

TENANCY

The Inner Sydney Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service has had an exceptionally busy year, assisting over 900 renters with advice, advocacy and representation to resolve their housing issues.

WHAT WE DO

Our service focuses on:

- Preventing evictions and homelessness.
- Assisting social housing tenants to have essential repairs carried out.

WHY WE DO IT

The ongoing rental crisis has placed our service in extremely high demand for advice on unfair rent increases and terminations.

IN THE NEXT YEAR...

We will:

- Continue to fight for people experiencing disadvantage.
- Advocate for improvements to the law and government policies to increase the security, stability, and wellbeing of all renters in NSW.

Our International Student Legal Service provides information, advice and representation statewide to international students. We also create and produce factsheets in community languages and have created an app 'My Legal Mate' to provide an accessible way for international students to access legal information.

In late January 2023, RLC convened a forum with key stakeholders to discuss concerns that the international student community will be significantly impacted by a shortage of housing and accommodation, including an increasingly tight rental market; inflation and rising cost-of-living; the reintroduction of a cap on working hours during semester; and systemic wage theft.

The forum was called to collectively consider how to create change, and was attended by more than 50 stakeholders from local and state, government, education providers, accommodation providers, student bodies, and frontline service providers. A second forum was held in March.

This year, we will continue to work with international students to protect their rights, and work with government and other stakeholders to ensure systemic changes and further support are put in place for international students in NSW.



27 APRIL 2023 - LORD MAYOR'S WELCOME FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



31 MAY 2023 - STUDY NSW CAREERS EXPO FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

COVID FINES

JULY 2022 - TEST CASE LAUNCHED

RLC filed an administrative law test case in the Supreme Court of NSW representing plaintiffs who sought to challenge the validity of their COVID-19 fines.

NOVEMBER 2022 - 33,121 FINES WITHDRAWN

The government conceded and the Supreme Court found that two COVID-19 fines were invalid. Revenue NSW then withdrew 33,121 COVID-19 fines.

APRIL 2023 - SUPREME COURT PUBLISHED ITS REASONS

The judgment clarified the requirements for a fine to be valid under s 20 of the Fines Act 1996 (NSW). This may also affect other fines where the offence is not specified.



IN THE NEXT YEAR...

We will continue to advocate for the fines system in NSW to be fairer for everyone – in particular, children and young people.

"Some of our clients were as young as 12 years old when NSW Police officers issued fines to them. Parents called us, in tears, unable to pay the fines issued to their young children."

– Camilla Pandolfini, CEO.



Increasing community awareness through social media.



STRIP SEARCH CLASS ACTION

IN JULY 2022,

Redfern Legal Centre filed a class action with Slater and Gordon Lawyers against NSW Police on behalf of people who had been invasively and unlawfully strip searched by police at music festivals over the past six years.

Figures show that in the past few years, thousands of people in NSW were still being subjected to strip searches, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and children disproportionately targeted.



Our Police Accountability Solicitor, Samantha Lee, appeared on 10 News First to discuss the class action.

"In the majority of cases... nothing is found and their invasive strip search is undertaken for absolutely no reason."
– Samantha Lee

USE OF FORCE

LAW ENFORCEMENT CONDUCT COMMISSION

Redfern Legal Centre is representing [YPM1] – a 14-year-old Aboriginal boy who sustained a serious and horrific injury while being arrested by NSW Police – in a Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC) examination into the use of force by NSW Police, along with systemic issues related to the arrest and detention of children.

"The unlawful use of force by NSW Police is of enormous public concern. Due to the enormity of police powers, monitoring, transparency and accountability is critical, not just for the benefit of the community but also the benefit of police," states Samantha Lee.

"Communities that are policed disproportionately, including First Nations people, young people, and people living with disability and/or mental illness will also experience excessive use of force by NSW Police disproportionately. NSW Police must face greater scrutiny and oversight on this issue."

"The public LECC hearing is a forum to ensure accountability and transparency on the use of force."

POLICING

EMPLOYMENT

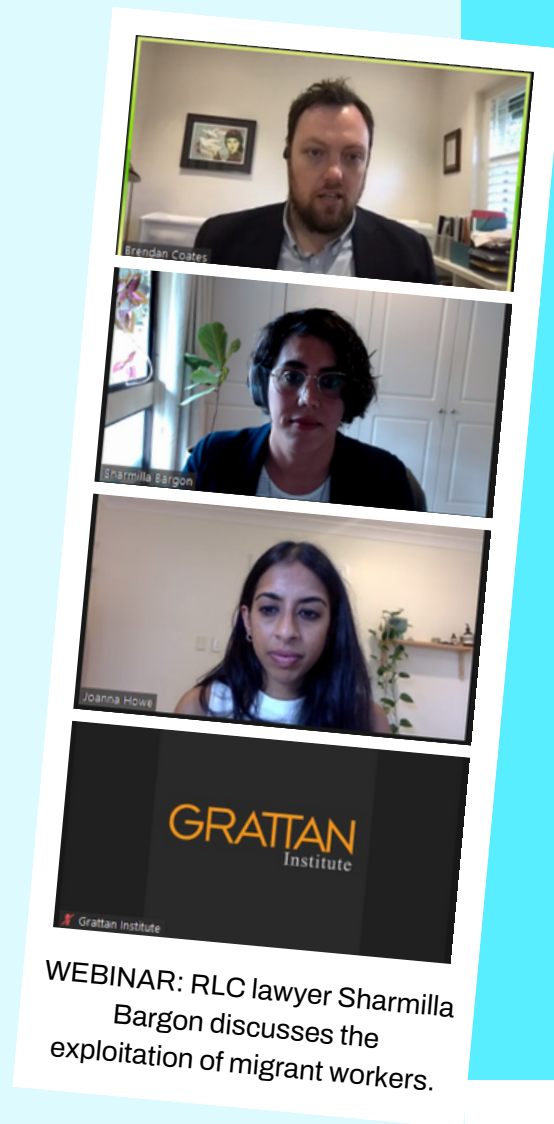
Redfern Legal Centre is part of an innovative statewide service, the Employment Rights Legal Service, provided in collaboration with the Inner City Legal Centre and Kingsford Legal Centre. This year, our employment law service has provided information, advice and representation to significant numbers of low-income workers experiencing disadvantage, and in particular to migrant workers.

We have focused this year on disadvantaged workers in regional and remote areas, including First Nations clients, and on assisting workers who have experienced sexual harassment, unfair dismissal and underpayments. We have also delivered a number of community legal education sessions to increase understanding in the community sector of employment rights.

POLICY AND LAW REFORM

Drawing on our casework, we have contributed our expertise to:

- ✓ Two significant reports published in 2023 on migrant worker exploitation and proposals for law reform to remedy this issue.
- ✓ The Federal Government's review of the small claims procedure at the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia.
- ✓ Federal Government consideration of stronger protections for migrant workers who address exploitation at work.



WEBINAR: RLC lawyer Sharmilla Bargon discusses the exploitation of migrant workers.

HJP

This year, we continued our busy Health Justice Partnership practice at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and commenced new legal outreaches at the Professor Marie Bashir Centre for people detained under the Mental Health Act 2007 (NSW) and at Common Ground, a housing initiative for people exiting long term homelessness.

HEALTH JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP



THIS YEAR...

Rashini Fernando joined us as our Health Justice Partnership Solicitor at the Sydney Dental Hospital. Together with the Sydney Dental Hospital social worker, Rashini assists to provide holistic support to dental hospital patients on a range of legal and social issues, and to have a positive impact on their lives. Rashini has delivered a range of legal education sessions to dentists to enhance their understanding of the legal issues patients might be facing and encourage referrals.

NEXT YEAR...

We will continue to assist patients at our health justice partnership outreach locations to better understand their rights and continue to expand our referrals through legal education sessions provided to health professionals.

FINANCIAL ABUSE SERVICE

PROVIDING SUPPORT & DRIVING CHANGE

RLC's Financial Abuse Service NSW, the first of its kind in Australia, provides a state-wide legal service providing trauma-informed expertise in family law and credit, debt and consumer law. We undertake policy, law reform, and capacity building and we work with government and industry to improve responses to financial abuse, including through coordination of the NSW chapter of the Economic Abuse Reference Group.

This year, we have assisted hundreds of victim survivors to recover and thrive from financial abuse, and we have delivered webinars to upskill lawyers and community works to recognise and respond to financial abuse.

Next year, we will take over sole coordination of the national Economic Abuse Reference Group, capacity build other state and territory community organisations to address financial abuse and continue, with the assistance of our partners, to provide holistic information, advice and representation to financial abuse victim survivors.

CASE STUDY

Our client accrued almost 30 demerit points and \$5000 in fines when a friend of the primary perpetrator retained possession of her car for 6 weeks, refusing to return it to our client, and incurred almost 20 separate fines. We successfully argued that the fines resulted from the family violence and that our client should not have been expected to nominate the driver who had made threats of violence against her when she received the fines.

All demerit points and fines were withdrawn and our client can now drive once again.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

In November 2022,

RLC appeared on behalf of the Economic Reference Group NSW (EARG NSW) at the NSW parliamentary inquiry on the criminalisation of coercive control.

Pictured: Gayatri Nair and Jasmine Opdam from RLC's Financial Abuse Service NSW. Photos by NSW Legislative Council.



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"[My mum] has been so worried about me for a long time and every new result that you achieve on my behalf is a huge relief for her. If she could, I know she'd be sending her own appreciation messages to you and the team. There is such a ripple effect on others thanks to how much you are doing to help lift me out of some of this debt... thank you." – Client

"Just wanted to send through a thank you message from yesterday. Your clear advice and the compassionate way it was delivered was very much appreciated and [client] is feeling much more reassured and focussed on her path forward." – Financial counsellor from a co-advice

CREDIT & DEBT

This year, our Credit & Debt service presented at a community expo organised by the City of Sydney (COS) at the Ron Williams Centre for Chinese community members, focused on elder abuse issues, and distributed a culturally appropriate factsheet developed with COS and community input translated into Chinese.

We also partnered with Thomson Reuters to update the Consumer Credit Law chapter of the Lawyers Practice Manual NSW to include new sections on short-term lending models that produce consumer harms including Buy Now, Pay Later products.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

This year, we published a suite of updated factsheets and self-help resources for clients and their advocates:

- Financial hardship
- Repossession of motor vehicles
- Total & Permanent Disability Insurance
- Fines – Reviews and write-off applications
- Centrepay Deductions
- Dealing with Local Court forms in debt cases

CASE STUDY

We assisted a woman who was made homeless after being provided with an inappropriate amount of credit, including loans and credit cards, from a major bank on nearly 15 occasions. She was encouraged to continually upgrade and refinance her loans because she could not afford her existing debts. The overwhelming financial stress of all this debt resulted in our client being diagnosed with a number of serious mental health conditions preventing her from regaining employment.

Redfern Legal Centre represented the woman in a complaint to the Australian Financial Complaints Authority and was able to assist her to have a bank debt of almost \$50,000 waived.

FIRST NATIONS

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Access Worker and First Nations lawyer have started and continued some exciting outreaches in the local community this year to Redlink, Mudgin-Gal and Tribal Warrior.

On 26th of January, we attended the annual Yabun Festival, which was held in Victoria Park upon the traditional lands of the Gadigal people in Sydney. We have also started a First Nations drop-in day on a Monday, when our friendly staff or volunteers are available to chat about legal issues over a cup of tea.

Next year, we will continue building our connections with local First Nations organisations and the community, including through our outreaches, and working on issues responsive to local community needs, including through delivering community legal education and considering the need for reform of the Working With Children Check system.

FINANCIAL WELLNESS WEEK

In April 2023, our First Nations Solicitor, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Access Worker, and some of our Financial Abuse Service team spoke to members of the local community at the First Nations Foundation's Financial Wellness Week community outreach event.



RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN LAUNCH



Redfern Legal Centre's first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) sets out our organisational commitment to reconciliation and contains a number of concrete actions for us to work towards between March 2023 and February 2025. We are committed to reconciliation across our organisation. Our Innovate RAP is an opportunity to develop and strengthen our relationships with First Nations communities, organisations and communities and engage staff and stakeholders in reconciliation.



Redfern Legal Centre launched our RAP during Reconciliation Week. We were lucky enough to have Uncle Michael West from the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council join us to deliver a Welcome to Country, as well as the talented Marlene Cummins who performed live.

