



**Albany Community  
Legal Centre Inc**



**ANNUAL REPORT  
2020**





# Welcome



Winding up the 2019-2020 year creates an opportunity to reflect on another busy and productive yet highly unusual year.

Albany Community Legal Centre (ACLCL) continues to be a source of strength in the communities of the Great Southern region. The formidable team at ACLCL has supported many individuals through the challenges of navigating legal issues and the complexities of the legal system. Legal advice, community legal education, disability advocacy, tenancy education and tenancy advocacy have formed the cornerstones of the support offered. I know that many people would have fallen through the cracks without the low cost and free support offered by the ACLCL.

How can we mention this year without discussing the curve ball of the coronavirus pandemic? ACLCL did not escape the impact. The entire team was transitioned

to working from home and they adopted a raft of strategies to minimise the risk of transmission of the virus to staff and community. It was a rapidly changing and difficult environment and I offer sincere gratitude to the professional way in which the team at ACLCL adapted to a new way of working. They were able to continue to offer advice and support for people throughout the entire period of office closure.

While the year continued to offer the usual challenges of funding uncertainty and changes to the internal workings of the organisation, what has always remained strong has been the vision and commitment to community. I thank the entire staff for always striving for better and I thank the board for always working for the positive.

**Angela Bristow-Baohm**  
Chairperson

The Albany Community Legal Centre acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands we work and live on within the Noongar nation.

We acknowledge the strength and resilience of Noongar people and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

# Our Team

## Our Board

as at 1 October 2020

**Angela Bristow-Baohm**  
Chair

**Lyndsey Unwin**  
Secretary

**Bev Alexander**  
Deputy Chair

**Christine Tozer**  
Board Member

**Levi Wheatcroft**  
Treasurer

**Dylan Parker**  
Board Member

## Our Staff

as at 1 October 2020

**Khalia Bastian**  
Solicitor

**Julie English**  
Administration Officer

**Denise Kay**  
Disability Advocate

**Tameka Brown**  
Principal Solicitor

**Tenaya Haines**  
Administration Officer

**Brodie Lewis**  
Business Manager

**Donna Coyne**  
Disability Advocate

**Kaye Hansord**  
Tenant Advocate

**Heather Nichols**  
Solicitor

**Carol Duncan**  
Bookkeeper

**Vanessa Hillerman**  
Paralegal

In August 2020, we farewelled Michael Montague from our team. We thank him for ten years of service to our Centre and the Great Southern community.

# Our Values

## Value expertise

We build networks and connect people with the best expert assistance and support our community can offer.

## Act with integrity

We act with honesty, integrity and fairness at all times.

## Empower our community

We equip and assist our clients to pursue and obtain just outcomes.

## Meet people where they are at

We tailor our services to meet the diverse needs of people in our community.

## Care and act with compassion

We seek first to listen, then to understand, then to help.

## Back our team

We rely on one another and are accountable to each other.



# Management Report

The last year has been far from a case of 'business as usual' for many of us. More than ever, the services of community support agencies such as ours have been critical to ensuring people are able to feel safe and empowered.

Through the entirety of the last year, we continued to provide low cost legal advice and advocacy to those in the Great Southern at most need. Where safe to do so, we have also provided education around the region.

In the period since March 2020, we have rapidly adapted to deliver these services through a range of COVID-safe means. This has included remote delivery (by telephone and video-conference), changes to meeting times and structures (to meet social distancing guidelines), and conference call based education.

These changes stretched resources and capacities of our team, as well as of our clients. Our staff worked almost entirely from home for six weeks, and then in a mix of locations for a number of months. We are pleased to say that while there have been changes in the methods of our service delivery, there has been no measured changes in the quality or outcomes of our services, and no significant outage of services through these periods.

We have continued to make headway into delivering our strategic plan this last year. We had to make some alterations to it due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in prioritisation of certain areas over others. One of the direct impacts of this reprioritisation has been the replacement of our six year old computer system with a modern, work from home capable, computer system which supported our COVID response plan.

The remainder of this report outlines some of the impacts and outcomes of our services for people in our region. These impacts are possible only because of our staff and our board, and we are thankful for all their contributions.

**Brodie Lewis**  
Business Manager

**Tameka Brown**  
Principal Solicitor

## Our Purpose

We are a community led independent agency that has provided legal and advocacy services for 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.

Our strategic plan provides a framework to:

- Maintain quality services to the Great Southern region;
- Ensure these services are evidence and consumer informed;
- Work with other sector experts to deliver equitable access to legal rights in the Great Southern;
- Deliver good governance, strong financial and organisational capacity; and
- Build skilled, motivated people to deliver on our vision.

This year, consultation within our team and with our contract partners has allowed us to prioritise some facets of this plan, delaying others, and allowed scope and focus to deal with the unique challenges that 2020 has posed.

# Legal Services

2019-2020 was another busy year for the legal team who have continued to assist clients with a range of civil, elder abuse, family violence, family law, future planning and tenancy matters.

There was a consistent high level of demand for all of our services and in order to help meet demand during this period, we implemented a twice weekly advice clinic with short appointments which allowed us to triage more complex matters and process simple matters quickly. Such an arrangement also meant we could spend more focused time on complex matters, especially in the area of family law.

When COVID hit in March 2020, we had to quickly redesign the way we provided our legal services so our clients were not unduly affected and legal staff and clients alike had to adjust to the ever-changing ways the Courts were handling matters and updating their processes. It was a massive adjustment for both sides and we thank our clients and staff for their patience and perseverance while we worked it all out.

Despite everything that was going on, we continued our partnership with Legal Aid WA and Anglicare WA to deliver a duty lawyer service at the Albany Court when the Family Court of Western Australia was on circuit. Between the three organisations, the provisions of both legal and support services enabled a full wrap around service to be available to people attending Court. Our solicitors provided unrepresented parties with

access to legal advice, assistance with settlement negotiations and duty lawyer representation, where able to. The aim of the program is to ensure that all users of the Family Court are safe and able to be heard with respect to their matter. This is a program that we continue to participate in.

Our legal staff persistently worked to maintain strong relationships with external organisations which enables us to better support vulnerable members of our community and fosters support and confidence amongst the workers.

Looking forward to 2020-2021, things are starting to return to normal. We are back doing some Community Legal Education, clients are being seen in person again and we are venturing out into the larger Great Southern region with Outreach recommencing in Katanning.

Following the lessons learned during COVID and after some changes to staff we are taking the opportunity to review how we are providing our services. We are looking at our priorities in terms of case loads and service offerings, refining out intake model, developing more template documents to increase efficiencies and prioritising training of staff. As part of the review we have also been considering how we can better assist and inform our clients and greater community and this has led to us working to draft example documents and legal information resources for clients and doing some in depth planning around the Outreach and Community Legal Education we hope to provide.

## Toni's Story

Toni came to see us after the death of Rick, her husband. Rick had always taken care of things for both of them, and she was at a loss as to what to do. Rick had been sick for a while, and a number of jobs had built up around the house over this time.

Toni had family, but they weren't in Albany to help. Mourning a loss, and already struggling with the jobs around the house, she was overwhelmed thinking about where to start with handling the legal matters after Rick's passing. With limited income, Toni wasn't able to afford assistance with these legal matters.

We talked with Toni about the steps that were needed. We helped her come up with a plan – to together take matters one step at a time and slowly get through the list.

We assisted by updating her Will, as well as doing the survivorship application necessary after Rick's passing. Having these in order encouraged Toni with other steps, and she felt confident she could make a start on some of the other jobs she had struggled with.

Toni said she felt a weight had been lifted from her shoulders by having the legal matters sorted, and was grateful to be able to move on.

Names and key identifying information in the above stories have been changed to ensure anonymity.

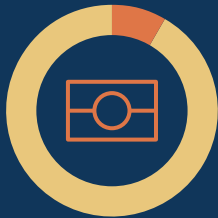


# Year In Review

## Client Demographics



35% Male  
65% Female



9%  
Aboriginal



16%  
FDV Risk



30%  
Over 65



34%  
had a disability or  
mental illness



6%  
at risk of  
Homelessness

## Community Engagement



**19**

Education  
Sessions



**49**

Duty Lawyer  
Advices



**32**

Home and  
Hospital Visits



**212**

Appointments  
Outside Albany



**981**

Referrals to  
Suitable Services



**1**

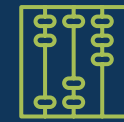
Submissions to  
Government

## Areas of Assistance



**143**

Child Related  
Matters



**58**

Financial Matters



**213**

Property and  
Separation Matters



**62**

Victims of Crime



**104**

Housing and  
Tenancy Matters



**443**

Future Planning  
Document Matters

## Services We Provided



**1431**

Legal Service  
Advice  
Appointments



**187**

Legal Case Files  
Closed



**82**

One-off  
IDAS Services



**25**

IDAS Case Files  
Closed



**155**

Tenancy Initial  
Appointments



**4**

Tenancy Case Files  
Closed

# Bianca's Story

Bianca is a stay at home mum taking care of two school aged boys. The youngest has multiple medical & behavioural conditions which caused occasional episodes of hyperactivity and impulsivity, requiring full time supervision. Bianca receives a pension to assist with caring for the boys.

Bianca came to us after a small fire at their house, the repair bill was estimated at under \$5000. Her landlord sought payment within three months. Bianca was anxious, because she felt the fire was accidental, and in any event did not have the finances to pay this in full.

After talking with Bianca, our advocate spoke with the landlord on Bianca's behalf. This confirmed that an investigation as to the origin of the fire suggested the youngest child had started it during an episode, but that it was not considered an accident by the landlord.

Bianca initially did not accept the landlord's assessment as she believed the fire was accidental. After reviewing the FESA fire report, she agreed that she should be held responsible. However, she was not in a position to pay. We devised a payment plan with her, and made an

offer to her landlord. As Bianca had otherwise been an exemplary tenant, and had no outstanding payments with them, the plan was accepted.

Following this, our advocate connected Bianca with financial counselling services to ensure she had tools to meet the ongoing payment plan. We also identified that there were medical bills forthcoming for the children, and noted that further financial assistance might be necessary.

Because of her previous good rental record, accompanied with the repayment plan being in place, we were able to apply for a Grant for her from a local grant provider. Bianca was provided with a grant that repaid half of the debt owed to her landlord. This allowed her to better budget for the medical expenses, and dramatically shortened the repayment plan period.

This outcome assisted Bianca and her children, by keeping them housed, able to afford medical expenses, and ensured the family's future financial security.

# Tenant Advocacy

Over the last year, our tenancy team has continued to provide tenants with education, advice and advocacy to assist them with housing issues.

We have seen an increasing number of people presenting with complex matters, over this period. These have often comprised tenancy issues alongside mental health conditions, other legal difficulties and/or physical health issues.

This increase in complexity has at times been testing, with moments of limited funding support preventing our advocates from tackling all of the challenges tenants are facing. We have responded by prioritising housing security and seeking to ensure tenants are engaged with alternative supports before concluding their matters.

Prior to the onset of COVID, these matters were accompanied by a steady stream of more straightforward advice to tenants listed in the Residential Tenancies Court.

As a result of COVID and the associated changes in Government policies around income support (JobKeeper and JobSeeker), as well as the rental eviction moratorium in Western Australia, we have seen applications to the Court in our region dramatically decrease.

While people have still been seeking advice earlier in their tenancy issues, the decrease in Court listings has allowed our team to focus more on the complex cases, some of which are detailed in our client stories through this report.

Ongoing relationships with partner agencies throughout the region have been vital to handling complex matters involving mental health, physical health and various other stressors in our clients lives. We, and our clients, have continued to be the beneficiaries of strong collaborations between services.

Names and key identifying information in the above stories have been changed to ensure anonymity.



# 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.

Through the IDAS service, we provide advocacy to people with any kind of disability in whatever area they are having problems – whether it be making a complaint, accessing services, navigating processes, financial problems and more. It is tailored to suit the individual, and our assistance ranges from giving information and support to self-advocate, through to attending meetings with the client, writing letters and filling in forms. We also deliver information sessions on a range of topics such as self-advocacy, State Administrative Tribunal, Guardianship and Administration Orders, and Wills, which we often present alongside the Centre's legal education sessions.

Accessing a Disability Support Pension for people unable to work due to a permanent disability continues to be a major area of concern, requiring significant assistance to navigate the

claim process. According to the Welfare Rights Advocacy Services, 9 out of 10 claims for DSP are declined. There have been a number of successful claims in this financial year, credited to the work of our advocates by clients.

July 2019 saw the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which has had a major impact on the service, with people requesting assistance with access, planning and appeals. One particular client was supported to request a review of their plan which was significantly underfunded. This resulted in their funding being increased 7 fold (see Case Study, highlighting one of the many issues with the roll out of this new funding model). NDIS appeals advocates are Metro based, those people needing face to face assistance have been an additional use of already stretched resources in the Region.

# Jack and Sally's Story

Jack and Sally had been homeless for a number of years. They had experienced a mix of sleeping rough, shelters and short stays in hostels and hospitals over this time in a variety of towns.

Jack had regularly crossed paths with the justice system, through numerous move on notices and interactions with Police. Sally had mental health issues, but did not take medication as she found that while sleeping rough it placed her at a higher risk of harm.

Both were already on waitlists for public housing, and had been waiting for a number of years.

Over more than a year, our staff had been reaching out to both Jack and Sally, talking about options on how we might be able to help them with their housing needs, as well as explore how we may assist with the other areas.

Jack and Sally eventually reached out for assistance.

Prior to looking at their housing needs, we assisted them to get identity documents and bank accounts in order. We were then able to link their housing applications, which resulted in their moving up the queue, and ultimately the Housing Authority being able to find them a house.

Having secure housing has enabled better health outcomes for both Jack & Sally. The house has also provided them with an opportunity for their children to stay with them, which Sally has enjoyed immensely.

Names and key identifying information in the above stories have been changed to ensure anonymity.





# Sector Engagement

We have continued to be involved in State and National networks across the year. These networks allow us to ensure we are engaging best practice in service delivery, and achieving strong outcomes for clients. This year saw the commencement of an inter-disciplinary community of practice seeking to share best practices in assisting victims of elder abuse. This group meets bi-monthly, and allows information sharing between lawyers, advocates and nurse practitioners to ensure a strong sector wide response to this growing problem.

Alongside this, we were pleased to be part of the first Department of Justice

outreach in Katanning. This outreach saw a range of Departments and community providers join in an 'open day' where we assisted drop in clients to obtain various identity documents, resolve outstanding fines, understand and remove driver's license suspensions, and engage them with Centrelink and job search providers. This model has been employed in other parts of WA successfully, and was a positive experience for all involved.

We have also maintained membership with CLCs Australia and Community Legal WA, including CLC accreditation throughout the year.

# Financial Report

During the 2020 Financial Year the Centre's financial management team navigated some difficult circumstances to continue service delivery with good adherence to budgeted performance.

Due to inadequate investment by State and Federal Governments, management set about the difficult task of reducing total staff costs by five percent. This reduction was implemented in stages during the 2020 financial year, and have resulted in decreased availability, despite an increase in demand for the Centre's services.

The Centre deftly mitigated the impact of the COVID pandemic through quick investment in the tools necessary to enable remote delivery of services. This allowed the Centre to continue to operate while social distancing measures were in place.

In spite of these impediments the Centre has finished the year with very good adherence to the accepted budget.

I take this opportunity to thank the Centre staff for their support and endurance through this difficult year

**Levi Wheatcroft**  
Treasurer

## Jim's Story

Jim came to see us following a car accident. He has been hit while walking, had accumulated a number of medical bills, and wasn't able to afford them. Jim didn't have secure housing, and had been staying with friends and family while recovering. He sought assistance to talk with the insurer, as he hadn't been able to do this by himself as he didn't have a fixed address.

While Jim had previously applied for a Housing Authority property, he was not on any waitlist. Due to his injuries, we were able to get the application prioritised. Unfortunately, while waiting for a house, Jim was also diagnosed with cancer.

While undergoing urgent treatment in hospital, a house became available. Our advocates assisted Jim, working with local community support agencies to furnish the house, and prepare it for his return from hospital.

Alongside this, our lawyers were able to negotiate a compensation payment for Jim from the motor vehicle accident. This assisted him to pay the various medical bills.

Jim loves his house. His security of housing has allowed him to focus on his health and wellbeing, with regular visits from home care providers keeping him on the mend, and in good spirits.

Names and key identifying information in the above stories have been changed to ensure anonymity.



# Outreach Services

Albany Community Legal Centre provides services to people throughout the entire Great Southern region. Our strategic plan has identified certain areas as high priority zones for our outreach services.

Katanning, due to a number of factors, is at the top of this list for regular outreach services. To ensure an ongoing quality of service, over the last year we have commenced a fortnightly service in Katanning. Due to financial constraints, this has required a suspension of our other regular outreach locations.

COVID resulted in complete suspension of outreach services through the higher levels of lockdown, however they were recommenced as a priority following the easing of restrictions.

One area that was significantly impacted by COVID was our periodic regional blitz, where we visit a number of regional locations for education and advice sessions. These generally take place over late summer (to suit patterns of farming communities), however COVID put a stop to these plans in 2020. We expect to conduct these as normal in 2021.



## Thank You

Albany Community Legal Centre wishes to acknowledge the input of the hundreds of staff, volunteers and supporters that have served our community over our first twenty five years. The Great Southern is a stronger and fairer place for your countless hours of work.

## Get Involved

If you would like to support us in any way into our next twenty five years, lets talk –

Phone – 9842 8566  
Email – [info@albanyclc.com.au](mailto:info@albanyclc.com.au)

Photos generously provided by Carol Duncan  
[www.carolduncan.com.au](http://www.carolduncan.com.au)



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