



ANNUAL REPORT

2022

50-year-old Amelia lives alone in her home near Albany. She has physical disabilities and together with complex mental health conditions, she is unable to work. Despite this, Amelia was required to look for work as she was only offered the Job Seeker support through Centrelink. Her previous application for the Disability Support Pension was deemed ineligible.

Amelia was referred to the Albany Community Legal Centre Disability Advocates by the Anglicare Financial Counselling team.

The Advocate supported Amelia to make an application to Centrelink for the Disability Support Pension. The Advocate liaised with Amelia's GP and Community Mental Health to gather supporting documentation for her application and accompanied her to the Job Capacity and Medical Assessments.

Amelia's application for the Disability Support Pension was successful. The additional money from the pension allowed her to pay off a couple of debts and she can now manage her day-to-day expenses.

While following up with Amelia to see how she was getting on, the Advocate noticed that Amelia was packing her belongings and storing them in boxes in the house. Amelia stated that she was packing in readiness for losing her home. She believed this was imminent.

A couple of years ago Amelia's then partner took out a significant loan against her home for his business. Amelia did not receive any benefit from the loan but was still legally liable for it and at risk of losing her home if it was not being repaid.

when the loan but was still legally ble for it and at risk of losing her me if it was not being repaid.

We appreciate everything that you are doing for us. You are our angel and so is the financial counsellor. Thank you for saving us!

Feedback: Good Morning.

The Advocate quickly arranged a joint meeting with the financial

counsellor and Amelia to explore this. The financial counsellor determined that she was not currently at risk of losing her home. Amelia was extremely relieved to hear this and as a result was more hopeful for the future.

The Advocate continues to work with Amelia as they now look to gaining Amelia access to the NDIS.

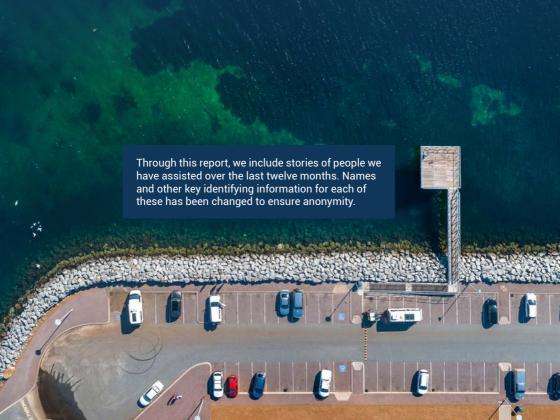


### Welcome

Albany Community Legal Centre (ACLC) is a community led independent agency that has provided legal and advocacy services to residents of the Great Southern community since 1995.

**Our Vision** is a just, fair and supportive community empowered through equitable access to legal rights for individuals and communities in the Great Southern region.

**Our Mission** is to provide quality legal, advocacy and education services to assist disadvantaged community members in our region.



## Chainperson's Report

Without doubt 2021-2022 has been a year of contrasts for ACLC. On one hand there was exciting new partnerships and projects, increased funding, and consolidation of core activities but on the other there was uncertainty and change.

Despite the variability, ACLC remained steadfast in delivering high quality legal and advocacy support for people in the Great Southern. Continued delivery of service and safety of the ACLC team were key priorities during the first 6 months of 2022 as the community faced the advance of COVID 19. The organisation was well positioned to prevail with sound planning, risk management strategies and resilient structures in place.

We had some challenging moments which required people to remain flexible in the way they worked and in the way services were delivered. The ACLC team were impeccable in the way they were able to pick through the challenges of the changeability to keep services flowing. It is with sincere thanks to the leadership provided by the ACLC management team Brodie Lewis (Business Manager) and Tameka Brown (Principal Solicitor) along with all the staff at ACLC that this was the outcome.

Throughout the year the Board has been working to understand some Community Legal Sector funding reforms that will be impacting some of the core funding

for ACLC. The reforms are requiring significant changes to organisational structure, and we have been engaging seriously with the process to ensure the best outcomes for the centre and for the community. We are positive that despite the challenges there is also an opportunity to strengthen the strategic direction, governance processes and service outcomes for the greater benefit of the community and the organisation.

We have concluded the year in a strong financial position and with processes in place to navigate what lies ahead. This has been made possible because of the commitment of the entire team. I thank each of the members of the board for the way they have contributed throughout the year despite the hardships and difficult decisions. I also thank the staff of ACLC for their ongoing determination and belief in what they are achieving as the collective of this unique and important place based community organisation.

**Angela Bristow-Baohm** Chairperson



As a community led organisation, ACLC is led by a Board elected from our local community members. Since inception, over 50 people have provided countless hours and skills to our Board, and we thank them.

#### **Our 2022 Board members are**

Angela Bristow-Baohm Christine Tozer

Chairperson Secretary

**Dylan Parker**Deputy Chairperson

Board Member

Deputy Chairperson Board Member

Carryn HillsKenneth JohnTreasurerBoard Member

### Want to support Albany Community Legal Centre?

Whether through volunteering or simply becoming a member of our association, your support helps us further our vision throughout the Great Southern. To find out how you can get involved, whether as a volunteer or a community member, talk to one of our team or visit our website at www.albanyclc.com.au.

## Management Report

2022 has been the year that ACLC, and all Western Australians, grappled with the reality of the pandemic. While the rest of the world was emerging from lockdown at the start of this year, our State was entering uncharted territories. We are pleased to have seen through the period with minimal service interruptions, ensuring the strongest possible outcomes for the most vulnerable in our community.

And thanks to the certainty in core funding, we were able to develop and implement new programs and initiatives over the year. One such initiative is the Great Southern Family Safety Project, launched in October 2021. This project has been very well received by our community, and by Government, with the latter providing a three-year funding extension as part of the Commonwealth's investment in legal services for women impacted by violence. This program augments existing services for people experiencing FDV, as well as our broader legal services targeting people unable to access the private legal sector.

We continued to deliver advocacy support for people with disabilities, securing renewals in core programs and kicked off a two-year pilot project to enhance links between peer and professional advocacy supports. And for people in both public and private rentals across our regions, we continued to deliver crucial tenant advocacy services – services increasingly in demand in a highly competitive rental market

Lastly, we have implemented significant developments in our organisational capacities through system improvements, such as the roll out of centre-wide IT and case management system upgrades at the start of January. These systems were put to the test with the onset of lockdowns and other restrictions in the first half of this year with our team working at least half their hours remotely for a two-month period over the peak of the third wave.

Overall, it has been a big year. Through the pages of this report, you will get an idea of the amazing work our team has carried out and the positive impact our services have had in this time on our clients.

#### **Brodie Lewis**

**Business Manager** 

#### Tameka Brown

Principal Lawyer

## Disability Advocacy

Since 2003 we have delivered the Individual Disability Advocacy Service (IDAS) throughout the Great Southern region on behalf of Sussex Street Community Law Service Inc. In 2021 we also secured Department of Communities funding to develop and deliver a Peer Support Self Advocacy project. Advocates have engaged with a number of peer support groups and this project is proceeding well.

We were fortunate enough to have a new Disability Advocate join the team this year. A very experienced and knowledgeable advocate, Gabrielle has strengthened the service provided by the advocacy team at the Centre.

We continue to provide advocacy to people with disability with a multitude of issues, the bulk of which remains claiming Disability Support Pensions (DSP) through Centrelink and issues with National Disability Insurance Scheme access or plans. Accommodation availability reached crisis point across the board, but advocates were nevertheless able to achieve good outcomes for a number of clients.

A DSP Information Package was developed and launched on the Centre website. The resource is specifically aimed at assisting people to claim the Disability Support Pension, supporting self-advocacy, but allows for them to return for professional advocacy assistance should they need to.

Ongoing service restraints due to COVID restrictions reduced delivery of information sessions, though we were able to visit schools and TAFE to talk to students as lockdown conditions eased. Our advocates are actively involved on several committees, including the Shire of Plantagenet Disability Advisory Group, Great Southern Disability Network, Great Southern Workforce Advisory Committee and Great Southern Aboriginal Advisory Committee and they continue to partake in regular stakeholder engagement.

Donna continues to provide advocacy to Noongar people and is passionate about providing her community with information and assistance. Thomas was referred to ACLC by his daughter's school. His young teenage daughter lived with physical disability in conjunction with Autism. Thomas was unable to work as his daughter attended a special educational setting suitable to the complexity of her needs. This school was some 150 kilometres from the family home. The house they were renting was the only affordable and secure housing they could locate in the area. Transporting his daughter to school each day and staying in town for the day before returning her home resulted in Thomas being unable to work and struggling financially.

First off, our Advocate referred him for immediate emergency relief from a local agency. We then assisted him to negotiate with the Department of Transport School Bus Service leading to an arrangement for his daughter to be picked up by bus at a town 50 kilometres from home and transported to and from school. Thomas was then able to access the conveyance allowance and with this money he purchased a reliable and more efficient vehicle.

From there, Thomas was assisted to make an application to the Department of Housing for priority listing for housing close to his daughter's school.

Though Thomas's daughter was under the NDIS, Thomas did not understand her plan. The plan was

Thanks heaps for all your help I really appreciate it. I couldn't have done it without you. Thanks heaps for nudging the right people on our behalf.

due for review, and Thomas was unsure of what was involved or how to go about getting her the supports she needed. Thomas was assisted to explore his daughter's needs in preparation for the plan review and then supported through the review meeting. The new plan made provision for the services he was hoping to achieve for his daughter. Thomas is now confident and independent in dealing with the NDIS and managing his daughter's plan.

For Thomas himself, he was relying on the Job Seeker Allowance and was required to look for work while caring for his daughter. Thomas wanted to work but did not have the time. Thomas had previously applied for the Carers Payment however had been unsuccessful. We assisted Thomas to submit a review of the decision to Centrelink together with supporting evidence, which was ultimately successful.

# Family Violence Legal Servic



The Great Southern Family Safety Project was set up in late 2021 in partnership with Anglicare. The purpose of the project was to ensure clients of the service were simultaneously receiving social support and legal help. The service is overwhelmingly accessed by women, although we also assist male and nonbinary victims of violence. Due to the success of the program, funding has been extended until 2025.

Referrals come through Anglicare for clients seeking support with Family Violence Restraining Orders (FVRO), parenting or property matters, divorce, child protection, or Criminal Injuries Compensation. These matters are usually complex and the clients or their children have often experienced significant trauma. To increase safety, most initial appointments are held at Anglicare where clients are already seeking counselling to provide a familiar setting and also greater privacy.

We focus on early-service delivery for clients who are in the process of separating or have recently separated.

This early period is a stressful and confusing time for many people, so providing early services ensures clients know their rights when leaving, and how to avoid future legal complications.

One of the areas of key legal assistance has been through the FVRO application process and obtaining orders to protect our client and/or their children. There are a large volume of clients wanting FVROs, however it is not always an appropriate avenue. Ensuring clients are aware of the full variety of options available to them and the legal implications of those options has avoided a lot of unnecessary Court attendances and has often led to better outcomes for the client.

Overall, we believe this program has been a great success and it has benefitted more than 100 families across our community over the last twelve months.

We thank the staff at Anglicare for helping make this program so successful, and the Police at Albany and Katanning stations for their support.



Nola was referred by Anglicare following an assault by her partner. Ben had been arrested the night before and Nola was worried about him coming home when released on bail. With support from Anglicare, we assisted Nola with an urgent Family Violence Restraining Order application protecting her. At the time, Nola was not worried about Ben taking the children.

Ben continued to harass Nola and attended the school to collect the children. Ben then made an application to the Family Court seeking that the children live with him. Nola was overwhelmed by the allegations made by Ben and worried her children would be taken from her care. We were able to assist Nola to quickly file her response documents and ensure the Court was aware of the risk issues posed by Ben, allowing the children to be returned to Nola's care.

Safety risks can increase urgency, so we keep some availability for short-notice appointments. Our lawyer has long worked exclusively with clients who have experienced family violence and trauma and is able to identify risk and present

My lawyer has been excellent to deal with. I've been so confident in their handling of my affairs.

these risks to the Court. The lawyer uses trauma informed practice to ensure clients feel safe and supported through their legal case.

Nola reported feeling empowered to take back some control in her life and that she better understood how to protect her and her children. Nola continues to work on her self-esteem with Anglicare and her recovery process from the trauma she suffered.

### Our Year i

#### Services delivered

#### Client dem



24

**Education Sessions** 



1064

One-Off Legal Advices Given



328

Legal Complex Matters Closed



31% Men 1% Non-binary 68% Women



CA



**26** 

Duty Lawyer Sessions at Court



159

One-Off Disability Advocacy Services



34

Disability Advocacy Complex Matters



30% Experiencing FDV



6 Und



128

Outreach Appointments



110

One-Off Tenant Advocacy Services



9

Tenant Advocacy Complex Matters Closed



42% Has Disability or Mental Health Condition



Low li 4(under \$4

### n Numbers

#### ographics

12% Aboriginal

#### Most common problem types



Parenting Matters



16%
Family
Property



Other Family Issues



LD

% er 25



28% Over 65



6%
Crime
Related



4%
Access &

Rights



19%

Government Services



9% ncome 40,000 pa)



18% At Risk of Homelessness



24%

Future Planning



19%

**Housing & Tenancy** 



5%

Other Matters

# Legal Services

Our Legal services have continued to deliver free advice and casework assistance to vulnerable people in the Great Southern. This year we were glad to receive a funding boost to increase services to people in our region through the COVID pandemic. This additional funding allowed us to commence the Great Southern Family Safety Project pilot, discussed above; as well as Youth Law Connect (below).

We have seen many hundreds of clients over the reporting period and provided assistance on a range of legal issues, though the area of greatest need remains Family Law, with a near equal split between issues related to parenting and issues related to property.

Our team have continued our regular outreach services to Katanning, with the lawyers delivering regular fortnightly services in partnership with Katanning Hub CRC. Over the period, we have seen a significant uptick in demand for this service.

A significant change this year has been the implementation of a new case

management system which has enabled us to capture more and better data and most significantly, reduce reliance on paper files. As an added benefit, we have also seen significant time savings realised across our legal service teams, with at least a 10% time saving in an average week.

The impacts of COVID over the last twelve months were felt in our legal services. While we have provided an uninterrupted service, we had to deliver services by telephone and video link for a couple of months at the start of 2022. We have also had subdued education services over the period, with only 24 services being provided for the year.

One of the services we have provided for many years is our Future Planning service, providing people with limited income access to legally drafted wills and related documents. We've drafted more than 300 documents in the last twelve months, providing many older Australians, and their families a greater certainty in the later years of life. This year we farewelled Vanessa from the team, a long-time part of our service and particularly this program. We wish her all the best with her future endeavours.

It took 2 ½ years to resolve a family law matter for our client Anne. When Anne came to us, her relationship with her husband was severely tested after their child was diagnosed with ADHD and a host of other developmental conditions.

Anne's husband was a 40-year-old Aussie bloke when he met 23-year-old Anne in her home country. Five years later and now living in Albany with a child with severe disabilities who was challenging their parents, the marriage did not survive. Worse still, the father could not understand 'what was wrong' with the child and expressed his frustration and anger through violent and manipulative actions

towards the mother. Although they separated, he still put her through the ropes.

It was hard on Anne. She had no family here to support her through this time. Without financial support from the father, she struggled You have been excellent to deal with. I'm so glad it's over. Thank you!

to provide for their child and meeting his various needs. In addition to language differences, there were also the cultural differences presenting challenges between her home country and Australia.

The lawyer and other staff at ACLC advised and supported Anne through the entire process of addressing both the financial and parenting side of things. In the end, the father was persuaded to take part in parenting and anger management courses which resulted in him having contact with his son on a regular basis, which made things easier for Anne.

### Youth Law Connect

Last year in our report we highlighted work done to explore areas of unmet need in the Great Southern including that of early intervention, particularly with people under 25.

We are pleased this year to report on the new partnership we developed with Albany Youth Support Association (AYSA), Youth Law Connect, which provides for dedicated pathways for legal advice and assistance for children and young people under 25 years. Youth Law Connect is focused on early intervention and educating young people on their rights and responsibilities.

Through this program, we have provided advice relating to such issues as criminal injuries compensation, restraining orders, residential tenancies, social security law, migration law, citizenship applications and minor criminal matters. Through the year we have also encountered consumer law matters (mobile phone contracts), financial services issues (buy now-pay later), and the financial fall out of motor vehicle accidents.

Open Access, AYSA's Albany Youth Centre, is open four afternoons each week from noon until 6pm. It is a safe and supportive space for young people to receive support, participate in activities (including music, games, art, life skill programs and more) or just hang-out in a relaxed, youth friendly, all-inclusive environment. For those sleeping rough or in need, there is access to a shower, free laundry facilities, food and something warm to drink. We provide outreach services at Open Access on fortnightly Wednesdays.

As young people do not always have access to transport, AYSA conduct additional services in locations across the region to meet needs of young people. Our outreach model has worked alongside this, with our lawyers travelling on many occasions to conduct appointments with young people in their own environments.

This partnership has been made possible through additional funding from the State Government to support people impacted by the pandemic. We look forward to discussing with the State how to continue this service after the conclusion of that funding program.

Nathan is a young student who met with us at one of our outreach locations. He presented with several legal issues including a tenancy issue with his landlord and a potential compensation claim for either:
(a) Criminal Injuries Compensation; (b) National Redress Scheme; or (c) a civil claim.

Nathan was linked in with several other support services – his GP, Practical Support, Case Management and counselling. We attended interagency meetings and worked alongside all these support services with a view to achieving a positive outcome for Nathan.

He was very anxious about his tenancy issue and the uncertainty surrounding his living situation and the real possibility of

homelessness. ACLC provided Nathan with legal advice about his rights and responsibilities and encouraged him to selfadvocate and engage with his landlord directly. Despite his initial trepidation, Nathan obtained a positive outcome.

The lawyer is great – we can ask questions, tell jokes, and she's funny and great to talk to.

Nathan was also provided with legal advice about his eligibility to lodge a claim for Criminal Injuries Compensation and the other options he had available to him. We then linked Nathan with a specialist community legal centre and a private legal practitioner to obtain specialist advice in relation to his other options.

## Tenant Advocacy

This year we farewelled Kaye, our longstanding tenant advocate, and welcomed Zitah to the role. Since taking on the role, Zitah has continued to provide advocacy support services to tenants, and has continued to build key relationships with ACLC stakeholders, including -

- Consumer Protection Albany Office;
- The Commons in Spencer Park;
- · Circle Green Community Legal;
- · Salvation Army;
- · St Vincent De Paul: and
- Anglicare WA, notably Housing Support.

Over the period, there has been extremely low rental vacancy rates in the Albany area. While a vacancy rate of 3.5% represents a balanced market, the current rate is 0.25% (as at September 2022). This means that as tenancy agreements come to an end, tenants are struggling to secure another rental. The usual short term accommodation options are also at capacity.

Faced with homelessness, renters often refuse to vacate. In these situations, our Tenant Advocate has helped negotiate for extensions to vacate or lease renewals

with lessors and property managers, something we have been fortunate to achieve for clients on a number of occasions.

Alongside this, we have continued to provide Duty Advocate Court assistance for tenants on a range of issues, with the Advocate being present either in person or via phone link at each Residential Tenancy Court listing in Albany.

Through education and outreach work, over the year we have seen a significant increase in the number of tenants with disabilities seeking support when dealing with both the Department of Communities, and community housing in relation to social housing. This has been in relation to applications, priority waitlisting and transfers and maintenance of these properties.

Most recently, our Advocate has commenced partnerships with both The Commons, a community support group in Spencer Park, and the Rainbow Coast Neighbourhood Centre to provide early stage tenant information and advice. We look forward to connecting with more renters in the region as we seek to help them understand their rights and responsibilities when renting.

A client requested assistance from the Tenant Advocate for ongoing and unresolved issues with sewage egress through drains in the back veranda, laundry, toilet, shower and bathtub at a property leased to them by the Department of Communities (DOC). After the first instance of this happening all four young children contracted Shigella (a notifiable bacterial infection). When the egress happened again months later the tenant requested an urgent transfer to a new property, as she was again concerned about her young children and the unborn child she was now carrying.

DOC responded by sending a plumber and having a biological clean. The family was re-located to temporary accommodation while the remedial work was in progress. Testing of swabs taken at the property by the City of Albany proved negative to Shigella and so DOC again declined the transfer request.

One week after the family returned to the property the sewage system flooded again. This time the Tenant and Indigenous Advocates from ACLC acted on their behalf in communicating and negotiating

Thanks again about all your amazing support.

their situation with DOC staff. After some 41 hours invested by the Tenant Advocate and a further 11 hours by the Indigenous Advocate, DOC provided housing that met the needs of this family, including access to schools and consideration of family and cultural issues.

The client has been extremely happy with the outcome and said that in the new property they 'can make a fresh start' and give their 'babies the life they deserve in a beautiful home'.



### Outreach

Over the last year, we have continued to deliver services throughout the Great Southern and parts of the southern wheatbelt – a region the size of Tasmania!

This region has seen us drive over 25,000km over the course of the year – working in strong partnerships with Community Resource Centres and Shires around the region to deliver education sessions and client appointments. Despite pandemic-based interruptions, we have continued to build a strong presence and caseload in Katanning, partnering with Katanning Hub CRC. We also developed regional partnerships with Anglicare's Katanning office and their mobile outreach service.

Alongside this work, we expanded Albany-based outreach with a number of partners, including:

- the Court for Tenancy and Family Court listings
- · Anglicare's St Johns Center;
- Albany Youth Support Association's drop-in centre; and
- · Albany Women's Centre.

As we head into a new year, we look forward to a less interrupted twelve months so we can actively work with our community partners throughout the region to deliver more education across the region.



## Financials

The last financial year saw a continued strong result for ACLC. We delivered a balanced financial result with a small surplus across our programs. Our auditor returned another clean bill of health. His comments and the full financial reports are on our website - albanyclc.com.au/audit.

This year we invested pilot funding in the Great Southern Family Safety Project. We used pilot funding from the Department of Communities as well as a portion of the COVID support funding delivered by the Commonwealth (which was directed to enhance services to meet increased demand caused by the pandemic). This project has been delivered with strong support and invaluable in-kind contributions from Anglicare WA - for which we are very grateful. We were extremely pleased to see in May this year the Department of Justice recognise the success of this pilot program by awarding us a further three years funding.

In addition, we have been successful over the year to secure a three-year extension to our Commonwealth Disability Advocacy funding (delivered in partnership with Sussex St CLS). We also renegotiated the State funding for the same – this time with new consortia partners People with Disabilities WA, and Advocacy Western Australia. These extensions are alongside project funding that has been received in the period from the Department of Communities.

The additional funding commitments this year led to the diversification of our funding streams, a key part of our strategic plan. Below is a quick snapshot of our key funding areas over the last twelve months. Two of those funding areas are up for renewal this year. We aim for similar funding certainty from those contracts.



LA-NLAP – National Legal Assistance Program – Department of Justice, WA

LA-FDV – Family Violence Project Funding – Department of Communities, WA (in partnership with Community Legal WA)

LA-COVID - Pandemic Community Support Boost - Department of Justice, WA

TA-TAES - Tenant Advocacy & Education Program - Department of Mines, Industry Regulation & Safety, WA

DA-IDAS – Individual Disability Advocacy Program – Department of Social Services, Cth & Department of Communities, WA (in partnership with Sussex St Community Law Service)

DA-PROJ - Disability Advocacy - Peer Supported Advocacy Project - Department of Communities, WA

### Client Outcomes

Over many years, we have made countless positive impacts for our clients. However, year on year, we work to improve our services effectiveness and impact for the people we assist. This year, we have implemented new impact evaluation processes for all our clients.

Through these processes, we can track the impacts we are making through our legal, tenancy and disability advocacy services, including our education programs. Our objective is to make a positive influence on the community here in the Great Southern.

With evaluations commencing January 2022 for all *new* matters, we conducted impact evaluations for 140 people over the reporting period. We anticipate this to increase over the coming years. The results are exciting -

85

Clients were assessed for impact to their circumstances through our assistance 86%

had demonstrated improvement in their circumstance through our work 32%

reported significant improvement in their circumstance

126

Clients were assessed for the impact on their personal goals in seeking assistance 90%

had demonstrated progress towards their goals through our work 29%

reported significant progress towards achievement of their goals

90

Clients completed an optional feedback survey during the period of assistance

89%

were happy with the assistance our team provided

74%

said that we helped them feel more confident addressing the issue we helped with



### Thank You

Our centre would not exist without the invaluable contribution of countless volunteers and community members.

Over the course of the last year, we are grateful for the contribution of the following people –

- Kate Lown
- Sophia Drazevic
- · Rana Massoudi
- · Celeste Woolf
- Georgia Henderson
- Nicola Eade
- Merryn Bocjun

To every person in this list, and everyone who has volunteered with our Centre over the last 27 years, we thank you. Your contributions help us build a just, fair and supportive community here in the Great Southern.

In addition to our community supporters, we thank our Government partners over the last twelve months for their ongoing financial contributions to the Great Southern –

- Department of Communities (Western Australia)
- Department of Justice (Western Australia)
- Department of Mines, Industry Regulation & Safety (Western Australia)
- Department of Social Services (Australia)
- · Legal Aid Western Australia





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