligible for Legal Aid.

We empower these women to understand the process and set the record straight on these matters, without exorbitant costs. This includes ensuring these women have access to an interpreter where necessary, so they can make themselves understood.





Supporting women at the Family Court

We provide support to women at the Family Court in Sydney CBD through the Sydney Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS). Under this program, a member of our Sydney WDVCS team provides information, referrals, support and safety planning to women with family law matters.

There continues to be a large gap between the number of women seeking low-cost legal representation and the services available. Family Court matters can run for extended periods of time, making it all the more important that our clients have someone in their corner. We support these women before and during their matters with advice, links to the services they need and planning to protect their safety.

In 2020–21, our FASS specialist worker assisted 119 women.

During the pandemic, the Family Court introduced a COVID-19 court list dedicated to urgent family law disputes that have arisen as a result of the pandemic. FASS is available to women going through this process. Our DFV Specialist Worker for this service found that clients were facing additional pressures, in an already complicated setting, throughout the pandemic.



Case Study

Rebecca was divorced after moving to Australia

Rebecca* was in an abusive marriage for many years before she decided to end it. She had a young son with her husband and they had been living overseas for more than a decade. Her husband encouraged the family to move to Australia as a new start, but a few weeks after arriving he filed for divorce. Rebecca had no support system here and was deeply impacted by the coercive control she had already experienced.

Our specialist worker supported Rebecca through her final hearing in the Family Court. She spent the week with Rebecca, having to remind her to eat, helping with breathing exercises, and preparing her to talk through the numerous examples of **abuse she would have to relive under cross examination**. Our specialist worker helped Rebecca stay calm and focused so that she could give instructions to a lawyer and follow the court's directions during the final hearing, as well as referring Rebecca to services that could support her further.

** Identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality.*

The FASS is funded by the Australian Government and overseen by Legal Aid NSW

Safety Action Meetings: A timely, integrated response to women at serious threat

When a woman is at risk of serious threat, swift action from the right services is critical. Safety Action Meetings (SAMs) aim to reduce threats to victims' safety through targeted information sharing.

SAMs are regular fortnightly meetings attended by senior members from government and non-government organisations in local areas that focus on reducing the immediate threat to victims' safety. SAMs are chaired by police and attended by representatives from each agency or service with the authority to make decisions at the table. This collaboration is critical to the safety of women and children. **Research has shown that a lack of information sharing between service providers can prevent victims from receiving effective and timely support and is a contributing factor in domestic violence-related deaths.**

South West Sydney WDVCS attends and coordinates three regular Safety Action Meetings in Bankstown, Liverpool and Fairfield, while Sydney WDVCS does the same in Central Sydney, the Eastern Suburbs and the Inner West.

In 2020–21, the SAMs were operating well and the strong relationships between SAM members continued to result in good outcomes for clients.



Case Study

How a Safety Action Meeting helped Sandra

Sandra* is a young woman with intellectual disability. She attends a support program each day where disability support carers run a variety of programs. One day, while attending the program, a support worker noticed some large bruises on Sandra. When asked, Sandra indicated that her father had hit her. Sandra is nearly non-verbal and would not be able to report to police herself, so the support workers reported on her behalf.

Police took out an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) with standard conditions and charged Sandra's father. The matter was referred to the local Safety Action Meeting (SAM), where it was determined the ADVO should be varied to add stricter conditions. At the SAM, a plan to provide ongoing support to Sandra was discussed with her support workers. A Safety Action Plan was created to ensure Sandra's safety and rights were represented.

If Sandra's matter had not been tabled on the SAM agenda, it is likely the ADVO may have remained the same and there would not be the **extra layer of protection added for Sandra's safety.** The SAM also enabled the SAM members to assist in providing ongoing advocacy and safety for Sandra in the disability space.

** Identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality.*



Empowering women and children to leave violence and achieve their goals

Our **Staying Home Leaving Violence** service (covering Liverpool, Fairfield and Bankstown) and our **Bankstown Domestic Violence Service** support women experiencing domestic and family violence through case management and case coordination.

These DFV casework services work with women to identify their goals and support them to achieve them.

What this means will be different for every client and their safety is always the top priority.

We take a holistic approach and match our services to the needs of each woman. Our team includes staff with language and cultural knowledge so we can provide our clients with accessible and welcoming support.



“ THANK YOU SO MUCH to you and to your beautiful organisation for all your support and help in this difficult situation. My daughter and I really appreciated it and we never forget all your kindness and help. ”



Safety is the priority

Women are most at risk when they are deciding to leave a violent relationship.

Our DFV casework services empower women to keep themselves and their family safe through safety planning, risk assessments, and enhancing their capacity to make informed decisions by providing access to information and services.

Ensuring safe housing can be a critical first step in this – from relocating to safe accommodation to security audits to providing security upgrades to their homes. For women at significant risk, we can also provide them with closed circuit television cameras and dashboard cameras.

Staying Home Leaving Violence

– Liverpool Fairfield

 **229 clients**
(including 36 children)

416 incoming referrals

 **Nearly 2,500 hours of support**
provided to those who contacted the service

In 2020–21, this service supported 229 clients, including 36 children. We also indirectly supported 321 additional children whose mothers were clients.


We provided the majority of clients (67%) with case management services, which involves the **development of a case plan for achieving the client's goals** as well as coordination of support services. For other clients we provide case coordination services, to arrange and follow up on the delivery of services and supports. Around 1 in 6 (18%) were provided with information or referral on to a service that could meet their needs.

Of the women and children in contact with us, **more than half (52%) were born outside of Australia** and 42% spoke a main language other than English at home. Nearly 1 in 5 (17%) required an interpreter.

Bankstown Domestic Violence Service

 **128 clients**
(including 20 children)

261 incoming referrals

 **Nearly 1,340 hours of support**
provided to those who contacted the service

In 2020–21, this service supported 123 clients, including 20 children. We also indirectly supported 183 children whose mothers were clients. We provided case management services to the majority of our clients (70%), which involves the development of a case plan for achieving the client's goals as well as coordination of support services. For other clients we provide case coordination services, to arrange and follow up on the delivery of services and supports. We provided around 1 in 3 of our clients (30%) with information or referral on to a service that could meet their needs.

More than half (55%) of the women and children who contacted us were born outside of Australia and 46% speak a main language other than English at home.

We were particularly honoured to have staff at Services NSW Bankstown select Bankstown Domestic Violence Service as their White Ribbon recipient in 2020.

The Bankstown Domestic Violence Service is part of the Integrated Domestic and Family Violence program funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice

The Staying Home Leaving Violence Service is funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice

The pandemic made it harder for women to seek help

The pandemic changed the lives of many of our clients. Both the Staying Home Leaving Violence service and Bankstown Domestic Violence Service saw a **spike in referrals once restrictions were eased and women could leave their homes, suggesting that lockdowns limited women's capacity to seek help**. This aligns with a recent Australian Institute of Criminology survey, which found that many women who experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former cohabiting partner since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic reported that safety concerns were a barrier to seeking help.

We saw a higher number of referrals for women who were impacted by domestic violence and who did not have residency and our Staying Home Leaving Violence Service saw many more women self-referring to the service.

Our case workers pursued new ways of working to meet the needs of our clients. As well as phone services to complete safety audits and connect with families, we supported families during school holidays with **education packs to support children learning at home** and activities for families to do together, such as jigsaw puzzles.

“Thank you very much for the amazing hamper. I am so touched. No one has ever given me anything like this before.”

Working in partnership

Our partnerships with other service providers allow us to offer wrap-around support to our clients.

By maintaining strong working relationships with local government and non-government services – the Department of Communities and Justice (covering housing and child protection), NSW Police, NSW Health, local community organisations – we provide women who come to us the best pathway to support.

Care packages for clients

Thank you to everyone who donated to us throughout the year so we could provide hampers and other small packages to women and children affected by domestic abuse, including:

- Lindt Chocolates, Costco, Georges River Life Care and Simply Divine Co for contributing to Christmas packages
- Crimson Life Church for providing beautiful Mother's Day gift bags
- Oz Relief Hampers for providing food packages
- Share the Dignity for providing women's dignity bags
- all the kind individuals who donated throughout the year.

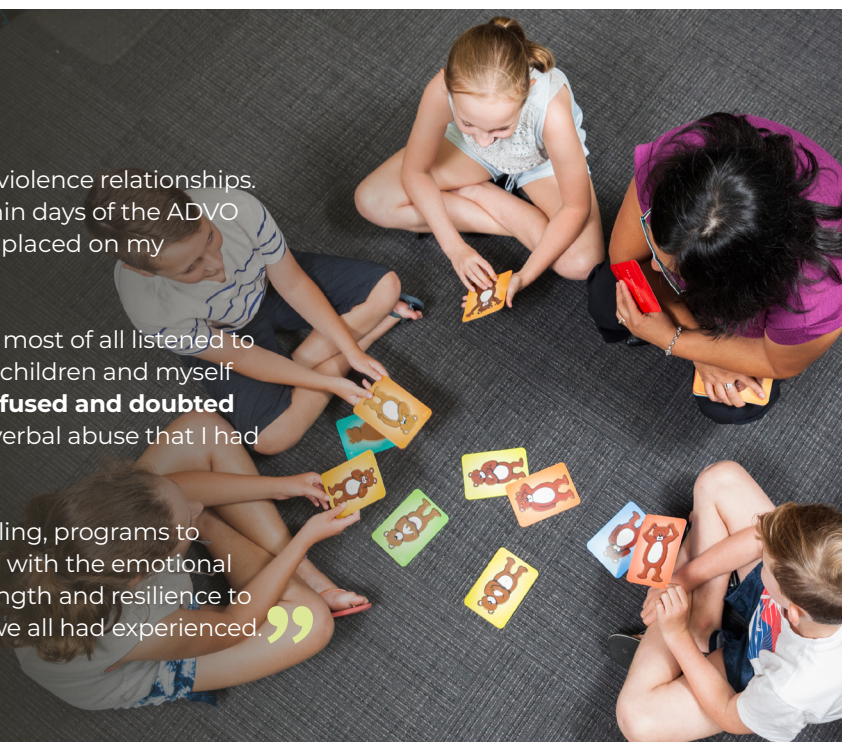
“Thank you very much for remembering me. The hamper is wonderful... The food has helped me to have more meals to eat.”

A message from one of our clients

“A fantastic service for women living in domestic violence relationships. I received a phone call from my case worker within days of the ADVO [Apprehended Domestic Violence Order] being placed on my ex-partner by NSW police.

“My case worker was very supportive, caring and most of all listened to my concerns about the safety and welfare of my children and myself at **a time in my life where I felt vulnerable, confused and doubted my own self-worth** because of the mental and verbal abuse that I had been subjected to for over 22 years.

“She linked me to services that included counselling, programs to support my children but most of all provided me with the emotional support that has allowed me to see my own strength and resilience to have protected my children through the abuse we all had experienced.”



Training other workers in the sector

In November 2020, our DFV casework team provided online customised training for professionals involved in the Bankstown, Fairfield and Liverpool Child and Family Interagency for whom domestic and family violence is not their core work of practice. This training covered:

- what is domestic and family violence?
- the responsibilities of workers and organisations to respond to client disclosures or worker concerns of domestic and family violence
- strategies for responding to domestic and family violence and a review of organisational responses.



Since running these sessions, our case management team has been approached by other service providers (such as, Centrelink, Family Spirit, NSW Health, NAVITAS) to provide further training for their staff and students on domestic and family violence, including risk assessment, safety planning, safety assessment. This allows us to **enhance the capabilities in the sector so that more women get a best-practice response.**



Case Study

Maria's partner was threatening to kill her

Maria* married her partner overseas. When she arrived in Australia pregnant with her first child, she thought it would be an adventure for her new family. **The violence and abuse started when she was six months pregnant.** During the relationship Maria experienced verbal abuse, physical assaults in front of her children and threats that her children would be taken from her.

When our Bankstown Domestic Violence Service started working with Maria, she had been assessed as being at serious threat. Her ex-partner was threatening to kill her and there was evidence that someone had been to the property and broken the side gate and the back sliding door. There were safety concerns when her children were being dropped off and picked up for changeover. We implemented a safety plan with Maria and carried out a safety audit. We installed a surveillance camera, lock change and secured the windows to her home.

We supported Maria as she pursued an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order to protect herself through the Local Court, and then again as she prepared to appeal a decision by the Family Court to remove her children from her care. Throughout this time, Mary had her court dates changed multiple times, partly due to the pandemic, and was required to attend psychological assessments that she could not afford

to pay for. She was accused of sending threats via text message, which were eventually found to have been incorrectly translated. **Maria felt she was let down by the system.**

We supported Maria throughout this process. We debriefed with her after each court proceeding, worked with solicitors advocating on her behalf, engaged with police and courts to gather accurate information and helped Maria's friends raise funds so she could comply with court requirements.

We also spent time with Maria to emotionally support her. Maria was feeling lost when she didn't have her children, so we developed some grounding and mindful meditation to help her with her anxieties. We gave Maria information on how to talk to the children about the separation, keeping her children out of the conflict, and provided books about feelings. When Maria's ex-partner put the family home up for sale, we helped her apply for housing and arrange the move.

After a lengthy process, Maria was granted sole parental responsibility for both of her children. We continued to support her until the property matter was settled and Maria and her children's support needs were met, keeping her safety and emotional stability front of mind.

** Identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality.*

Governance and finance

Income and expenses

Income for the Centre over the past year was similar to the prior year as our programs are largely funded via ongoing government contracts. Gross revenue grew slightly to a total of just over \$7 million, mainly due to temporary COVID-19 funding injections from state and federal governments and a grant from the Financial Counselling Foundation.

Total expenses for the year amounted to \$6.7 million, with just over \$6 million spent on program delivery. Some expenses were impacted by the need to work remotely; the most notable differences were that our IT-related expenses increased by about 30% and expenses related to conferences, travel and events were reduced. [The full audited financial report is available on our website.](#)

Accounting and HR systems

During 2020–21 the Centre changed its accounting system from MYOB to Xero and its payroll system from MYOB to Hero Pay. Hero Pay is the payroll program associated with the cloud-based HR system Employment Hero, which we adopted as our new HR software during the year.

Risk management

Our Risk Committee held four meetings in 2020–21. Matters considered by the Committee included actions required to minimise risks to staff and clients from the global pandemic, and actions to enhance staff wellbeing. In addition, the Committee developed governance documents including an Emergency Response Plan.

Management Committee

The Management Committee held seven meetings over the 2020–21 year. Following a resignation, a vacant position on the Committee was filled in June 2021. Our gratitude and warmest welcome to Rivkah Nissim who has offered her time and expertise to the organisation in joining this Committee. We thank Roohi Koya for her service and contribution to the Committee and the Centre (appointed 13.5.19, resigned 28.2.21).

Management Committee members are elected annually by the Association's members and are all volunteers.



South West Sydney Legal Centre is an Incorporated Association and a registered charity. It has reporting and compliance obligations to Fair Trading NSW and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. The Centre is an organisational member of the Fundraising Institute of Australia.



Community Legal Centres
Australia

Community Legal Centres Australia is our national peak body – we are accredited by them by participating in a quality assurance process to ensure that we operate according to best practice and industry standards. To maintain accreditation, the organisation must be a member of the NSW Community Legal Centres peak body, comply with the mandatory standards in the Community Legal Centres Australia Risk Management Guide and comply with the accreditation scheme that includes requirements relating to governance, financial and risk management, data management, communications, client satisfaction and cultural safety.

Management Committee members



Naushee Rahman,
President,
appointed 13.11.14

MAg (AgEc), BResEc (Hons)

Naushee has principally worked in the public sector during her career. She has spent over a decade with NSW Treasury and has extensive experience in strategic policy development, transformation and reform, supporting better outcomes for the people of New South Wales. Naushee has also worked in other state government agencies, advocating for policies supporting small businesses as well as working on hospital funding models.



Caroline Alcorso,
MC Member,
appointed 6.5.19

MA Social Science, PhD Economics,
Certificate IV Carbon Management

Caroline is a workforce, gender and diversity expert. She has enjoyed a long career in industrial relations, workforce development, immigrant women's programs and disability workforce policy and programs. Currently she consults via her own company Purpose at Work that works with service providers to create high-quality jobs that also achieve high-quality human services.



Diana Chang,
Vice President & Secretary,
appointed 2.5.19

BA LLB (Hons), GAICD

Diana brings extensive experience as a leading commercial litigation lawyer with governance and management experience. She has been a partner in commercial law firms including leading corporate boutique law firms and a global law firm where she was Office Managing Partner and Practice Leader.



Rivkah Nissim,
MC Member,
appointed 10.6.21

BA Politics, Graduate Certificate
Social Impact

Rivkah is Director, Advisory with strategic policy consulting firm Inside Policy. She has previously held senior roles with the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and has extensive experience in the not-for-profit sector, including domestic and family violence and homelessness services.



Rakesh Raj,
Treasurer,
appointed 2.5.19

B.Bus Accounting, Com Ad Cert, CPA

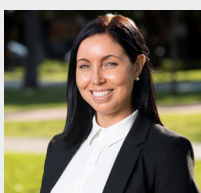
Rakesh started his career at Ernst & Young Chartered Accountants. He has been the Finance Director and Regional Controller of several Australian and multinational companies including large independent not-for-profit colleges. Rakesh is a Fellow of the Institute of Public Accountants and a BAS agent.



Carmela Tassone,
MC Member,
appointed 17.9.20

MA, LLB, BEd

Carmela is the Principal Director of CP Partnerships Legal & Consulting, a specialist legal and consulting practice. She has extensive human services experience having worked in legal and non-legal roles in government and non-government sectors. Carmela has expertise in litigation and legal policy and reform, particularly in relation to the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children.



Joanna Abraham,
MC Member,
appointed 17.9.20

LLB, LLM, BScSci

Joanna is a Principal Lawyer at Justice Connect and a member of the Human Rights Committee with the Law Society of New South Wales. Previously, Joanna held positions with the Australian Human Rights Commission, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights and Caxton Legal Centre. Joanna has had extensive experience in the not-for-profit legal sector.

Our partners and funders

Our legal service receives funding from the NSW Government and Australian Government, administered and managed by Legal Aid NSW. Our sincerest appreciation goes to our funding bodies and financial partners, and those who have engaged in innovative partnerships with us to improve access to justice.

Our domestic and family violence services receive funding from the NSW Government and Australian Government, administered and managed by Legal Aid NSW and the Department of Communities and Justice. Our Domestic and Family Violence Financial Counselling service is funded by the Financial Counselling Foundation. Our sincerest appreciation to our funding bodies and government and community partners.

South West Sydney Legal Centre has been an active member of the South West Sydney Domestic and Family Violence Alliance since 2017. The Alliance is a wonderful example of local collaboration between government and non-government organisations working together to break the cycle of violence.

Thank you

to all of our donors and our supporters during 2020–21, including:

- » ACON
- » Adam Guy, barrister
- » Ali Hallani, solicitor
- » Allan Goldsworthy, barrister
- » Arab Council Australia
- » Ashley Gobeil & Alice McLennan children trauma services
- » Asian Women at Work
- » Baker & McKenzie Lawyers
- » Bankstown Family Relationship Centre
- » Magistrates, Registrars and court staff at Bankstown Local Court
- » Bankstown PAC
- » Bankstown Women's Health Centre
- » Baptist Care
- » Benevolent Society
- » Blue Knot Foundation
- » Bondi Beach Cottage
- » Bonnie Support Services
- » Budyari Community Health Centre
- » Campbelltown Family Relationship Centre
- » Canterbury Bankstown Council
- » Cara House
- » CatholicCare
- » CatholicCare Liverpool
- » Central Sydney SAM Members
- » Central Tablelands and Blue Mountains Community Legal Centre
- » Centrelink Outreach
- » City of Sydney
- » Community Legal Centres Australia
- » Community Legal Centres NSW
- » Community Legal Centre Program Unit at Legal Aid NSW
- » CORE Community Services
- » Corrective Services NSW
- » Costco
- » Creating Links
- » Crimson Life Church
- » Cumberland Women's Health Centre
- » David Shoebridge, Greens Member of the Legislative Council
- » Department of Communities and Justice NSW – Sydney and South West Sydney
- » Department of Human Services
- » Domestic Violence Duty Scheme Solicitors (Downing Centre, Newtown and Waverley Courts)
- » Domestic Violence NSW
- » Domestic Violence Unit at Legal Aid NSW
- » Magistrates, Registrars and court staff at Downing Centre Local Court
- » e-Safety Commissioner
- » Eastern Beaches Police
- » Eastern Suburbs Domestic Violence Services Network
- » Eastern Suburbs Police
- » Eastern Sydney SAM Members
- » Fairfield Council
- » Fairfield Family Relationship Centre
- » Magistrates, Registrars and court staff at Fairfield Local Court
- » Fair Work Ombudsman
- » Financial Counselling Foundation
- » Frisina Lawyers

- » Georges River Life Care
- » Gilbert + Tobin Lawyers
- » Housing NSW
- » Hugh McDermott MP, State Member for Prospect
- » Human Rights Commission Kristian Bolwell, solicitor
- » Hume Community Housing
- » Illawarra Legal Centre
- » Immigration Advice and Rights Centre
- » Inner West Police
- » Inner West Safety Action Meeting members
- » Jack Tyler-Stott, barrister
- » Junction Neighbourhood Centre
- » Julie Dombrowski
- » Justice Advocacy Service
- » KARI
- » Kristian Bolwell, solicitor
- » Law Access
- » Legal Aid NSW
- » Legal Aid on behalf of Commonwealth Attorney General's Community Legal Services Program
- » Lindt Chocolates
- » Liverpool Council
- » Liverpool-Green Valley Domestic Violence Service
- » Liverpool Family Dispute Resolution Services
- » Magistrates, Registrars and court staff at Liverpool Local Court
- » Liverpool Neighbourhood Connections
- » Liverpool Women's Health Centre
- » Lokahi
- » Louisa Hatfield
- » Lou's Place
- » Lurnea High School
- » Macarthur Legal Centre
- » Makinson D'Apice Lawyers
- » Mark Higgins, barrister
- » Marrickville Legal Centre
- » Marsdens Law Group
- » Metro Migrant Resource Centre
- » Michael Costello, clinical psychologist
- » Moving Out Moving On
- » Mudgin-gal Aboriginal Women's Service
- » Magistrates, Registrars and court staff at Newtown Local Court
- » Newtown Neighbourhood Centre
- » Nicholas Lavidis, clinical psychologist
- » NSW Department of Education Representatives
- » NSW LGBTIQ DFV Interagency
- » One Door Mental Health Services
- » Out Loud
- » Oz Relief
- » Paul Lynch MP, State Member for Liverpool
- » Peter Cook, barrister
- » Peter Godkin, barrister
- » Rozelle Neighbourhood Centre
- » SDN Brighter Futures (Central and Eastern)
- » Settlement Services International
- » Share the Dignity
- » Simply Divine Co
- » South West Sydney Domestic and Family Violence Alliance
- » STARTTS Liverpool
- » Staying Home Leaving Violence (Redfern, Parramatta and Eastern Suburbs)
- » Sydney City Police
- » The Deli Women & Children's Centre
- » Tracey Spicer
- » Translating and Interpreting (TIS National) Service at Department of Home Affairs
- » Trish Doyle MP, State Member for the Blue Mountains
- » Uniting Counselling and Mediation
- » Uniting Fairfield
- » Victims Services
- » Warwick Farm Neighbourhood Centre
- » Magistrates, Registrars and court staff at Waverley Local Court
- » Weave
- » Wesnet
- » Western Sydney Community Legal Centre
- » Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre
- » Warringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre
- » Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre
- » Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program at Legal Aid NSW
- » Women's Legal Service NSW
- » Women's Safety NSW

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