

ANNUAL REPORT  
**2018-19**

WEST SYDNEY LEGAL CENTRE  
WEST SYDNEY LEGAL CENTRE

SOUTH WEST SYDNEY  
LEGAL CENTRE





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## Message from President and CEO

South West Sydney Legal Centre is a multidisciplinary organisation providing legal services to people primarily in the local government areas of Liverpool, Fairfield and Canterbury-Bankstown. We also deliver support and case management services to people who have experienced domestic and family violence.

Our local community includes some of the most disadvantaged local government areas in the state so there is great need for the work we do. Socio-economic challenges are often compounded by cultural and linguistic diversity - research shows that people from non-English speaking countries often fear the legal system and lack knowledge about their rights and responsibilities in Australia. Stories from our clients in this year's report illustrate how the right help can often solve a problem before more serious consequences result.

Providing an integrated legal and family and domestic violence service is especially important in areas where there is socio-economic disadvantage. This need was highlighted by data published in 2019 by the Law and Justice Foundation. Their research showed that women who experience domestic and family violence are 10 times more likely to experience a wide range of serious legal problems, which also increase the hardship and adversity they experience. Those legal problems are also more likely to lead to women's ill health, relationship breakdown, financial problems and housing instability.

Barriers to access to justice and domestic and family violence are experienced in all areas of Sydney. One of the ways we seek to contribute to breaking those cycles of disadvantage is by increasing our reach. We do this by working alongside partners to identify those most in need of help, by finding opportunities for outreach and with strategic expansion of our services in our areas of expertise.

In the second half of 2018, we extended our services to encompass an additional Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service in Central Sydney and the Local Coordination Points of Sydney, Newtown and Waverley. We also started auspicing the Fairfield Local Coordination Point. Our generalist legal service focuses on legal needs in South West Sydney - during the year we developed our relationship with The Hub auspice body, Core Community Services. This was reflected in increased and more consistent attendance numbers at the outreach. We also committed to bolstering our driving offences and criminal law capacity with the recruitment in the second half of 2019 of a senior solicitor with criminal law expertise to oversee and develop this area of the practice.

In November 2018, our Executive Officer Mike Thomas stepped down from his role - we thank him for his service to the organisation. Special thanks also to Effi Vassiliadis, our Office Manager, who acted in the EO role until Yvette Vignando was appointed as CEO in June 2019. Our gratitude also goes to the outgoing President Tony Jose who served on the Management Committee in various positions over five years. Naushee Rahman had been on our Management Committee for over five years when she stepped into the role of President in May 2019.

Our immense gratitude is due to all staff, providing frontline services and organisational support, whose dedication and compassion empower others to regain some control of their lives and give people the opportunity to achieve just and fair legal outcomes.

**Naushee Rahman**  
**President**

**Yvette Vignando**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

## Our purpose

- We are an integrated legal and domestic violence service
- We provide equal access to services to the most vulnerable in our community, particularly those in South West Sydney
- We collaborate with other service providers to improve outcomes for our clients across our legal and domestic violence services
- We aim to spread a culture of respectful relationships

## Our mission

- Serving the diverse communities of South West Sydney and beyond
- Providing high quality services to people who need them the most
- Getting just and fair outcomes for our clients
- Empowering people to take control of their lives and their legal issues
- Working with our community partners to support our clients and work for change in our communities
- Increasing safety, decreasing isolation, and in creasing empowerment
- Addressing the gendered inequity that women and children face
- Educating the community about the impact of violence and basic human rights

## Our organisation

South West Sydney Legal Centre was established in 1986. We are an accredited member of Community Legal Centres Australia. Over the years the organisation has grown and diversified from an essentially legal service-based organisation to one with a broader platform, delivering legal services and education; and family and domestic violence welfare services predominantly for people living or working in the local

government areas of Liverpool, Fairfield and Canterbury-Bankstown in 2018. In line with our commitment to breaking the cycle of domestic and family violence, we expanded our reach to auspice the Sydney Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service.



Leadership Team (from left to right): Elly Raffo - Manager Staying Home Leaving Violence and Bankstown Domestic Violence Service; Yvette Vignando - Chief Executive Officer; Peter Multari - Principal Solicitor; Effi Vassiliadis - Office Manager; Farah Assafiri - Manager South West Sydney Women's Domestic Violence Service; Susan Smith - Manager Sydney Women's Domestic Violence Service

## Meeting a growing need for services

The Law and Justice Foundation's 2018 report on Legal Need summarised the profile of our region, demonstrating the growing need for services, and citing for example that over 35% of households have an annual income of under \$52,000. Compared to the rest of NSW our catchment has a relatively higher proportion of people who are likely to need assistance from a community legal centre. In 2019 Law Society President Elizabeth Espinosa also highlighted the growing need, with the launch of a community backed campaign for a new multipurpose justice precinct in south-western Sydney to meet the demand for court services, which are not keeping up with the growth in population.

Our legal team works at Liverpool, offering advice, representation and referral services for clients. We offer free telephone advice sessions three times every week and visit courts and partner services to provide outreach advice, representation and mediation services. Our family and domestic violence teams support people who have experienced family and domestic violence, with case coordination and case management services in South West Sydney and court support services for women and their children in South West Sydney and Central Sydney.

We want our work to ensure those most vulnerable in our community have equal access to justice and to contribute to breaking the cycle of domestic and family violence for women and children. Our lawyers, domestic and family violence workers and all our professional staff are dedicated to providing the highest quality services to people who need them most.

## Legal services and education

We offer a generalist legal service to the local community, with expertise in employment, criminal, civil and family law. During the year we expanded some of our services. For example, we provided more services to our culturally and linguistically appropriate (CALA) family dispute resolution project. CALA provides a framework for culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experiencing family violence to effectively negotiate family law issues in a supported, legally assisted and culturally responsive setting.

Our Driving Offences Legal Service (DOLS) was also expanded by accepting additional referrals from Legal Aid for more serious offences. DOLS client numbers increased by 15% from the last financial year. By assisting defendants who would otherwise be unrepresented, our DOLS expansion has also benefited Legal Aid and the courts. The service also began accepting civil law referrals at Bankstown Local Court.

Internal referrals between our domestic and family violence support services and the legal service have been a long-standing feature, however we recognise the benefit of a more effective and integrated wrap around service delivery model for women experiencing or at risk of domestic or family violence. Our successful bid for additional State government funds in 2019-20 will allow us to further develop this integration. We envisage that this will include outreach services at court on Apprehended Violence Order list days.

Increasing knowledge of rights and responsibilities is another way we seek to address inequity. During the year, we delivered 40 community legal education sessions particularly in the areas of driving offences, fines, family law and employment law.

## Communities we serve

Our legal service operates within one of the most culturally diverse and fastest growing regions of Australia. South West Sydney is an area of relatively high social and economic disadvantage, including many suburbs that are among the most disadvantaged in Australia. Our core service areas of Liverpool, Fairfield and Canterbury-Bankstown local government areas are settlement locations for new arrivals and emerging communities.

Averaged across the three local government areas, 44.9% of residents were born overseas, with 16% of these having arrived in Australia within the last five years. 75% of residents have a non-English speaking ancestry, and over 58% of residents have English as their second language.

These socioeconomic factors generate vulnerabilities to a range of legal problems and present serious challenges when dealing with these issues. It is recognised, for example, that there is a distinct relationship between low education levels, non-English main language and the prevalence of legal problems.

## Our clients



# Access to justice





## Law reform and policy

Community Legal Centres have both the privilege and the social responsibility to participate in advocacy and law reform initiatives that seek to improve legal and social outcomes for some of the most vulnerable people in our community. While South West Sydney Legal Centre does not have a dedicated law reform and advocacy professional, we support and collaborate with other centres and peak bodies to make contributions to law reform.

During the year, we supported a submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) inquiry into Legal Responses to Sexual Harassment at Work- the submission was compiled by Kingsford and Redfern Legal Centres, Women's Legal Service NSW and the National Association of Community Legal Centres (now Community Legal Centres Australia). The submission recommended holistic legal and cultural change to reduce sexual harassment and increase access to remedies for victims of sexual harassment, including an extension of time to 12 months for lodgement of a sexual harassment complaint to the AHRC and amendment of the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act and the Fair Work Act to make sexual harassment unlawful for volunteers and paid workers.

## Legal service reach



## Maternity leave reform

Our legal service participated in an important law reform project involving maternity leave entitlements for mothers when their child is born prematurely and they need to take maternity leave early.

Following premature birth, parents are often unable to provide physical care or support for their child while they are in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. In these situations, mothers and their children would benefit from the option of having maternity leave commence once the baby is at home and in the full-time care of the mother.

Federal legislation does not currently allow commencement of maternity leave to start any later than the date of birth of the child. This means that mothers have less time to spend supporting and caring for their newborn, which we argued, is contrary to the intention of the entitlement.

Alongside other organisations, we petitioned our local Federal Member Mr Chris Hayes, to support the law reform initiative. Mr Hayes demonstrated his support by forwarding a letter to the Federal Attorney General seeking his consideration of the subject. We are continuing to monitor this important issue and as the opportunities arise, will continue to advocate for reform of this law.

## Driving offences legal service

DOLS was developed to address the large gap in Legal Aid services for driving offences and the impact of this on our community. In an area where English is a second language for over 58%, there is low capacity for self-representation so there is a disproportionate burden for our culturally and linguistically diverse driving community and their families.

South West Sydney has relatively poor transport connections. As a result, a high proportion of workers rely on motor vehicles to travel to work: an average of 69.3% across our catchment, compared to 58.2% for the greater Sydney area.

In addition to the financial impact of fines, a valid driver's licence can mean the difference between maintaining secure employment or not; being unable to drive can exacerbate the disproportionate economic and social impact of lack of access to legal services.

DOLS offers comprehensive legal advice and representation at the sharpest point of need – at court. Our duty solicitor approach involves weekly attendances at Bankstown and Fairfield Local Courts, where our lawyers work closely with Legal Aid duty solicitors and court personnel to ensure that nobody misses out on necessary legal advice and representation. The local courts describe the service as very valuable, assisting otherwise unrepresented drivers and greatly assisting court efficiency.

Recognising the value of DOLS, courts have recently expanded referrals to us to include other criminal offences and civil law matters for which Legal Aid is not available.

**DURING THE YEAR, OUR DUTY LAWYERS HELPED OVER 250 PEOPLE WITH DRIVING OFFENCE CHARGES.**

## CASE STUDY

### Help for a mother of three

Aida\* asked for our advice after she was convicted in her absence for a driving offence. She was disqualified from driving for many months. Aida was unable to assist us with any driving record history and enquiries made by us yielded no results.

Aida is a single mother with three children who was previously a victim of domestic violence. To escape her unsafe situation, she became homeless with her children. One child suffered from a serious medical condition. Aida suffered from depression and anxiety.

When we helped Aida lodge an annulment application for the conviction, we discovered that she had another legal name. Enquiries were then made about her driving record and we found that Aida was on active bonds for other driving offences. This new evidence made the annulment application risky. The Court could call up the bonds and was likely to disqualify Aida from driving for a long period. Aida instructed us to still make the application because she needed a driver's licence to care for her child's health.

Fortunately, the Court granted the annulment of Aida's conviction. After hearing our submissions, the Court agreed to take no action on the bonds and did not convict Aida for the most recent offence. Aida was placed on a good behaviour bond and was permitted to resume driving within a short period of time.

\*identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality



## CASE STUDY

### Employment Law

During the year over 20% of our clients had employment related problems. These included: unfair dismissal, general protections, unpaid or underpayment of wages and entitlements, bullying, harassment and discrimination.

The majority of clients were not union members so did not have access to affordable and timely legal assistance. We often witness the unjust effects of this power imbalance which is exacerbated by the decline in union membership in Australia and confirms the need for accessible justice in the employment law field.

During the year we noticed a trend involving employers attempting to limit employees' rights by making payment of entitlements conditional on the employee entering into a deed of settlement. The deeds involve the employee releasing the employer from its legal obligations and agreeing not to take any action against the employer. Most clients were unaware of how these deeds affected their legal rights. In most cases, we were able to help clients by negotiating a settlement without a deed or by negotiating a deed that did not disadvantage the employee.

Recognising the growing need in this area, in the latter part of the year, we committed to participate in the Workplace Advisory Service. This is an assistance service coordinated by the Fair Work Commission. Our participation will involve the provision of legal advice and assistance for self-represented employees in the Fair Work Commission jurisdiction.

### Compensation for unlawful dismissal

Our client Blake\* was the sole income earner for his young family. He had three young children and a wife to support. Blake started a new job as a carpenter for a local construction business. In the second month of his employment, he sought medical treatment for an ongoing chronic knee injury. The knee injury was unrelated to his employment. Blake had an adverse reaction to the medical procedure which resulted in him temporarily losing the function of his right knee.

Blake had to take two months' sick leave and kept his employer up to date with his progress. His doctor then cleared him for regular duties and he returned to work. On Blake's first day back, the site foreman asked Blake to attend a meeting and then terminated Blake, saying it was "unfair for the business" to allow Blake to work given his injury. Blake was upset as he had provided a medical certificate to his employer clearing him for regular duties. We helped Blake by filing a general protections application in the Fair Work Commission on the basis that he was terminated and discriminated against by his employer as a result of his taking sick leave and disclosing a chronic medical injury. Blake received over \$10,000 in compensation.

\*identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality

**DURING THE YEAR WE ASSISTED OVER 700 CLIENTS WITH EMPLOYMENT RELATED ISSUES. OVER 50% OF THOSE CLIENTS HAD ENGLISH AS THEIR SECOND LANGUAGE.**



## Family Law and alternative dispute resolution

Family Law continues to be our highest area of demand for legal assistance. During the year over 36% of our clients had Family Law related issues. Through our partnerships with Family Relationship Centres, our legal team continued its emphasis on alternative dispute resolution (ADR) to resolve and prevent disputes from escalating to stressful and prolonged litigation.

ADR is particularly important in family and domestic violence situations. The dynamics and impact of family and domestic violence often results in disputes remaining unresolved, generating unacceptable ongoing risk, particularly for women and children.

Our continuing involvement in development of the culturally and linguistically appropriate (CALA) family dispute resolution project is part of our commitment to integrated services in this area. CALA aims to provide culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experiencing family violence to effectively discuss and negotiate family law issues in a supported, legally assisted and culturally responsive setting. Many of these clients would otherwise have been considered unsuitable for mainstream ADR because of the domestic and family violence dynamics and challenges.

CALA and our ADR relationship with Family Relationship Centres utilise a multi-disciplinary, coordinated dispute resolution approach. Our lawyers work collaboratively with family dispute resolution practitioners, domestic violence support workers, counsellors and other community legal centres. This collaboration facilitates a flexible and tailored approach to dispute resolution for the benefit of our clients.

## CASE STUDY

### Increasing the safety for a mother and her child

Helena\* was referred to our service because a hearing date had been set for the Family Court to decide a parenting matter involving her six year old daughter. Helena was born overseas but married a man living in Australia.

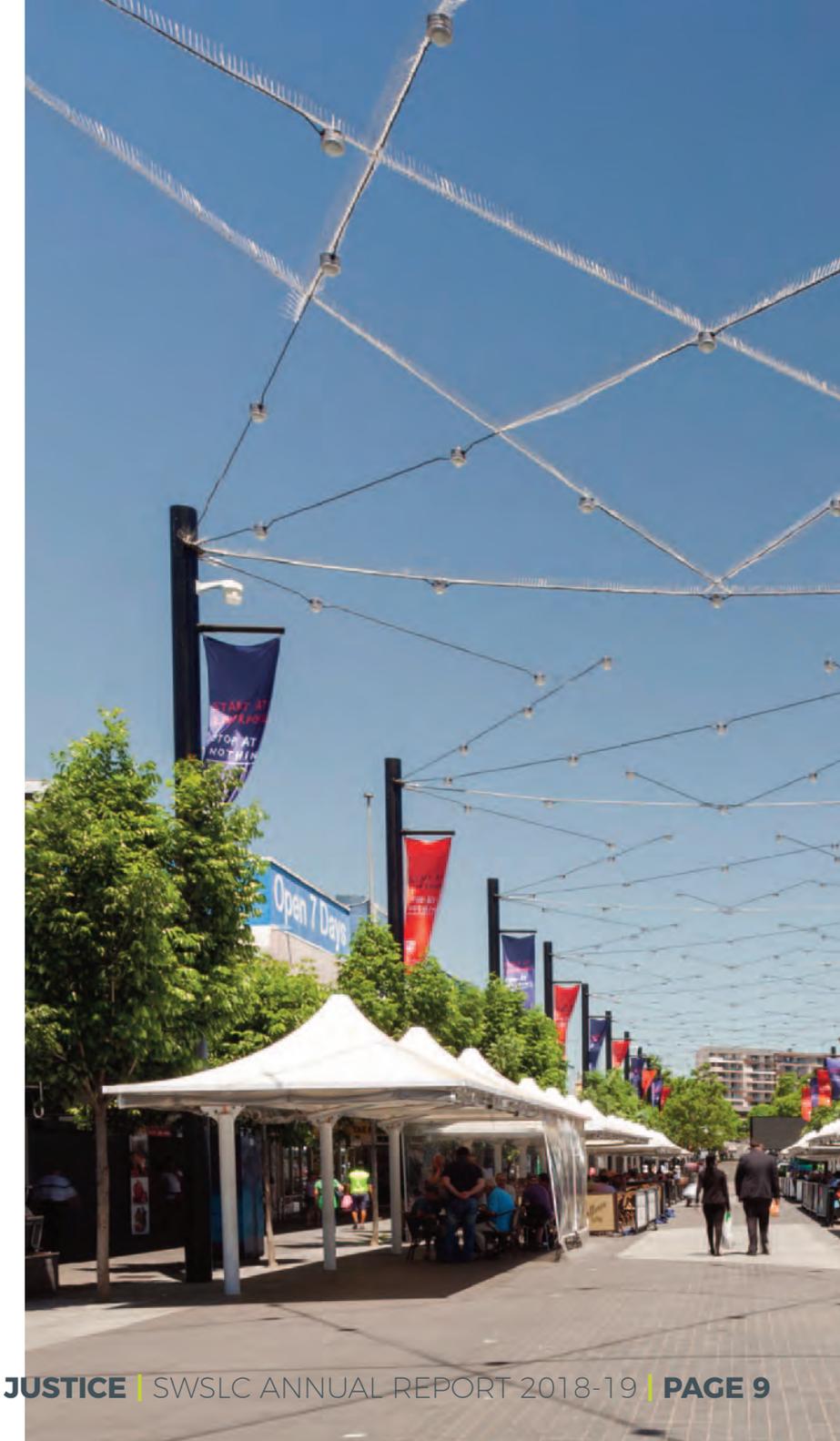
During the relationship, Helena was subjected to physical, emotional and financial abuse which escalated throughout her pregnancy and following the birth of her daughter. When her daughter was five months' old, she was violently assaulted by her husband. Concerned for their safety, Helena knew she needed to escape so contacted a women's refuge. They provided her with accommodation until she arranged her own.

After separation, because of the violence, the ex-husband was only allowed contact with the child through supervised visits at a contact centre. He wanted more time with the daughter in an unsupervised environment. Helena wanted to ensure that her daughter was safe when she was with her father. Helena also wanted to travel overseas with her daughter, to visit her family.

We arranged for a barrister who worked on a reduced fee basis. Time constraints also required our lawyer to prepare lengthy affidavits for final hearing and inspect subpoenaed documents.

Negotiations before the hearing resolved most of the issues between the parties, ensured the child would be safe from risk of harm and made Helena feel safe. At a separate hearing, against the ex-husband's objection, the court allowed the daughter to travel overseas with Helena.

\*identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality





## Criminal Law

Legal Aid's eligibility test for criminal law assistance essentially states that aid will only be provided where there is a real possibility of a term of imprisonment being imposed for the matter. This generates a significant gap in legal services for less serious charges, which can result in unnecessarily onerous and unfair outcomes, including imprisonment.

In our region, the impact of this eligibility test is compounded by defendants having limited capacity to represent themselves at court. Recognising this, we have continued our commitment to expand and bolster our criminal law footprint from driving offences to include criminal offences for which Legal Aid is not available.

The take up for this service has been significant. Local courts where we operate the Driving Offences Legal Service have also seized the opportunity to refer non-driving offence matters to our lawyers. Having regard to the trend, we recruited an additional solicitor with criminal law experience in the second half of 2019.

During the year, we assisted people with criminal charges including assault, drug offences, fraud, theft and social media related offences. Convictions for these sometimes less serious offences still carry the risk of imprisonment and the potential for other outcomes that create social and financial hardship, particularly for defendants suffering mental health issues.

**WE ASSISTED OVER 150 CLIENTS WITH CRIMINAL LAW PROBLEMS. OVER 50% OF THOSE REPORTED THAT THEY HAD A DISABILITY.**

## Rehabilitative response from the court

Elenoa\* was forced to flee her native country. She secured entry to Australia with a Protection Visa for herself, her husband and three youngest children. Her teenage child was refused entry and was sent to another country to live with family.

After arriving in Australia Elenoa worked as a gardener and had another child. Elenoa's husband is hardworking and is often away from the family, leaving Elenoa to almost singlehandedly raise her children. She has no family in Australia.

Elenoa's daughter caused issues at school and at home, including damaging property. She sought help, fearing that her daughter's actions would become unlawful but because the family are not citizens, many of Elenoa's requests for help were rejected.

One evening, Elenoa tried to counsel her daughter about damaging property and not taking care of her younger siblings while she was at work. Reacting to her daughter's defiance and disrespect, without thinking, Elenoa pushed her daughter to the ground, causing minor injuries. She was charged with assault and was deeply distressed.

Following our initial conversation with Elenoa, it was clear that her behaviour was out of character and there were underlying issues. Elenoa sought treatment from a clinical psychologist and was diagnosed with depression and post-traumatic stress disorder stemming from the tumultuous past couple of years.

We made submissions to the court about Elenoa's mental health issues, her ongoing treatment and her wish to resume a healthy relationship with her daughter. The court determined that it was more beneficial for Elenoa to receive medical help and dismissed the charge subject to her continuing treatment. Elenoa was able to move forward with her life, continue to build coping skills with her psychologist and maintained a relationship with her daughter.

\*identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality



## Our partners and funders

Our legal service receives funding from the State and Federal governments, administered and managed by Legal Aid NSW. In 2018 -19 we were fortunate to receive a boost through a sizeable one-off funding allocation from the NSW Government. We also benefited from funding from Catholic Care via our partnership with Bankstown Family Relationship Centre in the CALA project. Our sincerest appreciation to our funding bodies and financial partners.

Our deep gratitude also to all who have contributed to the success of our legal service and whose willingness to explore and commit to innovative partnerships has provided increased opportunities to address the legal needs of the most disadvantaged in our community.

## Thank you

Adam Guy, Barrister

Allan Goldsworthy, Barrister

Bankstown Family Relationship Centre

Bankstown Local Court Registrars

Budyari Community Health Centre

Campbelltown Family Relationship Centre

CatholicCare Liverpool

CORE Community Services

Corrective Services NSW

Department of Family and Community Services

Fair Work Ombudsman

Fairfield Family Relationship Centre

Fairfield Local Court Registrars

Frisina Lawyers

Kristian Bolwell, Solicitor

Housing NSW

Human Rights Commission

Law Access

Legal Aid on behalf of Commonwealth Attorney General's Community Legal Services Program

Legal Aid on behalf of NSW Attorney General's Community Legal Services Program

Macarthur Legal Centre

Marrickville Legal Centre

Marsdens Law Group

Metro Migrant Resource Centre

Michael Costello, Clinical Psychologist

Nicholas Lavidis, Clinical Psychologist

Settlement Services International

Western Sydney Legal Centre

Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre



**SOUTH WEST SYDNEY  
WDVCAS AND  
SYDNEY WDVCAS  
ASSISTED 5,816  
INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS  
IN THE REPORTING  
PERIOD WITH 18,036  
SERVICE EVENTS.  
BDVS AND SHLV  
ASSISTED 380  
INDIVIDUAL  
CLIENTS/FAMILIES  
WITH CASE  
MANAGEMENT,  
CASE COORDINATION  
AND REFERRAL  
SERVICES.**

## Domestic and family violence services

Our domestic and family violence services incorporate two Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services (WDVCAS), domestic and family violence case management services and community projects aimed at breaking the cycle of domestic and family violence in our region.

Our two WDVCAS are funded by the NSW Government to provide women and their children with information, advocacy, safety planning and referrals. The service aims to give victims improved access to and understanding of the Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) and criminal justice process, increasing the likelihood of them being protected by appropriate orders and giving them access to support systems that can assist them with legal and social welfare needs. Our Bankstown Domestic Violence Services and Liverpool and Fairfield Staying Home Leaving Violence services aim to increase the safety of women and children – they are connected to appropriate services, provided safety advice and planning and supported in a holistic way to regain control over their lives.

Our domestic and family violence teams are led by managers who are actively involved in peak bodies, interagency meetings and local alliances, all with a deep commitment to changing the story in Australia around violence. Ms Assafiri is on the board of Women's Safety NSW, Ms Raffo is an active member of the South West Sydney Domestic and Family Violence Alliance and Ms Smith is on the NSW Coroner's Domestic Violence Death Review Team.

In July 2018, our case management team members presented at the International Childhood Trauma Conference in Melbourne and then later at the South West Sydney Domestic and Family Violence conference about our child inclusive practice. Our case management practices have become increasingly focused on supporting emotional connections between mothers and their children, which are often impacted by trauma. During the year we offered parenting workshops and activities to develop deeper relationships between mothers and their children.

# Breaking the cycle of domestic and family violence

## Communities we serve

Our local area of South West Sydney is known for its cultural and linguistic diversity, and this brings strength and vibrancy to the community. At the same time, victims of violence who have language or cultural barriers that prevent them from accessing social support services are at particular risk of harm. Our Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services in South West Sydney and Central Sydney, and our Liverpool and Fairfield Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) services provide support for women and their children. Our Bankstown Domestic Violence Service (BDVS) provides support services for all victims of domestic and family violence, including children, whether male or female. BDVS may also provide services to perpetrators of domestic and family violence.

Australian data on domestic and family violence related homicides, murder, sexual assaults and kidnapping are deeply concerning. Looking only at assaults, a 2018 Australian Bureau of Statistics survey indicated that 64% of female domestic violence assault victims were offended against by an intimate partner. As it is estimated that only about a third of interpersonal violence is referred to police, it is difficult to accurately state the prevalence of family and domestic violence in any particular region. However, it is known that populations at higher risk of domestic and family violence include women and children from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds.

In November 2018 we extended our services to encompass Sydney Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (Sydney WDVCAS), based in Central Sydney and including the Local Coordination Points for Sydney, Waverley and Newtown.



## South West Sydney Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service

South West Sydney Legal Centre has been assisting women and children in the region with court support since 1992. During this time, alongside the growth in population, we have noted the growing need for our services. Assisting women in a region where there is relative financial disadvantage, we are also sensitive to the link between poverty and family and domestic violence. Women in financial stress, particularly with children, may be more likely to remain in dangerous relationships, feeling they don't have the means to leave. For women in our community who may be isolated by language or lack of extended family support, the risk of ongoing victimisation can be compounded.

Our South West Sydney WDVCS assists women and their children at Liverpool, Bankstown and Fairfield local courts who have experienced domestic and family violence. Since July 2015 all WDVCSs have been the central referral services for NSW Police following family and domestic violence reports. After referral, a WDVCS worker contacts the victim to offer safety information, advice, and referral options, and supports her through the court system.

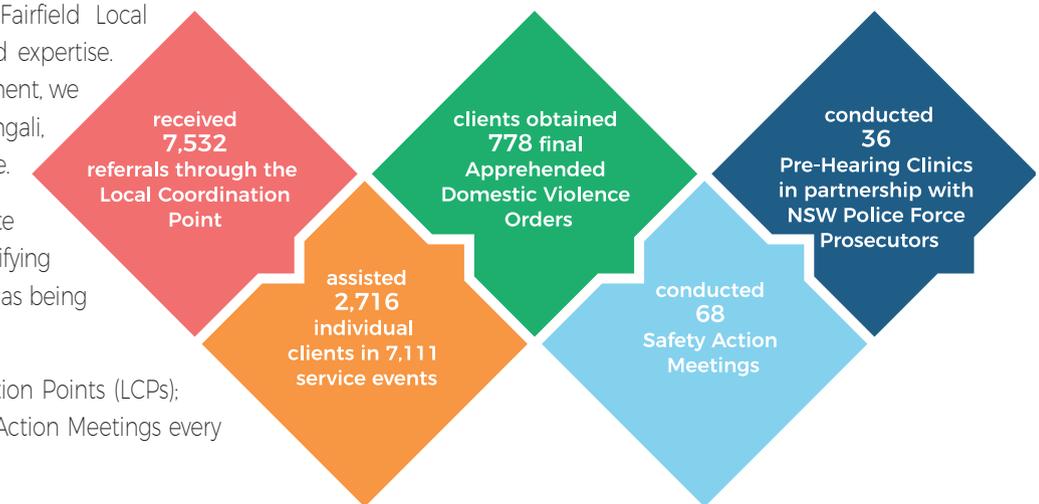
In November 2018 we took on the hosting of the Fairfield Local Coordination Point so our teams have grown in size and expertise. Reflecting the cultural and linguistic diversity of our catchment, we are fortunate to have team members who speak Arabic, Bengali, Dari, Farsi, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Spanish, Urdu and Vietnamese.

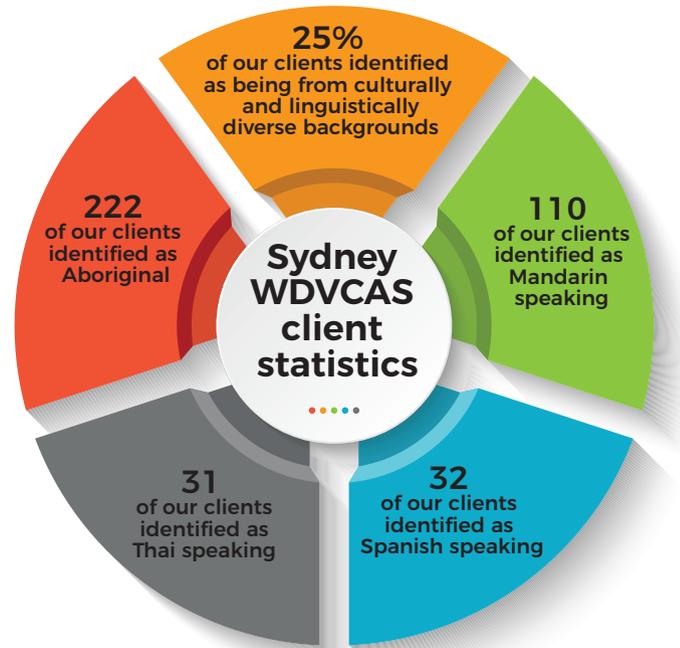
Like our sister WDVCS in Central Sydney, we were sad to note the number of older clients requiring our help, with 6% identifying as being over 60 years of age, 22% of our clients identified as being between 40-49 years of age and seven were under 15.

South West Sydney WDVCS hosts three Local Coordination Points (LCPs); Bankstown, Liverpool and Fairfield and runs three Safety Action Meetings every fortnight in these areas.



### South West Sydney WDVCS





## Sydney Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service

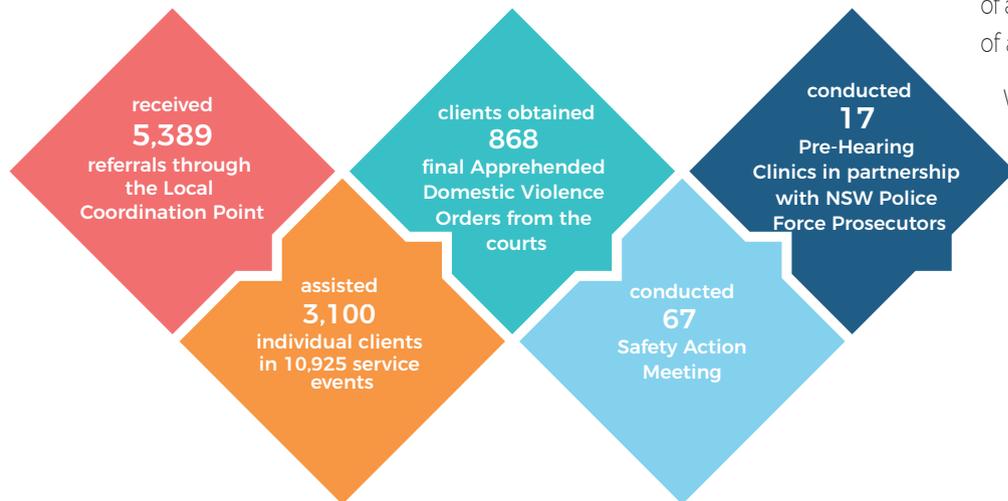
In November 2018 Sydney Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service (Sydney WDV CAS) became part of South West Sydney Legal Centre, and now works alongside its sister service, South West Sydney WDV CAS. The transition went smoothly and although both services run as individual services in separate geographical areas, the managers and the two teams have worked closely together since the transition. In particular, the teams have benefitted from the sharing of knowledge and resources, joint training days and discussions and problem solving regarding the systemic issues raised by our clients. Since becoming part of SWSLC, Sydney WDV CAS has grown in size and now has eighteen team members.

Sydney WDV CAS covers the Inner-Sydney area, the near Inner West and the Eastern Suburbs. The service is based at the Downing Centre Local Court and provides daily services there and weekly services at Newtown and Waverley Local Courts on AVO list days.

It was sad to note that during this year 30 of our clients identified as being over 80 years of age, 82 clients identified as being between 70 and 79 years of age, and another 138 clients identified as being between 60 and 69 years of age. Twenty-three of our clients were under 15 years of age.

WDV CAS hosts three Local Coordination Points (LCPs): Sydney City, Newtown and Waverley and conducts three Safety Action Meetings every fortnight in each area.

### Sydney WDV CAS



## Local Coordination Points

Our two Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Support Services are part of the NSW Government's coordinated response to domestic violence known as Safer Pathway. A key component of Safer Pathway is a state-wide network of Local Coordination Points (LCPs), of which six are hosted by our WDVCS services covering the Bankstown, Fairfield, Liverpool, Central Sydney, Newtown and Waverley areas. The LCPs provide a coordinated, timely and targeted response to victims of domestic violence that includes threat assessments, case coordination, and referral to local specialist services. As hosts of LCPs we also provide referral to and provide secretariat support for local Safety Action Meetings.

**APPROXIMATELY 95% OF VICTIMS REFERRED TO THE LCPs ARE REFERRED BY NSW POLICE, ALTHOUGH OTHER SERVICES AND AGENCIES ARE ABLE TO REFER CLIENTS. SYDNEY WDVCS RECEIVED 5,389 REFERRALS THROUGH THEIR LCPs DURING THE YEAR AND SOUTH WEST SYDNEY WDVCS RECEIVED 7,532 REFERRALS.**

## Standing by to help a victim of serious violence

Sophie\* was referred to a Local Coordination Point after police charged her boyfriend, Max, with assaulting her. Our LCP worker called Sophie, who did not want help at that time, but took our contact details.

Almost four weeks later, Sophie made an appointment to see us. She had been badly assaulted a second time but because of Max's threats she had been too afraid to go to police. Sophie described a number of horrendous assaults and offences. These included being locked in a room and not being allowed to leave over an extended period and being forced into the boot of a car and told that she was being taken into the forest to be killed. Sophie escaped from Max in the remote area he drove to, but he chased her down and took her back to his house. Sophie escaped only after persuading Max she would remain in a relationship with him and then went to hospital with serious head and neck injuries. The injuries were documented but Sophie would not agree to the hospital social worker calling police.

Sophie was staying with a friend but did not feel safe there. We made arrangements for her to stay at a refuge. Once Sophie felt safe, she agreed for us to contact police. Police immediately sent officers to meet Sophie and she then made a statement to detectives over two days. Max was arrested and charged with more than 20 offences and is in custody.

Sophie is now safely in the refuge and has a case worker. We update her about the charges, which police say will be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions. We will support Sophie through the court process, assist her to make an application to Victims Services and ensure she is connected to other appropriate services.

\*identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality



## Safety Action Meetings

The NSW Government's Safer Pathway response to family and domestic violence includes consistently identifying the level of threat to victims to ensure a streamlined pathway to providing an interagency response. Victims assessed at serious threat of further injury or death are referred to Safety Action Meetings (SAMs). South West Sydney WDVCS and Sydney WDVCS host six SAMs to provide this highly coordinated interagency response to victims assessed as 'at serious' using either the Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool or professional judgement. Our Safety Action Meetings are held in Bankstown, Fairfield, Liverpool, Central Sydney, Newtown and Waverley areas fortnightly and are attended by decision makers from NSW Police (who chair all SAMs), Housing NSW, Family and Community Services, NSW Health, Education, Corrective Services, Staying Home Leaving Violence and other relevant agencies and services. A safety plan is formulated for every victim on the SAM, with actions to be completed by the relevant agency or service, to mitigate the risk to the safety of the victim.

**SYDNEY WDVCS CONDUCTED 67 SAMs DURING THE YEAR FOR 359 VICTIMS ASSESSED AS BEING AT 'SERIOUS THREAT'. SOUTH WEST SYDNEY WDVCS CONDUCTED 68 SAMs DURING THE YEAR FOR 766 VICTIMS ASSESSED AS BEING AT SERIOUS THREAT.**

## Keeping women and children safer in their homes

Amanda\* was referred to a Local Coordination Point managed by one of our WDVCS teams and she was assessed as being at risk of serious threat. She was placed on the agenda of the local Safety Action Meeting. The SAM made a safety plan for Amanda with input from NSW Police, NSW Housing, FACS child protection, Corrective Services, Education and her case worker from a non-government agency.

Police applied for a variation to Amanda's Apprehended Violence Order to extend it for a further two years, including an exclusion order preventing the violent person from staying at her home. Police also agreed to conduct welfare and compliance checks to ensure the violent person was not attempting to breach the AVO. Also, as a result of the SAM, the Corrective Services representative was able to closely monitor the violent person and submit breach of parole reports based on the information that was shared.

Amanda wanted to be admitted for detox for ongoing alcohol misuse, which she said was a result of the domestic violence she had experienced. Services including Police, Local Coordination Point workers and health workers supported her application and Amanda was admitted to a detox clinic. Amanda's case worker advocated for her housing needs and the SAM representative from Housing prioritised her request and a property was found in an area that suited her needs.

During this time, Amanda's children had been living with her sister. The FACS Child Protection representative worked closely with Amanda, her sister and the children, and they were able to support all parties and ensure the children were eventually returned to live in the new home with Amanda.

\*identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality

## Family Advocacy and Support Services

Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS) is funded by the Commonwealth Government and includes the provision of a support worker who is part of a WDV CAS. A 2018 evaluation of FASS across Australia found that clients are likely to be self-represented, be particularly vulnerable due to family violence, experience complex social issues compounding family violence, and present with other legal matters which cross over jurisdictions.

The FASS has been found to positively impact families, courts, legal aid commissions and support providers, with benefits including a reduction of court time, an emphasis on early resolution, and high quality engagement between self-represented parties and courts.

Our FASS support worker is part of the Sydney WDV CAS and is based at the Family Court. The support worker provides the social welfare component of this service which integrates duty lawyers and social support services for clients attending the Family Court.

**OUR FASS SUPPORT WORKERS ASSISTED 228 CLIENTS AT THE SYDNEY FAMILY COURT DURING THE YEAR.**

FAMILY COURT OF AUSTRALIA

LIONEL BOWEN BUILDING

### CASE STUDY

## A helping hand through the court system

Aditi\* is a young woman who speaks little English and was being badly abused by her husband. She came to the FASS for legal advice about a divorce. Aditi was referred to our FASS social support and was encouraged to report the abuse to police who then took out an ADVO protecting the woman and charged the husband with a criminal offence. The matter was to be heard at a local court outside of Sydney, so the FASS support worker was able to arrange court support for Aditi through the wide network of WDV CAS across the state.

\*identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality

### CASE STUDY

## Increasing the safety of a mother and two children

Margaret\* is a single mother with two small children. She presented at the FASS for legal and social assistance. Margaret was having difficulty during handover times when the children were to see their father. Previous family court orders were not working as the father had started drinking heavily when the children were with him and he used the handover times as an opportunity to abuse Margaret. FASS assisted with legal advice and an application to Legal Aid for a family law solicitor, and our FASS social support worker provided assistance with referrals to counselling and some further family support for the children who were reacting to father's behaviour.

\*identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality

## Bankstown Domestic Violence Service

The Bankstown Domestic Violence Service (BDVS) is part of the Integrated Domestic and Family Violence program funded by the State government. The integrated service aims to improve outcomes for adults and children through a coordinated response to services for those affected by domestic and family violence. We provide client centred support that responds to clients' needs, both practical and psychological. Support for clients gives them increased access to a range of support services, such as counselling, police, health and housing.

BDVS provides advocacy and support to those who are still in an abusive relationship or have made the decision to escape the violence. Safety of women and children is paramount. Women are most at risk when they are deciding to leave a violent relationship, so we aim to 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.

White Ribbon  
Australia

**108 CLIENTS  
RECEIVED CASE  
MANAGEMENT  
OR CASE  
COORDINATION  
SERVICES.  
OVER 50% OUR  
BDVS CLIENTS  
IDENTIFIED  
AS BEING FROM  
CULTURALLY AND  
LINGUISTICALLY  
DIVERSE  
BACKGROUNDS.**

## CASE STUDY

### Long term support following a traumatic relationship

Mary\* was referred to BDVS four years ago. She had been married for many years and during the relationship had endured verbal, physical, sexual and financial abuse and stalking of herself and her children. An Apprehended Domestic Violence Order was applied for to protect Mary and her children.

South West Sydney WDVCS and Police also began supporting Mary alongside BDVS. Referrals were made to Victims Services for Mary and her children to support them for the trauma they had experienced. BDVS worked closely with police, supporting Mary to give her statement which was traumatising and emotionally draining. We helped Mary to attend hospital and medical appointments for injuries sustained during the relationship and four years after the initial referral, we also helped her through the lengthy court process relating to criminal charges of physical and sexual assault.

We supported Mary during the difficult process of giving her evidence via Closed Circuit Television for the hearing of the charges. At the end of the trial, Mary was relieved and emotional to hear the outcome communicated to her by the legal team - eight guilty verdicts and a 12 year custodial sentence.

\*identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality

## Staying Home Leaving Violence

Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) service is funded by the State government, supplemented with Commonwealth government funding. It aims to support women and their children impacted by domestic and family violence to remain safely in their own home or a home of their choice. We provide long term needs-based case work and we aim to engage women and their children to receive support from other key agencies such as police, Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services, Health, Housing and other appropriate agencies to support her and her children's needs.

The SHLV team conducts risk assessments and safety planning and aims to improve home security. We also provide support to women going through complex legal processes, enabling them to continue living in stable accommodation. Our aims include equipping women with the skills to develop and maintain support networks, and the skills and knowledge required to develop safe relationships.

One of the strengths of our service is the work we do with women to enhance and develop positive connections in their most important relationships. For example, our workshops and support services assist women connect with their children, and have a better understanding of their children's needs and the impact that violence may have on them.

**161 CLIENTS RECEIVED CASE COORDINATION OR CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES. OUR CLIENTS SPOKE A RANGE OF LANGUAGES REFLECTING THE DIVERSITY OF OUR REGION: COMMON LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH INCLUDED VIETNAMESE, ARABIC AND SPANISH.**

## Wrap around support for a vulnerable family

Our client Teresa\* has been receiving our assistance for five years after being referred to us by a refuge. She arrived in Australia as an international student with no family, having met her ex-husband online and marrying a few months after arrival.

Teresa was 30 weeks pregnant with a toddler daughter when she left the relationship due to controlling, verbal, emotional, psychological and physical abuse. Her ex-husband's mother was also controlling, verbally abusive and undermined Teresa's parenting. Her English was limited and her ex-husband would not allow her to study as a way of controlling her movements and connections.

Our SHLV worker helped Teresa with two successful Victims Services applications, and she was able to purchase furniture and ease the financial burden after separation. We also supported Teresa's relationship with her children - she participated in a Circle of Security parenting course and her children attended the school holiday activities that we ran.

Teresa was assisted through the local court to obtain Apprehended Violence Orders for protection from her ex-husband and his mother. We also assisted Teresa through the Family Court process where she was able to secure sole parental responsibility of the children.

Court matters took over four years. After each decision, Teresa's ex-husband brought her back to court, using the legal system to continue controlling her. We referred Teresa for legal advice during that time. When the court proceedings finished, Teresa completed an English course and is now studying a Diploma in Early Childhood - she has just been offered a paid part time position. She is now feeling happy and safe in this new chapter of her life, her children are doing well and appear to be happy spending some time with their father in a safe and meaningful environment.

\*identifying details have been substantially changed to protect client confidentiality



**IN COLLABORATION  
WITH TAFE NSW  
(CULTURAL AND  
LINGUISTIC  
DIVERSITY UNIT,  
SOUTH WEST  
SYDNEY)  
THE PROJECT  
DELIVERED A  
TAILORED 10-WEEK  
BUSINESS  
ADMINISTRATION  
COURSE TO THE  
MOTHERS AS  
MENTORS GROUP.**

## **Empowering CALD women and increasing their knowledge**

All women in the Mothers as Mentors group reported increased knowledge and understanding of domestic and family violence, principles of gender equality and respectful relationships, their rights as women in Australia, legal and support services available to protect and assist women and children affected by violence and abuse, the impact of trauma on women's health and wellbeing and the impact on children living in situations of domestic violence and abuse.

Many of the women reported sharing their learnings on respectful relationships and the impact of trauma on children affected by domestic violence with family members, friends and other women from their communities in the local area, as well as disseminating information via social media to family and friends overseas. Some of the women reported that they discussed the learnings from the weekly sessions with their husbands. This generated conversations between them that reviewed and challenged the gender roles and norms operating in their households. Some women reported that they gained the knowledge and confidence to seek help from local support services to assist with their own situations of domestic and family violence.

All the women agreed that they had developed safe and trusting relationships with each other in the group. Most of the women did not have extended family in Australia and many reported that the group had become the extended family network for them that broke their isolation and loneliness. Their participation in the group strengthened their self-esteem and self-confidence, and gave them courage to participate in community life in Australia.

### **Mothers as Mentors**

With funding from the Commonwealth government's Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities Leading Prevention programme, in 2018 we continued running a group for CALD women in a local primary school to develop their leadership and mentoring skills and become change advocates in their communities. This project was supported by ANROWS' researchers who developed a community of practice for workers to share skills and develop a deeper knowledge of action research. The funding was aimed at developing locally-led solutions to drive long-term sustainable change in community awareness, attitudes and behaviours with the aim of reducing violence in CALD communities.

The group programme, known as Mothers as Mentors included the delivery of tailored education and awareness raising workshops at the school during five school terms. With ongoing funding, the Mothers as Mentors programme will now be delivered at another local school during 2019-20.

The workshops focussed on increasing awareness of gender equality, respectful relationships and the dynamics of domestic and family violence. Topics were aimed at improving understanding of the legal options and services available to protect and support women and children affected by domestic and family violence. Activities were offered to promote personal growth, mentoring and leadership skills, and build hopes and aspirations for positive futures. A local mobile childminding service was engaged to care for the non-school aged children accompanying the women.

We also arranged for delivery of three full-day professional development workshops to school staff and teachers on Understanding Gendered Violence, Impact of Trauma on Child Development, and Trauma-informed Responses to Managing Challenging Child Behaviours in the Classroom.





## Our partners and funders

Our domestic and family violence services receive funding from the State and Federal governments, administered and managed by Legal Aid NSW, the Department of Communities and Justice and the Department of Social Services. 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. Our sincerest appreciation to our funding bodies and government and community partners.

### Thank you

Arab Council Australia  
 ANROWS researchers:  
 Maria Koleth and Elizabeth Orr  
 Bankstown Local Court  
 Bankstown Family Relationship Centre  
 Bankstown Women's Health Centre  
 Bankstown Youth Development Services  
 Baptist Care  
 Bass Hill Public School  
 Benevolent Society  
 Bondi Beach Cottage  
 Bonnie Support Services  
 Catholic Care  
 CARA House  
 Centrelink Outreach  
 Creating Links  
 Cumberland Women's Health Centre  
 Danny Mikati Consultancy Services  
 Department of Communities and Justice  
 NSW - Sydney and South West Sydney  
 (Housing, Corrective Services, FaCS, Health)

Department of Human Services  
 Domestic Violence Duty Scheme Solicitors  
 (Downing Centre, Newtown and Waverley  
 Courts)  
 Domestic Violence Unit at Legal Aid  
 Domestic Violence NSW  
 Downing Centre Local Court  
 Eriko Kinoshita  
 Fairfield Local Court  
 Foreshaw Lawyers  
 Georges Hall Public School  
 Gilbert + Tobin Solicitors  
 Immigration Advice and Rights Centre  
 Ingleburn Public School  
 Junction Neighbourhood Centre  
 Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre  
 Lifeline Macarthur Legal Aid  
 Liverpool Women's Health Centre  
 Liverpool Women's Resource Centre  
 Liverpool-Green Valley Domestic Violence service  
 Liverpool Local Court  
 Liverpool Neighbourhood Connections  
 Lou's Place

Lydia Shelly - Solicitor  
 Moving Out Moving On  
 Mudgin-gal Aboriginal Women's Service  
 Newtown Neighbourhood Centre  
 Newtown Local Court  
 NSW Police Force - Sydney City and South West  
 Sydney  
 NSW Department of Education representatives  
 Parramatta-Holroyd SHLV  
 Rozelle Neighbourhood Centre  
 SDN Brighter Futures (Central and Eastern)  
 Seconded workers from local agencies (Downing  
 Centre, Newtown and Waverley Courts rosters)  
 Settlement Services International  
 South West Sydney Domestic and Family  
 Violence Alliance members  
 Staying Home Leaving Violence  
 (Redfern and Eastern Suburbs)  
 The Deli  
 Victims Services  
 Waverley Local Court  
 Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Service  
 Women and Girls Emergency Centre  
 Women's Safety NSW



## Management committee members

In the 2018 - 19 year, the Management Committee held six meetings. There was change in Committee membership during the year, with some of our long-serving members stepping down. Special thanks are due to outgoing members Tony Jose and Mia Zahra who between them gave a total of almost 12 years' service. Naushee Rahman who has generously given her time to the organisation since late 2014, stepped into the role of President in May 2019.

Our gratitude to outgoing Management Committee members who stepped down from the Committee at various times in the first half of 2019: Tony Jose, Katherine Sainsbury, Mia Zahra, Maha Najjarine and Angelique Vongsaya.

Nada Nasser	President until 22.11.18 and then Vice President	
Naushee Rahman	Secretary until 2.5.19 and then President	
Diana Chang	Secretary	appointed 2.5.19
Caroline Alcorso	MC Member	appointed 6.5.19
Roohi Koya	MC Member	appointed 13.5.19
Rakesh Raj	Treasurer	appointed 2.5.19

South West Sydney Legal Centre is an Incorporated Association, with compliance obligations to Fair Trading NSW – it is governed by a Management Committee. Our organisation is also registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission and submits an Information Statement and audited financial statements annually to the ACNC. Our 2018-19 audited financial statements are also available on our [website](#).

Our Management Committee is elected annually by members and sets our strategic direction, providing the governance required to ensure we continue to operate at the highest standards and comply with our legislative and contractual obligations. Comprising up to seven members, our Management Committee are all volunteers – more information about our Committee members is available on our [website](#).

As a member of the national peak body Community Legal Centres Australia we are an accredited community legal centre, participating in a quality assurance process to ensure that we operate according to good practice and industry standards. The accreditation scheme includes an ongoing quality improvement process. In July 2019 our Management Committee formed risk subcommittee to ensure that we are continuing to identify and manage key strategic and operational risks.



- State government funding 80%
- Commonwealth government funding 16%
- Non-government funding 3%
- Investment income 1%

## Financial overview

The full audited financial statements of South West Sydney Legal Centre are available on our [website](#) and on the website of the Australian Charities and not-for-profits Commission. The report details our 2018-19 financial year total income of \$5.627 million and total expenses of \$4.973 million.

NSW State government funding represented \$4.508 million and Commonwealth government funding represented \$887,000 of our income.

Compared to the prior year, our income has grown by \$1.94 million. The increase in income mainly reflects an additional Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service that incorporates support for the Family Advocacy and Support Service at the Sydney Family Court, and an additional Local Coordination Point.

We are thankful for the State and Commonwealth government funding that allows us to support marginalised people who need our assistance during a very vulnerable time of their lives. However, there is a growing need for our services in this region and political cycles tend to create funding unpredictability. In addition to supporting community legal centres peak bodies' advocacy for increased sector funding, we are always considering options for additional income sources including from philanthropy and non-government grants.





# ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

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## Legal Service

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## SWS Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service

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Email: [swswdvcas@swslc.org.au](mailto:swswdvcas@swslc.org.au)

## Bankstown Local Coordination Point

Ph: 02 9708 0903 | Fax: 02 9600 6244

## Liverpool Local Coordination Point

Ph: 02 9734 6642 | Fax: 02 9600 6244

## Staying Home Leaving Violence Service - Liverpool and Fairfield

Ph: 02 9602 7795 | Fax: 02 9600 6244  
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## Bankstown Domestic Violence Service

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## Sydney Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service

Ph: 02 9287 7505 | Fax: 02 9287 7813  
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## Fairfield Local Coordination Point

Ph: 02 9734 7107 | Fax: 02 9600 6244



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