



**Redfern**  
Legal Centre

**Our Impact**  
**2020–2021**

This impact report provides a snapshot of our activities, and highlights the impact of our work over the 2020–2021 financial year.

## Our Theory of Change

At Redfern Legal Centre, we believe that:



### Because ...

- There are gaps and flaws in the design of services, policies, and laws in the legal system that are failing people and communities
- People experience inequality and injustices, and
- Marginalised communities lack a voice.



### We respond by ...

- Providing free legal services including legal advice and representation and referrals to provide holistic solutions
- Engaging in policy and law reform work to change the system, and
- Empowering and building capacity in the community and within the legal profession through legal education and providing an effective volunteer program.



### Which results in ...

- Increased access to justice for people experiencing disadvantage
- Increased capacity in our community to understand and address legal issues
- Integrated and effective responses to the needs of people experiencing disadvantage
- Empowered and resilient individuals and communities
- Systemic injustices being addressed.



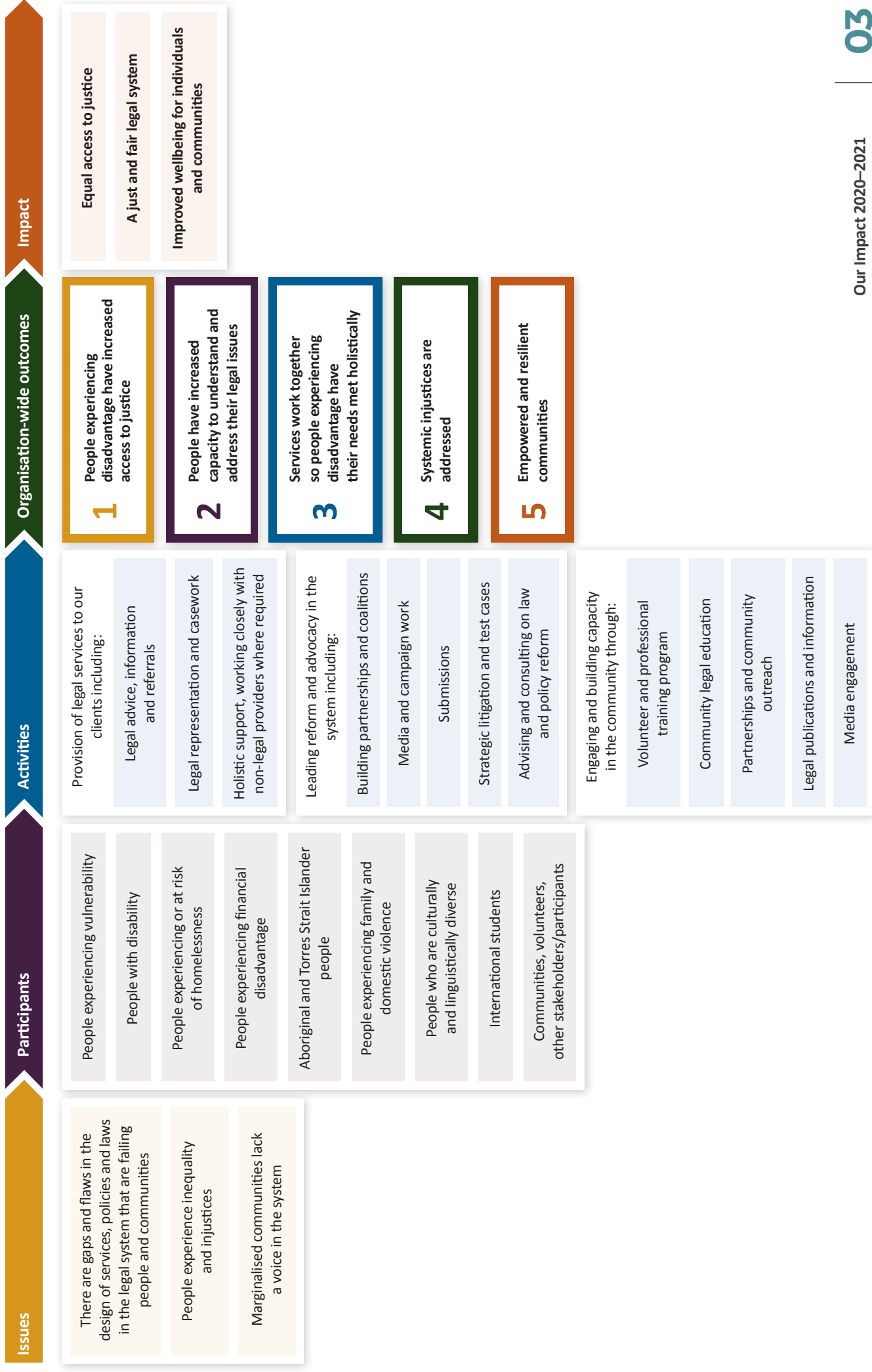
### Ultimately this will lead to ...

- Equal access to justice
- A just and fair legal system
- Improved wellbeing for individuals and communities.

At Redfern Legal Centre, we measure and track our performance against outcomes to hold ourselves accountable for the impact we have on people and communities. Our *2020–2025 Strategic Plan* is grounded on the belief that by achieving our goals, we will positively impact the people and communities we work with.

**Cover image:** RLC Financial Abuse Service NSW staff Gayatri Nair and Laura Bianchi at Parliament House, Canberra, February 2021.

# Redfern Legal Centre's Theory of Change



# RLC's Theory of Change – Achieving Outcomes

Outcome

1

People experiencing disadvantage have increased access to justice

## Legal advice and information

In 2020–2021, we assisted **2,594 people** with **3,966 occasions of legal advice and information**, completed **1,421 legal tasks**, and provided **3,265 referrals** during casework, representation and intake services.

### Client satisfaction

**83%**

of clients surveyed indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received

### Personal and cultural needs

**22%**

of clients surveyed had personal or cultural needs that RLC needed to consider

**81%**

of those clients agreed or strongly agreed that RLC met those needs

## Representation and casework

We increased access to justice through the completion of **184 occasions of casework and representation**.

Of the clients we supported in this way:

**29%**

were experiencing family violence

**94%**

were experiencing financial hardship

**36%**

First Nations people

**25%**

people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

**24%**

people with disability

## Casework outcomes

**46 clients** had a combined total of **\$776,369** in debts, contracts, fines and credit defaults waived, written off, cancelled or removed from credit reports.

**10 clients** were awarded a combined total of **\$308,209** in compensation, victims compensation and insurance.

**3 clients** were awarded a combined total of **\$116,147** in compensation under the Stolen Generations Redress Scheme.



In 2 matters, **child removal was prevented** and in 3 matters, **child contact was improved**.



**13 evictions prevented** in public, community and private housing.  
**3 people accessed social housing**, **2 housing transfers** achieved, and **5 social housing repairs** done.  
Debt for alleged damage to one property withdrawn for an amount of **\$15,000**.



**19 of our matters were investigated** by the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission or Police Professional Standards Command with two police officers being disciplined or counselled.  
**10 police complaint matters** with a potential civil claim against police for false imprisonment and assault.



**86%**

of stakeholders agreed we were effective or very effective at providing access to justice for people experiencing disadvantage.

We supported self-represented clients in the completion of **1,421 legal tasks**. We built legal capacity in the community by publishing **35 community legal education resources** and conducting **118 community legal education activities** in response to high needs legal areas.

**70%** of stakeholders surveyed agreed we were effective or very effective at having a positive impact on increased understanding of the law by staff in health or community organisations

**74%** agreed we were effective or very effective at engaging and building capacity in the community

**67%** agreed we were effective or very effective at having a positive impact on increased understanding of the law by individuals in the community

### Building capacity: Social housing repairs

Repairs and maintenance in public housing remain a complex and persistent issue in our community. RLC's Inner Sydney Tenancy and Housing (ISTAAS) service works to address this issue in a number of different ways, including by developing initiatives to build the capacity of the community to address this widespread issue.

ISTAAS published a *Repair Kit* that provides a step-by-step advice guide for public housing tenants about getting repairs done. The Kit can act as a supplement to advice from ISTAAS, a standalone tool for public housing tenants to self-advocate, or a resource for community workers to increase their capacity to assist public housing tenants with repairs matters. It is one of ISTAAS' most popular resources, and has been accessed online over 4,000 times.

### Building capacity: My Legal Mate

My Legal Mate (MLM) is a groundbreaking multi-language interactive video resource for NSW international students. MLM was created by Redfern Legal Centre, with support from City of Sydney, Study NSW and Fair Work Ombudsman, and built by education technology provider, Practera. Launched on campus at Macquarie University in 2019, MLM is available to education providers by subscription.

Thanks to generous support from our partners Study NSW and City of Sydney, 77,500 licences of MLM were made available to protect the wellbeing of international students across the state during COVID-19.

“When I contacted your service, I was confused, scared, and at a loss for where to begin. Your staff was professional, empathetic, patient and clearly explained everything I needed to know to organise, protect myself, and move on with my life in Australia feeling legally protected.”

“I would have no ability to navigate the legal system by myself. I would have made many bad decisions without [RLC's] support because I was really stressed.”

— Client survey, 2021

During the delivery of advice and casework, we also provided **2,607 referrals** to additional services, ensuring **holistic wraparound support** to address clients' complex and overlapping legal and non-legal needs. In addition, we provided **658 referrals at our front desk**, ensuring clients were able to connect with services appropriate to their legal and non-legal needs, even while our service was operating remotely. We conducted **242 stakeholder engagement activities**, working collaboratively with community services, government and industry to raise awareness, expand our impact and increase our reach.

### Working together: Electronic fines write-off pilot scheme

RLC's credit and debt practice identified a local and sector-wide problem that saw many people who were already extremely vulnerable accumulating large amounts of fines debt. This often amounted to thousands of dollars in fines, with no simple or effective way to address much of this debt.

RLC partnered with Revenue NSW to implement a streamlined electronic fines write-off pilot across the centre, after consultation with key stakeholders through the NSW Legal Assistance Forum Fines Working Group and Revenue NSW's Hardship Support Community Consultative Forums. The conclusion of the pilot successfully saw a significant amount of fines debt written-off and provided vital relief for clients experiencing severe financial hardship.

### Working together: International Student COVID-19 Crisis Accommodation scheme

RLC's International Student Legal Service NSW (ISLS) is funded by Study NSW to undertake casework, policy, and law reform for international students. It is the only specialist legal advice service of its kind in NSW. We advise students and respond to emerging legal issues affecting the NSW international student community studying onshore and offshore.

Vulnerabilities experienced by international students in NSW during the COVID-19 pandemic included a sharp rise in urgent housing issues such as evictions, accommodation disputes and homelessness. In response, ISLS worked closely with the NSW Government to inform the development of a groundbreaking scheme offering temporary crisis accommodation to international students in NSW.

In collaboration with a network of 15 government approved student accommodation and homestay providers, this \$20 million dollar NSW Government scheme was rolled out by Study NSW and Service NSW during 2020, placing 6,500 international students and their families into secure temporary accommodation for up to 20 weeks each.

## First Nations Justice

Access to Justice for First Nations Australians is central to our work at RLC. We work closely with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to address access to justice issues for First Nations people. RLC's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Access Worker works across the organisation to ensure that all of RLC's services are accessible and culturally safe, as well as conducting community outreach and building relationships with external organisations to ensure that access to justice issues are addressed. The Access Worker provides and reviews referrals to and from services who support First Nations people, as well as liaising with non-Indigenous service providers.

**In our survey of stakeholders working with First Nations people:**

**100%** said we were effective or very effective at providing access to justice for people experiencing disadvantage

**83%** said we were effective or very effective at services working together to meet clients' needs holistically

**80%** said we were effective or very effective at increased understanding of the law by individuals in the community

## Working together: Black Lives Matter

Amid the global Black Lives Matter movement, RLC's police accountability practice worked in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to create a public conversation examining the over-policing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and deaths in custody, asking what reforms to the criminal justice system should occur here?

We formed a coalition of stakeholder organisations to organise a free public webinar, working with National Justice Project; Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, UTS, Sydney; and Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT). We assembled a panel of subject matter experts to tease out the key issues in an hour-long interactive online discussion on police accountability and the need for structural reforms to the criminal justice system. The webinar engaged over 300 people watching and commenting live, and received almost 6,000 video views within the first 24 hours. It went on to reach over 16,000 people on social media, and was subsequently broadcast on ABC Radio's *Speaking Out* program, further expanding its impact and its reach.

## Working together: Health Justice Partnership

RLC's Health Justice Partnership sees solicitors embedded in health services to provide holistic assistance to support clients with multiple and complex needs.

### Angela's story

As a result of her fluctuating mental health, Angela\* had a history of altercations with police, and a record of previous minor criminal offences. The Concord Hospital Mental Health Team had grave concerns for Angela's welfare if she received a custodial sentence following a recent mental health episode that had resulted in police intervention. Working closely with Angela's treating psychiatrist and social worker, RLC's HJP solicitor highlighted the impact of intergenerational trauma to successfully argue the full weight of the *Bugmy* principle; that Angela's experience in childhood informed by the Stolen Generations be considered in sentencing. As a result, Angela did not receive a jail term.

Working with a community housing provider, RLC assisted Angela to obtain stable accommodation. Angela's secure housing and her cat continue to support her mental health.

\* Name has been changed



**73%**

of stakeholders agreed we were effective or very effective at services working together to meet clients' needs holistically

**"My mental health was restored, and my ability to parent and maintain an income as a single parent."**

"We were in a very vulnerable position, I was overwhelmed and I don't know how I would have got through it without RLC."

**"They are so understanding and supportive, they never judge and provide fantastic guidance and empowerment out of any predicament."**

"I am extremely grateful a service like this exists. I have a limited budget and would not have been able to work the legal system without RLC support. They listened to me, they let me cry, they treated me with compassion."

— Client survey, 2021

RLC forges collaborations and partnerships that assist us to make positive changes in laws and the legal system. We work to address systemic issues by engaging with government, industry and community organisations.

In 2020–21, we conducted **232 law reform activities** including:

13 policy submissions

73 policy consultations and 76 roundtables

giving evidence at 4 parliamentary inquiries

leading media and community debate with 106 media mentions on key legal issues

### Working to change the law: strip searches in NSW

Supported by our pro bono partner, DLA Piper, RLC's police accountability practice is the only specialised statewide legal service providing free legal advice, representation and education about police powers and the complaints system in NSW. Through our 'Safe and Sound' campaign, the practice has changed the way that NSW Police conducts strip searches. Launching in 2018 with a website and social media campaign, and followed by an award-winning report commissioned by RLC from academics at UNSW Law, the campaign created a platform for young people to share their stories about unlawful strip searches.

We formed a coalition of legal and non-legal organisations to push for change. We held strategic roundtables with legal and community sector stakeholders, met with key decision-makers, and ran community information sessions. In 2019, we released NSW Police data showing that young people and First Nations people were disproportionately being searched, garnering national and international media attention. In May 2020, the launch of our class actions investigation with Slater and Gordon Lawyers into unlawful strip searches was featured across all Australian TV networks, print mastheads and online, with an estimated reach of 1.995 million people.

By late 2020, our sustained advocacy and media engagement, coupled with complaints from members of the public, led to a series of investigations by the independent police watchdog, the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC). The pressure placed on NSW Police as a result led to significant changes to NSW Police strip search policy and practice, including introduction of new police guidelines and policies, and changes to supervision, governance and accountability structures to ensure that strip searches are being conducted lawfully.

### Financial Abuse Service NSW: consumer credit reforms

RLC's financial abuse service is NSW's only free statewide service providing free legal and non-legal support to people experiencing financial abuse in intimate partner relationships. We also work to address systemic issues which enable financial abuse to occur. Our change-making work is supported by the Ecstra Foundation.

In September 2020, the government introduced consumer credit reforms proposing to wind back responsible lending obligations. RLC's Financial Abuse Service NSW coordinated a submission on behalf of members of the Economic Abuse Reference Group (EARG) expressing concern that these reforms will increase the frequency and severity of financial abuse, and remove vital legal remedies for victim-survivors.

In February 2021, the Financial Abuse Service NSW represented EARG members before the Senate Economics Legislation Committee in Canberra and gave evidence about the impact of this legislation on people who experience family and domestic violence. We also supported the 'Save Safe Lending' campaign, providing expert input about financial abuse in meetings and correspondence to MPs, media interviews and a national open letter. As a result of these collective actions, the Bill (as at 30 June 2021) has not passed, with key members of the crossbench making public statements in support of upholding these important consumer protections.



69%

of stakeholders agreed we were effective or very effective at systemic change in the law, policies or practices.



### Measuring our impact: client surveys

Our work aims to improve the wellbeing of our communities. When asked if the help from RLC made the following issues better, no difference or worse:\*



**75%** reported better knowledge of the law and legal system



**30%** indicated it improved their family wellbeing



**67%** reported better stress levels



**25%** reported increased safety



**53%** reported a better sense of control over their own life



**24%** had improved housing



**36%** indicated we helped them improve their financial situation



**14%** had an improved employment situation



**30%** indicated their physical health was improved



**35%** said that without the help from RLC their situation would be worse overall

“I was in awe at their level of diligence and commitment to their clients ... I honestly do not know what I would have done without you. If only more people like you existed, our world would have been a better place.

— Client survey, 2021\*

“RLC is an extraordinary model for what a CLC can achieve. Love the innovation while maintaining solid base in a community practice.”

“RLC are an important life line for people. Your assistance was really appreciated and helped resolve my issue with a positive outcome for me. RLC are the best legal service in Australia and I know lawyers take so much pride in having the opportunity to work there. As they should.”

— Impact survey, 2021. \*\*

\* Clients received a survey within one week of advice and again three months later. Responses are from clients surveyed three months after their initial advice.

\*\* 362 Impact survey participants referred one or more clients to us.

# Our Impact 2020–2021

## Activities







# Redfern Legal Centre

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**[www.rlc.org.au](http://www.rlc.org.au)**