



**Redfern
Legal
Centre**

Impact Report 2022–2023



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Front cover: Bridget Cama, Co-Chair of the Uluru Youth Dialogue, visiting Redfern Legal Centre to discuss *The Uluru Statement from the Heart* and the First Nations Voice to Parliament.

Our Guiding Principles

In all our work, we will:

- Respect our clients, communities we work with, and each other
- Positively impact people experiencing vulnerability through strategic service delivery
- Ensure innovation and sustainability in our service delivery.





Achieving Outcomes

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.



In 2022–2023, we assisted **2,707 people with 4,394 occasions of legal advice** and completed **1,578 legal tasks** such as drafting a letter or court or tribunal application. We also provided **2,211 referrals** during casework, representation and intake services.

Client satisfaction

91%

report they would recommend RLC to other people.

Personal and cultural needs

71%

of clients from non-English speaking backgrounds or living with disability agreed or strongly agreed that RLC provided a culturally appropriate or responsive service.

Representation and casework

We increased access to justice through successfully completing cases for **280 people**. Of these people:

47%

were experiencing family violence

85%

were experiencing financial hardship

23%

identified as First Nations

27%

spoke English as a second language

20%

were people with a disability or a mental health condition

Casework outcomes

26 clients had a combined total of **\$348,946** in debts, contracts, fines and credit defaults waived, written off, cancelled or removed from credit reports. **Three** clients were given refunds totalling **\$22,761**. **80%** of this total was for clients who had experienced financial abuse. **Two** clients were awarded a combined total of **\$41,200** in compensation, victims' compensation, and insurance.

13 evictions were prevented in public and community housing. In at least two of these cases, the tenants being evicted were survivors of domestic violence, where the alleged breaches of their tenancy agreement related directly to the domestic violence. Two people accessed social housing, three housing transfers were achieved, and eight social housing repairs were undertaken as a result of our advocacy. The social housing repairs included repairs for an First Nations single mum with three children, who had been reporting significant repair issues (including roof leaks and ceiling collapses) for many years with no action from their landlord. In **two matters** a debt or rent arrears was waived or reduced for a total of **\$7,691**. In private rentals, **three unfair terminations or evictions** were prevented.

14 matters had unpaid wages or entitlements obtained to the value of \$479,204, including one payment of **over \$225,000** for a general protection and underpaid wages claim for a waitress dismissed because of her caring responsibilities. Six people received a **combined total of \$58,962** in compensation awarded for unfair dismissal, including one care worker and two office assistants. One apology was issued in relation to employment conduct. In **15 matters**, charges were dismissed through mental health diversionary court orders and in **8 matters** the criminal sentence was reduced. These matters included charges for drive with illicit drug present, unlawfully issued COVID-19 fines, court-elected COVID-19 fines and driving while car unregistered.

Six formal police complaints were lodged. These complaints included allegations of excessive use of force against a person with a mental health condition, a young person being harassed by police through ongoing stops and searches, and the use of a police dog against a child for a fine only offence. We ran **four successful bail applications** involving unacceptable risk factors including lack of fixed address, and successfully kept our clients out of custody while their charges were determined.

People have increased capacity to address and understand their legal issues

We supported self-represented clients in the completion of **1,578 legal tasks** such as writing a letter or filing an application with a court or tribunal.

We built legal capacity in the community by publishing **40 community legal education resources** and conducting **91 community legal education sessions**, both in the community and online.

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

64% agreed we were effective or very effective at having a positive impact on increased understanding of the law by individuals in the community.

79% agreed we were effective or very effective at services working together to meet clients' needs holistically.

Client feedback

You made me feel safe and strong after I spoke to your staff that I could get through life at the end of this case.

I attended in person without an appointment and was treated with empathy and kindness at a stressful time. I was later contacted by phone by a lawyer who was able to provide me with the information I needed. I was really grateful for the service and the kindness provided by everyone I encountered there.

I think your service is great, professional. You do worthwhile work for the community.

I was so respected and welcomed when I come inside your doors to address my issue. I was anxious and your staff helped me through the process and I felt safe to tell my story.

Services work together so that people have their needs met holistically

During the delivery of advice and casework, we provided **2,145 referrals** to additional services, ensuring holistic wraparound support to address clients' complex and overlapping legal and non-legal needs. In addition, we provided **743 referrals at our front desk**, ensuring clients were able to connect with services appropriate to their legal and non-legal needs.

We conducted **177 stakeholder engagement activities**, working collaboratively with community services, government and industry to raise awareness, expand our impact and increase our reach.

- Our Health Justice Partnership lawyers work collaboratively with health workers for positive change for Sydney Local Healthcare District clients.
- RLC's International Students Legal Service worked in partnership with the City of Sydney and Study NSW to publish a factsheet *Speak Up Speak Out* on sexual harrasment in 12 languages.
- We lead the NSW Chapter of the **Economic Abuse Reference Group (EARG)**, a national network of over 50 organisations working to address the financial impact of domestic violence. In 2023, we assumed national coordination of the EARG.

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 2022–2023 we conducted **422 law reform activities**, which included reports, submissions to state and federal government, participation in consultations and working collaboratively with our stakeholders.

Together with EARG NSW and the NSW Women’s Alliance, we advocated for comprehensive consultation with the DV Sector on the Coercive Control Bill in NSW.

86% of stakeholders surveyed agreed we were effective or very effective at providing access to justice for people experiencing disadvantage.

Measuring our impact: Client surveys

Our work aims to improve the wellbeing of our communities. When asked how Redfern Legal Centre had an impact on client wellbeing:

75% said our help improved their knowledge of the law and legal system

23% reported increased safety

64% said it improved their stress levels

26% said our assistance improved their housing situation

57% said it improved their sense of control over their own life

12% said our assistance improved their employment situation

34% indicated our help improved their financial situation

10% said our assistance improved their visa situation

24% indicated their physical health improved

67% said that overall Redfern legal Centre assistance improved their general wellbeing

25% indicated it improved their family wellbeing

When asked about their level of satisfaction with our service,

89% of participants indicated that they would recommend the services of Redfern Legal Centre to others.

First Nations Justice

Our work with First Nations people and communities is central and crucial to our work and our purpose at Redfern Legal Centre. We provide a priority service to First Nations people across all our legal practice areas.

We have started a First Nations Drop-In service every Monday at Redfern Town Hall, so that First Nations clients can meet face-to-face with someone without the need for an appointment, to have a cup of tea, do a legal health check and discuss legal questions.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Access Worker

Maureen Randall, the Redfern Legal Centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Access Worker, identifies and breaks down barriers to ensure culturally appropriate services are available to First Nations people accessing our diverse legal services. Maureen assists with triaging legal issues, providing referrals, and helping clients navigate complex matters with the legal teams.

Case study

We had the honor of standing by and providing crucial support to an incredible Auntie who survived the Stolen Generations. The journey of applying for a Reparations Payment from the Stolen Generations Reparations Scheme was not just a paperwork process; it meant confronting and reliving the deep-seated trauma of those distressing experiences.

We supported our client through this profoundly emotional journey. Beyond the application itself, we facilitated access to a network of crucial and relevant services, providing assistance during a time that required courage and resilience.

We organised a range of community events and stalls this year, including our stall at Yabun on Invasion Day. The stall featured informative factsheets, including one on the Youpla Funeral Fund collapse, and we gave away tote bags containing back-to-school materials.

We held stalls at four events for NAIDOC Week: the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence event, the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service NAIDOC week event, the Inner City NAIDOC week fun day held at Carriageworks and the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence.

We have renamed the rooms we use at Redfern Town Hall with First Nations words. Collaborating closely with Professor Jakelin Troy, Director of Aboriginal and Torres



Maureen Randall.

Strait Islander Research at the University of Sydney, we identified local words and consulted relevant organisations. We also conducted a community consultation. We have now adopted new First Nations names for our rooms at Redfern Town Hall. The names are: **Muru** (meaning: path or road); **Nanga Mai** (meaning: Dream a different dream); **Yuwing** (meaning: Truth); **Nganaga** (meaning: Ask anything); **Ngununy** (meaning: Food); **Baya** (meaning: Speak); and **Wiyana** (meaning: Outside).

First Nations Solicitor

Gail Brennan is the Redfern Legal Centre First Nations Solicitor. She is a proud Ngarrindjeri and Adnyamathanha woman from the Coorong and Flinders Ranges in South Australia. Gail engages with local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to identify systemic legal issues and areas of unmet legal need. Gail undertakes advice, casework, stakeholder engagement, community legal education and law reform on issues identified as unmet legal need.



Jasmie Opdam, Rebecca Campbell and Tanya Plibersek at Yabun Festival.

Gail conducts a legal outreach service at Tribal Warrior, and a monthly outreach clinic at Mudgin-Gal, a women's support centre that assists victim-survivors of domestic violence and offers programs for mothers and infants.

Gail offers advice and casework on a wide range of issues, including tenancy, victims' compensation, racial discrimination, apprehended violence orders, guardianship, credit and debt and the Stolen Generations Reparations Scheme. Gail helps to navigate complex legal matters while forging holistic connections to essential support services.

Redfern Legal Centre has started a project in collaboration and consultation with other organisations looking into Working with Children Checks (WWCC). The project aims to identify legal and non-legal barriers impacting on the ability of First Nations employees, volunteers and carers to obtain WWCC clearance and the reforms needed to increase the number of successful First Nations applications. Gail presented on WWCC to First Nations employees in the sector at 'Yarn Up'.

Education and training

We worked with Mudgin-Gal to present to local school students at Mudgin-Gal who were all young First Nations women. The students were completing a program with Mudgin-Gal to assist in reducing violence within the local school. We spoke about education options after school, employment and future goals. This led into discussions to raise awareness on legal issues that may arise for young people including; police powers when police ask students questions without a parent or guardian present, signing up to phone plans and gyms and how this may lead to debts and underpayment by casual jobs.

We consulted without with local organisation, Weave, on issues that are affecting people accessing their



Mia Walsh, Gayatri Nair and Gail Brennan.

programs. One of the issues identified was the police pulling over young people on their learners and provisional license. We are committed to developing legal resources to meet the educational need of young people obtaining their licence.

Case study

A First Nations client who was struggling with an overwhelming debt issue with their electricity provider. The provider ignored our attempts to alert them to the client's financial hardship and continued to threaten to disconnect their electricity causing unnecessary additional stress. The provider had neglected their own financial hardship policy and blatantly disregarded the regulations set by the Australian Energy Regulator. We escalated the matter to the Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW. Through our advocacy, we secured a debt waiver and obtained a customer service gesture payment, retroactive government rebates, and an official apology. This success represents not just a legal victory, but a vindication of our client's rights and a validation of their experience.

OUR IMPACT

- First Nations local organisations and the community drive and inform the work we do on First Nations issues
 - Redfern Legal Centre has trust and strong relationships with local and statewide First Nations organisations and communities
 - First Nations people are better informed about their legal rights.
 - Young people are better informed about their legal rights.
- Increase access to justice for First Nations people, particularly women and young people.

Financial Abuse Service NSW

The Financial Abuse Service NSW offers free legal assistance to individuals who have experienced financial abuse in intimate partner relationships. Our service is the only one of its kind in Australia. Our unique approach combines family law and credit, debt, and consumer law expertise, supported by the corporate, government and philanthropic sectors. We also advocate for policy and law reform to combat this often-overlooked form of family violence.

Working for change

We work for positive and systemic change, pushing for recognition and action on financial abuse by government and industry. We actively engage with community and industry networks and contribute our expertise to state and national advisory groups. We lead the NSW chapter of the Economic Abuse Reference Group (EARG), a national network of organisations working to address the financial impact of domestic violence. In 2023, we assumed national coordination of the EARG and have expanded our membership to over 50 organisations nationwide.

Financial abuse recognised in NSW legislation for first time

In October 2022, the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Coercive Control) Bill 2022 was introduced in NSW Parliament. It proposed creating a standalone criminal offence for coercive control in intimate partner relationships, along with other amendments to criminal and protection order laws.

Redfern Legal Centre, together with EARG NSW and the NSW Women's Alliance, advocated for comprehensive consultation with the domestic violence sector. We expressed concerns about the risk of victim survivors being misidentified as primary perpetrators of family violence. Our submission on the draft legislation highlighted issues like the high evidentiary threshold, inconsistent definitions, and a short implementation period for necessary police and judiciary training and system changes.

Our joint efforts prompted a parliamentary inquiry. We provided expert testimony to the Senate Standing Committee on Social Issues, which was drawn upon during the parliamentary debate and featured in the committee's final report.

The legislation passed on November 16, 2022, and is set to take effect in early 2024. This makes NSW the first state in Australia to establish a standalone criminal offence for coercive control and is the first recognition

I am beyond grateful for everything you and RLC has done to help me! I wouldn't be anywhere near the person I am today if you didn't help me with everything! I feel very free now!

Thank you all for the assistance that I have received during this challenging moment of my life. The support, care and professionalism I have experienced from the team has nothing short of extraordinary. Thank you for making me feel human again, that I am not just a number. That I matter and am worthy of your time.



Members of our Financial Abuse team.

of financial abuse in NSW law. Our advocacy led to significant improvements to the legislation, including clear examples of financially abusive behaviours, review mechanisms, and safeguards for First Nations, LGBTQI+ individuals, and culturally diverse communities, which we will continue to monitor as the offence comes into effect in 2024.



Gayatri Nair, Jasmine Opdam, Associate Professor Jane Wangmann and Professor Kate Fitz-Gibbon at the inquiry into Coercive Control laws.

RLC in the media

NSW needs to address coercive control, but this rushed law is not the way to do it

Gayatri Nair in *The Guardian*

This criminal offence could end up retraumatising victim survivors and criminalising people who are most in need of protection. Domestic violence advocates are raising concerns at a New South Wales upper house inquiry into coercive control laws. The State is rushing to add an untested new criminal offence which may not best protect victim survivors. We need to address coercive control, but introducing this criminal offence without amendments and adequate safeguards could end up retraumatising victim survivors and criminalising people who are most in need of protection.

There is a need for significant cultural and systems reform in the police, judiciary and broader community before rushing in criminal laws as multiple women's organisations and legal specialists have warned at the NSW upper house parliamentary inquiry. Domestic and family violence is our biggest social problem. We know it kills women every week. We know it costs our community and our economy too much. We need to take our time, listen carefully to those who are most impacted, and be willing to adapt and learn, to get this right.

Stopping 'Buy Now, Pay Later' products being used as a tool of financial abuse

A recent survey of financial counsellors shows Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) products are being increasingly used as tools of financial abuse. Victims are coerced into opening BNPL accounts for their partners or have accounts fraudulently opened in their names. These survivors often end up with multiple debts since BNPL providers do not consider existing obligations in their affordability checks. The BNPL voluntary code of practice falls short in protecting victim survivors. We have advocated for stronger industry regulation and enforceable consumer safeguards to prevent harm from BNPL products. We contributed to a joint consumer submission, featured in the Sydney Morning Herald, calling for tighter BNPL regulation.

The Federal Government has responded by committing to regulate BNPL under the *National Consumer Credit Protection Act*. This approach will apply responsible lending requirements similar to other types of consumer credit. The Hon Stephen Jones MP, Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services, acknowledged our concerns, citing the potential for BNPL products to be weaponised in abusive relationships (Minister's Address to the Responsible Lending and Borrowing Summit, 22 May 2023).

Advice and casework

This year, our service experienced unprecedented demand and assisted over 300 clients across NSW, a 65% increase compared to last year. The greatest demand was for consumer credit issues, and demand for family law property settlement advice remained high.

Education and training

We hosted nine new webinars, attracting over 500 live attendees and nearly 300 on-demand views. Our Accredited Family Law Specialist conducted webinars

Case study

In 2017, Lily's* marriage ended. In 2018, she reached property settlement orders with her ex-partner, receiving around \$150,000 from the sale of their home. In 2019, she began a relationship with Theodore, who subjected her to financial and physical abuse over 18 months, stealing over \$120,000 from her accounts. Lily became homeless, isolated from friends and family, and lost her job due to health issues and an assault.

Lily sought help from the Financial Abuse Service, which assisted her in obtaining debt waivers and repairing her credit report. We also helped her make complaints to the banks, resulting in refunds, compensation exceeding \$30,000, and several debt waivers.

*Name changed for client safety and privacy.

for family lawyers to enhance their understanding of financial abuse in property settlement, spousal maintenance, and child support. We also provided training to community workers, covering topics including addressing financial abuse with fringe lenders, credit report recovery after financial abuse, and mortgage stress related to financial abuse.

We presented at the Economic Justice Australia Conference and the WESNET Tech Safety Summit. We delivered a CPD session at the CLCNSW Quarterly Conference, discussing successful state-wide collaborations and how our service effectively collaborates with regional partners to provide comprehensive support to clients, enhance complementary services, and build capacity in addressing financial abuse.

We released two new factsheets: one on *Fixing Your Credit Report after Financial Abuse* and another on *Financial Hardship and Family Violence*, aimed at aiding advocacy and resolving legal issues stemming from financial abuse.



Gayatri Nair and Jasmine Opdam at the inquiry into Coercive Control laws.

RLC in the media

Buy now, pay later failing family violence victims

Jasmine Opdam quoted in *CHOICE*

Support workers advocating for victims of family violence say undertrained BNPL providers are making inappropriate requests. Jasmine Opdam from Redfern Legal Centre's Financial Abuse Service agrees, saying in many cases the victims of the abuse don't even know they have got BNPL debts in their name. "In identity theft or fraud circumstances, the victim survivor typically has no idea that they even have buy now, pay later accounts open in their name until they are being pursued, either by the provider or by a debt collector, for the debt," she says. ... Opdam says in her practice she has seen a wide range of BNPL providers request that victims provide a police report about any economic abuse before providing a debt waiver.

OUR IMPACT

- People are less financially stressed
- People feel more able to leave and remain out of an abusive relationship
- People have increased capacity to navigate the legal and financial system
 - Families and children are safer and more financially secure
- Greater public awareness of financial abuse and where to seek help
 - Reduction in poverty and homelessness



RLC's Rashini Fernando and social worker Cecilia Coorey at the Sydney Dental Hospital.

Health Justice Partnership

RLC's Health Justice Partnership (HJP) offers legal assistance to Sydney Local Healthcare District (SLHD) clients, including those at Royal Prince Alfred (RPA) Hospital, Sydney Dental Hospital (SDH), the Professor Marie Bashir Acute Mental Health Unit and social housing facilities RedLink and Common Ground. We are grateful to the health professionals who refer clients to our unique service and allow us to work collaboratively for positive change.

We prioritise trauma-informed care. Many of our clients, who often require hospitalisation for acute medical issues, face complex challenges, including injustices, discrimination, mental and physical health issues, and substance use.

This year, we started a weekly clinic at the Professor Marie Bashir RPA Acute Psychiatric Unit. This has seen an increase in advice and casework related to criminal charges. With the support of dedicated healthcare professionals, our legal representation aims to divert people with serious mental illness away from the criminal justice system and avoid incarceration. We successfully advocated for numerous diversionary sentences for clients with significant prior court histories.

In September 2022, we launched a pilot legal health check initiative, leading to a surge in referrals, especially from Special Care Dentistry and the Community Oral Health Clinic. These referrals involve clients with legal concerns spanning debt, tenancy, family law, child protection, guardianship, and fines. The hospital's introduction of domestic violence screening for patients has also led to increased referrals for family law and AVO (Apprehended Violence Order) advice and support.

Our HJP service at the Dental Hospital assisted one client reduce an \$18,000 debt with the Department of Communities and Justice to just \$6,000 through negotiation and consent orders. In another case, we assisted a client in a child protection matter, resulting in successful resolution with limited intervention from the Department of Communities and Justice.

We assisted an Aboriginal woman who faced eviction after orders from the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT). We represented her in a set-aside application and, when unsuccessful, filed an appeal, drafted submissions, and referred her to another service for ongoing representation.

In another case, we assisted a client in resolving an NCAT tenancy matter where they were being sued for \$18,000 in end-of-lease costs. We negotiated a reduction of the debt to less than \$6,000 and a payment plan for the client, finalised by consent orders.

Education and training

We presented on new sexual assault consent laws to the RPA sexual assault team and also conducted community legal education sessions on debt, apprehended violence orders and tenancy at hospital-wide staff meetings. We were also invited to provide information on powers of attorney and guardianship orders at the Sydney Local Health District carer network.

As co-convenor of the CLCNSW Quarterlies Family Law and Care and Protection Network Group, HJP promotes ongoing education within the sector. In May 2023, a session covered proposed changes to equal shared parental responsibility presumption and related topics, featuring insights from a leading Family Law Accredited Specialist.



RLC in the media

Angela's story featured in an article dated 3 September 2022 "Advocate – Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies' eMagazine titled "Health Justice for All". The article spoke to the broader benefits of a HJP in addition to outlining a client story from HJP's practice.

Angela* was supported through NSW's Redfern Legal Centre's health justice partnerships with Sydney Local Health District where they have co-located lawyers at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, the Sydney Dental Hospital and community outreach settings. As a result of a fluctuating mental health condition, 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, Redfern Legal Centre's (RLC) health justice partnerships 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 housing. This outcome, as well as her cat, continue to support her mental health.

*Name changed for client safety and privacy.

OUR IMPACT

- Health care consumers are informed about legal rights and options
 - Health-harming legal issues are addressed
 - Improved health and wellbeing
 - Better understanding of DCJ care and protection processes
- Greater access to legal and health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people with complex needs

Police Accountability

RLC's statewide police accountability practice provides free and confidential legal advice about police powers, access to police records, and police complaints, as well as advice on decision-making by government agencies and complaints processes administered by government.

We work with our clients, the community and the sector to identify and address unlawful and unjust systemic policing issues through policy, advocacy and law reform. The year, the practice has experienced a growing demand for legal advice on police-issued fines alongside our ongoing work in police complaints.

Redfern Legal Centre wins historic test case on COVID-19 fines

Redfern Legal Centre secured a significant win in the NSW Supreme Court, after filing a test case on behalf of three clients who received COVID-19 fines, arguing that the fines were invalid because they didn't specify the alleged offence, as required by the *Fines Act 1996* (NSW).

For over three years, RLC has assisted people experiencing disadvantage, and young people and their parents, with their concerns on COVID-19 fines. We have also advocated in partnership with other organisations including the Aboriginal Legal Service and the Public Interest Advocacy Centre on the issue. We filed the test case because of our ongoing concerns regarding the legality and impact of the fines.

Before the hearing, Revenue NSW withdrew one plaintiff's fine, and on the day before the hearing, they conceded that the other two fines were invalid. The NSW Supreme Court declared the two penalty notices

in question invalid and ordered the Commissioner of Fines to refund the fines paid by our clients. This victory led to the withdrawal of 33,121 COVID-19 fines by Revenue NSW.

The case was covered in over 50 published articles, including numerous international articles published in Greece, UK, Canada, India, Poland, America, Germany, and New Zealand. Samantha Lee and Alexis Goodstone appeared across TV, print and radio to discuss the court win, including on ABC News, 9 News, 7 News, SBS, ABC radio, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Guardian*, ABC online and other media platforms.

In April 2023, Her Honour Justice Yehia published her reasons in the Supreme Court test case. Her decision clarifies the requirements necessary for a fine to be valid, and calls into disrepute all the remaining 29,017 COVID-19 fines that have not been withdrawn.

Working for change

In June 2023, RLC and the Public Interest Advocacy Centre made a formal complaint to the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC), asking the LECC to investigate the way police enforced COVID-19 fines, following an internal video published by *The Sydney Morning Herald* showing former NSW police commissioner Mick Fuller directing officers to take a "strong approach to enforcement" and that they "start to issue tickets over using discretion". While the LECC declined to investigate the complaint, it provided another opportunity to draw attention to the manner in which the pandemic was managed, including taking a law enforcement approach to addressing a health issue.

Fines commissioner concedes that COVID fines in Supreme Court test case are invalid



Georgina Mitchell

Updated November 29, 2022 –
12.03pm, first published at 11.36am

The NSW government has conceded that two COVID-19 fines being challenged in a Supreme Court test case are invalid, opening the door for more than 30,000 other people to have fines worth \$30 million cancelled.

Redfern Legal Centre brought the case on behalf of three of its clients who received fines ranging from \$1000 to \$3000 during the 2021 public health lockdowns. One of the clients, Rohan Pank, [had his fine for sitting in a park withdrawn](#) after the case was filed.

Above: Screenshot from *The Sydney Morning Herald* story about the invalid COVID-19 fines.



Above (left): Samantha Lee and Rohan Pank, who was issued with a \$1,000 fine; **and (right):** Alexis Goodstone, Samantha Lee and Camilla Pandolfini outside the NSW Supreme Court.

We presented on our work on COVID-19 fines at the national Community Legal Centre Australia Conference, discussing our advocacy and the successful test case in the NSW Supreme Court. We sought to raise awareness of how we successfully advocated for change on COVID-19 fines with other community legal centres and organisations nationwide. In June, we hosted a webinar examining the recent NSW Supreme Court judgment and its potential impact on future fines.

Drawing on our COVID-19 fines casework, we are investigating the reform needed to create positive change for fines issued to children generally. Working with a coalition of organisations, we have commissioned an academic report, in collaboration with several universities, to assess the impact of COVID-19 fines and the NSW fines system on children.

COVID-19 fines had a severe impact on people facing financial hardship. Data shows that fines were issued disproportionately to First Nations people and in low socioeconomic regions and suburbs. Further work continues to achieve the withdrawal of the balance of the COVID-19 fines.

Strip searches

In July 2022 we filed a class action, with Slater and Gordon Lawyers, against the State of NSW, on behalf of people who were invasively and unlawfully strip searched at music festivals in the last six years. The

Case study

We provided assistance to a client living in social housing who had been convicted of a drug driving offense resulting from her use of legal and prescribed medical cannabis. Due to the conviction, her license was suspended, and she faced several fines. We petitioned to have the sentence relisted on s.4 appeals and then facilitated a rehearing of the matter, resulting in the withdrawal and dismissal of the original ruling. Collaborating with the Credit and Debt practice, we successfully advocated for the write-off of all the client's fines.

class action seeks redress for young people who were strip searched and aims to clarify in what circumstances strip searches are lawful.

The class action follows on from a long campaign 'Safe n Sound' by RLC on this issue, after hearing numerous stories of people who experienced traumatic strip searches where police failed to ensure the preservation of privacy and dignity as required by law. We have worked with a coalition of legal organisations and academics at UNSW to advocate for change. This advocacy has been successful in increasing awareness of the issue and changes to NSW Police policies and practices. We believe that further, significant, legislative change is needed to ensure that unlawful strip searches do not occur.

RLC in the media

Music festival patrons launch class action against NSW Police

Samantha Lee quoted in *The Guardian*

Samantha Lee, a senior police accountability solicitor at Redfern Legal Centre, said the case would aim to show that “invasive and unlawful police searches” at festivals “have become routine, resulting in very few charges, but leaving thousands of young people and minors humiliated and severely traumatised”.

“With this class action, Redfern Legal Centre and Slater & Gordon are seeking compensation and redress for the significant numbers of people believed to have been unlawfully searched,” she said. “We also look to the courts to make findings that will ensure this traumatising police practice becomes the exception not the rule. Time has shown that police policy changes and internal education programs will not prevent the overuse of this blunt and harmful policing tool. Ultimately, we need legislative change to ensure safer policing and real change. Until that time, we are looking to the courts to clarify in what circumstances strip-searches are lawful.”

Samantha Lee quoted in the ABC online

Redfern Legal Centre solicitor Samantha Lee said she hopes there will also be significant changes to the law to stop NSW Police doing searches except under serious and urgent circumstances. “The legislation still allows for a child as young as 10 to be strip searched in New South Wales without a parent present. It still provides no clarification around cavity searches and squatting and coughing,” she said. “It still allows police to strip search without a support person present. So we want to see not just internal policy changes, but some really significant changes to the law.”

Children searched more than 100,000 times by NSW police

Nigel Gladstone for *The Sydney Morning Herald*

Redfern Legal Centre obtained the search data via freedom of information laws. Their solicitor for police accountability, Samantha Lee, said the results showed “over-policing” Indigenous people. “The data reveals a shocking level of disproportionate person searches conducted on First Nations people compared to the general population,” Lee said. “In locations such as Surry Hills and Waterloo, First Nations people were 10 times more likely to be searched than the general population. In key regional areas, they were up to seven times more likely.”

NSW Police and use of force

We act for a 14-year-old First Nations child who sustained serious and horrific injuries and was hospitalised after being arrested in Northern NSW. Following our advocacy, the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC) held a public hearing on systemic issues including use of body worn cameras and excessive use of force by the NSW Police. Our calls for a public hearing received coverage on various media outlets including *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, and Nine News. Two NSW Police Force manuals have now been released to the public following the hearing: the manual on use of force and the manual on use of body worn cameras. This is a huge win for accountability and transparency. We continue to advocate for a parliamentary inquiry into the use of force by NSW Police as it is a systemic issue that has incredibly significant ramifications for the NSW community including injury and death.

“The use of force is a systemic issue,” said RLC’s Sam Lee. “Communities who are policed disproportionately, including First Nations people, young people, and people with living with disability and/or mental illness will also experience excessive use of force by NSW Police disproportionately.”

Stops and searches in NSW: a disproportionate impact

We highlighted the disproportionate impact of police searches on First Nations people and children, based on documents obtained from NSW Police. This revealed that First Nations people, including children, face a higher likelihood of being stopped and searched.

OUR IMPACT

- Increased understanding of police powers and legal rights
- People feel better equipped to address police misconduct
- Reduced stress and anxiety
- Police complaints are resolved

International Student Legal Service NSW (ISLS)

RLC's International Student Legal Service NSW (ISLS) is the only independent specialist legal service dedicated to the more than 230,000 international students in NSW.

ISLS offers free, confidential legal advice, advocacy, resources, education, and support to protect international students' rights and help resolve legal issues before they escalate and negatively impact the health, well-being, education, and overall experience of living and studying in NSW. As a frontline statewide provider, ISLS is a leader in addressing international students' exploitation and identifying and monitoring the emerging socio-legal issues and trends that impact them. We proactively engage stakeholders and advocate for systemic change.

Housing and cost-of-living crises

The rising cost of living, including accommodation, places international students under significant strain, made worse by the mandated return of onshore in-person study and the reintroduction of caps that limit working hours.

ISLS held two large forums with key stakeholders. We sought assurances from education providers that international students would have access to affordable and safe housing. We continue to engage directly with the government about the issues raised, and proposed reforms to address the issues.

Education provider debt: Fatima's story

International student Fatima* turned to ISLS for help when her university upheld her complaint of sexual harassment against a university staff member. The university failed to inform her if the employee was still on campus. This left Fatima feeling unsafe and concerned about potential retaliation, making it difficult for her to attend classes. She even contemplated returning to her home country.

Initially, Fatima sought clarification from the university's internal dispute support services, but they couldn't assist her. They referred her to ISLS for guidance on whether the university could be compelled to disclose the employee's on-campus status and assistance in navigating this process. Upon reviewing the university's policies, procedures, and correspondence with Fatima, ISLS identified that the university had not followed its policies. They hadn't provided Fatima with a written outcome of the investigation or information about the employee's presence on campus.

ISLS offered Fatima extensive guidance and support in preparing correspondence to her university. As a result, she succeeded in compelling the university to inform her that they had found the employee guilty of sexual harassment and had consequently terminated their employment.

Additionally, ISLS connected Fatima with relevant support services. With the issue addressed, Fatima felt safe returning to her classes, allowing her to continue her studies in Australia.

* Name has been changed

Responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment

In partnership with the City of Sydney and Study NSW, ISLS published a new factsheet *Speak Up, Speak Out* on sexual harassment, supporting students in identifying, reporting, and seeking assistance. The factsheet is tailored to international students, available in 12 languages and addresses sensitive topics through a cultural appropriate lens tailored to accessibility, and readability.

Advice and casework

International students continue to require legal assistance to navigate issues, including education provider disputes, domestic violence, family law, visa and migration, debts (including for university), and employment. In addition, ISLS has seen a trend in tenancy issues, particularly rent increases and evictions alongside cost of living pressures that negatively impact the mental and physical wellbeing of international students.

Advocacy for change

International Student visa holders must comply with specific visa conditions. Condition 8105, which limits work hours to 40 hours per fortnight during the semester, was temporarily lifted to address labour shortages caused by the pandemic. This has helped international students cope with rising living expenses, including accommodation costs.



International students working with Redfern Legal Centre as part of the Study NSW Jobs Connect Six-Week Internship Business Challenge and Community.

ISLS has advocated removing Condition 8105 because unscrupulous employers exploit it, pressuring international students to work beyond the prescribed hours, knowing they risk visa cancellation. This exploitation can lead to underpayment, discrimination, bullying, and even harassment of international students, who have limited recourse due to their vulnerable visa status. Permanently removing this condition would prevent such exploitation and protect the wages and conditions of all workers.

After the announcement that the cap would be reinstated in mid-2023, ISLS wrote an open letter to the relevant Ministers expressing concerns. We were pleased to meet with representatives for the Minister for Home Affairs in response to our open letter to raise our concerns and suggestions for change.

Sydney University Law Society's (SULS) Volunteering Program

In 2022, ISLS partnered with the Sydney University Law Society (SULS) to launch a volunteering program. Fifteen international law students volunteer with ISLS during the semester. The program provides international students with valuable professional experience while studying. Since its inception the program has grown,

with students contributing by researching and drafting law reform documents, conducting legal research, and creating crucial resources for the NSW international student community.

Study NSW Jobs Connect Internship: Business Challenge and Community Challenge Program

In April 2023, ISLS participated in the Study NSW Jobs Connect internship program, established to provide international students with work experience, skills, and connections. ISLS mentored nine international students on a research project to enhance the provision of legal information to international students. Leveraging their unique experiences, language skills, and cultural backgrounds, the team devised innovative communications approaches to connect with the NSW international student community.

The internship program concluded with a final pitch presentation, where the ISLS team performed exceptionally, securing second place in a closely contested competition. This presentation was part of the Study NSW International Student Career Expo, attended by around 2,700 international students and featuring over 50 stallholders.



International Students at Lord Mayors Welcome for International Students.

Consultation with government on prevention of migrant worker exploitation

In collaboration with others, Redfern Legal Centre has been consulting with government on how to best prevent migrant worker exploitation including through stronger protections against visa cancellation. Our input has included speaking to the experiences of our clients and casework, and the issues we have encountered in the current system.

Community events

We attended include the annual Lord Mayor’s Welcome for International Students event in April, with over 800 international students and dozens of key stakeholders.

ISLS also participated in Macquarie University’s Connected with Community campaign, which aims to bring volunteer and community-based organisations onto campus to raise awareness, promote their work within the community, and get international students involved.

OUR IMPACT

- International students’ rights are protected
- Exploitation of international students decreases
- International students can access secure accommodation and better living conditions
 - International students’ financial situation improves
- International students have stable employment and fair wages
 - Students’ safety, wellbeing and mental health is enhanced

Employment Law

Our employment law practice is committed to supporting individuals frequently targeted for exploitation, including migrant workers, international students, First Nations workers, and those in regional, rural, and remote areas.

The Employment Rights Legal Service (ERLS) is a collaboration between Redfern Legal Centre, Kingsford Legal Centre and Inner-City Legal Centre, with a primary mission to deliver specialised employment law services while bolstering the capacity of other community legal centres (CLCs) throughout New South Wales to effectively address employment law cases.

Legal Advice and Casework

We represented a young Aboriginal man in regional NSW, employed as a lifeguard, who received a show cause letter following an altercation with a disruptive patron who made threats towards our client. We intervened, and successfully advocated for him, resulting in the retention of his job.

We provided urgent assistance to a First Nations care worker in regional NSW who faced unfair dismissal. Our client found herself abruptly terminated without any regard for her exceptional past performance. We swiftly intervened on her behalf. Negotiating to secure a resolution, fighting for a settlement that honored her work history. We were able to secure compensation that recognised her commitment ensuring she received the acknowledgment she deserved.

Our practice has a focus on offering advice and representation in cases of sex discrimination as part of our Respect@Work practice. We've encountered several instances of gendered discrimination, including women not passing probation post-pregnancy announcements or facing termination upon returning from parental leave.

In a significant sexual harassment case, we supported an LGBTIQ female client who received a sexually explicit text message from a male CEO and director. With our assistance, she secured over \$60,000 in compensation and an apology. We also utilised the vicarious liability provisions of the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth), given her employer's absence of proper policies or training manuals on sexual harassment.

We are eager to explore the new positive duties for employers, as outlined in the Respect @ Work reforms, to prevent hostile work environments and sexual harassment.

Many of our employment law cases involve unfair treatment on the basis of gender, including family and domestic violence, caring responsibilities and age.



RLC's Seri Feldman-Gubbay presents an 'Employment Law 101' workshop to migrant workers and international students at Meadowbank TAFE.

My words are not enough to express how grateful I am for what you have done for me. Thank you for guiding me in different paths during this. I hope that you will have many good things in life especially good health.

In collaboration with pro bono partners Hall & Wilcox, we represented a client from regional NSW in a general protections dismissal claim. She was terminated following a domestic violence incident, which resulted in an apprehended domestic violence order against her husband, who was the brother of the company owner. We skilfully negotiated a settlement amounting to \$30,000 and secured a letter of reference. This case highlights a need for legal reform as section 351 of the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) does not extend to adverse actions resulting from experiences of domestic violence.

We also assisted a 60-year-old woman who had been working in retail and paid a "flat rate" for the last 15 years as a 'casual' employee. We helped our client understand what she should have been paid, as she had been underpaid wages, superannuation and long service leave. Due to statutory time limits on making legal claims, the client was only able to recover the last six years of entitlements, but the client was very happy that we were able to claim back \$30,000 for this period from her employer.

Education and Training

ERLS participated in the Grattan Institute's webinar event, "How do we eradicate exploitation of migrant workers?" after the release of their report, "Short-changed: How to stop the exploitation of migrant workers in Australia."



Attendees of a session presented by RLC's Sharmilla Bargon on the Respect@Work legal amendments at the Employment Law Network.

We were nominated by Community Legal Centres Australia to provide feedback for the Federal Government's review of the small claims procedure at the Federal Circuit & Family Court of Australia. We highlighted the difficulties faced by temporary visa holders in accessing this pathway and suggested amendments to expedite wage redress for our clients.

We presented a session about the Respect@Work legal amendments at the National Employment Law Network meeting during the Community Legal Centres Australia conference. We engaged in productive discussions on exploring the new legal framework, identifying test cases on new legal points, and coordinating nationally for better client outcomes.

Community and Government Engagement

As part of the Federal Government's commitment to tackle migrant worker exploitation, we have consulted on visa protections and potential solutions. In a

roundtable on Migrant Worker Exploitation with the Department of Home Affairs and other stakeholders, we shared case studies, discussed the ineffectiveness of the Assurance Protocol, and explored visa concerns. We have also actively worked with the Migrant Justice Initiative on a visa comfort proposal for migrant workers experiencing exploitation.

We have been invited by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to provide feedback on the small claims process for wage recovery, focusing on the challenges faced by migrant and vulnerable workers in accessing this remedy.

We have conducted workshops and training sessions, disseminating information about ERLS services, and discussing issues like sexual harassment and sex discrimination under the updated *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth). These sessions encourage meaningful discussions about the legal pathways available to victims of workplace discrimination.

OUR IMPACT

- Workers know their rights
- Workers are empowered to enforce their workplace rights
- Matters involving workplace harassment, discrimination, unfair dismissal or underpayment are resolved
 - Reduced stress and anxiety, and improved wellbeing
 - A more productive and harmonious workforce

Credit, Debt and Consumer Law

RLC's credit, debt and consumer law practice provides advice, advocacy and community legal education in consumer credit, banking, insurance, superannuation, debt recovery, and consumer complaints, using our casework to inform law reform initiatives.

We also assist people in navigating the legal system through claims to Ombudsman services, other dispute resolution providers, the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal and the Local Court Small Claims Division.

Working For Change

Our law and policy reform work draws heavily open the issues we see in our day-to-day practice. We regularly collaborate with other consumer advocates to strengthen our impact on policy submissions and provide case studies to support sector-wide submissions. We continue to advocate for change in the buy now, pay later sector, management of financial hardship and how telecommunications companies, government and essential service providers treat consumers.

Examples of our collaboration include our ongoing work with the NSW Legal Assistance Forum Fines and Traffic Law Working Group. We aim to enhance the fines system for individuals facing significant disadvantages. Additionally, we've seen more clients seeking assistance due to the rising cost of living. They may need support negotiating financial hardship arrangements with their utility providers, banks, telecommunication companies and other credit providers.

Advice and Casework

We assist clients to have their fines written off via our streamlined system with Revenue NSW. In one case, we represented unemployed First Nations woman who had experienced domestic abuse and was engaged in protracted family court proceedings with the perpetrator. We secured a write-off of her outstanding parking fines of \$4,000, improving her mental well-being and financial circumstances.

We assisted a client who experienced long-term mental health issues who was continuing to be harassed by debt collectors more than seven months after we had obtained waivers of unsuitable credit products. Despite debt waivers the client was subjected to continued harassment via text messages and phone calls, and we assisted in lodging a complaint with the credit provider. Contact was ceased and our client's wellbeing improved.

Found the information and conversation I had was informative and precise and made my understanding of the situation a lot clearer in regard to how proceed forward.

We do know we have Redfern LC to rely on for advice. Very grateful.

[The RLC] solicitor wasn't judgemental in his approach - just practical, which the real value of a solicitor... [they] assisted me in this quite difficult matter about my only asset (ie a car) which is socially important to me for mobility etc.

THANK YOU to the team. I really do appreciate it. This has been worrying me for a long time. This happened all whilst a family member was in serious ill health. It was a stressful time.

Education and training

We conducted two webinars: "Help! My Client has Problem Debts 1: How to navigate internal dispute resolution" and "Help! My Client has Problem Debts 2: External Dispute Resolution." These webinars were well-received by the community workers and financial counsellors.

Community/Government engagement

We work with government to centre the needs of consumers – rather than government – in their interactions by engaging in the NLA Working Group, the NSW Government Financial Hardship Policy Framework Codesign Working Group, the NCAT General, Commercial and Motor Vehicles Forum.

We work closely with the local First Nations community and social housing tenants on education on credit and debt matters. We present community events focusing on elder abuse and distributed culturally appropriate and translated fact sheets.

We partnered with Thomson Reuters to update the Consumer Credit Law chapter of the Lawyers Practice Manual NSW.

Case study

Our client initially approached RLC while facing long-term homelessness, unemployment, and mental health issues. Over a decade, she struggled with a debt that she refinanced multiple times without reducing it significantly below the original principal amount. Seeking hardship assistance from the bank yielded only deferred repayments and no proper assessment of responsible lending compliance.

She filed a complaint with the Australian Financial Complaints Authority (AFCA), and upon recognising the adverse impact of the bank's actions on her well-being, the AFCA case manager referred her to us for assistance. We helped expand her complaint, addressing both financial hardship and responsible lending practices.

Our advocacy highlighted how the bank's behavior worsened her mental health conditions. As a result of our efforts, the bank agreed to waive a \$43,000 debt.



Ameila Klein and Rebecca Campbell presenting at the CLCNSW Quarterly.

RLC in the media

NSW motorists left fuming by 'predatory' ticketless parking fines

Jordyn Beazley in *The Guardian*

The council announced that the system was introduced to limit confusion and give people more information on the fine. To avoid cases where tickets are removed, leaving people unaware of them until a reminder notice is sent, giving them less time to pay. But a solicitor at Redfern Legal Centre, David Hofierka, who helps clients with fines, says fines sent by post or electronically often give people less time to contest or access hardship options.

"[The fines] can be inadvertently missed, mistaken for a scam, or never end up reaching the person at all, for example if they haven't managed to update old contact details with Revenue NSW," he says. Hofierka agrees drivers can be confused by a lack of information on tickets left on the windscreen, but he says taking away a physical copy of the ticket isn't the answer. "Putting more information on the paper fines is what we'd prefer, having that in your hand is more useful, especially for elderly or disadvantaged people."

OUR IMPACT

- People are empowered to take control of their finances
- People can confidently navigate the legal and financial system
 - Families and children are more financially secure
 - People feel less financially stressed
 - Reduction in homelessness and poverty

Inner Sydney Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service

RLC offers legal support for tenancy and housing issues through the Inner Sydney Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service (ISTAAS). We provide legal information, advice, and representation. We draw on the experiences of the community to inform our policy, advocacy and law reform work, and we deliver community legal education on tenancy law through our CLE program.

Working for change

Contributions made by ISTAAS to the NSW government's statutory review of the domestic violence provisions in the *Residential Tenancies Act 2010* included recommendations to introduce a broad definition of "domestic violence," shifting the responsibility of serving notices of termination on the remaining co-tenants (often the perpetrators) from victims to landlords, ensuring bond return for domestic violence victims, and allowing tenants to change locks without landlord consent in domestic violence situations.

Our focus this year involved helping public housing tenants with persistent repair problems. We secured repair orders, rent reductions, and compensation for many clients through NCAT, exposing systemic issues in NSW's public housing maintenance program. We continue to advocate for better housing conditions for public housing tenants through government engagement.

Advice and casework

Most tenants contact ISTAAS through our phone advice service, with over 1700 individual advice sessions conducted this year. We continue to allocate resources where they are needed most, working with clients experiencing complex and intersectional disadvantage.

The rental crisis in NSW has led to a huge increase in demand for advice on rental issues. Many tenants have sought advice due to rent increase notices and termination notices from landlords.

Thanks to funding from the City of Sydney, we supported public housing tenants affected by redevelopment, primarily in Glebe. We also assisted tenants in other redevelopment zones by developing resources and connecting with stakeholders and prepared for upcoming relocations in Waterloo in the coming years.

Thank you for your call and advice earlier regarding my tenancy. FYI, please see attached confirmation that they have now withdrawn the NCAT application – given they had failed to first issue a Termination Notice as discussed. Many thanks for your assistance. It's reassuring that your service is available during this challenging time in the rental market.

Finally after 11 weeks I have a ruling in my favour. Please thank Ned and the other tenancy advice advocates for their advice and guidance. I am so grateful.

Education and training

We hosted two webinars, one on domestic violence and tenancy, the other on termination and eviction, both well-attended and informative. We joined a Tenants Union Facebook Live to offer advice on addressing mould issues and provided training for Tenants' Advice and Advocacy services on the intersection of tenancy terminations and criminal proceedings.

Case study – repairs in public housing

A single mother raising four children in public housing in Waterloo, faced persistent kitchen flooding and the relentless invasion of mould, issues that threatened the safety and well-being of her family.

Together, we took action, leveraging ISTAAS to lodge an NCAT application, a critical step toward resolution: the Land and Housing Corporation was held accountable and ordered to undertake the necessary repairs, to ensure a habitable living environment.

Not only did the outcome produce an order for mandatory repairs, but our collective efforts also secured a rent reduction, and a \$4000 compensation payment acknowledging the distress the family had endured due to substandard living conditions.

Working with our client we were able to successfully advocate for her right to dignity in safe and secure housing.



Leanne O'Reilly, Alison Mackey and Amanda Brooker at the National Community Legal Centre Conference in Hobart.



Alison Mackey and Ned Cooke at the RAP launch.

RLC in the media

'I was in tears': collapsed ceiling in family home a sign of dire state of NSW public housing

Ned Cooke quoted in *The Guardian*

A month after a storm made his son's bedroom uninhabitable, mushrooms were growing in the skirting boards and Dean Kahukiwa was still waiting for repairs to begin. When the ceiling of an upstairs bedroom in Dean Kahukiwa's public housing unit in Sydney collapsed during a storm in February, the father of three immediately started calling for help. "I was watching it as it was happening, first the water started to come in through the window. Then it sort of spread across the ceiling towards the light and all of a sudden a crack started to appear. Then 'whoosh' it went", he told *The Guardian*. "I was in tears mate. I'm on the phone to housing, trying to get them to do something, they said we can send someone in 48 hours".

A month later, nothing had changed. The room was covered in mould and debris from the storm, and mushrooms had begun growing in the skirting boards of the bedroom. Ned Cooke, from the Inner Sydney Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service and Redfern Legal Centre, said stories like Kahukiwa's were "extremely common". "It's a major issue and has been for a long time, and typically it's the most major repairs where it's really affecting the liveability of the housing are when it's hardest to get any action", he said. While the issues with public housing maintenance were "multi-faceted", the lack of coordination between the tenancy and maintenance services created a level of "accepted inefficiency" within the system.

OUR IMPACT

- A better standard of living
- Improved housing policy
- Tenants are less stressed
- Prevention of homelessness



Redfern Legal Centre's International Student Legal Service NSW at the Australia Sports Program.

Community Legal Education

Our advocacy training program presented sixteen webinars, to a total audience of over one thousand five hundred people, mainly community workers:

- Problem Debts #1: Internal Dispute Resolution
- Resolving financial abuse issues: Fringe Lenders
- Women @ Work
- Fines and Penalty Notices #1: Challenging the Fine
- Domestic Violence and Tenancy in NSW
- Terminations and Evictions in NSW
- Repair your Credit Report after Financial Abuse
- Mortgage Stress and Financial Abuse
- Fines and the Impact of the recent NSW Supreme Court Case
- Problem Debts #2: External Dispute Resolution.

The Financial Abuse Service presented three specialist family law webinars for community workers:

- Financial Abuse and Child Support
- Financial Abuse and Spousal Maintenance
- Financial Abuse and Property Settlement.

The Financial Abuse Service also presented in-depth versions of the same topics for private family lawyers.

We received strong feedback on the quality of our community education:

- The webinar consolidated and expanded [my] knowledge of this area. Thank you.
- Always great to have a refresher and tips from RLC.
- I look forward to these sessions.
- Thank you – your training is always helpful and concise enough to be digestible!
- Excellent presentation, greatly appreciate the effort in putting these presentations together and delivering them at no cost – would have no other option in learning about it to this level of details without this. Also really appreciate the resources on your website.
- Many good tips and skills provided for us to now use with our clients' complex cases where unjust lending has occurred.
- RLC training is always on target and informative.
- I don't work in the law so this webinar was very informative. An initial set in building my understanding.
- The resources on your webpage are fantastic!
- The session was awesome. I will be in touch with you both for further information.
- Some excellent insights into practical steps to take in relation to joint debt and debt acquired without the client's consent. Thought this webinar was excellent.



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