



Annual Report 2023–2024

Australian Centre for
Disability Law

Acknowledgement



The Australian Centre for Disability Law ('ACDL' or 'the Centre') acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands across Australia, and particularly the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, Traditional Owners of the land on which the ACDL office is situated. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

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Australian Centre for
Disability Law

The Centre works with all people with disability and has experience with a wide range of impairments and disability, including physical, intellectual and sensory impairments as well as neurological, psychosocial and a range of long-term health conditions. It provides legal assistance free of charge to its clients, who come from socially, financially and legally disadvantaged backgrounds and rely on the Centre for legal assistance.

Phone +61 2 7229 0061

Toll-free 1800 800 708

NRS 133 677
or www.relayservice.gov.au

Fax +61 2 8088 6069

Email info@disabilitylaw.org.au

Web www.disabilitylaw.org.au

Note: All case studies in this publication have been de-identified, and all names changed.

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About the Australian Centre for Disability Law

The Australian Centre for Disability Law is a community legal centre specialising in the legal rights of people who are discriminated against because of their disability. The Centre was established in 1994 to help people with disability and their supporters to learn about and pursue their rights under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth.)

Based in Sydney, the practice services disability clients across metropolitan and regional New South Wales and represents clients across Australia in human rights cases. Clients come from socially, financially and legally disadvantaged

backgrounds and are provided with legal assistance free of charge.

Funding comes from the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments, and from the NSW Public Purpose Fund. From time to time, the Centre also receives project-specific funding from other government and non-government supporters.

The Centre's management committee provides oversight and governance. Members of the committee include people with disability, those with extensive

We specialise in the legal rights of people who are discriminated against because of their disability.

We work with a diverse range of people with disability, including those with physical, intellectual and sensory impairments, as well as neurological, psychosocial and long-term health conditions.

practical and academic legal expertise, and experience in disability advocacy, management and financial control.

The Centre has a small permanent staff of practicing solicitors who are supported by volunteer solicitors and paralegals. In addition, significant legal assistance on a pro bono basis is provided through partnerships with commercial law firms. Funding constraints mean paid administrative and operational support is limited. The Centre also works in close conjunction with a number of disability advocacy organisations.

Membership of the Centre is open to individuals, organisations and corporations who share the Centre's vision.

The Centre is an independent, non-profit, apolitical organisation that is incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 2009 (NSW). It is a public benevolent institution for the purposes of Australian taxation law and is therefore eligible to receive tax-deductible donations.

Our Services

We offer many services, including providing legal advice and tasks, taking on selected casework, assisting with referrals, delivery of community legal education, and undertaking law reform projects.





Our vision

A society in which people with disability live with dignity, and in which their human rights and fundamental freedoms are recognised, respected and fulfilled.

Our purpose

We will work towards the realisation of our vision by providing people with disability and their supporters with specialist legal assistance in our designated practice areas, and by undertaking complementary community legal education, continuing legal education and policy and reform activities.

Our goals



To work with and alongside people with disability and their representative organisations towards the realisation of the legal and human rights of people with disability in our designated practice areas



To ensure that our work is distributed equitably across all disability groups



To ensure that those people with disability and their supporters who are most socially and legally disadvantaged, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, have equitable access to our services



To understand and interpret disability and disability rights concerns within a social model of disability in which 'disability' is conceptualised not as a personal characteristic but as a result of people's interactions with a social environment prone to barriers that are capable of being overcome



To identify and pursue opportunities to achieve outcomes in our designated practice areas that will have a broad positive impact on the realisation of the human rights of people with disability



To contribute to the positive development of the law as it affects people with disability and their supporters at state, national and international levels



To support the work of Disabled People's Organisations in Australia and internationally, by contributing legal knowledge and expertise where this is relevant to their work



To build the capacity of disability rights and legal services in Australia

Chairperson's report

for the year ended 30 June 2024

Welcome to the Australian Centre for Disability Law (ACDL) 2023-2024 Annual Report. I hope you enjoy reading about the invaluable work our Centre undertakes.

This year, our Centre made significant progress in two relatively new practice areas while managing a substantial increase in demand for our existing services. Later in this report, you'll learn more about our service for survivors of domestic, family, and sexual violence for people living with a disability; and the successful implementation of our integrated, multi-disciplinary approach to the Health Justice Partnership with the South-Western Sydney Local Health District Mental Health Service.

We also continued work on a number of other innovative projects for which ACDL has previously been awarded funding. This includes the Learning Together project, and the Talk Up project, which are both at completion.

Mark Patrick, our Managing Principal Solicitor, leads a team of dedicated staff and volunteers providing professional legal services to our growing clientele. This report highlights significant success in each practice area. All staff should be proud of their hard work and contributions to the Centre and the communities we serve.

I am also pleased to report, Community Legal Centres NSW (CLCNSW) formally awarded us Accreditation and Certification under the National Accreditation Scheme for a 3-year period.

I would like to acknowledge the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department as well as the NSW Attorney General's Department, from whom we receive our main sources of funding.

ACDL maintains strong ties with several pro-bono law firms — Baker McKenzie, Hall & Wilcox, HWL Ebsworth, Sparke Helmore, Wotton + Kearney and Clayton Utz — who continued to provide volunteer solicitors to the Centre. I would like to thank these firms for their continued and invaluable support.

During the year we welcomed Nancy Walker (HJP Solicitor) and Operations & Administration Manager Pat Chiene; and farewelled solicitors Andrea Kelly and Sarah Adbou, whom I thank for their contribution to the Centre during the year.

Our Management Committee comprises a diverse group of individuals who greatly assist ACDL to achieve its mission, values and vision through decision making on a governance and strategic level. This year, the Management Committee welcomed two new members, Kairsty Wilson and Michele Hardesty-Munday. We have also been fortunate to retain our existing committee members this year.

Thank you to my colleagues on the Management Committee for their ongoing professional support and dedication. I also extend my sincere gratitude to the Centre staff and volunteers for their unwavering dedication, commitment, resilience, and drive in carrying out ACDL's vision and making a significant impact in the community.

I commend this report to you.

Jenny Green, Chairperson

Rachel's success with reasonable adjustments at work

Rachel lives in a regional NSW town and is in her late 40's. She was diagnosed a few years ago with a degenerative condition affecting her physical mobility. She has been working in a call centre for a telecommunications provider for over 15 years.

Rachel had advised her employer of her diagnosis, and requested reasonable adjustments in her employment, including the use of a special headset, a quiet space to work, working from home arrangements and use of the National Relay Service.

The employer had initially agreed to some but not all the requested reasonable adjustments, and over the course of a year, required Rachel to use her paid and then unpaid sick leave. Rachel came to ACDL after she had been on unpaid sick leave for 3 months.

ACDL initially advised Rachel on her rights under disability discrimination law

and wrote a letter to her employer setting out the employer's obligations to make reasonable adjustments and putting forward a proposal in which Rachel would return to work with the necessary reasonable adjustments in place.

The employer did not respond positively, so ACDL assisted Rachel to make a complaint of disability discrimination to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

ACDL represented Rachel in conciliation, and an agreement was reached at conciliation for all the reasonable adjustments sought by Rachel in the first place. Rachel was extremely thankful for ACDL's assistance, telling ACDL *'I wouldn't have been able to return to paid employment without your assistance in obtaining the adjustments I needed. I was very nervous to attend conciliation and so glad to have had your representation during the conciliation conference.'*





Message from the Executive Officer

for the year ended 30 June 2024

Welcome to the 2023–24 Annual Report, marking our 30th year in operation. It is a pleasure to present this report and highlight our achievements, successes and challenges over the past year.

Throughout the year, we experienced high demand for our services. We provided more legal advice and performed additional legal tasks in order to meet this demand.

This year, we provided 321 instances of legal advice and completed 51 legal tasks to help resolve legal problems at an early stage. In addition, we opened 8 dispute resolution services to represent clients during conciliation proceedings in either the Australian Human Rights Commission or Anti-Discrimination NSW and commenced proceeding in court or tribunal in 2 instances. Whilst the delivery of legal services was below our targets, this was unavoidable given the labour market for solicitors remains tight. We also provided 22 community legal education activities both online and at in-person community events.

During the year, we concluded both the Talk Up project and the Education Toolkit project. The Talk Up project was a collaboration with the First Peoples Disability Network and People with Disability Australia and aimed to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, advocating for positive changes to promote equality and justice. We achieved this by using a community connector model to deliver culturally appropriate education, training and resources to First Peoples with disability and their communities on their legal rights and to build capacity in self-advocacy. We worked with communities in Mt Druitt, Dubbo, Wellington and the Northern Rivers to co-design the Talk Up booklet with information on legal and human rights related to housing, police powers, rights on release from custody, disability discrimination, advocacy support and the NDIS. Our work generated much interest within the community, and we estimate our work improved and will continue to improve the outcomes of First Nations People with disability. We estimate

the direct improvement to the lives of between 500-1000 people and many more through word of mouth and the availability of the Talk Up resources throughout the local district.

We thank the Department of Social Services for funding this project and the Talk Up project. Additionally, we acknowledge June Riemer and Melanie Marne from the First Peoples Disability Network for their significant contributions, as well as the logistical support provided by People with Disability Australia during this project.

This year, we further developed our Health Justice Partnership with the South-Western Sydney Local Health District Community Mental Health Service. Our relationship with the local health district has been outstanding, with very positive feedback from staff and many clients benefiting from seamless referrals to our service. More information about this project can be found later in the report.

We are also grateful to the NSW Government for providing the Centre with funds to establish a service for victims-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. Whilst the funding for this project ended 30 June 2024 we intend to continue to offer this service to our clients.

The Chair and I both attended the Conference of State Parties in June 2024 and attended many of the side events. I was also a co-presenter at the side-event, "Access to Justice through the CRPD Optional Protocol" and delivered a paper titled, "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Advocating for Human Rights under the Optional Protocol".

In 2023-24, significant time and effort went into planning our relocation to the new office premises commencing July 2024. During the build phase, staff worked from home, with morale and productivity

remaining at high levels. Appropriate work-from-home support was provided, including the provision of technical support and equipment, ergonomic checks, and the provision of booked office space for meetings as required. Thank you to all staff who continued to maintain high levels of service; and to our colleagues at People with Disability Australia, for their assistance with office space. I also extend my gratitude to Pat Chiene for her efforts in managing the office move.

We remain dedicated to supporting our team by offering various programs, such as group supervision, financial assistance for external counselling, and access to external developmental training programs.

As always, I am grateful for the past year and excited for the year ahead. Thank you to our staff and volunteers for their unique contributions to the success of our Centre, and to our strategic and pro bono partners for their continued support.

I also thank the Commonwealth and NSW governments, and the Trustees of the NSW Public Purpose Fund for funding our work through the Community Legal Centres Programme, administered by Legal Aid NSW. I'd especially like to thank our funding managers at the Community Legal Centres Programme for their support during the year.

Our legal firm partners provide us much needed additional capacity for the Centre to meet its strategic objectives and deliver legal services to our clients. I thank them for their continuing support.

I am also greatly indebted to all members of the management committee who give up their time to serve our community. I'm particularly thankful for Ms Jenny Green's leadership of the management committee and her ongoing support.

Mark Patrick, Executive Officer

Our people

Our Management Committee

Our volunteer Management Committee is responsible for the governance of the Centre. Its members have broad experience and expertise, including as practising and academic lawyers, disability advocates and as management and accounting specialists.

Management Committee Members 2023 - 2024

Jenny Green	Chair
Julian Laurens	Vice Chair
Giancarlo de Vera	Treasurer
Samantha French	Secretary
Rosemary Kayess	Committee Member
Mark Rae	Committee Member
Kairsty Wilson	Committee Member
Michele Hardesty-Munday	Committee Member

Our staff (for period ended 30 June 2024)

Our staff work tirelessly to ensure the best possible outcomes for our clients.

Mark Patrick	Managing Principal Solicitor & Executive Officer
Anastacia Totoeva	Health Justice Partnership Senior Solicitor
Kimia Randall	Health Justice Partnership Solicitor
Nancy Walker	Health Justice Partnership Solicitor (from May 2024)
Andrea Kelly	Health Justice Partnership Solicitor (until Jan 2024)
Rebecca Belzer	Solicitor, Discrimination & Generalist
Sarah Adbou	Solicitor (until June 2024)
Patricia Chiene	Operations & Administration Manager (from April 2024)
Harry Rutner	Solicitor (casual)
Sania Saeed	Paralegal (casual)



Our legal firm partners and volunteers

Our Centre is fortunate to have incredible support from law student volunteers, law firms, secondees and pro bono solicitors. ACDL would not be able to do the work that it does to help people with disability

learn about and pursue their legal rights, without the dedication, efficiency and professional support shown by all our volunteers and pro bono solicitors.

Our law student 'vollies' attend the Centre on a voluntary basis for 2 days per week for a minimum of 6 months. These dedicated and community-minded students work tirelessly manning our phone lines, responding to all enquiries, and often being the face of ACDL as clients come to us seeking assistance. We often call them the 'engine room' of ACDL, and we would be lost without them. This year, we thank the following vollies:

Iffah Karim	Serene Duong	Chloe Tang	Blake Cavanagh
Rajiv Sharndil	Megan Schnitzler	Brandon Melton	Joyce Amitai
Rayyan Khan	Siena Hopper	Manat Kaur	Sania Saeed
Maria Graciela Cobarrubias	Shakira Lin	Ross Kourtis	Hannah Richardson
	Yadhavi Vasanthan	Celona Zhao	Danielle Santos

We also receive additional support from Clayton Utz, who run a weekly advice clinic and provide outstanding levels of service and legal expertise to some of our clients. This service is efficiently and thoughtfully run by George Stribling, with the constant support of David Hillard and Jessica Morath. The solicitors at Clayton Utz put countless pro bono hours into providing considered and detailed advice, and we wish to thank the following solicitors:

George Stribling	James Crosby	Lauren Parnaby	Rosannah Iemma
David Hillard	Alyssa Taylor	Tina Lau	Ellie Flannery
Jessica Morath	Alexander Hook	Eli Hall	Cloe Jolly
Sian Ooi	Maisie McFadyen	Vincent Giang	Natalie William
Nick de Bres	Trent Wilson	Nicholas Wigney	

We also thank our pro bono law firms Baker McKenzie, Hall & Wilcox, HWL Ebsworth, Sparke Helmore Lawyers who provided us with the equivalent of one solicitor per week on a rotating basis. These clinics are managed by Jenny Ma, Karen Keogh, Reece Murphy and Nuhulan Ahmed. We wish to thank for following solicitors:

Joyce Zhang	Audrey Chan	Yasmin Frost	Jennifer Cheal
Stephanie Miller	Tania Hanna	Kelsey Baird	Anthony Donohoe
Kelsey Baird	Angela Pale	Isabella Baweja	Katt Faapito
Anton Nguyen	Brendan Edgehill	Austin Nguyen	Carl Newton
Luke Dapares	Elisa Lee	Janine van Eyk	Hugh Pearce
Claudia Matthews	Vasudha Akula	Nicholas Langsworth	Cathy Nguyen
Trent Morfis	Nancy Tang	Andrei Nestea	Katherine Teague
Stephanie Miller	Taylor Wright	Jennifer Wicks	Jade Dunne
Claudia Chaffey	Sophie Morstyn	Amy Stenning	

Throughout the year, we received the generous provision of secondee solicitors from Sparke Helmore, Wotton Kearney, Hall & Wilcox and HWL Ebsworth. These firms have kindly provided a secondee for between 1 and 3 days per week for up to 4 months. This year we thank the following secondee solicitors for their service to ACLD:

Allie Marshall	Teegan White	Inez Murphy	Rebekah Johnson
Anthony Metcalfe			



Our work

Disability discrimination

People with disability are subject to high levels of discrimination, and are often the victims of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Our legal practice focuses on areas of law affecting people with disability such as discrimination, employment, guardianship and public trustee matters, problems with housing and debt and education.

Over the course of the year, the Centre provided 321 instances of legal advice, completed 66 legal tasks, and worked on 51 casework representation services.

Casework and representation

Typically, our discrimination representative service involves very intensive and time-consuming casework which may

commence immediately before or after the alleged act of discrimination.

In some cases, a matter can be resolved by sending a letter on behalf of a client advising the other party of their legal obligations and that action will be taken if they do not address a problem within a specified period. We will attend meetings with clients to try to resolve matters when necessary.

In other cases, we assist clients with a complaint to either the Anti Discrimination NSW (ADNSW) or the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). This includes drafting complaints, advising on options and/or representing a person in a conciliation conference.

Where these approaches fail, we will pursue the matter to conclusion in the relevant tribunal or court.

Dispute resolution

In some cases, we will take on matters that are more intensive or where legal proceedings have commenced. This is often because a client is particularly vulnerable. The work may involve attending a conciliation conference at the ADNSW or the AHRC.

Some examples of these types of matters are:

- Resolving an employment matter involving failures to provide reasonable adjustments to support the ongoing employment
- Refusal by education authorities to provide reasonable adjustments to students with disabilities

We faced challenges in meeting our target for dispute resolution services during the reporting period, primarily due to ongoing staff shortages and the high market demand for solicitors.

Court and tribunal matters

When resources permit, the Centre will act for parties involved in matters before courts or tribunals in relation to systemic issues that warrant the dedicated use of our resources.

This is usually the most intensive disability discrimination client work we undertake, and we examine the individual merits of

such cases carefully before proceeding to represent the client.

Legal advice and tasks

During the year we provided 321 legal advices to people with disability and provided 51 legal tasks. We also provided an additional 72 legal advices and 18 legal tasks through our Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence funding stream.

Legal information and referral

Our legal information and referral service involves providing general information about the law, legal systems and processes and other support services to assist in resolution of legal related problems. When an enquiry falls outside our areas of practice, our team will assist by providing a referral.

This year, our team facilitated 1,453 referrals for clients we could not assist.

Community legal education

The Centre plays a key role in educating members of the community about disability discrimination law, what disability discrimination looks like, and how to act on possible discrimination when it arises.

This year the Centre conducted 22 community legal education programs.



We also invested significant work in creating 7 new community legal education resources.

During the year we:

- Provided disability discrimination training to People with Disability Australia
- Delivered Disability Discrimination Training to several law firms
- Attended the South West Sydney Disability Forum Bankstown
- Presented to a class at *Literacy for Life* at Mt Druitt

Outreach

Our team make visits to rural and regional areas to provide advice and education on disability discrimination and about rights. These include advocacy and legal services, disability services, family violence services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services and Land Councils, and individual clients.

We continued our monthly outreach clinic at the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association's Granville office. This year we visited Wellington and the Norther Rivers, and Whalan Community Centre.

Community Events

The Centre attends disability expositions and events to raise our profile and promote better awareness among people with disability and relevant organisations about our service. These events are an

opportunity to network with other disability and legal organisations and make contact with people with disability who are in need of legal assistance.

During the year we attended community events at Bankstown Community Mental Health and Cooee Festival in Mt Druitt.

Policy and law reform

Policy and law reform is often the most efficient way of dealing with systemic legal issues and social injustice. It can result in change for a whole group of people and prevent repeated costly, time-consuming legal proceedings for individuals facing similar situations.

Our policy and law reform work are informed by our casework experience, as well as by detailed research and policy analysis. Much of this work is undertaken by our volunteers.

This year we:

- Prepared or were involved in 12 law reform initiatives
- Endorsed a submissions calling for the NSW Government to increase investment in repairing and maintaining social housing
- Signed an open letter to the NSW Premier requesting a review of new bail laws likely to disproportionately affect young people
- Endorsed PIAC's submission on the Aviation Green Paper



Disability discrimination practice highlights

93

instances of stakeholder engagement

12 law reform activities



27

intensive casework worked on during the year



321

legal advices & 51 legal tasks

provided to people with disability

22



community legal education programs conducted

7

community legal education resources created

The Talk Up Project

The Empowering Generations of First People with Disability & their Communities to Understand their Legal Rights & Advocate for Themselves project, funded by the Department of Social Services under the Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) initiative, is a collaborative effort between the Australian Centre for Disability Law, First Peoples Disability Network, and People with Disability Australia. The project aims to improve the individual capacity of First Nations people with disabilities and their communities through culturally appropriate education, training, and resources.

The project employs a community connector model to deliver its objectives. This model focuses on providing education and training to First Nations people with disabilities and their communities about their legal rights and self-advocacy. The project also involves establishing partner agreements and structures for effective program delivery. The service delivery area for this project is New South Wales, with a primary focus on First Nations people with disabilities.

Throughout the project's duration, significant efforts were made to engage with the community and deliver the intended outcomes. The project reached out to various regions, including Northern Rivers, Wellington and Dubbo, and Mount Druitt. The project team visited multiple community locations, such as Graceades Cottage Bidwill, Aboriginal Men's Shed, Babayan, Wangari, Cooee Festival, Jubulum Village Tabulam, Namina Village, Casino Men's Group, Dubbo Land Council and others, to connect with the community.

In addition to supporting individuals with disabilities, the project also benefited family members and carers. In Dubbo and Wellington, 70 family members and

carers were directly supported, while in Mount Druitt, the project engaged with 1,400 family members, organisations, and festival attendees. In Northern Rivers, 40 family members were supported, and 15 organisations were engaged. Overall, the project consulted with and engaged with over 1,500 family members, carers, and organizations, providing them with information on legal rights and self-advocacy.

The project also focused on employing First Nations people with disabilities to deliver the project. A total of 3-5 First Nations people with disabilities and 4 other individuals were employed to facilitate the project's activities. These employees played various roles, including providing legal and non-legal information, coordinating consultations, producing videos, and offering administrative support.

The project's impact on the community was significant, with an estimated 500-1,000 individuals reporting improved outcomes as a result of their participation. The project's success was attributed to the culturally appropriate approach, which involved yarning with the community and co-designing resources. The project developed tailored resources, including informational books and video resources, to address the specific needs of First Nations people with disabilities.

We thank all the participants involved in this project, including current and former staff members, for their contributions to its success. We also acknowledge the Department of Social Services for funding this project through the Information, Linkages, and Capacity Building program.



Talk Up Project — Making a Difference

Anne faces various challenges in the community, including issues related to housing, access to personal care and fitness support, understanding her rights, and re-entering employment. When Anne first met the project team for Talk Up, she was uncertain about who to approach for assistance with issues arising from her location, disability, cultural background, and socioeconomic status. She also needed help understanding her rights and accessing support as a member of the First Nations community in an area where support resources are limited despite a high prevalence of disabilities. Through her participation in the face-to-face consultations provided in a NSW regional town, Anne has established connections with various services and workers. She has begun to advocate for herself and others with disabilities who may not know how to access resources.

Anne has gained confidence to express her needs and took part in a video production aimed at explaining the Talk Up project and the importance of addressing issues faced by individuals with disabilities. She now

receives support through her NDIS plan, which includes assistance from a support coordinator to help her access necessary services and understand her plan provisions. Additionally, Anne is involved in several project advisory groups. These groups meet monthly online to discuss social and sexual safety for people with disabilities. She is also engaged in another project that provides resources on housing for First Nations individuals with disabilities.

Anne's primary goal is to return to employment, and her involvement in these projects allows her to be compensated for her expertise and knowledge as a woman with a disability and a member of the First Nations community living in a regional town in NSW. Anne has noted that the Talk Up project has significantly improved her awareness of available resources and support. The information books developed for the project, which are culturally sensitive and tailored to the needs of First Nations people with disabilities, have been particularly valuable for initiating important conversations within the community.



The Free Legal Hub — our Health Justice Partnership

Health Justice Partnership with South-Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD) Mental Health Service

In its first full year, this face-to-face legal service for people with mental health conditions has thrived. By integrating a multi-disciplinary approach, our HJP lawyers have become integral team members alongside community mental health workers at Liverpool and Bankstown. They provide comprehensive legal advice and support to some of the state's most diverse and disadvantaged communities.

Highlights

The outcomes that have been achieved for people with mental health conditions are as impressive as they are varied, resulting in significant financial relief, legal support, and improved living conditions for our clients.

A summary of the key achievements over the last 12 months include:

- **Debt Relief:** \$8,948.55 in state debts/ fines and \$45,969.21 in debts chased by collectors waived for multiple clients
- **Medical Bills:** \$1,457.22 in ambulance bills waived for three clients
- **Rent Arrears:** \$16,442.00 in rent arrears waived for a deaf and mute client

- **Citizenship and Residency:** Assisted clients in securing Australian citizenship and permanent residency, including those with mental incapacity and in abusive relationships
- **Insurance Claims:** Negotiated \$62,205 in accepted medical treatment claims
- **Legal Diversions:** Helped clients obtain s14 diversion orders and non-convictions due to mental health
- **Housing Repairs:** Secured repairs and a \$365 weekly rent reduction for social housing clients
- **Traffic and Legal Issues:** Removed erroneous traffic charges and provided guidance on AVOs and guardianship orders

Tim Marr, Team Leader of the Early Psychosis Intervention Program at Liverpool Hospital highly commended the Health Justice Partnership team for their work and had this to say...

“Since the legal team has come on board to support us, our therapeutic relationship has improved significantly with our patients. Being able to offer patients legal assistance has been transformative.”

Interview with Clinicians

The HJP team recently conducted interviews with clinicians at Liverpool Hospital to solicit feedback on the new Health Justice Partnership service. A recurring theme highlighted the positive changes in service delivery and enhanced client relationships due to the integrated legal support, with one Team Leader quoted as saying, “It’s been a game changer!”

Here’s a snapshot of what three clinicians had to say.

Team Leader, Adult CMHT:

Collaboration: *Kimia’s skills and flexibility have positively impacted the team and client interactions.*

Capacity Building: *Ongoing legal support from the HJP solicitor has allowed us to focus on our clinical roles.*

Embedded Support: *Having a consistent legal advisor on-site is crucial for clients with chronic mental health conditions.*

Knowledge and Training: *The legal advisor provides targeted training, filling knowledge gaps in our team.*

Mental Health Impact: *Resolving legal issues reduces patient stress and prevents relapses.*

Anecdotal Evidence: *Clients show improvement after receiving legal assistance.*

Clinical Care Coordinator /Social Worker:

Improved Therapeutic Relationships: *The presence of Kimia, our lawyer has significantly enhanced our clinicians’ relationships with patients.*

Integrated Support: *Legal support effectively addresses the intersection*

of mental health, substance use, and legal issues.

Client Empowerment: *Clients appreciate the legal support, leading to positive outcomes like waived fines and regained licenses, which reduces stress and increases independence.*

Effective Communication: *In-person meetings help ensure clients understand the information provided.*

Team Leader, Early Psychosis Intervention Program (EPIP):

Proven Effectiveness: *There was initial confusion and scepticism about the practical benefits of the partnership. However, the partnership has proven to be highly effective, particularly within multidisciplinary teams (MDTs), helping to identify legal issues that might otherwise be overlooked.*

Capacity Building: *Clinical staff often lack the capacity to follow up on legal channels, making the solicitor’s support crucial. Having Kimia available has also increased staff capacity to handle quasi-legal tasks and navigate legal systems more effectively.*

Incentives for Engagement: *Addressing legal issues, such as debts, immigration, and family law, provides an incentive for clients to engage with EPIP, beyond just complying with medication.*

In-Person Support: *Face to face interactions, including home visits, are crucial for effective engagement and support and provide a deeper understanding of client circumstances.*

Continuity of Support: *It’s important to have continuous legal support for clients, especially during different stages of their illness. This helps in reducing stress and managing relapses.*



Health Justice Partnership: Legal advocacy brings relief for Amaya

Amaya, who only speaks Arabic, was referred to the Free Legal Hub. She has a diagnosis of schizophrenia, PTSD, and a history of domestic violence. She sought legal help for an old telco debt, estimated between \$700-\$1,500, but later found to be \$1,930.

The HJP lawyer:

- Liaised with a telco and collected financial documents to show Amaya's financial hardship
- Negotiated with a debt collector, including preparing a hardship application
- Helped a clinician prepare a support letter for a full debt waiver

Despite the debt collector's push for a repayment plan, the lawyer's advocacy led to the full \$1,930 debt being waived. Amaya expressed immense gratitude, noting the significant psychological relief and financial stability this brought her.

Amaya said she was most grateful for the legal advice and representation that she received. *"I am very happy now". She said that had she not discussed her legal problem with the HJP lawyer, "I probably would have kept paying off the debt, kept thinking and stressing about it, not knowing where I would get the money from to pay it off".*

What our clients say about us

General Practice client (assisted with support for child's education at school):

“(Dear Bec), Thank you so much for everything. Your help has restored my faith in humanity. I feel ... inspired to help others, especially those with health issues. Your detailed and practical advice has been invaluable, particularly in improving our relationship with the school for our son's education.

Your support at the conciliation conference was incredible. I was nervous, but you made me feel heard and supported. I'm delighted with the outcome and relieved to have this behind me.

We are over the moon with the success in obtaining adjustments for our son. We couldn't have done it without you. Your quick responses and helpful suggestions were greatly appreciated.

Thank you again for all your help.”

HJP client (assisted with debt write-off):

“(Dear Ana), I am profoundly grateful for your diligent efforts and unwavering dedication in handling my legal matters. Your expertise and guidance have been invaluable.”

HJP client (assisted with court matter):

“(Thanks Kimia), we could not have asked for a better lawyer to work with! Thank you for putting my mind at rest. I can sleep tonight knowing I only need to say five words in front of the judge.”



What our clients say about us

HJP client (assisted with insurance claim):

“Thank you Kimia you’re the best. I don’t owe any more money. I’m over the moon thanks soooo much.”

Generalist practice (assisted with obtaining adjustments at work):

“(Dear ACDL), I wouldn’t have been able to return to paid employment without your assistance in obtaining the adjustments I needed. I was very nervous to attend conciliation and so glad to have had your representation during the conciliation conference. ”

HJP client (assisted with drug possession charges):

“(Dear Kimia), Thanks so much for everything. I’m prepared for court tomorrow thanks to your help and support. You’re amazing. I’ll let you know the outcome. Fingers crossed it will be a good result.”

HJP client (assisted with housing, child support, Centrelink matter):

“(Hi Nancy), Thank you for your patience and understanding in supporting me with my housing, child support, and Centrelink matters. I deeply appreciate your legal advice, guidance on my rights, and your encouraging words. Your support motivates me to move forward. Thank you so much for everything.”





Legal advocacy in action: Linh's journey to justice

Our Health Justice Partnership (HJP) Solicitor received a referral from Bankstown Community Mental Health Centre for a client with multiple legal issues. Linh had recently secured housing with Homes NSW, but her rent had unexpectedly increased from \$185 to \$550 per week due to incorrect information about child support. Linh had never received child support despite applying for it in 2019.

The solicitor helped Linh rectify the rent payment issue with Homes NSW and assisted her in completing a statutory declaration and rental subsidy application. The solicitor also advised her to apply for child support and assisted her contact the Child Support Agency.

While awaiting the rental subsidy decision, Linh received an NCAT Notice of Conciliation. The solicitor assured her of legal support and filed a Notice of Appearance for her case. The ex-husband threatened violence upon learning of the child support application, but the solicitor advised the client on obtaining an ADVO, which deterred further harassment.

Outcome

Ultimately, with the support from the HJP solicitor, Linh's rent was reduced back to \$185 per week, \$2,850 in arrears was cleared, the NCAT application was withdrawn, and fortnightly child support payments commenced. Linh was very grateful and wrote the following note of thanks:

"Hi Nancy,

I'm writing this letter to say thank you for your patience and understanding in supporting me with all my housing, child support and Centrelink matters.

With great appreciation and a graceful heart, I'm thankful to have you to give me the legal advice and rights.

Your time, support and kind words of encouragement will give me motivation in moving forward in the future.

Thank You so much for everything."

A collaborative approach: assisting our clients in court

Our HJP solicitor, Kimia assisted a client of the Liverpool community mental health team to regain his driver's license, despite the client having received a driving license disqualification until 2041 as a result of being declared a "habitual traffic offender". Kimia filed an application with Liverpool Local Court to quash this declaration, and represented the client in court.

In preparing for court proceedings, Kimia liaised with clinical staff at Liverpool to obtain up to date medical evidence regarding the client managing his mental health condition; arranged a number of character references; and assisted the client with a letter of apology explaining why the client feels he is being rehabilitated and can now drive on NSW roads.

The court application was successful and each of the client's habitual traffic offences were quashed. This meant that instead of needing to wait until 2041 to reapply for his licence, our client was able to do so immediately. The Magistrate even congratulated the client on the outcome!

The extent of advocacy and court representation for the client was extremely appreciated and the client subsequently (and proudly) texted our solicitor, stating that he passed his driving test. Being able to drive has enabled our client to better care for his elderly mother and be more socially integrated. The support of the HJP has had a significantly positive impact on the client's quality of life.





Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence — legal advice and representation to victim-survivors with disability

We were fortunate to receive funding from the NSW Government to establish a new practice area providing legal advice, representation services, general assistance and referrals to victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence with disability.

Over the course of the project, ACDL provided more than 75 individual legal advices, assisted clients with more than 25 legal tasks, and provided 11 clients with representative services, including legal support in family law matters in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, drafting parenting plans, drafting a property law settlement for a client with a disability, obtaining Centrelink support post separation, child support matters and successfully assisting victims of a violent offence with applications for victim's support and assisting clients to obtain and understand Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders.

Through this service, ACDL has also assisted many victim-survivors of domestic violence with referrals to other community support services, including in housing, mental health care including accessing counselling services and the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service.

Whilst formal funding for this service has now concluded, ACDL will continue to assist victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence with legal advice and representation services in the areas of escaping family violence and ADVO's, family law, Victims Support Scheme, child support applications and targeted referrals to support organisations. ACDL is very thankful for the funding received for this practice area that has enabled ACDL to further expand the areas of law in which we have expertise to assist people with disability to access their legal rights.



Safe and Informed: Samira's path to understanding her rights

Samira is a person with an intellectual disability. Samira, who speaks English as a second language, required trauma-informed legal assistance due to her past experiences of family and sexual violence. She needed help understanding an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO), liaising with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and the Children's Court regarding child protection proceedings, and advice on safety planning.

The Centre provided support by:

- Meeting with Samira multiple times with an interpreter

- Explaining the ADVO terms and effects
- Advocating with DCJ and assisting in reporting a sexual assault disclosed by her daughter
- Obtaining and explaining critical documents from the Children's Court.
- Helping Samira prepare a safety plan

As a result, Samira now understands the ADVO, has received important documents and medical information about her children, and knows the steps to protect herself. She expressed gratitude for the Centre's support.

Learning together — tools to help you get the support you need at school

This year, we completed the Learning Together with over 16,500 people accessing and benefiting from the resources created by this project.

During the year 83 people have participated in activities, including families of students with disability, students with disability, and professionals who support students with disability in education. The distribution and promotion of the Learning Together toolkit has continued to reach large numbers of students with disability. In the past twelve months, approximately 3,876 individuals have visited the dedicated project web page to access resources. Resources are being accessed by students with disability and their family members or carers.

The project website offers several accessible versions, including Auslan, Easy Read, E-text, Audio narrated, Large Print, and Braille (available upon request).

The toolkit continues to be promoted online through the ACDL website, social media (ACDL Facebook page), and our networks via email and face-to-face meetings. Our Facebook campaign increased traffic to the project website and during this period, we reached 44,208 people and generated 1,040 link clicks to the Education page on our website. We also promoted the toolkit on YouTube, which featured a short animation about the toolkit and was viewed 789 times, with most viewers watching beyond the 40-second mark.

During the year, 98 people registered for training, and we presented to 947 parents of students with a disability. Regular online and face-to-face training,

and work is underway on an on-demand, self-paced online training course that will be permanently available on our website, significantly increasing access for students, families, and advocates.

We also completed the resources that focused on engaging with CALD communities, translating the toolkit into community languages, and providing training in those languages. We translated the toolkit into eight community languages: Arabic, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Vietnamese, Bengali, Assyrian, Korean, and Urdu. We also translated the Community Training PowerPoint presentation into these languages and liaised with community groups to organize face-to-face training. Additionally, we completed work on a voice-over to record training sessions in each community language, ensuring in-language training availability beyond the project's life. A short animated video promoting the toolkit has been developed with TenAlphas, captioned and translated into four community languages, with four more in production.

Feedback we received from participants included increased awareness of their rights in education and confidence in advocating for necessary adjustments to enrol or maintain enrolment in an educational institution. They also praised the template letters and advocacy tools which provided practical examples of strategies to self-advocate in educational institutions. This led to increased participation in education and will likely lead to stronger contribution of people with disability in the community.



Jinny: Reasonable adjustments in education

Jinny lives with a disability and has difficulty remaining in education without the provision of reasonable adjustments. Jinny knew she had rights in education but lacked the confidence to make the request for reasonable adjustments because of the power imbalance between the college and herself. The Learning Together training provided Jinny with knowledge and understanding of her right to education, and our template letters and advocacy tools provided practical examples of strategies to self-advocate with the college. Jinny felt empowered to engage with the college to advocate for her rights and did so successfully. As a result, Jinny felt included in mainstream education and her self-confidence and general well-being has improved.

Jinny found out about our Learning Together training via our promotional activities in the local area. Jinny would have found self-advocating difficult without our tools and strategies. With our training and advocacy tools, Jinny successfully advocated for herself and is better supported by the college and is enjoying college life.

Jinny now has a positive and mutually respectful relationship with the college and is grateful for our Toolkit and the strategies we devised for self-advocating. In the future Jinny intends to use similar strategies in other areas of life. She is also looking forward to joining the workforce in her chosen field of study and feels the college is now more inclusive of herself and other people with disability.

Our community organisation partners

The Centre maintains partnerships with a number of individuals and organisations who share our vision and values. These relationships maximise the strength of our organisation, and help us to achieve the best possible outcomes for our clients.

Many of our clients lack the resources, confidence or knowledge to take their legal complaints beyond the advice stage. Our partnerships with disability advocacy service providers put us in a unique position to provide clients with a holistic service to suit both their legal and advocacy needs, so that the best overall outcome can be achieved.

We would like to thank First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN), Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association (MDAA), People with Disability Australia (PWDA) and Disability Advocacy NSW for their ongoing association and support.

We would also like to thank Central Coast Community Legal Centre, Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre, Women's Legal Service of NSW, Justice Connect and Your Story Legal Service.



First Peoples
Disability Network



