



**Albany Community
Legal Centre Inc**



**ANNUAL REPORT
2021**



Welcome

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.

I can say with certainty that 2020/2021 was a year of change for Albany Community Legal Centre (ACLCL). The changes have been unsettling but have also been positive and have created some fresh perspectives and opportunities for the centre.

ACLCL has been fortunate to have had a new Principal Solicitor join the service. Tameka Brown took up the position in October 2020 and stepped straight into reviewing the service structure. This has been important in managing what is realistically achievable for the community and for the service. Tameka has been integral in engaging with the Piddington Society, the McCusker Foundation and with PLT students to improve the service. Her ability to lead and work as part of a cohesive team has been integral to her success in the role.

The year saw the service shift to a new location. This was a massive undertaking for the entire team and their family members, who volunteered their time to ensure the shift was as smooth as possible. The new service location is light, bright, and welcoming and once everything settles in will be a more flexible and positive space for staff and community.

The ACLCL Board has gone through some changes of members. Carryn Hills came on board as our new Treasurer. She has great enthusiasm and knowledge which has assisted guiding us with the office move, purchase of a new vehicle and planning for financial stability. We welcomed two other new members who have helped navigate some of the governance issues faced. We

also had two members move on from the Board. I thank them for their contribution and time and wish them all the best. I acknowledge also the ongoing commitment of all Board members. Everyone has been required to step into supporting the centre in different ways. Each person has given and supported openly and with sincere consideration.

Funding is a circular issue for the service. There is always uncertainty around what funding will be available, but with continued vision and development of partnership networks there is always possibility. Our Business Manager Brodie Lewis is always adapting and looking for funding opportunities that will create more certainty. Brodie has been instrumental in driving many of changes that have occurred during the year.

The management team at ACLCL are astounding leaders and inspiring people. They have navigated their team through all the changes this year. They have given over and above what is expected to get things done. This is often a requirement of managers in small not for profit organisations such as ACLCL, but it is not always easy. I thank you Brodie and Tameka for all you have given, done, carried and held this year. The organization is lucky to have you.

Finally, I thank all the staff and volunteers of ACLCL. You are the community of ACLCL and were the ones that took on all the changes and adapted to meet the organisational needs. ACLCL is strong because of you all.

Angela Bristow-Baohm
Chairperson

Our People

Board

Angela Bristow-Baohm

Chair

Dylan Parker

Board Member

Bev Alexander

(until March 2021)

Carryn Hills

Treasurer

Helen St Jack

Board Member

Rani Param

(until February 2021)

Christine Tozer

Secretary

Volunteers

In addition to our Board Members, who volunteer their time and expertise, we are privileged to have had the support of the following volunteers throughout the last 12 months.

Brendan Talty

Merryn Bojcun

Daniel Henderson

Courtney Keymer

Amy Golding


Jessica Hewlett

Kate Lown

Nicola Eade

Mikhaila Smith

The contributions our volunteers make helps shape the impact of ACLC and enables us to advance our vision of a just, fair and supportive community. We thank each volunteer who has given their time and energy to the Centre this year, and over our 26-year history.

A nighttime photograph of a cityscape with a large, modern building on the right, its lights reflecting in a body of water in the foreground. The sky is a deep blue, and the city lights are warm and glowing.

Albany Community Legal Centre (**ACL**C) 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.

Our People

Our Staff

as at 1 October 2021

Brodie Lewis

Business Manager

Carol Duncan

Bookkeeper

Denise Kay

Disability Advocate

Donna Coyne

Disability Advocate

Heather Nichols

Solicitor

Kaye Hansord

Tenant Advocate

Khalia Bastian

Solicitor

Kirsten Beidatsch

Client Services Officer

Tameka Brown

Principal Solicitor

Vanessa Hillerman

Paralegal

Zitah Barto

Client Services Officer

In March 2021 we farewelled Julie English from our team. We thank Julie for six years of service to our Centre and the Great Southern community.

The wonderful photos throughout this report have been graciously contributed by our very own staff and volunteers.

Thanks to Carol Duncan, Vanessa Hillerman, Kate Lown & Kirsten Beidatsch for these contributions.

Values

As a staff team, we collaboratively developed the below values, and work to uphold them in all that we do.

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

In the previous report, we detailed the areas of our service delivery that were impacted by COVID-19 during 2020. While those impacts have left a shadow upon the most recent 12 months, COVID-19 was also a catalyst for many significant and necessary changes to our procedures and services. The impact of these changes has rebuilt us as a stronger, more resilient community service provider.

These last 12 months have been a period of slow and steady change, development, and reflection across all of our service areas. All the while we continue to deliver client services to our priority client groups.

The most significant change has been to our priority client groups - this is the first alteration to our eligibility and service offerings in over ten years. This is discussed in detail opposite. We are receiving positive feedback about these changes from our strategic partners and Government stakeholders. We continue to work with our staff to improve efficiency, service targeting and in identifying

innovative ways to service demand. However, as we cannot assist every person, we need to constantly improve our priority models to ensure we are having the most effective possible impact in our region.

Despite the changes in limiting potential clients to more targeted cohorts, an ongoing challenge has been the dramatic increase in people seeking assistance. This is across all our service offerings, but particularly in our Family Law, Family Violence and Disability Advocacy areas. We have attributed these increases to a dramatic upswing in warm referrals from local providers.

This report highlights both our work this year and the plans we have to continue to seek justice for all in the Great Southern during 2022.

Brodie Lewis
Business Manager

Tameka Brown
Principal Solicitor



Our Priorities

At the start of 2021, we implemented a new service model which highlighted four distinct priority groups. Our previous service discretions were resulting in inconsistent client experience. The pandemic highlighted a critical need for clear and consistent models.

Our model prioritises service delivery to **four** key groups –

- people experiencing poverty
- people living in insecure housing
- people with disability or mental health issues
- people experiencing family violence

Research has highlighted people in these categories have both a higher likelihood to need assistance from lawyers and advocates, as well as a lower likelihood to resolve their issues without assistance. Dedicating targeted service delivery to these priority groups is therefore consistent with our mission.

After effecting these changes we have seen consistently higher engagement from community sector partners, both through referral and consultation methods. This has been an unexpected and positive development.

A second significant development related to the priority changes has been the implementation of a web-based intake tool that allows self-service for client eligibility assessment. Potential clients or referral partners no longer need to wait on the phone or email to find out whether we can assist – if they're not eligible, they immediately get alternative contact options based on their needs, saving them time and patience.

The remainder of this report explores the services we are providing to people in our dedicated priority areas. It highlights some specific successes achieved for our clients over the last year. While names and identifying information have changed, these stories are examples of the practical impacts our team has made here in the Great Southern.



People Experiencing Poverty

People living under the poverty line have been identified as a priority service cohort for legal services at ACLC. While people on low incomes have been found to encounter legal issues at a similar rate as the general population, they are significantly more likely to have legal issues that require assistance from a lawyer or advocate to resolve.

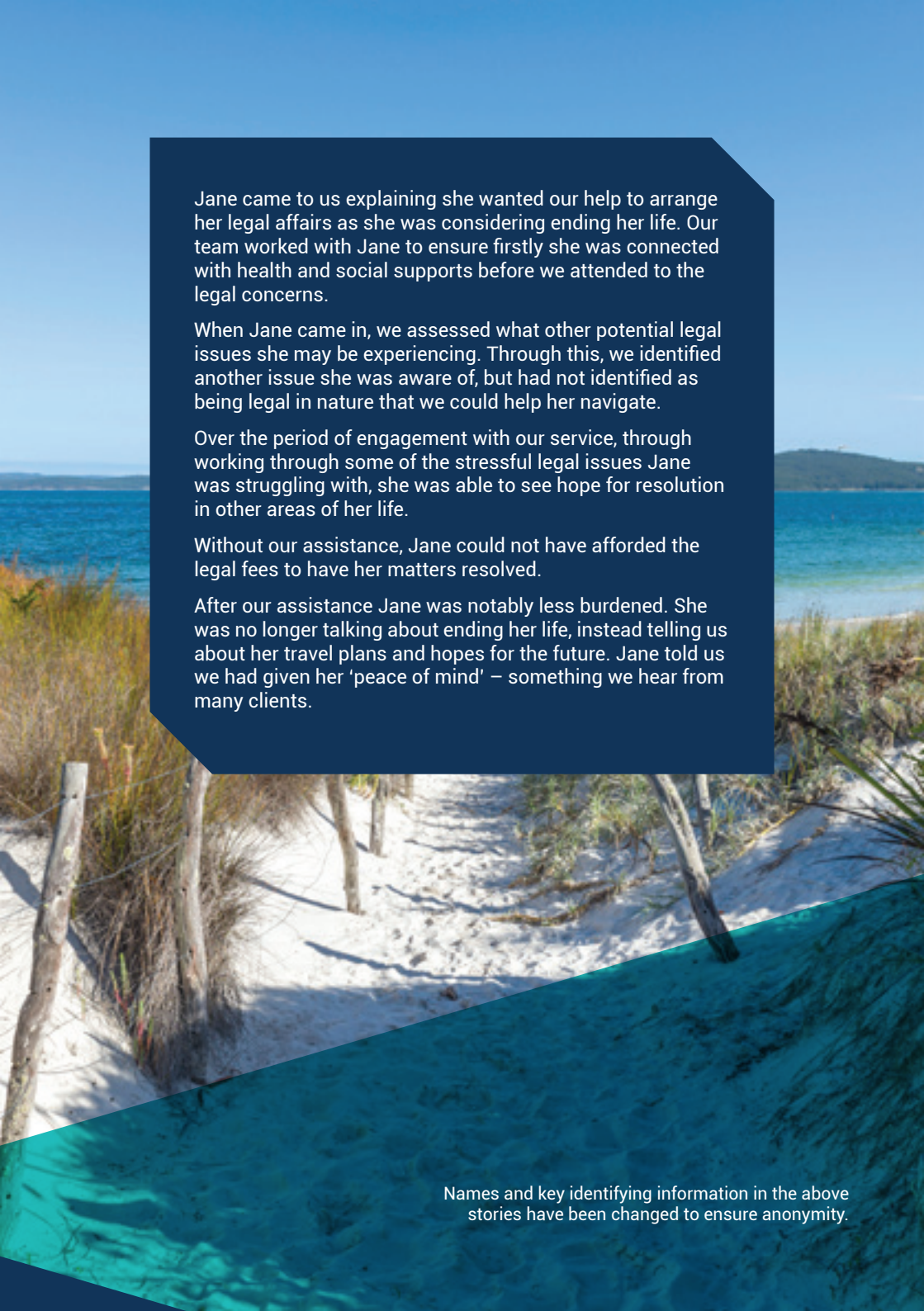
The National Legal Assistance Plan (NLAP) highlights people on low income as a key focus area for Community Legal Centres. Our priority model considers household income, and assesses it against the Henderson Poverty Line to determine eligibility. This model considers both household composition and stage of life, meaning households with multiple children are afforded a higher 'threshold' for eligibility than a single person household (in other words, a sliding scale).

The intersection of poverty with other legal problems is also very high. Individuals with multiple disadvantages require considerably more legal assistance. People on low and no incomes made up nearly 90% of our service cohort last year. This figure has been similar for the last five years.

In addition to this there is a clear link between unresolved legal problems and other life impacts such as physical and mental illness, social disengagement, insecure housing and financial trouble.

Over the last year, we have recorded numerous examples of clients seeking our assistance for legal issues causing them stress and significantly impacting both their physical and mental health. The top three legal issues faced by this client cohort in the last twelve months were –

- Future Planning Matters – 22%
- Property Separation Matters – 20%
- Housing & Tenancy Matters – 15%



Jane came to us explaining she wanted our help to arrange her legal affairs as she was considering ending her life. Our team worked with Jane to ensure firstly she was connected with health and social supports before we attended to the legal concerns.

When Jane came in, we assessed what other potential legal issues she may be experiencing. Through this, we identified another issue she was aware of, but had not identified as being legal in nature that we could help her navigate.

Over the period of engagement with our service, through working through some of the stressful legal issues Jane was struggling with, she was able to see hope for resolution in other areas of her life.

Without our assistance, Jane could not have afforded the legal fees to have her matters resolved.

After our assistance Jane was notably less burdened. She was no longer talking about ending her life, instead telling us about her travel plans and hopes for the future. Jane told us we had given her 'peace of mind' – something we hear from many clients.

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

Our Year in

Services delivered



28

Education Sessions



1715

Legal Service Advice Appointments



176

Legal Files Closed



41

Advices at Court



115

One-off IDAS Services



30

Complex IDAS Files Closed



109

Outreach Appointments



164

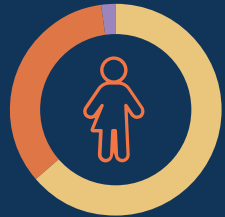
Tenant Advocacy Advice Appointments



37

Complex Tenant Advocacy Files Closed

Client demographics



65% Women
35% Men
2% Non-binary



2% CA



22% Experiencing FDV



5% Under



43% Has Disability or Mental Health Condition



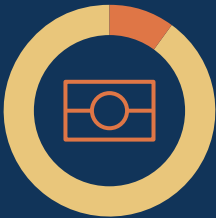
87% Low Income (under \$40,000)

n Numbers

ographics



14%
LD



10%
Aboriginal



10%
per 25



35%
Over 65



5%
income
(0,000 pa)



11%
At Risk of
Homelessness

Most common problem types



14%

Parenting
Matters



20%

Family
Property



5%

Other
Family Issues



10%

Crime
Related



6%

Access &
Rights



6%

Government
Services



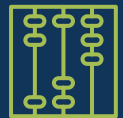
22%

Future
Planning



15%

Housing &
Tenancy



2%

Other
Matters

Family Violence

Assisting victims of family and domestic violence (**FDV**) has been a core part of our work for decades. Community Legal Centres across Australia are at the forefront of providing legal assistance to victims, as well as leading efforts in law reform and systemic change to improve the legal system's support of victims of FDV.

It is well-documented that victims of family and domestic violence are four times more likely to experience other legal issues (in addition to FDV). Further, they are two times more likely to need assistance to resolve these issues, and significantly less likely to be equipped to navigate the legal system without assistance.

Over the last five years, there has been a steady increase in –

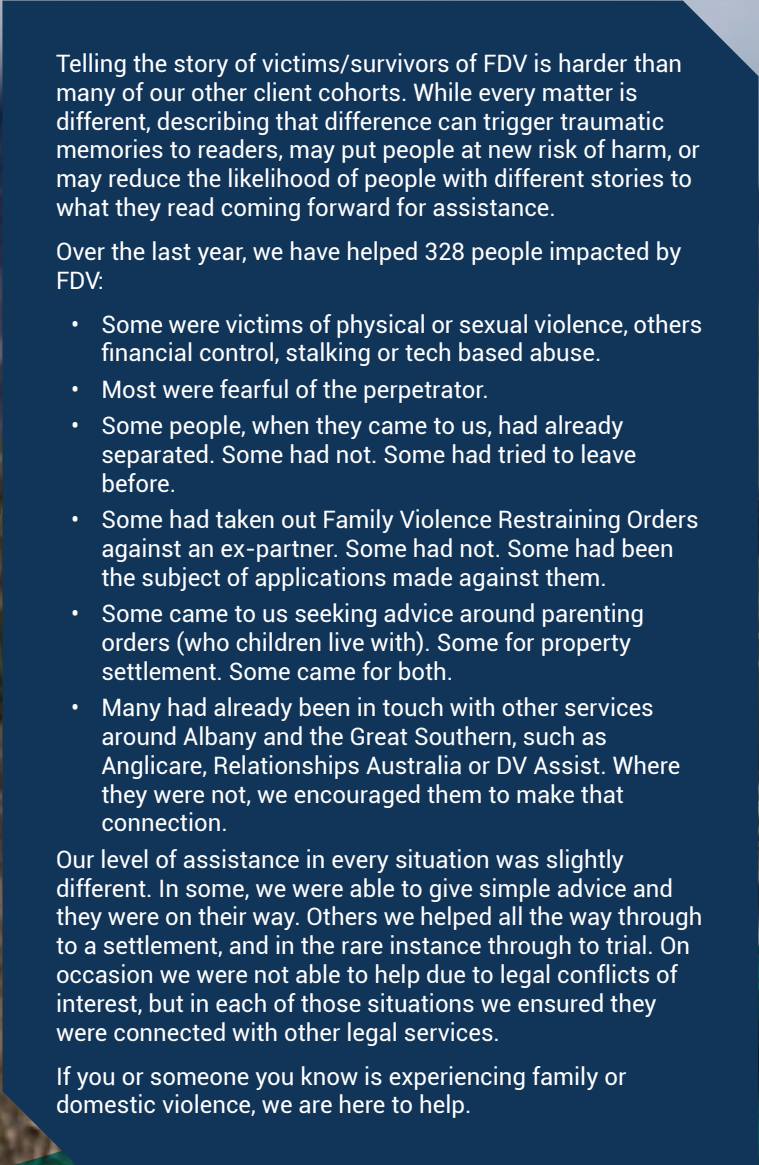
- the volume of people seeking our assistance;
- the complexity of their legal needs; and
- the risk of harm posed by users of family and domestic violence.

These steady increases mean our service model is constantly under review. One of the strategies we employ to attempt to meet the above need is fostering ongoing wrap-around service partnerships. One such example is our partnership with Legal Aid, Anglicare WA, and the Family Court of Western Australia to run the Family Advocacy Support Service (**FASS**) when the Family Court is on circuit in Albany.

Through FASS, all parties attending Court can access legal assistance (via multiple providers to prevent conflicts of interest) and social support. Experience has shown when all parties to FDV matters get legal advice and social support, safety can often be improved for the parties and any children involved.

People experiencing family and domestic violence made up 22% of our clients in the last 12 months. They continue to increase as a proportion of our overall client cohort each year. These clients have presented with issues in the following problem areas -

- Parenting Matters – 33%
- Property Matters – 28%
- Restraining Orders – 20%



Telling the story of victims/survivors of FDV is harder than many of our other client cohorts. While every matter is different, describing that difference can trigger traumatic memories to readers, may put people at new risk of harm, or may reduce the likelihood of people with different stories to what they read coming forward for assistance.

Over the last year, we have helped 328 people impacted by FDV:

- Some were victims of physical or sexual violence, others financial control, stalking or tech based abuse.
- Most were fearful of the perpetrator.
- Some people, when they came to us, had already separated. Some had not. Some had tried to leave before.
- Some had taken out Family Violence Restraining Orders against an ex-partner. Some had not. Some had been the subject of applications made against them.
- Some came to us seeking advice around parenting orders (who children live with). Some for property settlement. Some came for both.
- Many had already been in touch with other services around Albany and the Great Southern, such as Anglicare, Relationships Australia or DV Assist. Where they were not, we encouraged them to make that connection.

Our level of assistance in every situation was slightly different. In some, we were able to give simple advice and they were on their way. Others we helped all the way through to a settlement, and in the rare instance through to trial. On occasion we were not able to help due to legal conflicts of interest, but in each of those situations we ensured they were connected with other legal services.

If you or someone you know is experiencing family or domestic violence, we are here to help.

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

Disability & Mental Health

The Individual Disability Advocacy Service (IDAS) has been a long running partnership between Albany Community Legal and Sussex Street Community Law Service to provide advocacy services to people with disabilities and mental health conditions in our region.

People with disability or mental health conditions have disproportionately high legal and advocacy needs. This demand is partly due to increased engagement with government and services, partly due to reduced self advocacy capacity, and partly due to inherent structural discrimination throughout various parts of our society.

One of the biggest changes for people with disabilities and their families over the last few years has been the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). A key part of the NDIS is the creation and administration of individually designed support plans.

Many decisions and assessments are made when designing these plans and they do not always get them right.


Assistance with the NDIS and Centrelink applications were equally out largest areas of assistance in the last twelve months, each comprising some 25% of total services ion this priority group.

Another growth area in this period has been assisting people with disabilities to find and retain accommodation.

The reduced movement of renters due to the eviction moratorium, as well as population growth in the region, has led to very low rental supply. Unfortunately, this has meant that many of our clients have struggled to find and retain secure accommodation.

In partnership with our tenant advocates, we assisted 42 people with disabilities or mental health conditions to find or retain secure accommodation.

The Individual Disability Advocacy Service (IDAS) is delivered throughout the Great Southern region by Albany Community Legal Centre on behalf of Sussex Street Community Law Service Inc.



James came to us after an NDIS assessment for his child, Sam, who has a degenerative health condition. Sam's condition creates difficulty with mobility, self-care, communication, and participation in daily life.

The NDIS plan developed for Sam significantly underfunded support services, therapies and consumables and made no provisions for necessary home and vehicle modifications to accommodate Sam and the care and support he required.

We supported the family to make an application for an internal review, which saw the plan funding increased sevenfold. But there was still no allowance for home and vehicle modifications.

We then worked with the family and with specialist lawyers at Legal Aid to initiate a formal review in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). Alongside this, the family fundraised to contribute towards the purchase and modification of a vehicle. We were able to assist the family to secure funding through other sources to support their needs.

After the complex and drawn out review process, the plan funding for this family was further increased with specific allowances made for home and vehicle modifications. Everything pooled together ensured Sam's day to day care needs were met. It enabled the family to purchase a vehicle which was specifically modified to fit Sam's needs and to make significant progress on building a purpose built home for Sam.

James was absolutely clear he would have given up without our assistance. The internal review process and AAT process was exhausting and stressful. Had James given up, Sam would not have received appropriate funding to get the supports he needs and his quality of life would be degraded.

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

Insecure Housing

The housing space has been interesting over the last 12 months as the protections put in place by the Government at the height of COVID-19 to look after tenants came to an end. Whilst WA at large saw a dramatic increase in demand for tenancy advice services following the lifting of the COVID-19 moratorium on housing evictions and rental increases at the end of March 2021, within our service, and the Great Southern generally, the landscape looked a little different.

From our statistics we know most tenants coming through our Centre do not reach out to us as a first port of call. Therefore, in preparation for the ending of the moratorium, we spent significant time identifying support services for people experiencing housing instability.

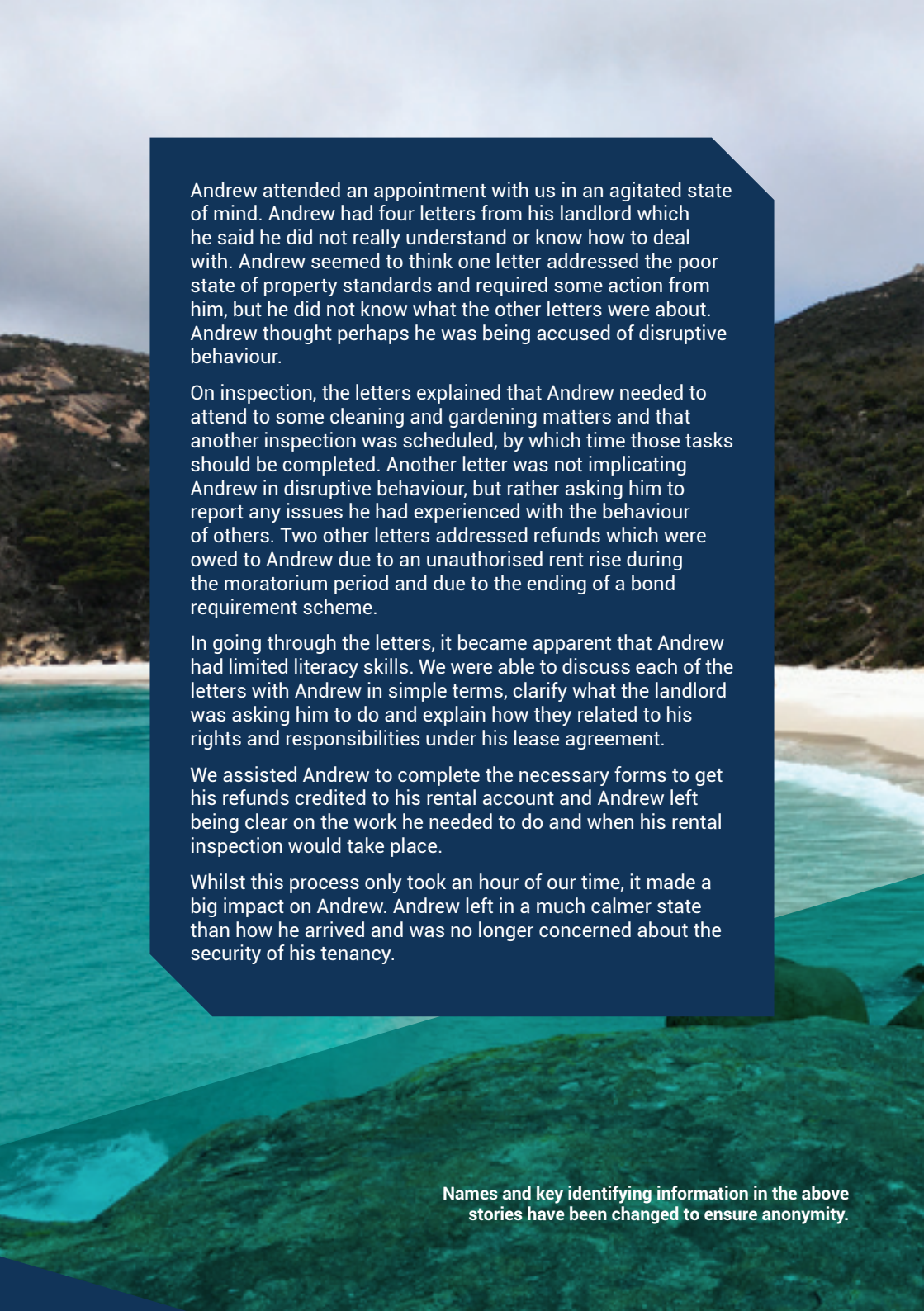
We sought to support them with legal education to raise awareness about the implications of the moratorium ending, the options available to people to get tenancy advice or assistance, and what people could do for themselves to improve their situations.

Our Centre found during this period a surprising proportion of landlords in the Great Southern have been reluctant to evict tenants into homelessness. This is to be commended, as in other parts of the State, many tenants have been forcefully evicted and dragged through Court proceedings.

This is not taking away from the fact there is a significant shortage in rental stock in the Great Southern and there is a high number of people and families who are struggling to secure permanent housing. From a legal standpoint there have been less issues than we predicted, which is encouraging.

Our work is not done. We anticipate in the next little while, those people who were able to stay in their tenancies will start to experience financial stress from rent increases and landlords will begin pursuing people for repayment of rental arrears.

If you or someone you know is behind in their rent payments or has concerns, then please come and see us for some tenancy advice, sooner rather than later.



Andrew attended an appointment with us in an agitated state of mind. Andrew had four letters from his landlord which he said he did not really understand or know how to deal with. Andrew seemed to think one letter addressed the poor state of property standards and required some action from him, but he did not know what the other letters were about. Andrew thought perhaps he was being accused of disruptive behaviour.

On inspection, the letters explained that Andrew needed to attend to some cleaning and gardening matters and that another inspection was scheduled, by which time those tasks should be completed. Another letter was not implicating Andrew in disruptive behaviour, but rather asking him to report any issues he had experienced with the behaviour of others. Two other letters addressed refunds which were owed to Andrew due to an unauthorised rent rise during the moratorium period and due to the ending of a bond requirement scheme.

In going through the letters, it became apparent that Andrew had limited literacy skills. We were able to discuss each of the letters with Andrew in simple terms, clarify what the landlord was asking him to do and explain how they related to his rights and responsibilities under his lease agreement.

We assisted Andrew to complete the necessary forms to get his refunds credited to his rental account and Andrew left being clear on the work he needed to do and when his rental inspection would take place.

Whilst this process only took an hour of our time, it made a big impact on Andrew. Andrew left in a much calmer state than how he arrived and was no longer concerned about the security of his tenancy.

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

Outreach Services

We continue to deliver services throughout the Great Southern, both by outreach as well as via partnership with our local Community Resource Centres.

The increased focus on Katanning over the last 18 months has resulted in a dramatic increase in both client and service engagement in the northern parts of our region, and we are now seeing clients at a similar proportional rate as our Albany offices on many issue types.

A key part of our outreach services is the availability of a vehicle to safely travel through the region. Unfortunately, our trusty old hatchback failed us earlier this year and was not repairable. We have been fortunate to replace it with a larger car, more suited to the longer distances we are regularly travelling now, and we are looking forward to taking a team on the road throughout the region later this year.



Financials

This year has seen another strong fiscal result by the ACLC. At end of financial year, the Centre had returned a small but healthy profit with spending on all key areas within appropriate limits. Our new auditor returned a clean bill of health and you can find his comments on our website - albanyclc.com.au/audit.

This year we have been able to make two big financial investments - a new vehicle, as well as upgrading to newer office premises. Both investments were made possible by a number of years of good financial performance. Our management and previous Boards deserve our thanks for this too.

Looking forward we're particularly excited to see another big change. You may be

aware that an ongoing feature of our financial reports over the last eight years has been a frustration around the short term nature of our Government service contracts. We're particularly pleased to have this year signed a contract with our largest funding partner (the Department of Justice) for four years. This funding certainty lays the groundwork for continued and improved service delivery by the Centre over this period and into the future. This gives us the ability to plan more than one year ahead.

Below, we've given 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.



NLAP – National Legal Assistance Program – Department of Justice, WA
TAES – Tenant Advocacy & Education Program – Department of Mines, Industry Regulation & Safety, WA
FASS – Family Advocacy & Support Services – Attorney General's Department, Cth (in partnership with Legal Aid WA)
IDAS – Individual Disability Advocacy Program – Department of Social Services, Cth & Department of Communities, WA (in partnership with Sussex St Community Law Service)

Sector Engagement

ACLCLC is one of 26 Community Legal Centres in Western Australia, and one of over 160 nationally. We work within these networks to improve access to justice for disempowered people and groups across Australia.

Over the last 12 months, we have been involved in initiatives to improve access to Wills and Enduring Powers of Attorney throughout Western Australia. We have also led a network of lawyers and pro-bono law firms in the development of a Criminal Injuries Compensation online training module – a tool that will improve the ability for victims of crime in WA to access legal assistance when seeking compensation for their injuries through

Emerging Issues

One area highlighted over the last few months that has not been a traditional focus, is the growing demands for legal and advocacy support from youth and young adults.

Research indicates these cohorts are currently under-supported by legal assistance services. The reasons for

that vital legislation.

We continue to work with the Department of Justice to improve access to all legal assistance providers, which includes not only CLCs, but also Legal Aid, Aboriginal Legal Service and the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services around WA.

Through the period, we have maintained membership of both Community Legal Western Australia and CLCs Australia. We have maintained our Accreditation as a Community Legal Centre, ensuring high quality legal and advocacy services for our clients.

this are complex, however recent work in the CLC sector around the country has delivered innovative practices that help to improve engagement with younger clients.

With the assistance of additional funding expected toward the end of 2021, we look forward to trialling these models over the coming 12 months and addressing a notable gap in our service model.

Reconciliation

Over the last three years, ACLC has been reviewing our engagement with the national reconciliation movement. Both our Board and staff are keenly aware of the need to better respond to the opportunities this offers us – both in better supporting clients in our region, as well as supporting the broader aims of understanding historical trauma and its impacts today.

We are taking a two-fold approach in this space. Firstly, we are taking practical steps where clear opportunities present themselves. Secondly, we have engaged help to develop a pathway towards more formal reconciliation processes in the coming years.

The practical steps we are taking include ensuring an Acknowledgement of Country is part of all Board meetings, providing all existing and new staff with up to date cultural training and displaying local Noongar art in our premises. Our own Donna Coyne, a local Menang elder, has volunteered to assist with this work. We're proud to display her art in the foyer of our building.

A highlight this year was Avril Dean, local Menang elder, welcoming our staff and guests to Menang Country at the opening of our new offices in July this year (pictured with Donna Coyne).



Donna Coyne and Avril Dean

Alongside this, we are working towards a formalised reconciliation plan. This commenced in earnest with the support of a volunteer who conducted wide ranging stakeholder engagement to understand the current position of ACLC in this space.

We seek to capture the thoughts and opinions of Aboriginal voices in our community to inform our thinking. ACLC has now formed a steering group to assist staff and board members to progress this work and to ensure the Centre continues to walk the path of reconciliation.



**Albany Community
Legal Centre Inc**

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