





Acknowledgement

ARC Justice acknowledges Aboriginal Peoples as the traditional and current custodians of the land upon which we work. We respect that this land always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land. Aboriginal sovereignty has never been ceded.

We pay our respect to Elders past and present, as well as all Aboriginal people who have fought, and continue to fight, for equality, self-determination, culture, Country and community.

We recognise systemic injustices that have been caused by colonisation and remain ongoing today. It is our responsibility to educate ourselves about these issues.

We aim to always respect and work with Aboriginal communities to bring justice. We know that we have a lot to learn and we are committed to doing this. We won't always get it right, and we genuinely welcome feedback from community.

We celebrate the strength, culture, connection to Country, incredible resilience and contribution of Aboriginal Peoples to our whole community.

We are grateful for the knowledge and wisdom so many Aboriginal people have shared with us and we look forward to working together in the years ahead.

Contents

Acknowledgement	2
Chairperson and CEO Report	4
Our Programs and Services	8
Our Strategy	6
Our Impact	10
Who we've helped	12
COVID-19	16
A tale of two towns: addressing postcode injustice in regional Victoria	20
Our People	24
Our Financials	26
Our Supporters	28



Chairperson and CEO report

Andrew Chittenden and Hayley Mansfield

Welcome to the 2020-2021 Annual Report. We are proud to be sharing this snapshot of ARC Justice's work for the year.

COVID-19 has thrown up no shortage of challenges in every home, business and sector of Victorian life again this year. Inequalities in our communities have been exposed and reinforced. Human rights have been at the forefront, while the role of government and balancing of individual freedoms with our responsibility to community, have resulted in lively debate.

In this environment, free, independent legal and tenancy support have never been more vital. Nor has ARC Justice's role in upholding the human rights of regional and rural Victorians. Whether we are appearing for clients in court; building legal and tenancy rights literacy; or advocating for systemic improvements for regional and rural Victorians; we have an important role in advancing equal access to justice and human rights.

We have seen a remarkable increase in the intensity and complexity of legal, tenancy and social issues affecting our clients. For some clients, the lack of suitable supports has adversely affected their outcomes and mental health.

Many services are only now starting to transition back to face to face services and their waitlists are the longest they have ever been.

COVID-19's impact has been no less disruptive on how we work. For some, the lasting memory of this year will be our agility to transfer from the office to bedroom, to the kitchen table and then back again, while juggling home schooling and care responsibilities.

This has not diminished our impact. The creativity, problem-solving capacity and commitment of our staff is illustrated throughout this report. We have found ways to keep serving our communities as lockdowns came and went, including maintaining open doors throughout all but the most restrictive periods.

The flexibility that the pandemic response has demanded will continue to shape the way we work. We will build on technological advancements and continue mixed-model service delivery to facilitate access to justice.

Remote access to court hearings means our lawyers are able to represent clients at satellite courts more often. This seemingly simple innovation improves access to justice because it saves people having to self-represent or seek adjournments, prolonging their matter.

At a systemic level, we continue to advocate for the realisation of a safe and fair justice system. Five years on from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, our lawyers have continued to work with the sector to implement and adapt reforms to best meet the needs of our clients.



We have undertaken important research this year into women's experience of the family violence intervention order system, and we look forward to sharing the findings of this research with you next year.

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System's report was released this year. Many findings align with our observations and the experiences of our clients, who are all too often struggling to access supports.

We have seen a significant rise in clients presenting with stress and mental health conditions, which is compounded by lack of available treatment services, sometimes resulting in clients interacting with the justice system. ARC Justice welcomes the opportunity to advocate for improvements to services and their resourcing.

Next year, ARC Justice will be reflecting on our successful 2017 to 2022 strategic plan and our areas of focus for the next five years. Work has commenced this year to understand legal and tenancy needs in our community, which will inform this plan.

We have also undertaken a substantial review of our organisational branding as a part of this process. We look forward to getting further input into our strategy next year from partners and the community.

Reflecting on the achievements and challenges of the past year, ARC Justice has emerged from the pandemic strong and well placed for the challenges ahead. This is only possible because of the commitment and contributions of the many people who contribute to our work.

We take this opportunity to thank our Board of Directors, our staff and volunteers, our local partners, funders, and our supporters. We look forward to continuing to work together to advocate for access to justice in regional and rural Victoria.

Andrew Chittenden
Chairperson

Hayley Mansfield
Chief Executive Officer

Vision, purpose and principles

Our vision

An inclusive community built on a foundation of human rights and equality before the law.

Our purpose

We promote equality and access to justice for people in rural and regional Victoria by: providing legal, advocacy and support services, elevating justice as an issue in public discourse, and advocating for systemic change to uphold human rights.

Our principles

The follow principles guide our work:



Community

We serve, build capacity and are accountable to the community to which we belong.



Learning

We are inquisitive and receptive to new ideas, use evidence-based practice and share our knowledge to achieve the greatest impact for our communities. We learn from both our successes and mistakes.



Partnership

We believe that partnership and collaboration between individuals, communities and organisations is the only way to create meaningful and sustainable change.



People

We are committed to ethical and sustainable practice and value our people in achieving our purpose.



Recognition of First Peoples

We celebrate the strength, culture and contribution of Australia's First Peoples. We recognise the systemic injustices brought against them, and work in partnership with local Aboriginal communities to bring justice.



Respect

In all our work we show respect. We value diversity and acknowledge differences, knowing these strengthen our community.

Our strategy

We are working towards this vision with a focus on the five priority areas identified in our 2017-22 Strategic Plan:

Five priority areas

- 1** Increase access to justice and secure housing for the most vulnerable individuals in regional and rural Victoria.

 - 2** Our services will recognise and address the interconnectedness between social and economic circumstances, physical and psychological health and our clients' interaction with the legal system and housing.

 - 3** The experience and expertise of our local communities will guide our work.

 - 4** Advocate for systemic change that enhances the rights of rural and regional Victorians.

 - 5** Build our organisation's capacity to achieve its purpose.
- 

Our programs and services



Shepparton
Law Courts
10 - 18 High Street

- Supreme Court of Victoria
- County Court of Victoria
- Magistrates' Court of Victoria
- Children's Court of Victoria
- Coroners Court of Victoria
- Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

Court Services Victoria is proud to acknowledge the Traditional Owners and custodians of this land, and pay respect to their Elders both past and present.

Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre

Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre (LCCLC) is based in Bendigo and provides free legal information, advice and representation services to people living in Central Victoria.

We help people who are experiencing disadvantage, who cannot afford a lawyer, or who have other complex needs. LCCLC is a generalist legal service, with dedicated Child Protection and Family Violence Programs. We partner with health and family violence services in Bendigo and Maryborough, to ensure that people with complex legal, health and social needs have access to integrated support.

Housing Justice

Everyone has the right to safe and secure housing. Housing Justice stands up for the rights of tenants, helping people to solve their tenancy problems and stay in their rental homes.

Our Housing Justice team is based in Bendigo and provides tenancy information, advice and practical support to people living in private rental properties, or social housing, across Central Victoria.

Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre

Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre (GVCLC) is based in Shepparton and provides free legal information, advice and representation services to people living in Northern and North East Victoria.

We help people who are experiencing disadvantage, who cannot afford a lawyer, or who have other complex needs. GVCLC is a generalist legal service, with a specialist Family Violence Program.

2020 - 21 has been a unique year. This report primarily focuses on the impacts of COVID-19 in our community, our whole of organisation response and impact.

For details about our individual projects and programs, you can visit our newly updated website.

www.arcjustice.org.au

Our impact

While the past 12 months, and the year prior, have been amongst the most challenging years to navigate, the effects of COVID-19 have not diminished the positive impact of our services in the community.

There has been a steady increase in demand for assistance. Many of our clients were experiencing complex challenges, compounded by the social and economic impacts of COVID-19.

We have witnessed a substantial impact on families, as they experience increased pressure and complex challenges during the COVID-19 crisis, in turn impacting on their legal needs and housing.

Supporting the community with family violence, family law, child protection and tenancy advocacy remained our core focus this year. Going in and out of lockdown throughout the year, our team of lawyers, advocates and support staff have been flexible and responsive to the needs of their clients, delivering a mix of services remotely, via telephone and videolink, and in-person.

This year we saw a steady increase in access to legal and tenancy support services, with 945 people accessing tenancy support through our Housing Justice Program, while 2,040 individuals accessed legal assistance through our Loddon Campaspe and Goulburn Valley CLCs.

We provided 303 ongoing legal representation services and 1,633 legal advice services, while 549 people were provided tailored tenancy information services and 396 people accessed ongoing tenancy assistance.

As a result, we have continued to achieve strong outcomes for some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

Examples of these outcomes include:

- Children being placed back into family care;
- Long-term intervention orders being created to keep women and children affected by family violence safe;
- Complex parenting plans negotiated during COVID-19 to avoid the need for families to engage in stressful litigation processes;
- Fines being set aside for clients experiencing financial disadvantage compounded by COVID-19; and
- Community members maintaining safe and secure housing through our tenancy advocacy program.

See our section on COVID-19 for further information about the impacts of COVID-19 we are seeing in the community.



1,633

Legal advice/
tasks



1,163

Duty Lawyer
services



303

Legal
representation
services



396

Clients supported
with ongoing
tenancy support



549

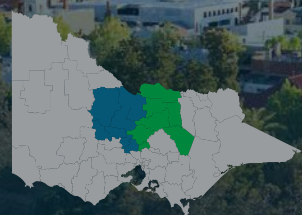
Clients assisted
with tailored
tenancy information

We aim to reach people where they live. This year we helped **2,330** people in regional and rural Victoria with legal and tenancy assistance.



**loddon campaspe
community legal centre**

959 CLIENTS



- Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre and Housing Justice
- Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre



**goulburn valley
community legal centre**

1081 CLIENTS



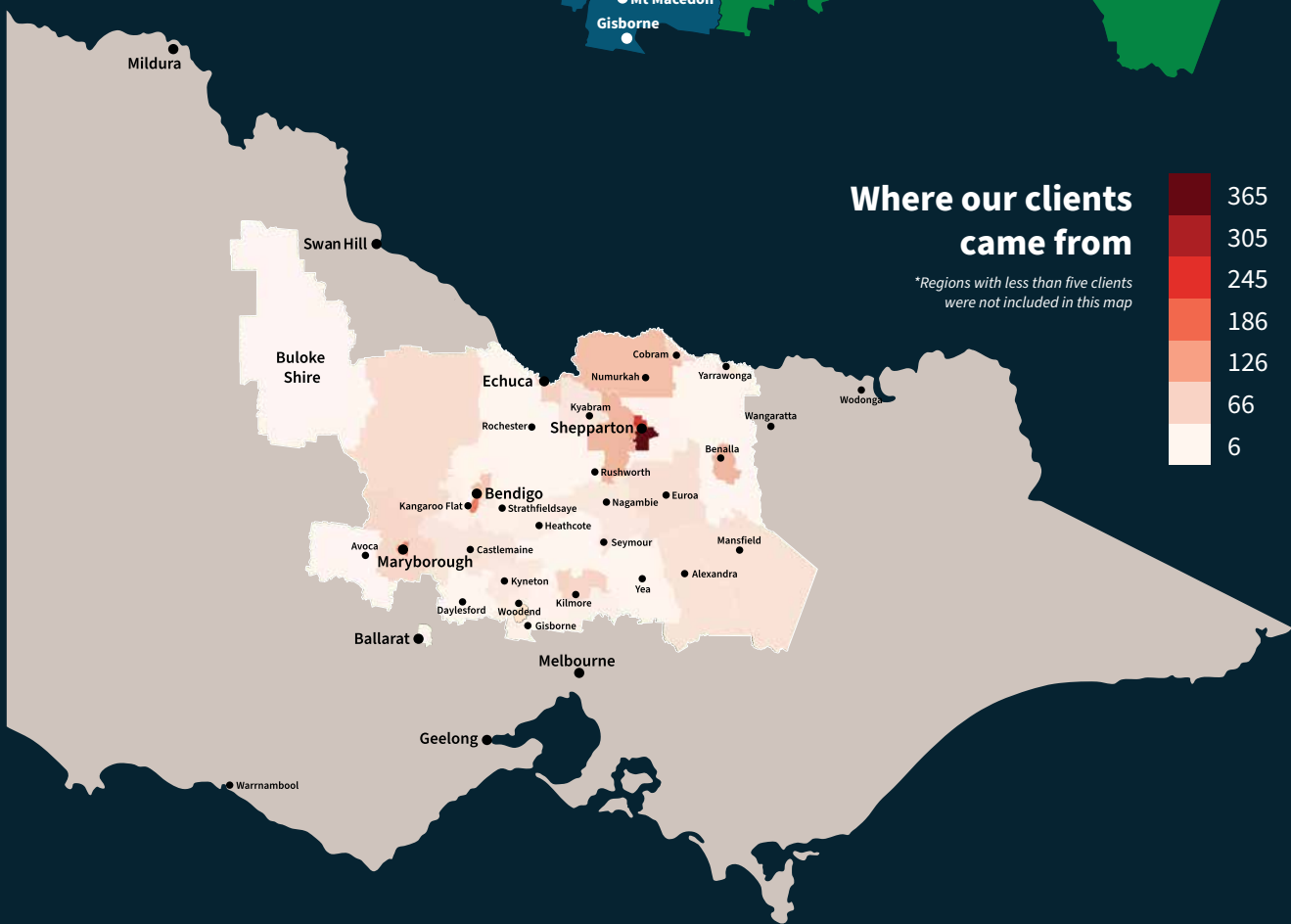
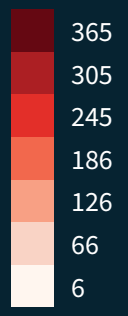
housing justice

945 CLIENTS



Where our clients came from

**Regions with less than five clients were not included in this map*



Who we helped

We prioritise helping people who are experiencing systemic disadvantage or marginalisation, to increase their access to legal and tenancy services, thereby ensuring that they have a voice in the justice system.



Most common legal issues

Family Violence

Other Civil Law (including consumer, credit and debt, housing, social security, mental health and injury)

Family Law - Parenting

Child Protection

Family Law - Property



Most common tenancy support issues

Notices to vacate/evictions

Repairs

Rent arrears/financial difficulties

Lease breaking



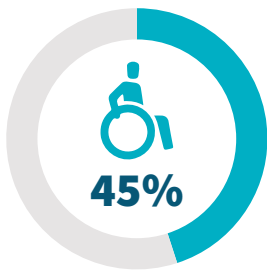
Financial disadvantage

96% of our ongoing legal representation services were provided to clients experiencing financial disadvantage in 2020-21.

People experiencing financial disadvantage, are more likely to experience legal and tenancy issues. They are also more likely to encounter barriers to accessing assistance with these issues.

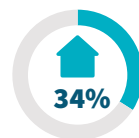
Our catchment includes some of the most socio-economically disadvantaged Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Victoria, based on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). Of our total legal services, the following were provided to clients experiencing financial disadvantage:

- **96%** of our ongoing legal representation services
- **84%** of our legal duty services
- **89%** of our legal advice services



People with disability and mental health issues

45% of clients accessing our services in FY2020-21 were people living with disability or mental health issues.

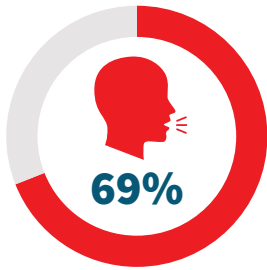


34% of our casework tenancy clients, were experiencing mental health issues.

People living with disability are more likely to face barriers to accessing legal and tenancy assistance, as well as being less likely to present for assistance. Therefore, working in partnership with health and disability service providers, is key to reaching this cohort and addressing their needs.

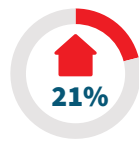
This has been a critical element of all our integrated service partnerships, particularly with Maryborough District Health Service (MDHS). The Central Goldfields Shire (Maryborough) has the highest proportion of people living with a severe or profound disability of all LGAs in Victoria (7.2%), and the highest rate of people (per 1,000 population) on disability support pensions.

Overall, **45%** of clients accessing our legal services in FY2020-21 were people living with a disability or mental health issue. **51%** of legal representation services were provided to this cohort, while **34%** of our casework tenancy clients were experiencing mental health issues.



Family violence

69% of clients assisted by our legal service were experiencing family violence, or had a legal issue in which family violence was a factor.



21% clients provided with tenancy support were experiencing family violence.

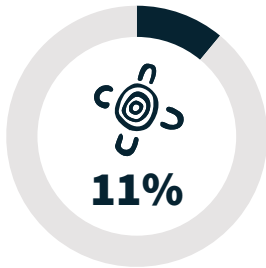
Three LGAs in our catchment rank in the top ten for the highest reported incidents of family violence in Victoria:

- Central Goldfields (5th),
- Greater Shepparton (8th) and
- Mitchell Shire (10th).
- Benalla (12th) and Campaspe (16th) also fall within the top twenty.

Applicants for family violence intervention orders often have multiple and complex legal needs. In Victoria, **63%** of applicants for family violence intervention orders (AFMs) are women. The clients we see through our partnership with Centre for Non-Violence reflect this fact, with many women presenting with multiple and complex legal needs, including:

- family law parenting issues,
- family law property issues,
- issues relating to separation and divorce,
- other civil law issues (including debt and tenancy problems),
- child protection, and
- occasional criminal law issues.

Perpetrators of family violence typically have other civil and criminal law matters stemming from, or related to, family violence. Through our therapeutic justice partnerships in Shepparton and Maryborough, we have learned that connecting perpetrators to appropriate legal and other therapeutic support services, is critical to addressing the factors underlying their offending behavior, which in turn, improves safety outcomes for the affected family members.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

(particularly those living in Echuca, Bendigo and Shepparton)

11% of all legal representation services delivered during FY2020-21 were provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

Research indicates high levels of unmet legal need within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Systemic injustices that have been caused by colonisation remain ongoing today and we see this each day in the justice and housing systems.

All local government areas within our catchment have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population equal to, or greater than the state average, with the largest populations in Shepparton, Echuca and Bendigo.

We aim to always respect and work with Aboriginal communities to bring justice. All our services prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for this reason.

In FY 2020-21, 17% of our child protection clients were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This is consistent with the over-representation of Aboriginal families in the child protection system, and particularly high levels of systemic injustice and legal need in this area.

COVID-19

Key issues we have seen in the community arising from COVID-19

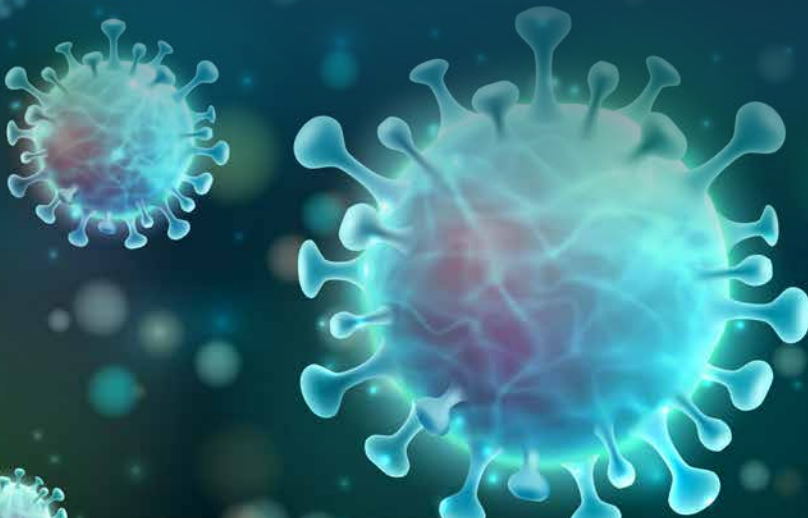
During the past financial year we have continued to see an increase in the intensity and complexity of legal and social issues being experienced by our clients.

While the impacts of COVID-19 have been widespread, families are among the worst affected:

- Families have been navigating separation, parenting and property matters, including housing. This includes needing to navigate closed borders between states or between metro and regional Victoria.
- Family law has been the area of highest unmet legal need and has been further exacerbated with families unable to afford private representation due to financial pressures and, at the same time, being ineligible for legally aided services.
- COVID-19 has increased the number of people with family violence matters being 'processed' through the court without access to independent legal advice, with courts discouraging parties from attending as they prioritise urgent matters only. This also limits their access to other support services. ARC Justice is currently conducting research into this matter and working collaboratively with police and the courts to address this in our catchment

Lack of access to health and social supports, has compounded the legal and tenancy issues experienced by individuals and families:

- Most support services navigated the pandemic by suspending face-to-face delivery, operating a telehealth type model. For some clients, the lack of suitable supports adversely affected their outcomes and mental health. Many services in our communities are only now transitioning back to face-to-face service and their waitlists are the longest they have ever been.
- Lack of access to services and wait times negatively impacts all areas of justice. In criminal matters, where sentences are contingent on completing treatment programs, most programs drastically reduced capacity due to COVID19 requirements. This limits referral options for the courts and the ability for individuals to meet court mandated requirements.
- Our child protection clients have been significantly impacted. We've seen disability supports for children with complex needs no longer available and a corresponding escalation in support needs, leading the Department to become involved with families, who may otherwise have avoided intervention, if appropriate supports had been available.
- We've had many parents without children in their care, requiring intensive assessments or programs, to get their children back within the required timeframes set out by legislation. With a lack of appropriate models of assessment and therapeutic programs, and the clock ticking, the child is unable to progress being placed back in the parents' care.



There has been a six-month COVID time extension for parents to comply with these directions, but with the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, this extension has not been sufficient for many of our clients. For some, the situation has become critical. Without legislative amendments, there is little hope of children ever being reunited with their families.

- The Department suspended most, if not all, face-to-face contact for children and parents, but offered no alternatives. This has resulted in a concerning trend of children not having access to supervised visits with their parents, and being unable to work with support services, which has severely impacted outcomes for parents in child protection matters.
- In our Maryborough Therapeutic Justice Project (with the Maryborough District Health Service), our social worker facilitated Skype sessions in the carpark for parents and children whose contact had been cancelled. This enabled parents and children to maintain some semblance of connection, highlighting the benefits of using integrated service models in the child protection space.



The Bendigo office layout and main entrance have changed to ensure social distancing.

Insecure housing and tenancy issues continue to impact clients across all our programs and services:

- The moratorium on evictions and increased support for those without an income, were not sufficient to prevent many facing insurmountable rental arrears and eviction. Our tenancy advocacy service has experienced unprecedented demand, with unemployment affecting both homeowners and renters. Clients are increasingly needing many months of support, compared to a few weeks prior to the pandemic.
- One of the great differentiators of people's capacity to navigate COVID-19 related challenges has undoubtedly been home ownership.
- With wait lists for VCAT hearings blowing out, many renters required support fighting illegal evictions; some even required help obtaining intervention orders against the homeowner.
- Many faced difficulties having maintenance attended to, with homeowners sighting COVID-related reasons such as lockdowns preventing them travelling to make an assessment.
- The availability of affordable housing is at an all-time low. There has been a sharp increase in rental demand, partially fueled by the increase of people from metro locations moving to regional areas. High demand and low supply has driven up rental prices, making safe and secure housing out of the reach of many low income earners.
- The knock-on effect, has been a significant increase in homelessness and poverty in our region, forcing people to live in unsafe conditions. We have observed that this has disproportionately impacted women. In several vases this has resulted in some being assaulted, be it physically or sexually, and seeking our assistance with personal safety intervention orders.

COVID-19

Our response

Throughout the pandemic we have had a frontline role addressing the community's legal and tenancy needs, with a focus on needs exacerbated by COVID-19 and other access to justice challenges associated with lockdowns and remote service provision.

Our primary focus over this period has been maintaining access to legal and tenancy support in an everchanging service environment, while ensuring the safety of our staff and clients. This commitment has underpinned our operations since the start of the pandemic.

We were among the first community services in our region to re-open our offices and re-commence in person service delivery in September 2020, after the extended lockdown. We have maintained services on-site throughout subsequent lockdowns, and fully opened our doors to the community as soon as possible each time, ensuring that clients who require in-person support, have had continuous access to appropriate assistance.

We have also maintained our family violence duty services at courts across the region throughout the year, including periods of lockdown, providing remote assistance to clients via phone and video link. Our support to Housing Justice clients continued by phone throughout the year.

As a result of these efforts and adaptability of our team, we have managed to meet or exceed our pre-COVID service levels, at a time when access to legal and tenancy support has been more important than ever for the community.

The safety and wellbeing of our workforce has been critical to achieving these results. Throughout the year, we have:

- responded to frequent changes in public health regulations and continually updated our COVID Response Plan and training
- made substantial changes to the layout of our Bendigo office to ensure social distancing;

- regularly updated our COVID-safety plan and training materials;
- provided substantial support to staff working both on- and off-site, with a strong focus on mental health and wellbeing
- implemented software and hardware solutions to enable staff to quickly change between onsite and offsite work.

The lessons we have learned this year will help to shape our shaped future services for the better.

Lessons learned during COVID-19 will continue to inform how we deliver services into the future.

Continued flexibility in our response to COVID-19 and mixed model of service provision (in-person and via telephone/online), offers increased options for the community in how they connect and engage with legal and tenancy assistance.

For example, while some of our clients found it difficult to engage with unfamiliar or inaccessible technology based communication platforms, others found that accessing support from home much easier, particularly those with children. It enabled them to balance work, caring responsibilities and their disability (or other capacity-affecting limitations), while engaging with their lawyer, social worker or housing advocate.

The upgrades made to our communication and IT systems, to better support flexible work arrangements, will continue to be of value, particularly for staff working between our offices, outreach sites and regional courts.

We have welcomed these opportunities to make sure our service provision is as targeted and flexible as possible. We are committed to taking the lessons of the last year forward to continue to improve our service delivery.

CASE STUDY:

Monica's story*

Monica* is a young mother who was referred to our service by the Orange Door for assistance with a police-initiated family violence intervention order (IVO) and criminal charges relating to assault.

Monica had previously separated from her ex-partner, the father of her children, who had been abusive towards Monica while they were together. Despite the separation, Monica's ex-partner continued to use physical and emotional violence to hurt Monica, and used their children to exercise coercive control.

One day, during a changeover of the children, Monica's ex-partner became physically and verbally abusive. Monica sustained substantial injuries from the attack, and to get her ex-partner to stop, she hit him. Monica was too scared to report what happened, or to seek any medical help for her injuries.

Some days later, Monica was visited by police and charged with assault. Her ex-partner had reported the incident, saying Monica hit him without reason. During the police interview, it was noted that Monica had visible injuries and she told the police that it was her ex-partner who had attacked her and caused the injuries, and that she had only hit him to get him to release her.

Monica told the police about being the victim of long-standing abuse at the hands of her ex-partner and that police had been called to a previous incident at the house. This previous callout resulted in police taking out an IVO for Monica's protection, but her ex-partner contested the IVO.

The police advised Monica that they were going ahead with the criminal charges against her. They did not take a statement from Monica about her injuries. The police subsequently withdraw the IVO application protecting Monica, saying there was insufficient evidence to continue.

A worker at the Orange Door raised concerns about Monica and her children's safety in the absence of an IVO, referring Monica to one of our lawyers. The worker was also concerned that Monica had been wrongly identified as the perpetrator of assault, and that it should have been her ex-partner who was charged.

*Not the client's real name. This is a composite case study, combining the experiences of several clients with similar experiences to ensure privacy and safety.

Our lawyer worked with Monica to make her own application for an IVO, for the protection of herself and her children. Her ex-partner once again contested the IVO, and the matter was listed for a directions hearing. After substantial negotiation with our lawyer, Monica's ex-partner ultimately consented to the order without admissions, and Monica was granted an IVO.

In relation to Monica's assault charge, our lawyer reviewed the evidence and confirmed that Monica could argue self defense. The police refused to withdraw the charges, and a contest hearing was set. Unfortunately, Monica could not afford a private barrister and was not eligible for pro-bono assistance. As a result, Monica instructed our lawyer that she would plead guilty, as the thought of having to represent herself at Court and be subject to cross-examination was too traumatic.

Our lawyer successfully negotiated with police for the charge against Monica to be dealt with by way of a diversion order, which was granted. Monica was not convicted, alleviating her concerns about the impact a conviction would have on her employability.

Monica said that while she wished the police had withdrawn the charge altogether, and not mis-identified her as the perpetrator of abuse in the first place, she accepted the outcome. She was relieved to have an IVO in place to protect her, and her children, from further abuse.

...

Monica's story is not unique, with many survivors of family violence being wrongly accused of perpetrating violence themselves. There is very little assistance for people like Monica, who could not afford a private barrister. Without our assistance, it's unlikely that Monica would have received an IVO protecting her and the children, or a diversion for the criminal charge.



A tale of two towns:

Addressing postcode injustice in regional Victoria

Comparing the impact of place-based integrated service partnerships to traditional models of legal service delivery

A key learning from our integrated services work across Regional Victoria is the importance of place-based legal services, and the critical role that integrated legal services play, in overcoming barriers to justice for regional Victorians. This has been further highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maryborough Court House, Victoria





Echuca, Victoria

Over the last five years, ARC Justice has been piloting, evaluating and replicating a model of integrated legal service delivery across the Loddon Campaspe and Goulburn Valley regions.

This model involves a lawyer and a social worker working together across both court and community health settings to support clients with multiple and complex legal, health and social needs – particularly those at risk of criminal charges, family violence or child protection intervention – to address the factors contributing to the client’s legal problems and to improve justice and wellbeing outcomes.

In May 2017, a place-based legal service was established in Maryborough, with a senior lawyer based in the community, in addition to our fortnightly duty lawyer service at the court. A community development officer was also employed to provide community education and stakeholder engagement.

In December 2018, our integrated legal service with Maryborough District Health Service (MDHS) was established, with a community lawyer and a social worker working together at MDHS three days a week to provide additional support to clients, on top of existing services.

This model drew on lessons from an effective pilot program implemented by our Goulburn Valley CLC in Shepparton.

Echuca provides an interesting point of comparison. Echuca experiences similar ‘postcode injustice’ issues to Maryborough. It is located between two regional centres (Bendigo and Shepparton) and often falls through a service gap. There are no health justice or integrated service partnerships based in Echuca.

In Echuca we are currently limited to a drive-in-drive-out model of outreach, which is a common mode of service delivery for regional CLCs covering large catchments. This is the service model that existed in Maryborough prior to the establishment of our place-based service.

In 2018, representation service levels were similar in both locations, but a subsequent increase can be seen in Maryborough following the integrated partnership with MDHS.

Figure 1 shows trends in access to legal advice services in Echuca and Maryborough. Access to legal advice has steadily increased in Maryborough and this positive trend has continued throughout COVID-19.

Legal advice numbers in Echuca are consistently lower by comparison and dropped significantly in 2020 due to the impacts of COVID-19 on court-based operations.

● Echuca ● Maryborough

Figure 1: Number of clients assisted annually since May 2017

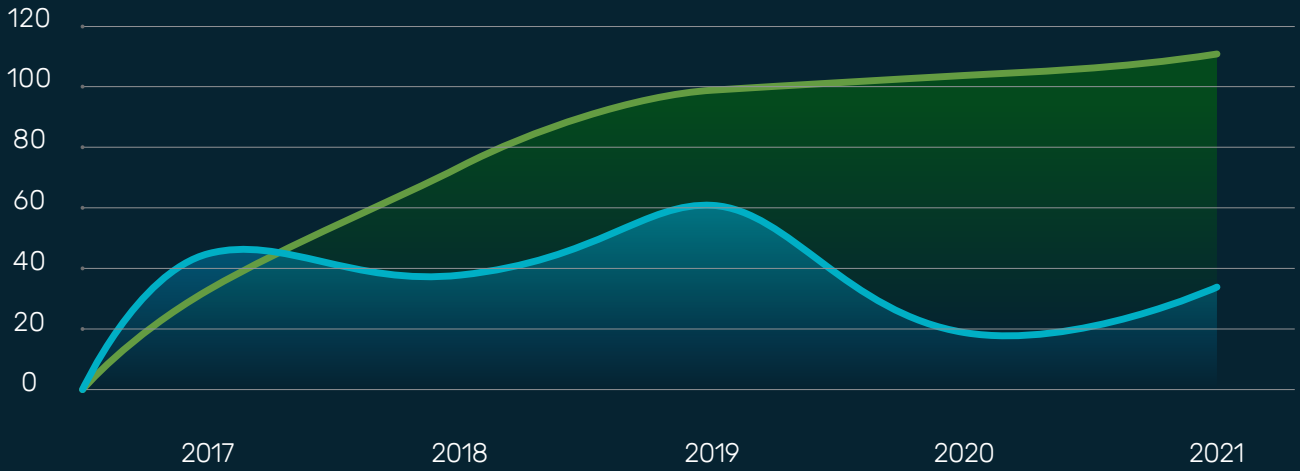


Figure 2: Number of ongoing representation services provided annually since May 2017

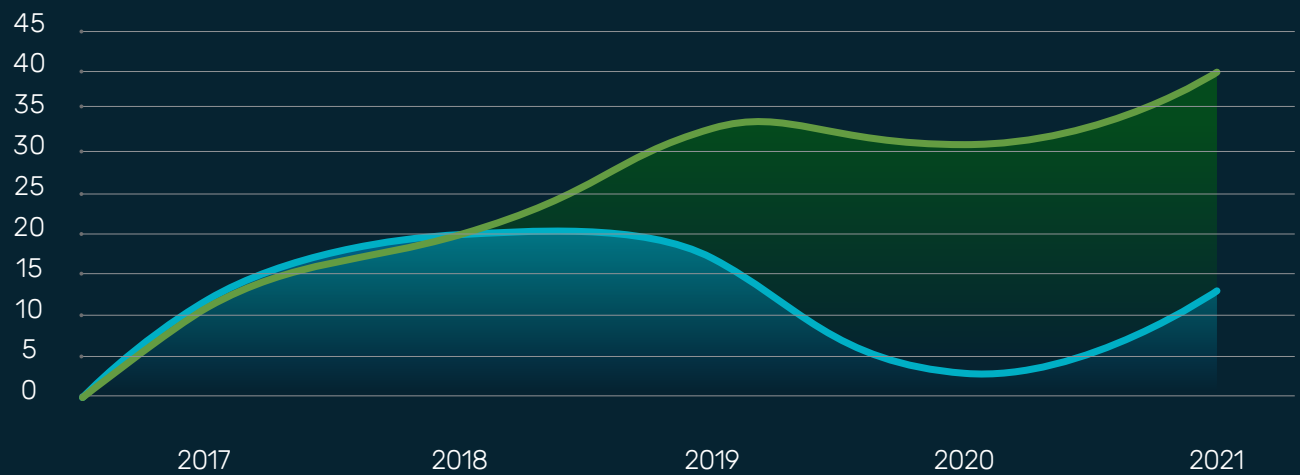
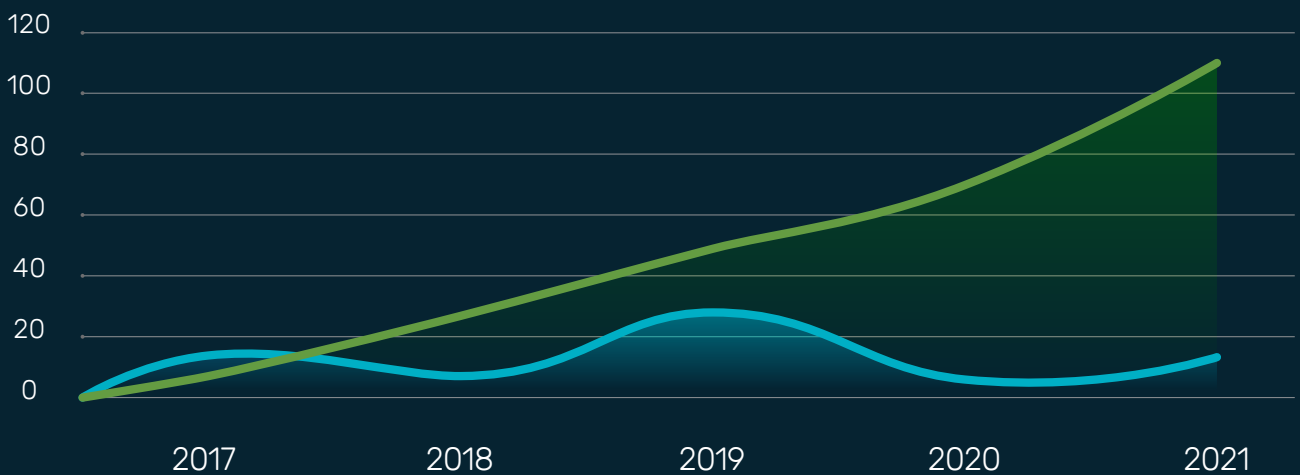


Figure 3: Number of discrete advice services provided annually since May 2017



A MODEL TO ADDRESS 'POSTCODE INJUSTICE': A TALE OF TWO TOWNS CONTINUED

Over the last three years, we have reached less than 1% of the Echuca population through the drive-in-drive out service model. This is contrasted to the 5% of the total population in Maryborough who we have reached through our place-based legal service.

The potential for place-based services to overcome access to justice barriers was further highlighted during COVID-19. The integrated service partnership with MDHS enabled a continued flow of referrals – and the provision of in-person services – for vulnerable clients during periods of lockdown, mitigating the impact of service disruptions and providing clients with more options to access appropriate levels of support throughout COVID-19.

Our community development worker in Maryborough, was invited to join the local council's pandemic relief committee, playing an active role in service coordination over this period. She also contributed to large-scale campaigns to disseminate information about our legal services to all households across the shire, in partnership with the council and local police.

As a result of this work, ARC Justice has reached 215 vulnerable community members impacted by COVID in Maryborough, compared to only 53 clients in Echuca.

Figure 2 shows similar trends in access to ongoing representation services in Echuca and Maryborough. In December 2018, representation service levels were similar in both locations, but a subsequent increase can be seen in Maryborough following the introduction of the Maryborough Therapeutic Justice Partnership. Access to ongoing representation services in Maryborough reduced slightly in 2020 during the COVID-19 crisis, while in Echuca the impact was more severe.

Figure 3 shows similar trends in access to discrete advice services in Echuca and Maryborough. In 2017, representation service levels were similar in both locations, but a continued increase can be seen in Maryborough with the introduction of place-based services. People accessing this support in Maryborough increased even further with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ensuring access to justice in regional towns outside of the major hubs in our catchment, will be a key focus of ARC Justice in the years ahead. Committed to learning from our successes and our mistakes, we continue to document, evaluate, learn from and adapt our place-based integrated service model, to ensure we are achieving the most impact.

We have learned an incredible amount during this time, with our integrated service model achieving excellent results and showing that it can be replicated in other local government areas. These learnings will underpin our work to increase access to justice in regional Victorian towns into the future.

...

We are grateful to the Victorian Legal Services Board and the Victorian Department of Justice and the Community Safety Integrated Services Fund (administered by the Federation of Community Legal Centre) for their ongoing support of our work in Maryborough.

Our people

Our team of skilled staff are dedicated to helping people with complex legal and housing problems.

Our Staff

Our dedicated staff provide critical help to people in need every day. We have 39 staff working across our offices in Bendigo, Shepparton and Maryborough. Over 75% of our staff are involved in frontline service delivery, including:

- ▶ **19** Community Lawyers
- ▶ **3** Housing Advocates
- ▶ **6** Intake, Paralegal and Reception Officers
- ▶ **1** Community Development worker

We would like to thank all of our current staff (and those who left the organisation this year), for their hard work supporting our clients and community.

Volunteers and students

With the repeated lockdowns and limiting the number of people onsite, this year has been disruptive for our volunteer and student programs. We thank all our dedicated volunteers for their continued support and understanding during this time.

We utilised the time to conduct a review of ARC Justice's Volunteer Program. We recognise the incredible amount of goodwill, expertise and experience that many people in the community would like to offer, in order to support the community.

An amazing opportunity exists for ARC Justice to strengthen our volunteer and student program, to ensure we are leveraging this support from the community. We look forward to sharing the results of our review and implementing the recommendations in the year ahead.

CEO transition

Our CEO, Hayley Mansfield enjoyed parental leave for six months of this year, while Chief Operations Officer, Annika Kearton, stepped in as interim CEO.

At the end of 2021, Hayley will be moving on from ARC Justice and would like to thank everyone for a remarkable five years leading ARC Justice's work.

The Board will be recruiting a new CEO in early 2022 to lead ARC Justice's next chapter.

You can find more information about our leadership team by clicking [here](#).



Hayley Mansfield



Annika Kearton



Our board

The Board drives ARC Justice's strategic direction and ensures a strong system of governance and oversight to maximise the organisation's impact. Guided by the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, the Board works closely with the Executive Officer to enable the organisation to obtain and effectively allocate resources to implement the organisation's strategic priorities. Through a structured risk management framework and sub-committees, the Board ensures ARC Justice complies with all legal and policy obligations, while ensuring the organisation's ongoing sustainability.

We thank our Board of Directors for their time and expertise.



Andrew Chittenden
Chair



Clare Fountain
Secretary



Melinda Charlesworth



Christopher McDermott
Resigned May 2021



Kate Scarce



Khayshie Tilak Ramesh

Financials

FY 2020-2021

This is a summary of our financial position as at 30 June 2021. This information has been taken from our audited financial statements, and a full copy can be downloaded from our website www.arcjustice.org.au or available upon request.

The audit of our financial records was completed by MGR Accountants in October 2021.

Statement of profit and loss

and other comprehensive income for the year ending 30 June 2021

	2021 (\$)	2020 (\$)
Revenue	3,972,926	3,770,669
Expenditure		
Administration and program expenses	465,892	499,399
Depreciation and amortisation	267,803	287,823
Employee benefits expenses	2,795,255	2,952,582
Finance charges	50,281	54,907
Total expenditure	3,579,231	3,794,710
Operating surplus	393,695	(24,041)

Balance Sheet

	2021 (\$)	2020 (\$)
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,185,184	500,045
Investments	1,093,791	1,079,103
Trade and other receivables	-	267,300
Other assets	95,500	131,638
Total current assets	2,374,475	1,978,086
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	289,525	293,332
Right-of-use assets	996,867	1,144,675
Total assets	3,660,867	3,416,093
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	215,787	237,345
Prepaid income	781,469	744,458
Provisions	215,232	232,291
Lease liability	178,782	180,012
Total current liabilities	1,391,270	1,394,106
Non-current liabilities		
Provisions	88,737	100,946
Lease liability	885,093	1,018,967
Total liabilities	2,365,100	2,514,021
Net assets	1,295,767	902,072
Equity		
Retained earnings	1,295,767	902,072
Total equity	1,295,767	902,072

Thank you to our supporters

ARC Justice would like to thank all our funders and partners for their support throughout the year. Without your commitment, we would not be able to increase access to justice and create change across Regional and Rural Victoria.

- Victorian Government
- Commonwealth Government
- Victoria Legal Aid
- Victorian Legal Services Board
- Frances and Harold Abbott Foundation (administered by Centre for Non-Violence)
- WCF Thomas Charitable Trust
- Victorian Law Foundation
- Centre for Non-Violence
- Bendigo Student Association
- StreetSmart
- Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative
- Maryborough District Health Service
- Bendigo Community Health Services



Contact Us



Our offices are open 9:00am to 4:00pm, Monday to Friday. Our phone lines are open until 5:00pm.

 loddon campaspe
community legal centre

Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre
171 Hargreaves St, Bendigo, Victoria 3550
Phone: (03) 5445 0909
FREECALL: 1800 450 909

 goulburn valley
community legal centre

Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre
Suite 1/1 High St, Shepparton, Victoria 3630
Phone: (03) 5831 0900
FREECALL: 1800 310 900

 housing justice

Housing Justice
171 Hargreaves St, Bendigo, Victoria 3550
Phone: (03) 5445 0990
FREECALL: 1800 450 990
Email: info@housingjustice.org.au





Office: 171 Hargreaves Street, Bendigo

Post: PO Box 432, Bendigo, VIC 3552

Email: reception@arcjustice.org.au

Phone: (03) 5445 0909

FRECALL: 1800 450 909

arcjustice.org.au