



Law Clinic data snapshot August 2015-April 2016

## **Building services at the social housing community at Redfern – a Health Justice initiative**

On 29 July 2015 Legal Aid NSW and Redfern Legal Centre commenced a weekly Law Clinic from an office within the Redfern Housing Estate in the McKell building at 55B Walker Street, Redfern.

The Redlink model places people at the heart of the service system by having legal advocates, government providers and community organisations operating out of an integrated service hub on site.

The Redlink project is a recent example of a targeted and flexible outreach model. This model draws from the knowledge that Health Justice partnerships are an effective method to deliver legal services.

It highlights Legal Aid NSW and Redfern Legal Centre's commitment to working collaboratively together in new ways with community and government partners.

Redlink began as a FACS 'Safe Estate' demonstration project idea in 2014. Redlink is a direct response to a request from the community to bring services 'inhouse'. The project was co-designed by all of the core partners in 3 workshops from late 2014 to 2015. The workshops were facilitated by Judith Stubbs.

For the very first time residents can access legal, housing, health services, wellbeing programs and social activities all in the one place.

### **The core partners of Redlink are:**

- Redfern Neighbourhood Advisory Board (NAB)
- Sydney Local Health District (Child and Family Health, Drug Health, Mental Health)
- City of Sydney Council
- The Factory Counterpoint Connect
- Redfern Legal Centre
- Weave
- Redfern Police
- Legal Aid NSW
- AbilityLinks
- Centrelink Outreach
- Good Shepherd Financial Counselling
- Partners in Recovery
- Redfern Community Health
- Mission Australia – Room to Grow

The Redfern Neighbourhood Advisory Board (NAB) is the backbone of the social housing community and its participation is crucial to the project's ongoing sustainability. It is made up of elected tenant representatives, along with representatives from government and non government bodies. The NAB has been in existence for over 25 years.

At Redlink social workers, lawyers, health professionals, financial counsellors, community workers, tenants and community volunteers work side by side to tackle complex and entrenched problems- social isolation, violence, nutrition, debt stress, intergenerational disadvantage, street drinking, methamphetamine and other drug use.

# The Redfern social housing estate

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Easily recognised by five distinctive high-rise towers, the Redfern estate has over 1500 tenancies and is one of the most concentrated areas of public housing and social disadvantage in Sydney:

30%

of tenants receive a Disability Support Pension

5%

of head tenants are employed

9%

are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander compared with 1.2% of Greater Sydney

## Start up phase and stakeholder engagement

Much work was done by lawyers and paralegals in the months before and after the delivery of the first legal advice service on 29 July 2015. This included:

- Participating in co-design workshop with community and partners
- Meeting all local stakeholders on multiple occasions outside of the co-design workshops to build relationships and trust
- Delivering several Community Legal Education sessions
- Participation in the Redlink Steering Group quarterly meetings
- Service promotion in the Redlink newsletter
- Assisting organisations, medical practitioners and government to become registered as Work and Development Order sponsors in order to assist clients clear fines debt.

In April 2016 all the Redlink Partners gathered together and discussed how the project was working and to plan for the future. This meeting was later followed by an **Exposition Day** on which all the core partners presented information on their Redlink Services. Residents were also in attendance and spoke passionately about building community and tackling issues such as domestic violence.

These events are the mechanisms which sustain the project by deepening the links between the partners.

A **Redlink Services Booklet** was also produced and is used for service cross-referral. A Law Check-Up tool has also been developed and is being trialled for clients and workers to identify legal issues.

# Services delivered

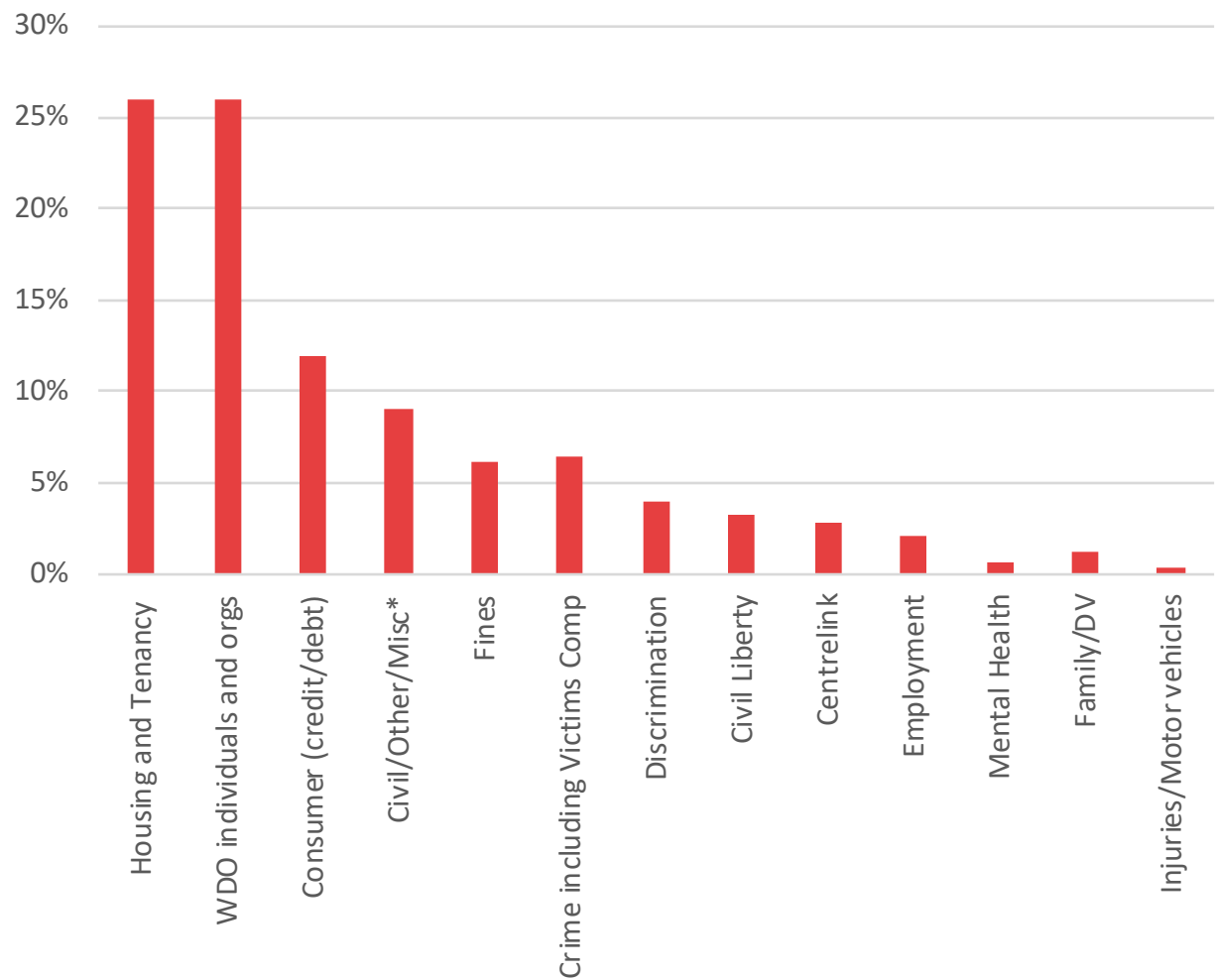
*In the period August 2015 to April 2016 Redfern Legal Centre and Legal Aid NSW, have together delivered over 279 services to 103 clients.*

A weekly Law Clinic is delivered onsite by civil lawyers from Legal Aid NSW and Redfern Legal Centre. Every Tuesday, lawyers alternate from each service to deliver 4-6 hours of legal advice dealing with the clients' complex needs.

The Law Clinic is typically attended by one lawyer, and alternatively a lawyer from the WDO service and a paralegal. A civil lawyer also frequently attends the drop-in Friday morning tea at the Community Room.

The civil law practice helps resolve diverse legal problems that impact on people's everyday lives. These include debts, unpaid fines, Centrelink disputes, employment problems and more.

## Types of issues seen



*\*Civil/Other/Misc may include topics such as freedom of information, defamation, advice about the National Disability Insurance Scheme or a wide range of miscellaneous topics*

# Client profile for August 2015 to 30 April 2016

## Gender



43%

of our clients were female



47%

of our clients were male

## Indigenous

26%

of law clinic clients were indigenous and 78.5% non Indigenous.

## Centrelink benefit

76%

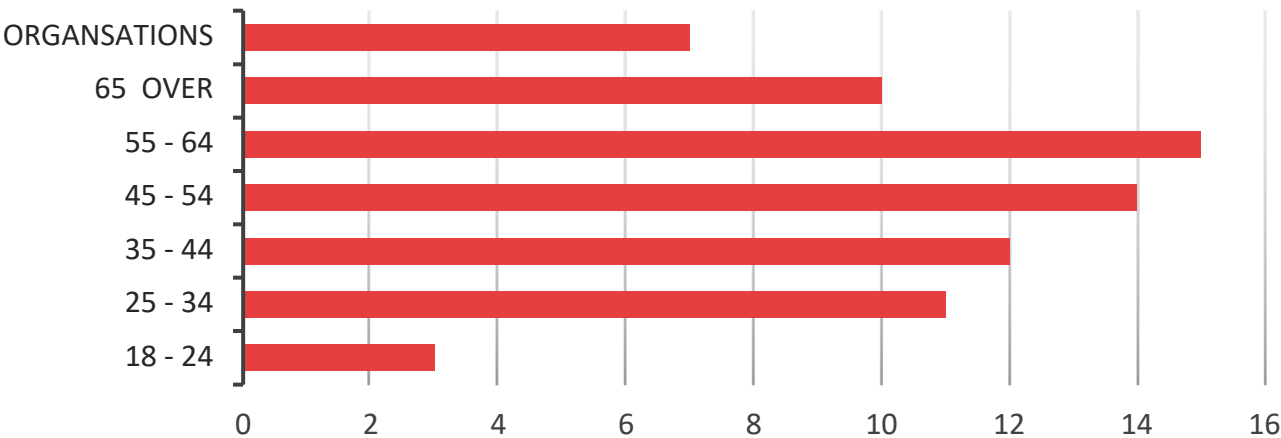
of our clients were on benefits and 20.55% on no benefit.

## Country

22%

of our clients were born overseas

## AGE Distribution



# Building community

## Aboriginal men's cooking group

A new cooking group has started at the Poets Corner community room attracting over 30 men from the Redfern Housing Estate and wider community. Non Aboriginal men are also welcome.

This group self seeded from 5-6 Aboriginal men looking for a space to meet for cultural gatherings and healing back in October 2015.

This event is a WDO approved life skills activity. Now men who previously may have faced social isolation get together, learn new skills, improve their nutrition, share their culture. To top it all off they can reduce their fines if they have any. Planning for the project started in August 2015 and much work has gone into getting it up and running.

## Morning tea brings results

Unpaid fines are an issue for many residents. At a morning tea, Janine, a resident, approached the solicitor and asked about the fines brochures she was distributing. Janine's partner, Alan, had over \$3,000 in fines that he couldn't pay. Alan was reluctant to approach the solicitor directly, but Janine introduced them.

The solicitor learned that Alan was recently released on parole and was about to start drug and alcohol treatment. The lawyer worked with Alan's doctor, a WDO sponsor, and arranged for Alan to do a Work and Development Order. By participating in treatment, Alan is clearing his fines debt at the rate of \$1,000 per month. Alan is progressing well with his treatment and will soon be debt-free.

## Community engagement

Every Friday RedLink hosts a community morning tea on the Redfern Housing Estate. Legal Aid NSW solicitors attend regularly (together with other partner agencies) to build trust with residents and promote the law clinic.

This event has now grown to reach 30-60 community members every week, with the enthusiasm for social events growing.

Previously there were few if any opportunities for tenants to socialise within the estate. Now people are making new friends, learning how to improve their nutrition and working off fines.

One young tenant who knew few people before attending now says she can approach a lot more people around the estate after breaking the ice by chatting to them at morning tea. She now finds the estate a much more welcoming place than when she first arrived.

A couple of younger men who are regular drug users now stay clean on Fridays so they can participate in the morning tea. These men are also talking to older people at morning tea and forming friendships with them which is breaking down the usual intergenerational barriers.

Another man has had his parole period shortened after his good work at the morning tea was communicated to Probation and Parole.

Some of the social workers, medical staff and lawyers attend and are available for chats and referrals. These informal encounters build trust and confidence with people, who then find it easier to attend in the more formal office setting.

# Work and Development Order Service

The Legal Aid Work and Development Order (WDO) Service also works from Redlink sending out an additional lawyer to set up WDOs.

The WDO team helps eligible clients with unpaid fines to clear their debt by undertaking approved WDO activities, such as mental health treatment, drug or alcohol treatment or a life skills course. The team will locate appropriate WDO sponsors and connect clients with those services.

The team also prepares applications to write off debts where debts are so large that they are unlikely to be paid off and in instances where clients are unable to undertake activities.

Clients are also assisted with time to pay arrangements and applications for refunds of garnishee orders which severely impact our vulnerable clients.

The WDO team assisted organisations by drafting submissions and applications, and collating documents required by the Department of Justice which made the process much easier for the organisations.

The onsite workers at Redlink are now identifying clients who are eligible for WDOs, and linking them to services.

Since August 2015 the WDO team has brought on board and supported several local WDO sponsors such as:

- Redfern Drug & Health, Sydney Local Health District (Harm minimization strategies, interventions, education and referral)
- Poets Corner Medical Centre
- New Horizons (men and women's lifestyle courses, employment for people with disabilities)
- Weave (Youth and Community Services assisting vulnerable women and families)

## WDO Service Statistics

The WDO Service assisted 10 clients and 7 organisational clients:

- 90% of clients on Centrelink
- 50% of clients on Newstart
- 20% of client Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- 3% of clients speaking a language other than English



# Case studies

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## Working together to sustain successful tenancies

Roy was an Aboriginal man who was regularly seen around Poets Corner. He was referred to the Redlink Law Clinic in late 2015 and attended with his social worker who was assisting him to get support. He had received a warning letter from his public housing provider regarding unauthorised occupants, high numbers of visitors, verbal abuse towards security staff, intimidating neighbours, vandalism and anti-social behaviour. The public housing provider were close to issuing a notice of termination to end his tenancy.

Supported by the social worker, the solicitor discussed the issues with Roy as well as the serious threat to his tenancy he was facing. Roy had been homeless himself and found it difficult not to allow other homeless people to stay at his house. He felt that he needed support to stop this as well as to get rid of the unauthorised occupant.

After discussing the matter with Roy and his support worker, he agreed that it would help him to be moved to another inner city area that was away from Poets Corner. This would also help him to evict the unauthorised occupant. The housing provider agreed and Roy was moved to temporary accommodation at which point it was discovered that the unauthorised occupant had been hoarding and brought bed bugs into the premises.

Working with the social worker was a tremendous support as she assisted Roy to get involved in other types of social activities, undergo rehab and attend both his health and legal appointments.

The solicitor was also able to negotiate with another housing office to withdraw an NCAT application which had been made to force Roy to agree to abide by his tenancy, but did not assist Roy in a positive way to work with the services and resolve his health and legal issues.

Roy was then moved into a permanent tenancy in another inner city area, was able to improve his health, and greatly reduced his alcoholism. He also participated in positive social activities as an Aboriginal leader.

This case study is just one of many that shows the benefits, of health and legal services working together to support vulnerable people, government departments and the community generally.

## Help getting a fine annulled

Hong is an aged pensioner who does not speak English. She attends the RedLink Law Clinic with a family member to interpret. Hong has received a fine for failing to attend jury duty, and with enforcement costs her debt is now close to \$2,000. Hong was overseas for most of the enforcement period and a property seizure order has been issued.

Ten years earlier Hong was called for jury duty, and she sent in a request that she not be summoned due to her limited English proficiency. That request was lost after a system upgrade. The lawyer arranges for Hong's fine to be annulled on the basis that she is elderly and vulnerable.



# Case studies

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## Wraparound service for an Aboriginal family

An Aboriginal couple with high needs were assisted by the integrated RedLink team. They were homeless and had urgent family and criminal law issues. The lawyer met the couple at the RedLink office outside of scheduled appointment times.

The couple had three children and were expecting their fourth child any day. Child protection agencies had removed the other children from their care. Fearing that the new baby would also be removed, the couple had not accessed any antenatal care.

The lawyer linked the family with the Family Law Early Intervention Unit at Legal Aid NSW who provided specialist care and protection legal assistance.

The father also had concerns about a police request for DNA matching against their database. The lawyer consulted a colleague from Legal Aid NSW's criminal law division, who provided advice on the client's legal position.

Meanwhile the RedLink social worker organised hospital care and health services for the mother, while the FACS officer arranged stable accommodation for the family to help demonstrate that they were in a better position to care for their baby.

Thanking the lawyer, the manager said:

*I had to get Michael's advice today about a very complex case with an Aboriginal family. If RedLink wasn't onsite they just wouldn't have sought help and the whole situation would have imploded. It remains to be seen if we can still salvage something but we are all going to try. This case ticks every box - legal, housing, health etc... This is a case of intergenerational Aboriginal disadvantage and family displacement.*

*I am so grateful to have Legal Aid NSW on board and that I was able to just ring Michael and get assistance today.*

