

Impact Report

2024–25



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.



Message from Chair and CEO

From strength-to-strength

At Southside Justice, our people are our greatest strength.

For the second consecutive staff survey, 100% of our team agreed this is a great place to work – a reflection of our commitment to wellbeing, growth, and leadership at every level. We thank our staff for leading with passion and purpose, and for making justice accessible to our community every day.

This year, we celebrated the retirement of Victoria Mullings, featured on our cover. After more than 30 years in community legal centres, Victoria leaves behind a legacy built not on headlines, but on everyday victories – helping people reclaim control over their lives. We thank Victoria for a career defined by compassion, courage, and unwavering commitment.



Over the past year, we have deepened and expanded our partnerships, recognising their vital role in extending our reach, strengthening our impact, and delivering integrated support to our community. These collaborations have directly enabled funding for several high-impact initiatives. We know that meaningful partnerships take time, trust, and shared purpose. They are central to our strategy, and we remain committed to investing in them as a core part of how we work and grow.

We extend our sincere thanks to the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner, one of our most steadfast and visionary supporters. Their backing has been instrumental in our pursuit of becoming a more impactful and sustainable organisation.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to Barry Nilsson for their extraordinary pro bono contribution. Since 2023, they have funded a full-time secondee – creating a valuable graduate pathway into community law while significantly expanding our family law capacity.

We are living through a polycrisis – a convergence of multiple, overlapping crises including housing insecurity, rising living costs, and systemic service gaps. These challenges don't just coexist; they compound one another, creating deeper and more complex forms of disadvantage. In times like these, people turn to community and place for support.

Over the past year, demand for our services grew – particularly among people facing family violence, housing insecurity, and financial stress.

With unmet legal need continuing to rise and resourcing remaining limited, too many individuals missed out on life-changing legal support. Looking ahead, our work has never been more urgent. As pressure continues to mount, so too will our commitment to delivering accessible, integrated legal assistance – ensuring our community receives the support it needs, when it matters most.

We were pleased to see our revenue grow and begin to diversify – an essential step toward long-term sustainability. While we've made meaningful progress, structural funding inequities continue to challenge us and the sector. As we move forward, we will stay the course on our strategic goal – deepening partnerships, expanding funding streams, and building a more resilient organisation for the future.

We extend our sincere thanks to our Board, whose steadfast leadership has helped guide Southside Justice through a period of growth and transformation. Their strategic oversight, commitment to our purpose, and unwavering support have been instrumental in strengthening our foundations and positioning us for long-term success.

Thank you to everyone who continues to walk alongside us – we're proud of what we've achieved, and looking forward to building even greater impact.

With gratitude,
Denis and Mel

Our approach

Southside Justice's work is guided by our Strategic Plan 2023–2028, which sets out our vision for a fair, safe, and inclusive community.

This strategy identifies three core impact areas that shape where, how, and with whom we work.

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 to economic security, fair income support, and a life free of unjust debt.

Overlaying our strategy is our Theory of Change and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework, which enables us to track progress, assess effectiveness, and continuously improve. The MEL framework helps us understand and communicate our impact through four key questions:

1. What did we deliver?

We track the legal services, education, and advocacy activities we provide, including who we reach and how we support them.

2. How well did we deliver it?

We assess the quality of our work through client feedback, partner surveys, and thematic case studies to understand how well our services meet community needs.

3. What changed as a result?

We evaluate the changes experienced by our clients and partners, such as increased legal capability and confidence, to understand our contribution to both immediate and long-term outcomes.

4. What have we learned?

We reflect on our data and experiences to identify what's working, where we can improve, and how we can better contribute to systemic change.

This report is structured through the lens of these four MEL questions and framed by our strategic impact areas. We use a mixed-methods approach - quantitative service data, qualitative feedback, client stories, and partner insights - to build a holistic understanding of our work.

Snapshot

What we delivered

716 Clients

79%

Women

19%

Men

2%

Gender Diverse

2407 Services

603

Legal Advice

242

Legal Tasks

160

Legal Representation

446

Duty Lawyer

929

Information and Referrals



- Community Partners — 72%
- Self-referral — 22%
- Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) — 6%

Of these clients:

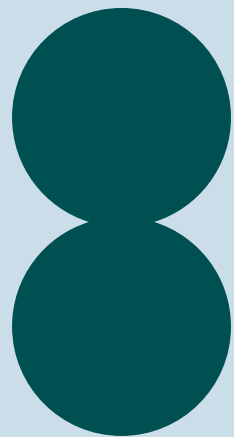
- 89% were experiencing financial disadvantage
- 42% were at risk of or experiencing homelessness
- 73% were women, and of those women, 62% were experiencing or at risk of family violence
- 51% lived with disability, most commonly psychological
- 35% were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and 4% of clients were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



Safe Justice

What we delivered

The need for Safe Justice remains urgent and ongoing. In the past year, 60% of clients presented with legal issues including family law, family violence, criminalisation and discrimination. This is in addition to our Duty Lawyer service at the Specialist Family Violence Court in Moorabbin, which supported over 440 individuals through the Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO) process.



In recognition of this growing need, particularly among women, we have strategically pursued opportunities to expand our capacity to deliver legal support in these areas. This year, we are excited to have commenced the following new initiatives:

- **Alexis - Family Violence Response Model (A-FVRM):** Leading a partnership with Gippsland Community Legal Centre, we have embedded Senior Family Violence Lawyers into A-FVRM police units in Melbourne and Gippsland. Supported by the **Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner (VLSB+C)**, our integration into this award-winning model strengthens our response to high-risk family violence cases in partnership with The Salvation Army and Victoria Police.
- **Maternal and Child Health (MCH), Health Justice Partnership (HJP):** In collaboration with our three local councils and supported by the **Victorian Government**, this initiative embeds lawyers in MCH services, offering early legal help to new mothers experiencing or at risk of family violence, often at the first point of disclosure.
- **REACHher:** Delivered with Peninsula Community Legal Centre and Southeast Community Links, this **VLSB+C** funded project supports vulnerable women leaving family violence in working towards long-term financial independence. Clients receive integrated support with the aim of securing safe and sustainable long-term housing outcomes.
- **Legal Health Checks at Olive's Place:** This **Equity Trustees** supported pilot is based at Olive's Place, a family violence refuge that is part of VincentCare. It ensures every person entering the refuge receives a legal health check, helping identify and address legal needs early in the recovery journey.

These programs have enabled us to expand our family law and family violence practice from one lawyer to four, allowing us to take on more representation work and provide deeper, more sustained legal support with the potential for greater long-term impact.

Lina's Story

Lina's* story illustrates Southside Justice's commitment to trauma-informed, culturally responsive legal support that empowers women to assert their rights and safety.

At Southside Justice, Lina found not only legal advocacy but also emotional safety and trust through her work with Leeah, one of our dedicated community lawyers.

With our support, Lina successfully challenged a baseless cross-application for a Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO); a tactic often used by perpetrators to discredit and re-traumatise victim-survivors. In Lina's case, her ex-partner, despite being subject to an existing intervention order, attempted to manipulate the legal system to further control her. "He thought maybe if he got me arrested, he could still win," Lina shared. "I just wanted to be left alone."

With Southside Justice's support, the cross-application was struck out. "It's not just a win for me," Lina said. "It's a win for women. That you can't just abuse the system and think you'll win just because I'm a woman."

Reflecting on the experience, Lina said, "I would have been lost if Leeah didn't take my case. I would have had to accept whatever he put on me. But Leeah gave me confidence. She made me feel like I could speak."

Leeah described the experience as "the epitome of what you want to do as a community lawyer, when you get to work with someone, not for them."

Lina's story highlights the profound harm caused when legal systems are weaponised by perpetrators and the transformative impact of accessible, trauma-informed legal support.

Her courage in sharing her experience underscores the urgent need for greater investment in services like Southside Justice. As Lina said, "Imagine how many women don't get this access."

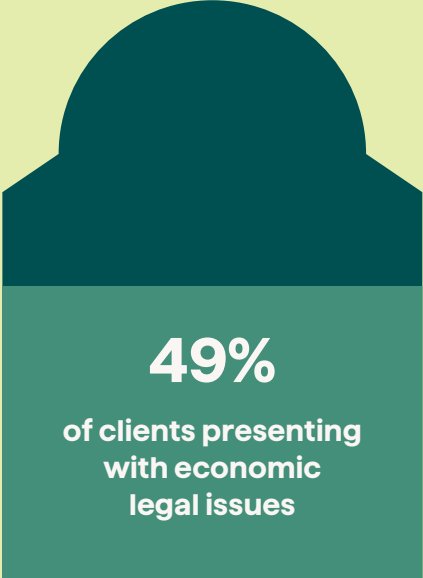
*Name changed with permission



Economic Justice

What we delivered

Economic justice remains a core focus of our work, with 49% of clients presenting with economic legal issues such as fines, debt, employment rights and compensation.



49%

of clients presenting
with economic
legal issues

This year, our economic impact totaled over \$154,000, which includes the revocation of fines and awarding of compensation in matters where the client experienced hardship or loss because of their legal issue.

Most of our economic justice work involved supporting clients with fines-related matters, where legal advocacy can make a significant difference.

One such case is Juliette's*. During a period of homelessness caused by family violence, Juliette accumulated multiple fines, each one compounding the challenges she already faced.

"I was experiencing extreme financial hardship at the time of incurring the fines," Juliette shared. "I started to experience serious mental health issues as a consequence."

Recognising the broader context of Juliette's situation, her lawyer, Jess, worked to gather comprehensive supporting evidence to successfully apply for the fines to be withdrawn.

"I felt emotionally supported and understood by Jess," Juliette said. "I felt Jess was really trauma-informed. I appreciate this opportunity to rebuild my life debt-free. My experience with Southside Justice has built my confidence in services as I felt understood, accepted, and empowered."

The commencement of the REACHher project this year strengthens our commitment to economic empowerment for women. We know that women who leave relationships involving family violence often suffer significant economic disadvantage, impacting not only their immediate stability, but the long-term wellbeing of themselves and their children. REACHher seeks to secure fairer property settlements for women, while also advocating for systemic reform to make housing access more equitable. The project recognises that economic justice is essential for recovery and ongoing safety.

We extend our thanks to Good Shepherd for their valued partnership, which enabled a financial counsellor to work alongside our legal team. This integrated model provided holistic support to clients navigating complex financial and legal issues. Due to changes in Good Shepherd's funding structure, this partnership concluded in June. We are now actively exploring new opportunities to continue this important integration. We are especially grateful to Cathy from Good Shepherd for their significant contribution to both our clients and team.

*Name changed with permission

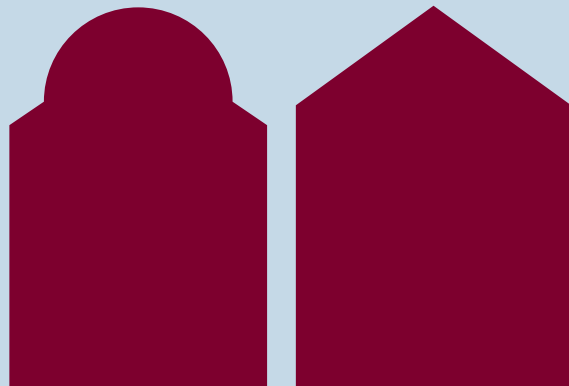
Housing Justice

What we delivered

This year marked the first full year of our Housing Justice lead role - an important step in deepening our impact in this critical area.

While we are not directly funded for housing justice work, the need in our community is undeniable. Over one quarter of clients this year presented with legal issues related to housing, primarily relating to maintenance and repairs issues, unfair service charges, and evictions. Our focus remains on supporting people in public and community housing, recognising that other funding streams exist for private rental advocacy. This is a difficult but necessary decision to ensure our limited resources are directed where they are most needed.

This year we've been able to engage more proactively with systemic housing issues and community-led advocacy. A key example is our work with residents at 259 Malvern Road, South Yarra. In September 2024, the Victorian Government announced that this public housing tower would be demolished as part of the government's public housing renewal plan. We worked closely with residents to understand their concerns and in March 2025, we made a formal submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers. Our submission is grounded in the lived experiences of residents and calls for greater transparency, communication, and guaranteed rights for residents.



We have been deeply engaged in advocacy around proposed local law changes in the City of Port Phillip that would disproportionately impact people experiencing homelessness. In collaboration with community partners, we led advocacy efforts highlighting the human rights implications and urging the Council to adopt evidence-based, non-punitive responses.

Despite expert advice cautioning against punitive measures, the Council proceeded to consult on a new law that could permit the confiscation of belongings used by people sleeping rough. This disappointing development has only strengthened our resolve. We remain committed to organising and advocating on this issue, standing firmly with our community partners and those with living and lived experience of rough sleeping.

As Chris Middendorp from Sacred Heart Mission affirms, this collective effort is vital:

“We have greatly valued Southside Justice’s advocacy as it challenges perceptions and stands for dignity, rights, and genuine safety for all. Southside Justice has been a strong ally, representing the legal and human rights of people experiencing homelessness while amplifying their voices in a sometimes shrill public debate. Strengthening collective efforts, Southside Justice advocate for approaches grounded in social justice and compassion, ensuring decision-makers resist criminalising disadvantage and prioritise solutions that address the causes of homelessness. This partnership exemplifies the impact of standing together to promote justice and inclusion.”

– Chris Middendorp, Head of Homeless Services, Sacred Heart Mission



Sex Worker Legal Program

What we delivered

This year marked a major milestone for our specialised, statewide Sex Worker Legal Program (SWLP) - the conclusion of its first three years. Thanks to our deep collaboration with sex worker organisations, the program is now firmly established, trusted, and visible within the sex worker community.

In 2024–25, we delivered 197 legal services, a 21% increase in services delivered the previous year. This growth is significant given the conclusion of government funding in June 2024, which reduced staffing capacity but did not adversely impact service targets or quality.

One of the most powerful indicators of the program's impact is the rise in self-referrals - from just 1% in year one to 19% in year three. This reflects growing trust and awareness of the program among sex workers, as well as the growing confidence of workers to independently pursue their legal rights.

Beyond casework, a significant focus this year has been securing future funding of the SWLP. Since the program's inception, we have consistently advocated for government accountability in funding services that socialise the sex work decriminalisation legislation.

After initial disappointment in the May 2025 state budget, we launched a targeted campaign calling on the Attorney-General and Treasurer to reinstate government funding for the program. This campaign included letter writing, parliamentary pressure from MPs, media coverage in *The Guardian*, radio interviews, and grassroots social media advocacy by sex workers.

Thanks to this collective effort, government funding was secured for a further three years - a huge win for the community and a testament to the power of collective advocacy. The funding will support a modest expansion of the program, enabling the addition of the paralegal role with a pathway to a graduate lawyer position.

This year also brought profound grief. The lenient sentencing of the man responsible for the deaths of sex workers Yuqi Luo and Hyun Sook Jeon, and the murder of a sex worker at the Rainbow Garden brothel, were devastating events in the community. We stand with sex workers in recognising that these tragedies are not isolated. They reflect the deeply interconnected nature of community attitudes towards sex workers, institutional stigma, and ongoing violence.

Our advocacy work continues to elevate sex worker experiences within the justice system. This year we helped shape sector-wide policy priorities in response to the Australian Law Reform Commission's final report on Justice Responses to Sexual Violence, ensuring that sex worker experiences are meaningfully represented in broader reform agendas.

Our work is only possible through our trusted partnership with Vixen. Our sincere thanks to the Vixen team for their continued guidance and leadership.



Annie's story

The Sex Worker Legal Program successfully supported Annie* to pursue her right to justice through both civil and criminal avenues after a client failed to pay for her services.

Annie met Trevan through a dating arrangement website. After providing commercial sexual services, Trevan's bank transfer to Annie didn't clear. Despite multiple attempts to contact him, Trevan ghosted Annie, making it clear he had no intention of paying.

Annie, unable to afford private legal help, was referred to the Sex Worker Legal Program. Annie's lawyer advised her that she could pursue the payment owing in civil law and could also report the matter to police. Annie's lawyer explained fraudulent nonpayment for sexual services is a criminal matter and a serious sexual offence. The Sex Worker Legal Program supported Annie to pursue the civil claim for non-payment and also advised her on how to report the matter to police, which Annie did. The criminal matter is now being pursued by police.

"When this incident occurred, I was like, so scared. And I was just like, how the **** am I gonna do this? I don't have any money. I was stressed about the situation, like really stressed. I had no idea that there was even free legal services. Finding out about the Sex Worker Legal Program was mind blowing."

*Name changed with permission

How well are we delivering it?

Client experience

The experience that clients have at Southside Justice is just as important as the legal outcomes achieved. One of our key principles is that people are the experts in their own lives – it's our role to meet them where they are at, listen to and amplify their voices.

This year, we gathered feedback from 40 clients who accessed our advice and representation services, offering valuable insights into how our services are received. The results affirm the strength of our client-centred, trauma-informed approach.



Referral partner experience

With our community partners contributing to 70% of referrals to Southside Justice, it's important we understand their experience of our services and continually work together to improve the experience for our clients.

This year, we received feedback from 15 community workers who regularly refer clients to Southside Justice.



We recognise that the scope of our services may not always meet the needs of all people in the community. While we continue to expand our capacity in areas such as family law and family violence, we remain alert to unmet legal needs and opportunities for deeper collaboration with specialist community services.

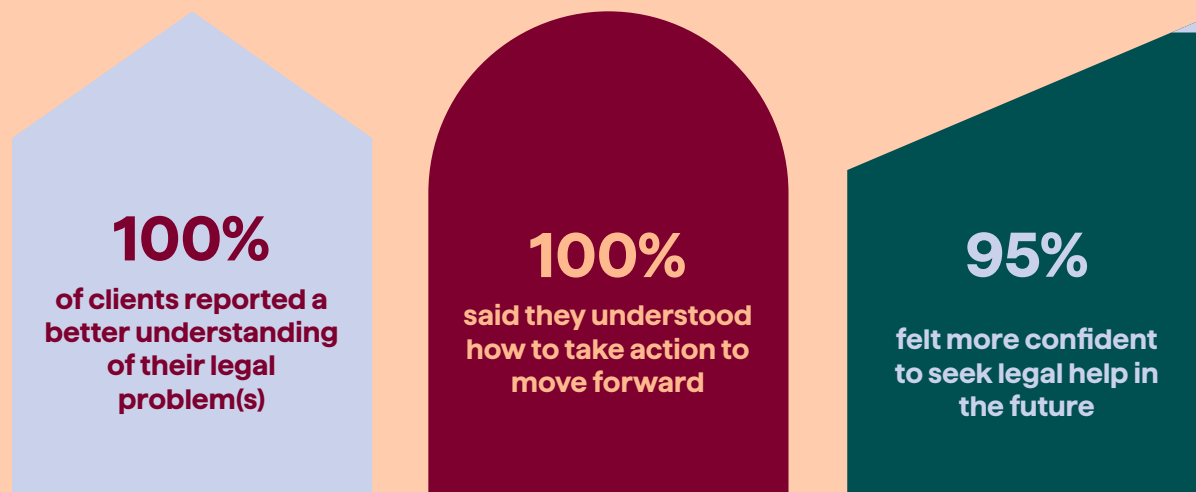
What is changing as a result?

Client outcomes

Understanding what is changing because of our services helps us understand the short and potentially longer-term outcomes of our work.

We understand that quantifying long-term outcomes requires ongoing and systems-level evaluation and therefore we focus on changes that we consider in our 'sphere of control'. These are changes that are possible because of the direct interaction we have with our clients.

From our feedback surveys, we found that:



These outcomes reflect meaningful change at a personal level. For many clients, legal issues are deeply intertwined with trauma, stress, and uncertainty. Gaining clarity about their rights and options is often the first step toward reclaiming agency. Feeling less overwhelmed and more informed allows clients to make decisions with greater confidence and clarity.

Importantly, increased confidence to seek legal help in the future suggests a shift in how clients perceive the justice system. This is a critical foundation for longer term legal capability.

At a broader level, these results have implications for access to justice. When people understand their legal problems and know how to act, they are more likely to resolve issues early, avoid escalation, and engage with legal processes proactively. This reduces pressure on crisis services and contributes to a more equitable and responsive justice system.

What have we learned?

Partnerships amplify impact.

Our principle of **Together is Better** recognises that the legal and community sectors are more effective when we work together. Investment in partnerships with over 30 local organisations continues to be central to our service model and has only strengthened in the past year.

Through expanding and deepening our partnerships, we have successfully secured funding for new initiatives that directly address the needs of our mutual clients. While the outcomes of our collaborative work remain overwhelmingly positive, we recognise this doesn't happen by accident. Meaningful partnerships require time, trust, and shared values and we remain committed to investing in this work.

Our advocacy matters.

Despite being one of the smaller place-based centres in Victoria, we are now confidently leading advocacy efforts and sharing our impact more visibly. Our campaigns to secure funding for the Sex Worker Legal Program, uplift the voices of residents in public housing, and challenge unjust responses to the homelessness crisis, are key examples of our advocacy making a difference.

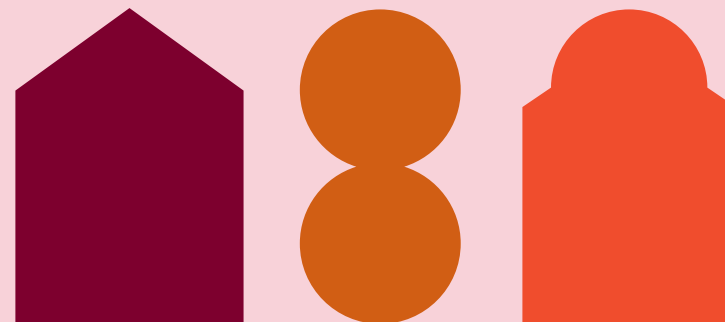
We know these efforts have only been possible because we've built strong foundations and secured the resources needed to extend beyond our day-to-day legal practice.

A more strategic communications approach has also increased engagement and built stronger support for our work. It is rewarding to see our investments begin to pay off in this space, and we intend to build stronger coalitions to amplify and extend our advocacy into the future.

Unmet legal need is growing – but we lead with hope.

We are witnessing a surge in demand driven by compounding external pressures – housing insecurity, rising cost-of-living, and limited access to essential services. These challenges are not isolated. They reflect broader societal crises that touch everyone in our community. Yet, in the face of growing complexity and hardship, we remain grounded in purpose and guided by hope.

Our thinking remains big; exploring how technology can improve access to justice, how partnerships can strengthen impact, and how innovation can help us reach more people, more effectively.



Financial overview

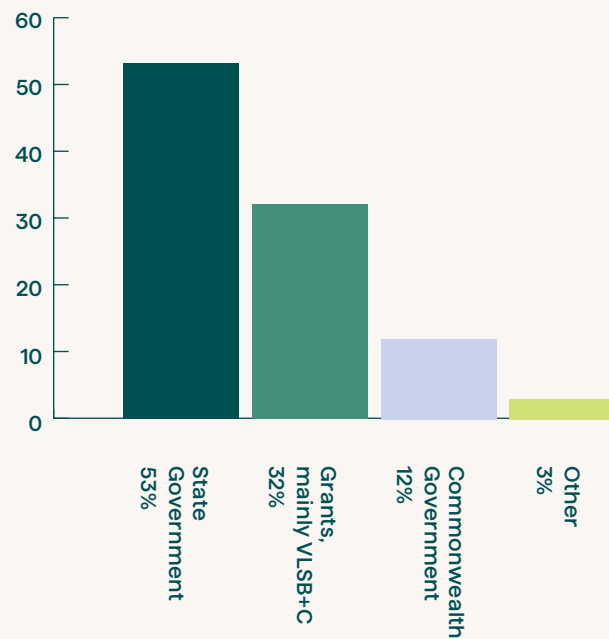
We remain committed to securing funding that reflects the true cost of delivering high-quality, impactful services. Ensuring sustainability means investing in the resources, infrastructure, and staffing required to meet client needs effectively – now and into the future.

In 2024-25, our total income was \$1,514,176, reflecting a 23% increase from the previous financial year. We are pursuing an ambitious growth trajectory over the next three years to strengthen our financial sustainability and expand our impact.

In line with our income growth, our total expenditure for the year was \$1,512,244, highlighting our commitment to sound financial management and operating within budget.

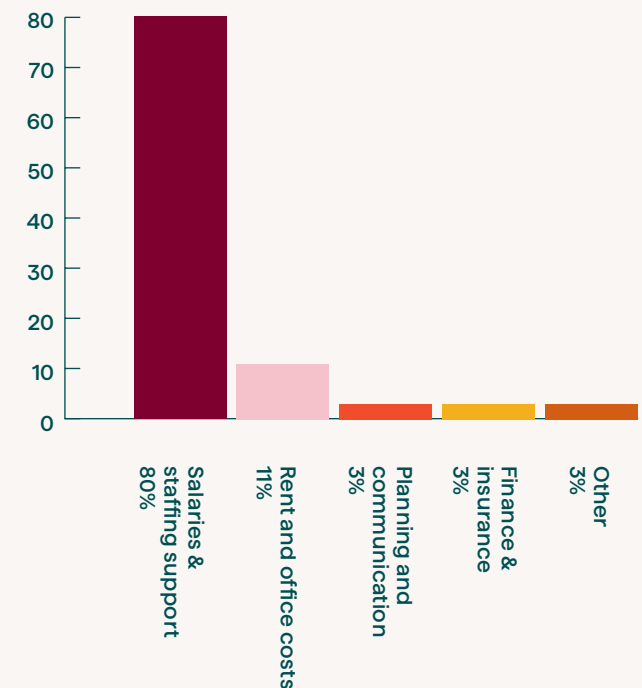
The audited financial results for the 2024-25 financial year showed a modest surplus of \$1,932. At 30 June 2025, we held operational accumulated funds of \$236,734.

Income



We've reduced our reliance on government funding by 25% as part of our strategy to diversify income sources.

Expenses



Our largest investment is in our greatest asset – our staff. The next most significant expense supports the maintenance of our high-quality office space.

Thank you

We greatly appreciate the support and funding from:

Barristers

Jordan Wright
Christopher Tran
Lucien Richter
Angela Sharpley
Ryan Kornhauser
Sam Jayasekara

Community legal centres

Community Legal Centres Australia
Federation of Community Legal Centres
Gippsland Community Legal Centre
Job Watch
Justice Connect
Peninsula Community Legal Centre

Government & Statutory Authorities

City of Bayside
City of Port Phillip
City of Stonnington
Commonwealth Government of Australia
Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety
Victoria Legal Aid
Victorian Government
Victoria Law Foundation
Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner

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South East Community Links
South Yarra Public Tenants Association
St Kilda Gatehouse
The Salvation Army
Uniting
Victorian Public Tenants Association
VincentCare
Vixen





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