

Southside Justice

Annual Report 2021-22



Acknowledgment of Country

At Southside Justice we acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work, and we pay respect to Elders past and present. We recognise their continued connection to the land, waters and culture and we acknowledge their sovereignty has never been ceded. Our office is located on the land of the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.

118A Carlisle, St Kilda, Vic, 3182



Message from Denis & Mel



A refreshed start

Packing up our office on Chapel Street this year, we uncovered past annual reports. In 1984, we found this from the Chairperson:

“Maybe one day in the not too distant future we’ll get our promised new premises, a photocopy machine and maybe even a dictating machine”.

Whilst the last on the wish list is now redundant, we did after 38 years get a new premises (plus a high-tech scanner).

Our new office on Carlisle Street – next to the Salvation Army and across from the St Kilda Town Hall – was made possible from the social impact backing of Just World Investments, together with the support of the Victorian Attorney-General, Jaclyn Symes, and one of our local Federal MPs, Josh Burns. This arrangement demonstrates the growing convergence between profit and purpose, and the important role each play in advancing justice for all.

After almost 50 years as St Kilda Legal Service, it was time for a new identity. Consulting with the board, staff, members, stakeholders and clients, Southside Justice emerged as a better reflection of the community we’re here to support - St Kilda, but also the 26 other suburbs in our catchment.

Another significant change for the service this year, was the Board's decision to direct resources into strengthening our model of targeted and integrated service delivery. Post pandemic, the Board decided not to resume the volunteer night service. We sincerely thank all the lawyers and law students who volunteered with us for over 40 years.

This year we continued to invest in our organisational infrastructure and systems. In doing so, we aim to procure services that share in our commitment to advancing social and sustainable objectives. A huge achievement for the legal team was implementing a cloud-based practice management system, improving efficiencies, creating flexibility and reducing paper waste.

Like many in the community sector, we're still reeling from the effect of the pandemic. We've witnessed a worsening of key social and health indicators – mental health, homelessness, housing affordability, family violence – just to name a few. These pressures are driving a new demand for our services but providing these services now costs more. We have and will continue to advocate for comprehensive and sustainable funding for our Centre and the sector.

We know that an engaged and high-performing workforce is essential to achieving our purpose and goals, and we thank each staff member, current and past, for their continued commitment, enthusiasm and aptitude.

We also acknowledge the unwavering commitment of our volunteer board members. This year, we bid farewell to Stephanie Tonkin, and welcomed Sonia Clarke, Amanda Storey and Peter Dikranis to the Board.

Through our resolve and resilience, we're positioned to meet the emerging needs and challenges that come our way. Our major priorities for 2022-23 include:

- Develop our Strategic Plan and Impact Framework
- Continue to explore new partnerships and integrated ways of working
- Organise our 50-year celebration and host a BIG party!

In this report, we highlight the key activities and outcomes that matter most to our clients, community and stakeholders. By reading this report, we hope you'll get a clear picture of our work and impact.

Denis Nelthorpe (President) and **Mel Dye** (Chief Executive Officer)



Our work

Why

Southside Justice – delivering impactful responses to meet legal need

We are an **independent, not-for-profit, community-based** organisation providing free legal help to people who live in the council areas of Bayside, Port Phillip and Stonnington. We also operate two state-wide services, the LGBTIQ+ Legal Program and the Sex Worker Legal Program.



Our purpose is to help people experiencing disadvantage to prevent and resolve legal issues. We also advocate for fairer laws, policies and systems for the community.

We deliver legal services through our five programs:

- **Community Justice Partnership**
- **Community Law Program**
- **LGBTIQ+ Legal Program**
- **Sex Worker Legal Program**
- **Family Violence Program**

How



We give information, referral, advice and represent people at courts and tribunals. We mostly help people with legal problems relating to criminal law, debt, discrimination, family law, family violence, fines, social security, tenancy and victims of crime.

What

For more information about us, go to www.southsidejustice.org.au

Community Justice Partnerships

A lawyer is not typically the first person a client turns to in legal need

We acutely understand that for many of our clients, a lawyer is not always the first person they turn to for legal help.

We also know that targeted and integrated legal help, delivered at the right time and the earliest possible opportunity can help resolve problems that can otherwise escalate, leading to more problems, greater disadvantage, and higher costs.

We remain committed to our Community Justice Partnership Program and this financial year, partnered with:

- Launch Housing
- Sacred Heart Mission
- Salvation Army
- Star Health.

Annie – a caseworker at Sacred Heart Mission – knows the benefits of a collaborative approach and putting people at the heart of everything we do:

“Southside Justice has supported our clients immensely by removing barriers that our clients face in accessing legal support. Southside Justice have provided a free and trauma informed service to our clients with life changing outcomes through their legal advice and support.”



Community Law Program

Responding to community need

Our lawyers respond to community need through our Community Law Program where we prioritise people experiencing disadvantage in our local community. We also accept and promote referrals from community and health organisations in our catchment, covering 26 suburbs.

Our targeted assistance improves our clients' lives in many ways; increasing their safety and financial security, ensuring they remain securely and safely housed, and preventing them from becoming unnecessarily criminalised.

Megan – a student planning a career in disability care – was criminally charged and due to face court. Megan felt overwhelmed about the process and unsure about the impact of a criminal record on their student placements and future career.

“Having a conviction would impact my future employment and affect my life in all aspects....I was scared that this would wreck my life.”

At court, we helped Megan avoid a criminal conviction. Since achieving this outcome, Megan has regained confidence, and now looks forward to working in a profession that helps others.

We know that there is a clear link between disadvantage and women's involvement with the criminal legal system, which is why it is so important we provide services to address this systemic issue.



LGBTIQ+ Legal Program

Identifying priority legal need for the greatest impact

Since 2018 we've delivered Victoria's only statewide community-led LGBTIQ+ Legal Program.

To ensure the program reaches people with the greatest need, we launched our LGBTIQ+ Legal Program Strategy: July 2021 – December 2022. The program focuses on helping people who have been impacted by their LGBTIQ+ identities. We prioritise:

- LGBTIQ+ people affected by family violence
- LGBTIQ+ people who have experienced violence, discrimination and harassment, and
- Trans and gender diverse people.

Over the last year the demand for family violence related legal assistance has increased significantly, now representing 40 percent of our work.

Our clients often have complex histories of trauma. They may not have engaged with the legal system before or have had negative experiences that impact upon their trust and willingness to engage with the courts, police and legal professionals. This contributes to the stress our clients often experience going to Court.

“Having your representation and your confidence made me feel reassured that everything would be ok... Every step of the way, you understood me and provided me answers which made a difference getting through this...”

Improving access to the legal system

Our program recognises the importance of creating cultural change to ensure a more inclusive, informed and accessible legal system. We provide community legal education to both legal and community sectors on improving LGBTIQ+ access to the legal system. In 2021-22, 489 professionals attended our training activities across Australia.

LGBTIQ+ Legal Program

Systemic advocacy and research

We strive to ensure our clients voices and experiences are central in all of our systemic advocacy work. We are a trusted advisor to government and the legal sector on law reform and policy issues affecting LGBTIQ+ Victorians.

Raising awareness of trans and gender diverse experiences of Victorian prisons

In 2021, our program made a submission to the *Cultural Review of Adult Correctional Centres in Victoria*, highlighting the experiences of our trans and gender diverse clients who are or have been in prison. This work represented the culmination of the last three years of advocacy for the rights of trans and gender diverse people in Victorian prisons. We have used this work and the voices of our clients to inform community training and further advocacy opportunities in both the legal and LGBTIQ+ sectors.

Exploring LGBTIQ+ experiences of the Victorian family violence legal system

In 2022, we partnered with Monash University's Centre for Gender and Family Violence Prevention to conduct a study into the experiences of LGBTIQ+ victim and survivors who have accessed the Victorian family violence legal system. The study's findings will enhance the limited evidence base on LGBTIQ+ experiences in the family violence legal system and influence policy and service system reforms. A final research report will be launched in late 2022.

For more information about the LGBTIQ+ Legal Program, go to <https://lgbtiqlegal.org.au/>



Sex Worker Legal Program

We advocate for the rights of sex workers

For over 25 years, we've provided legal help to sex workers; with a focus on the St Kilda area. We've advocated for the rights of sex workers, including for the full decriminalisation of sex work and particularly street based sex work.

In May 2022, the Victorian Government passed the *Sex Work Decriminalisation Act 2022*. Together with community partners, we strategically advocated for this law. We were successful in our funding ask to the Victorian Government to establish a state-wide legal service for sex workers and plans are afoot to expand its reach and scope over the next 12 months.

During the year, we started a dedicated legal advice clinic for sex workers, which has drawn inquiries from the sex work community about a diverse range of legal issues including:

- Workplace rights
- Discrimination
- Reporting being a victim of crime
- Family violence
- Understanding changes to the law as a result of decriminalisation.

Historically, criminalisation, discrimination and stigma have prevented sex workers from seeking legal help and reporting experiences of unlawful discrimination and harm. The purpose of the Sex Worker Legal Program is to help bring down the barriers to sex workers knowing and engaging with their legal rights as community members.



Family Violence Program

Providing holistic services to victim survivors

We address the growing family violence need in the community through our duty lawyer service at the Specialist Family Violence Court (**SFVC**) at Moorabbin and working in collaboration with others to improve the system and safety for victim survivors.

As part of our SFVC program, we provide a wrap-around legal service to clients. This involves speaking with the victim survivor before and after their court hearing. We know this is best practice, a view shared by a family violence support worker.

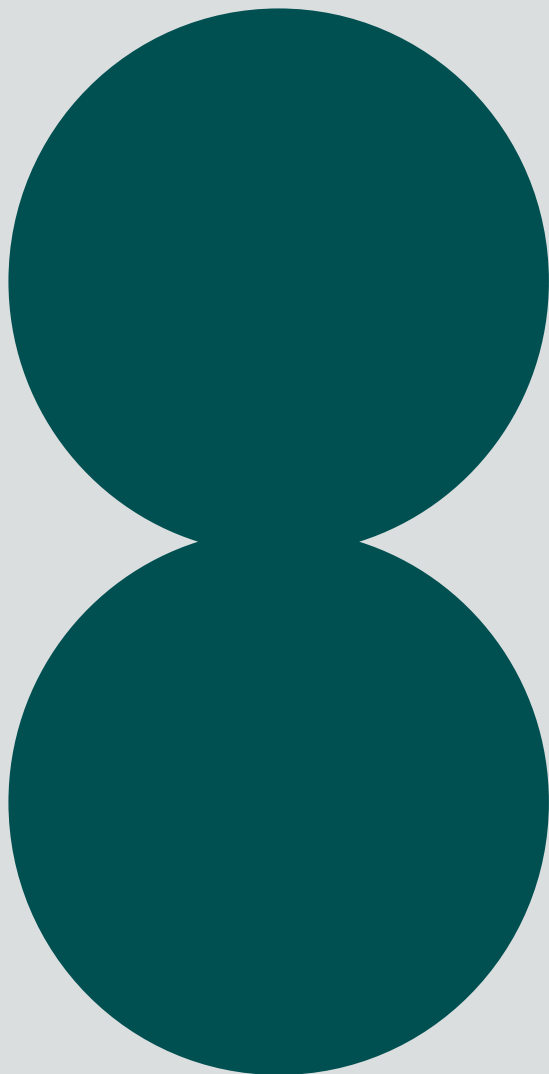
“...it provides reassurance when [clients] meet with a lawyer prior to the hearing. Clients have articulated that this familiarity makes them feel heard and that they are less likely to have to continue repeating the circumstances, which can be re-triggering”

Toula recently separated from her violent partner and was living in crisis accommodation with her three young children.

Our lawyer spoke to Toula before the court hearing and reassured her about the process and outcome. Due to the severity of Toula’s case, we represented her on multiple occasions and provided follow up support.

“[The lawyer] made sure I knew everything and all the possibilities, this guidance was needed as I was very emotional at the time.”

Through our advocacy and support, the Court granted Toula an intervention order and she and her children now feel safe.



This year in numbers

We helped 804 people

Of our clients:

- ◆ **57%** were experiencing or at risk of family violence
- ◆ **87%** were experiencing or at risk of financial disadvantage
- ◆ **50%** indicated they had a disability or mental illness
- ◆ **21%** were experiencing or at risk of homelessness

We provided the following services:

- ◆ **796** legal advices
- ◆ **183** legal tasks
- ◆ **520** duty lawyer services
- ◆ **638** information and referrals
- ◆ **161** legal representation

Our financials

Investing in our future

We reported a net loss of \$189,973 this financial year, primarily due to planned investment in office accommodation.

Service agreement grant funding from the Victorian Government and Commonwealth Government as part of our Community Legal Service Program (CLSP), administered by Victoria Legal Aid, remains Southside Justice's primary source of revenue, representing 63% of total revenue earned.

Our income this year was also made up of Victorian Government grant funding for our LGBTIQ+ Legal Program (administered by the Department of Justice and Community Safety), and a seed grant from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation.

Total revenue declined by 5% (\$1,460,518 from \$1,546,915) from the previous financial year, mainly attributed to the end of one-off COVID funding.

Employee benefits expenses (\$1,115,774) represented our major expense, comprising 80% of our overall expenditure.

At June 2022, we have accumulated funds of \$229,753 and cash reserves of \$147,928.

Southside Justice is in a good financial position, proving it can plan and respond to challenges and continue to provide critical support services to our community.



Thanks

We're appreciative of the support and funding from:

- Clayton Utz Foundation
- Commonwealth Government of Australia
- Just World Investments
- Department of Justice & Community Safety
- Department of Treasury & Finance
- Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- State Government of Victoria
- Victoria Legal Aid

