



**Thursday 5 December 2019 | FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Redfern Legal Centre takes aim at financial abuse**

5 December 2019, Sydney – Redfern Legal Centre (RLC) has teamed up with leading financial and legal service providers to launch the first state-wide service in New South Wales to address financial abuse in intimate partner relationships.

The Financial Abuse Service NSW was established in response to high levels of unmet legal need identified through RLC's Credit and Debt and Domestic Violence practices. The service is being formally launched in Sydney today. *(Details overleaf)*

"Financial abuse is an insidious form of domestic abuse where a person uses money to exert power and control over their partner," RLC's Financial Abuse Service NSW Team Leader, Laura Bianchi said.

"Financial abuse can affect anyone. Many people don't even realise they are being manipulated until the relationship breaks down and they are left homeless, with tens of thousands of dollars' worth of debt," Ms Bianchi said.

The Financial Abuse Service NSW will leverage relationships with the corporate sector to assist people in crisis through free legal support and help guide government and industry responses to this widespread but under-reported form of domestic violence.

American Express, PwC Australia, Ashurst and King & Wood Mallesons will provide support for the legal service arm of the service, with Ecstra Foundation providing support for statewide law reform, advocacy and capacity development work. The service is also supported by Commonwealth Government funding administered by Legal Aid NSW under the Community Legal Services Program.

"We are extremely excited to be partnering with such forward thinking and innovative corporations and government to be delivering this life saving service," RLC CEO Joanna Shulman said.

### **Sandra's\* story (\*Name has been changed)**

"When I went to the Redfern Legal Centre's Financial Abuse Legal Service NSW, I was in a desperate state. I had been in a violent relationship for seven years. Not only was I emotionally and psychologically broken, I was trapped financially by the relationship. I was tens of thousands of dollars in debt, I had a court case against me. I was facing an uncertain future.

Looking back on the relationship now, there were things that occurred that didn't seem right to me. [My partner] wasn't working at the time so I was the primary provider. He suggested that we open a business and I thought that was a great idea, but the business and all the accounts and the directorship had to be in my name. I had always had my own account. Then he suggested that he'd become a signatory on my account. He insisted that the lease be in my name. All of the utilities were in my name.

He would say that he had paid bills and I'd find out that the bills hadn't been paid. And every time I tried to discover more, he would twist my thoughts, or deflect my questioning. I was a fly caught in a web. And he was the spider expertly manipulating me. I was so mentally broken, that I couldn't see a way out of my situation.

The work that the Financial Abuse Service NSW team have undertaken on my behalf has been life changing – profoundly so, and I thank God every day for it.

Not only have they helped me find my voice again, they've helped me regain my financial independence, which was something that was taken from me.

What the financial abuse service have taught me is that change and empowerment is possible. Though we may feel lost and alone, and no one can help us, there is a way forward. And there is hope.”

- **The Hon Christian Porter MP, Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations said**, “This service is going to enhance the physical and economic security for survivors of family violence. We commend the Redfern Legal Centre for the creation of the financial abuse service, and I'm looking forward to the improved outcomes this new service can deliver for vulnerable Australians.”
- **Caroline Stewart, CEO, Ecstra Foundation said**, “Ecstra Foundation is really committed to building the financial capability of all Australians within a fair. financial system. However, we know that financial issues are really the root cause of so many other legal and social issues that people, individuals and communities face. So this is why Ecstra Foundation is partnering in a multi-year partnership with Redfern Legal Centre.”
- **Julian Charters, Vice President & Senior Counsel, American Express said**, “We know the financial system inside and out, and we can help navigate that for Redfern Legal Centre and victims of financial abuse. Additionally, we can help lobby for change in areas where the regulatory and legal framework of the financial system are falling short.”
- **Dan Creasey, Head of Pro Bono & Community Impact, King & Wood Mallesons said**, “The strategic vision for us is to reduce inequality and to reduce poverty, particularly amongst children and young people. There is obviously a very strong connection between financial abuse, domestic violence and poverty, so we're really interested to be involved.”
- **Lynda Reid, Director, Legal, PwC Australia said**, “It really fits beautifully within PwC's approach of trying to tackle the homelessness issue. And there were just lots of synergies to bring our legal pro bono practice into the picture.”
- **Ali French, Pro Bono Lawyer at Ashurst said**, “Working at the service has given me a huge insight into the disturbing impact of intimate partner violence and financial abuse in our community. I am in awe of the resilience of the clients we work with and inspired by the lawyers at Redfern Legal Centre who work every day to support some of the most vulnerable members of our community.”

#### **LAUNCH DETAILS (RSVP to [finn@rlc.org.au](mailto:finn@rlc.org.au))**

Date: Thursday 5 December 2019

Time: 8.45am - 10.30am

Address: American Express, Level 4, 12 Shelly Street, SYDNEY NSW 2000

*Sandra\* will be available at the launch for interview alongside representatives from organisations supporting the Financial Abuse Legal Service NSW.*

**For media inquiries contact RLC Communications Manager Finn O'Keefe:  
[finn@rlc.org.au](mailto:finn@rlc.org.au), 9698 7277, 0424 548 019.**

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General enquiries: Monday to Thursday 9am – 9pm, Friday 9am – 6pm

Interviews by appointment: Monday to Thursday 6.30pm – 8pm