

# Shaping our future

**Strategic plan**  
2023 – 2028





Southside Justice exists to increase access to legal support for people in our community. We strive to promote fairness and advocate for social justice.

For 50 years we have worked with and alongside our community and partners to respond to legal need and to address inequity in the legal system. The next 50 will be no different, but the context we operate in will evolve and with it, we will too.

The next five years will be focused on actions that secure our organisation through our people, partners and funding; that demonstrate our value through our connection, evidence and ability to share our impact; and that helps us to thrive through community voice, scale and resilience.

This five-year strategy is not an end point but the foundation for the many years beyond.

# Acknowledgements



## Acknowledgement of Country

Southside Justice acknowledges over 65,000 years of continuous custodianship and care by the Boon Wurrong people of the Kulin nation for the lands and waters where we live and work. We acknowledge the Boon Wurrong people as the traditional and rightful owners of these lands, whose sovereignty has never been ceded. We pay respect to elders past and present and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, recognising their ongoing leadership and strength of the world's oldest living culture.

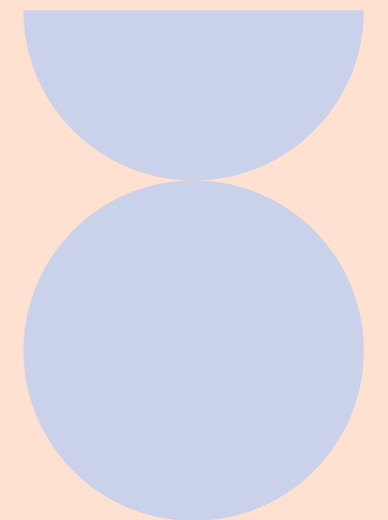
## Statement of commitment to self-determination

Southside Justice recognises self-determination as the foundation to achieving better outcomes and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. First Nations' leadership, cultural knowledge and control is key to empowering communities and embedding cultural safety. We acknowledge that the systemic, structural and social effects of colonisation, violence and racism continue to devastate and harm First Nations people. These harms are especially prominent in the legal system. Continued Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody, high rates of criminalisation, and the ongoing removal of children from their families are the results of continued discrimination and systemic racism. To support truth, justice and treaty in Australia we must empower the leadership of First Nations communities by ensuring they have the ability to make decisions about the things that affect them. Southside Justice is firmly committed to working with First Nations people and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to improve Aboriginal justice outcomes.

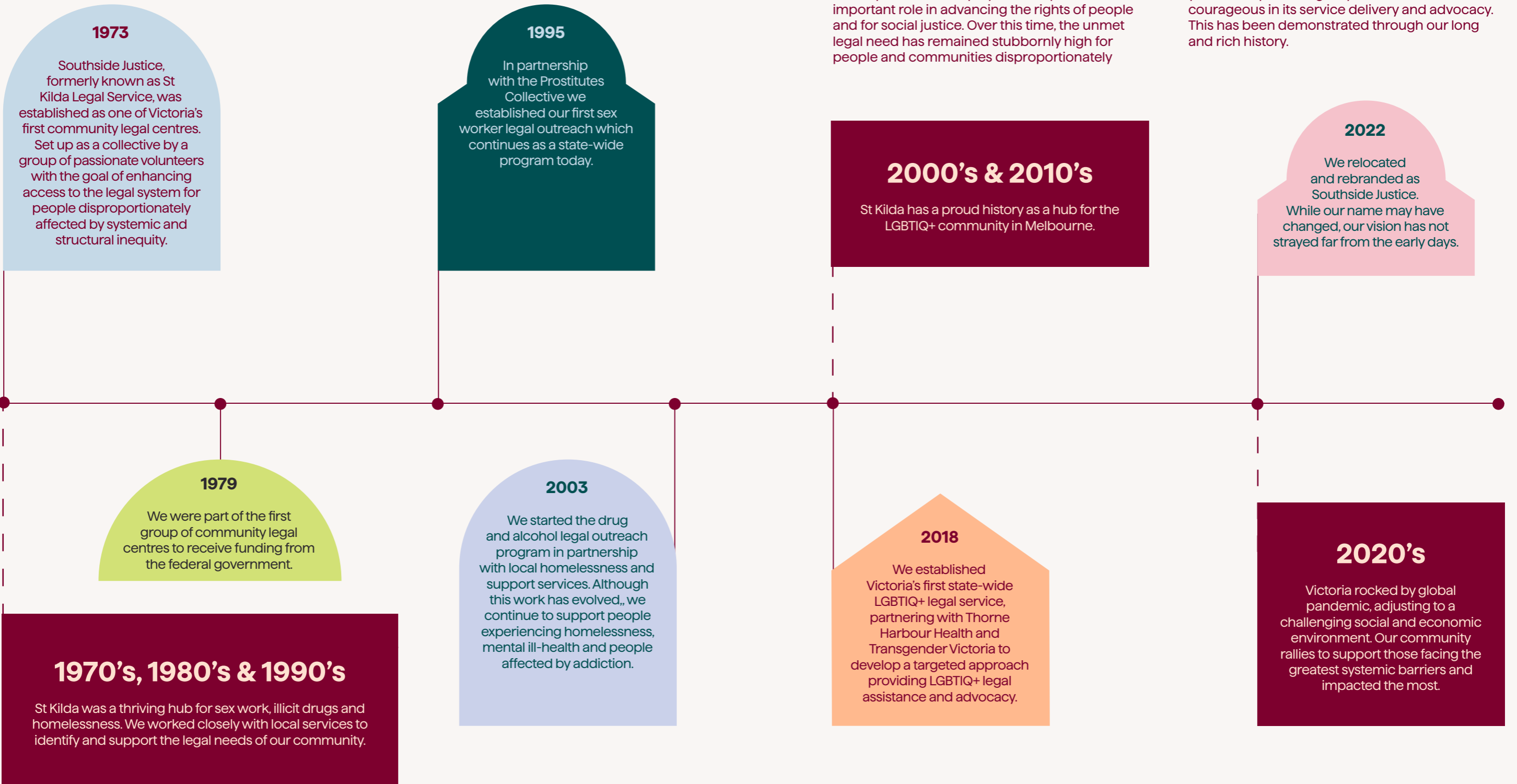


## Our commitment to diversity and inclusion

Southside Justice is committed to providing an inclusive, safe and respectful service, free from discrimination, harassment and racism. We recognise the impacts of inequity and discrimination and strive to remove the barriers these create. We are committed to listening, learning and being led by people with lived experience to improve our workplace, our service and engagement with the legal system for all. Southside Justice celebrates diversity as a strength within our organisation. Supporting diversity and providing an inclusive and respectful service is key to achieving our vision of a fair, safe and inclusive community.



# About Us



**Community – Working with and for**

Our community is a cornerstone of our work. The lives and experiences of the communities we work with and for drive our work. Over the next five years, we primarily exist for:

- People impacted by inequity and the lack of fairness in the legal system who live and access services in the local government areas of Bayside, Port Phillip and Stonnington.
- Communities that require tailored advocacy to increase access to justice through our targeted statewide legal programs.
- People who can achieve fairer outcomes and increased access to the legal system through collective advocacy with our partners.

We work with partners to identify and support people in our community. By adopting an integrated and holistic approach, we are better able to address intersectional needs and provide tailored support.

**Principles – Guiding our work**

Our principles are the practices and beliefs that guide the work we do and how we do it. They will support our commitment to engaging in purpose driven and values led work.

- **Community lawyering.** We practice with self-awareness, compassion and a commitment to working in solidarity.
- **People and communities are the experts in their own lives.** We recognise, listen to and amplify their voices.
- **Together is better.** We know that the community and legal sector are more effective together. We always collaborate for greater and deeper impact.

**Values – Shaping our work**

Our values are central to shaping our behaviours and culture. They will influence and drive the way we work over the next 5 years.

- **Inclusive.** We are respectful and informed, addressing the impacts of inequity and discrimination and celebrating diversity.
- **Courageous.** We are considered yet brave and bold in our actions, decisions and practice.
- **Adaptable.** We listen, learn and evolve with the needs of our staff, partners and community.



# Context

**The context we live and work in continues to evolve and change, and with it the need to respond and adapt. In looking ahead to the next 5 years, the following context has been important to informing and shaping our strategy.**

**Changing social, economic and environmental factors**

The world around us is constantly changing, becoming more connected, and increasingly facing shared challenges. Today a crisis on the other side of the world can have real implications in our community. This has been illustrated through a time of increased inflation and cost of living, driven by global conflict, the growing threats from climate change and the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This impacts community safety, housing security and economic inequity, all of which applies more individual and communal pressure. These are global challenges that play out with real consequences in many homes, influencing the need for services like community legal centres. We need to take note, to listen and be ready to respond through our collective support and advocacy.

**Legal need**

Identifying legal need and developing tailored initiatives will be driven by our commitment to actively engage with our community and partners. Our local area is home to over 300,000 people and includes some of the most affluent suburbs, yet:

- An estimated 25,000 people are on low incomes
- Housing is increasingly unavailable and unaffordable
- Income disparities are growing, and
- The gulf between generations, and their relative opportunities, health and security, is widening.

Compounding these local issues, are the universal high rates of family violence, a public and community housing crisis and a broken income support system. We also know that finding legal help is not always easy, that some groups are particularly vulnerable to legal problems and that health and legal problems commonly occur together.

We will go into the next five years ready to use data, the knowledge of our partners and being led by our community’s lived experiences to inform, reach and respond to need and focus on where we can add the most value.

**Competitive landscape**

Whether it is for funding, workforce, exposure or (at times) clients, there is competition. In some contexts, it can be healthy, making sure the way we work is purposeful and effective. In many others it exacerbates challenges and limits the impact we can have. The evolving nature of the legal assistance sector has also driven rivalry, with significant changes emerging in how we deliver, develop and target our services. The next five years will unlikely see a significant change to the need to compete for the funds available in some contexts, but it shouldn’t limit how we approach these challenges. It is about how we create a compelling and purpose driven value proposition that recognises the importance of people, community, partners and sustainability.

# Bringing our strategy to life

## Over the next five years, we will continue to evolve how we work, who we work with, for and alongside and what we respond to.

Our service model will move to a coordinated integration of key partnerships that will enhance access through partner referrals and early intervention initiatives. It will:

- renew our connection to both places and communities experiencing the greatest legal need
- add more value by providing collaborative, holistic advocacy with our key partners, and
- position us as leaders in the way we contribute and participate in actions that promote fairness and progress social justice.

**Vision** – The change we aspire for

**A fair, safe, and inclusive community.**

Our vision goes beyond our work in the legal system. It is for a world without structural or systemic barriers, that supports communities to thrive through fairness, safety, and meaningful inclusion. Our work will play a role in working towards this vision.



**Purpose** – The why we exist

**To increase access to legal support, promote fairness and advocate for social justice.**

Our purpose recognises the services we offer and the change we aspire to make. It is our contribution to the vision. We aim to increase access to legal support and help people understand and exercise their own rights. We pursue fairer outcomes and prevent negative consequences of escalating legal problems. We contribute to meaningful systemic change and help create a more just and equitable community.

**Role** – The work we do

- **We support** people facing the greatest need in our community understand their legal rights and access the support and services they need.
- **We advocate** for people to achieve fair and just outcomes, for better laws and systems that promote fairness and progress social justice.
- **We collaborate** with community and sector partners at the right time and place to help people overcome complex problems and to improve their lives.

Our role is our action. The practical work we deliver will continue to combine the frontline –directly supporting people with legal need – with the background – exploring partnerships and sharing our knowledge to help us reach more people, and advocate for better. Our role is already evolving as we enter this strategy, with a focus on strengthening how and where we work. This will continue as we explore new ways of delivering value to our community and the broader sector.

**Impact** – The areas we will focus on

The impact we aspire for matters. We know we can't work across every issue and for everyone and that we are part of an ecosystem that responds to a range of community needs. In shaping this strategy, we have focused on building on our existing strengths and expertise, as well as identifying new opportunities for growth based on current and future legal need.

This strategy identifies three impact areas each guided by the commitment to challenge inequity and create systemic change. These areas guide where, how and with whom we will work over the next five years.

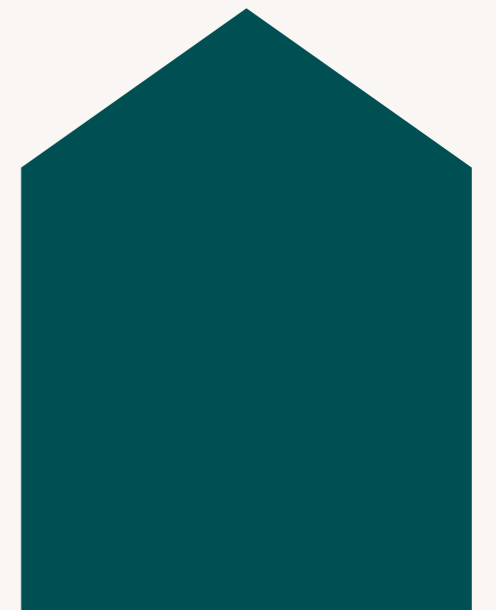
- **Safe justice** – Promoting safety and freedom from gender-based violence, and advocating for people harmed by discrimination and criminalisation.
- **Housing justice** – Standing up for the right to safe, secure, and affordable housing through supporting people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity.
- **Economic justice** – Pursuing the right of all in our community to enjoy economic security, a fair level of income support and a life free of unjust debt.

Our work in each of these areas is a commitment to integrate partnerships that will increase our ability to identify and reach those with the greatest need in the community. We will do this by delivering collaborative early intervention initiatives with our partners. We know this approach results in better outcomes for people and communities, and reduces the burden on an already stretched legal system.

**Enablers** – The levers that support our strategy

These are the foundations for shaping our future. They will enable us to deliver on our strategy and make a positive impact in our areas of focus.

- **Focus on place and community** – Clarity of the places and communities we serve and the priority groups we are best placed to work with.
- **Effective and responsive team** – Ways of working and internal structure that strengthens culture, enables development, supports quality and a focus on value. insecurity.
- **Enabling partnerships** – Partnerships that help to enhance our service and create better outcomes for those we work with, for and alongside.
- **Greater funding security** – Explore funding options and alternative organisational structures that provide greater funding security and support better outcomes.



## Shaping our future

This sets out our strategic priorities over the next five years. These strategies are not designed in isolation, they are connected and complementary. They recognise the need to secure the foundations for the organisation. To be adaptable and informed by what we learn so we can focus on delivering the most value. And to continue to evolve in how we work with and alongside others to scale our impact and thrive.

### 1. Secure the future

#### 1.1

**Evolve how we operate.** Invest in the capabilities that will help to identify, nurture and secure funding aligned to our impact and developing our structure to support this.

#### 1.2

**Prioritise partners.** Identify and focus on partnerships that help us prioritise our integrated and early intervention service approach and create sustainable funding opportunities.

#### 1.3

**Workforce security.** Embed policies and processes that provide longer-term roles, support diverse experience and professional development, and that keep staff health and wellbeing central in our work.

### 2. Demonstrate our value

#### 2.1

**Respond to our community.** Build mechanisms that help us to better engage with partners and our community, to continually adapt and prioritise the work we do, the people we help and the places we operate.

#### 2.2

**Build the evidence.** Develop our outcomes framework to capture data and evaluate our work, using this evidence to identify our impact, inform our leadership and focus on future investment.

#### 2.3

**Tell our story.** Sharing our outcomes and learnings through relevant communication channels to ensure we reach, connect to, and positively influence our partners, funders and supporters.

### 3. Thrive as an organisation

#### 3.1

**Scale the service.** Leverage our strengths and areas of expertise to shape partnerships, programs and services that demonstrate positive impact, attract long-term funding and can be scaled.

#### 3.2

**Embed lived experience.** Recognise and respect the knowledge and experience of our community and ensure our work is informed by their voices and perspectives.

#### 3.3

**Agile and resilient.** Embed data and insight into our practice to help us learn and evolve. Decisions and actions driven by our knowledge and performance, the voices of our partners and community and access to sustainable funding.

## Evaluating our progress

**Southside Justice is committed to implementing and monitoring this strategic plan through the development of an outcomes framework. This will encompass a range of indicators that will help us to evaluate our progress and performance, making sure we celebrate our success and learn from everything we do.**

The performance indicators embedded in the outcomes framework will be continually reviewed and refined to ensure we can both capture information as well as gain value from the insights, helping to guide our work and inform our future investment.





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