



MACKAY REGIONAL
COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE Inc.

ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

Celebrating 20 years



Annual Report 2022 – 2023

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Snapshot

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1,122 clients
(legal advice and/or ongoing assistance)

81.3% earn less than
\$52,000 a year

69% female

35.4% over 50

31.1% (350) disability
and/or mental illness

11.1% (125) clients
identify as First Nations

1,658 legal advices

108 legal tasks

186 D&FV duty lawyer
services

43 ongoing matters

About Us

The MRCLC

Our Centre provides a high quality, accessible and holistic legal service to the Mackay, Isaac and Whitsunday communities. Our Centre operates within a social justice framework, incorporating advocacy, community education and seeking legal change to address inequalities in the law.

The MRCLC is an independent charity administered by a volunteer management committee, providing legal assistance through employed staff and volunteers.

The Centre provides free and confidential legal advice, information, referrals and ongoing assistance to financially disadvantaged people. The Centre also delivers presentations on various legal topics to community and other organisations, as well as to the general public.

The service is provided from our Mackay office, at outreach locations throughout the Whitsunday, Isaac and Mackay (WIM) regions and by phone. Legal Advice Evenings, where local solicitors volunteer their time to provide advice, operate twice a month.

Address: Suite 9, The Dome
134 Victoria Street
PO Box 995
Mackay QLD 4740
Phone: (07) 4953 1211

Email: admin@mrclc.com.au
Office Hrs: M – F 9am-4pm
Legal Advice Evenings:
2 per month 5:30-7:30pm

Web and Socials:

<https://mrclc.com.au/>



Acknowledgement of Country

The MRCLC acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional custodians of the land on which we work in Mackay, the Yuwi and Yuwibara, as well as those of neighbouring lands, and to their Elders past, present and emerging.

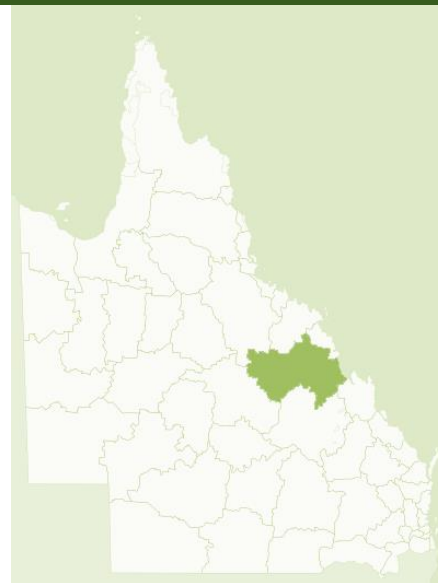


We also acknowledge the connections and contributions of Torres Strait and Australian South Sea Islanders to the Mackay region.



About Us

Mackay	Whitsunday	Isaac
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Population – 180,889

121,691

37,152

22,046

Area (sq km) – 90,140 km²

7,614 km²

23,818 km²

58,708 km²

(ABS 2021) <https://www.abs.gov.au/>

Distance from Mackay

South	North	West
Sarina – 36km	Proserpine – 126km	Moranbah – 193km
Carmila – 87km	Airlie Beach – 149km	Middlemount – 246km
Clairview – 129km	Bowen – 192km	Dysart – 250km
St Lawrence – 159km	Collinsville – 273km	Clermont – 280km

About Us

Our Purpose and Vision

Vision Statement

To enable the most disadvantaged persons, primarily located in the Mackay, Isaac and Whitsunday regions, to understand the legal system, their rights and to enforce those rights.

From the Manager and Principal Solicitor

The MRCLC has continued to provide services throughout the Mackay, Whitsunday and Isaac regions. I offer enormous thanks to our hardworking staff who help to improve people's lives by providing high quality legal assistance in often multifaceted and challenging circumstances. With residential vacancy rates remaining very low, rents significantly increasing along with inflation, we see our clients in hardship and facing dire consequences if they cannot resolve issues particularly around their employment, tenancy, debt or family law property settlement.

MRCLC has continued to expand its service offerings in the past year by entering into a contract with Legal Aid Queensland to provide a Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS) and entered a Service Agreement in relation to the new Queensland Workplace Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Service (QSHADS) funded by the Commonwealth Government and allocated to MRCLC by the Queensland Government. We believe both programs will be of great value to our community.

The MRCLC applied for and received funding to deliver community legal education presentations with Bravehearts over 2 years. This unique partnership for the MRCLC commenced in July 2022 with the aim to help protect children from sexual abuse.

We welcomed back Maria who had a short hiatus from volunteering at the MRCLC before we were in a position to employ her in a combined QSHADS and tenancy role. Consolidating roles, this morphed into a full-time tenancy solicitor position from January 2023 while Rikki undertook work in the QSHADS program. Rikki continues to assist in other programs when the need arises. I appreciate her willingness to undertake the daunting task of establishing this new specialist program.

I thank our experienced solicitors Simone and Vanessa, who have consistently continued to display their passion to deliver high quality legal services to our clients. I also thank our

Administration Officers Janice and Katie, who manage a high workload with the needs of clients engaging with our service in often stressful circumstances.

We appreciate the support of volunteers and the organisations where we conduct outreach. With your support we are able to assist more clients than we otherwise could. In 2022-2023 volunteers provided 144 advices at our Legal Advice Evenings.

The MRCLC was incorporated on 24 July 2003 and officially opened on 10 December 2003 by the Honourable Rod Welford MP Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, and Tim Mulherin MP Member for Mackay. It operated as a volunteer only service until recurrent funding was provided in July 2005. Legal advice was provided via volunteer lawyers at Legal Advice Evenings from February 2004 at The Neighbourhood Hub, formerly known as George Street Neighbourhood Centre. I am very proud to have been the Manager and Principal solicitor for 13 of these 20 years. The initial establishment and amount of growth over that time is attributed to many amazing volunteers, management committee and dedicated staff. I look forward to the new services, FASS and QSHADS, being provided in our region and continuing the work under the other programs for the benefit of our community.

Mission Statement

To provide a high quality, accessible and holistic legal service primarily to the Mackay, Isaac and Whitsunday communities within a social justice framework, including by incorporating advocacy, community education and to seek legal change where there are inequalities in the law.

About Us

Our Objectives

- (1) To provide a free and accessible legal service;
- (2) To seek legal and social change in order to create a more just society;
- (3) To address inequalities within the law and society;
- (4) To promote legal education;
- (5) To provide a legal service that recognises the social/welfare issues facing its clients;
- (6) To provide crisis counselling and support and/or referral to appropriate agencies;
- (7) To encourage community participation in the delivery of the legal services it provides;
- (8) To develop and support self-help strategies and alternate methods of dispute resolution;

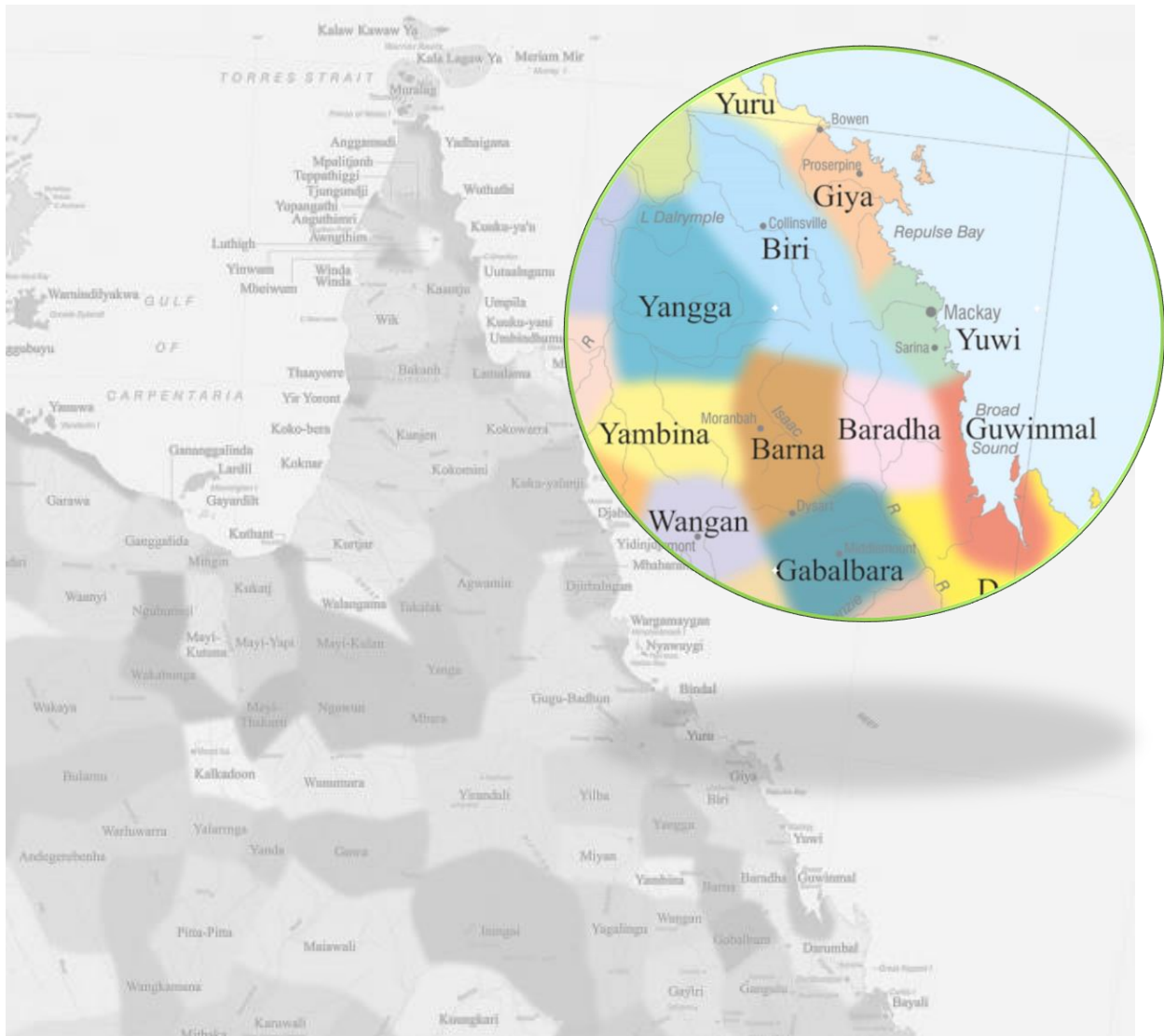
for the benefit of disadvantaged and marginalised people primarily in the Mackay, Whitsunday and Isaac Regional Council areas and other localities that are beneficial to the Centre.

Our Region



About Us

Our Region



The MRCLC acknowledges and pays respects to the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and to Elders past, present and emerging.



About Us

Our Environmental, Social and Governance Obligations

Environmental

MRCLC is committed to managing and reducing its environmental impact. To this end, MRCLC has a Rubbish and Recycling policy that governs our rubbish disposal and recycling procedures. MRCLC purchases energy efficient appliances and equipment and maintains same to avoid energy overconsumption. Cardboard, cans and other materials are placed in recycling bins.

MRCLC hopes to purchase a motor vehicle in the next year and is considering a hybrid vehicle to manage its environmental footprint.

Social

MRCLC is mindful of its social impact, both internally and externally. Owing to the nature of its work, MRCLC has a positive social impact.

MRCLC has a range of policies dedicated to the overall health and wellbeing of its staff members, including policies that provide for leave for staff experiencing domestic and family violence, and for flexible working arrangements.

At the external level, MRCLC always aims to source equipment and office supplies from local companies to support local businesses and employment. MRCLC's service providers, including our IT provider and cleaning company, are all small local businesses.

In the 2022-23 financial year, MRCLC's Reconciliation Action Plan ('RAP') Working Group worked towards the objectives contained within our first RAP. MRCLC has recently submitted its next RAP, an Innovate RAP. We are excited to continue our reconciliation journey in the coming years.

MRCLC is committed to gender equality and equal opportunity employment. Our Manager and Principal Solicitor is female, as are all our staff members. There is significant cultural diversity amongst our staff.

Governance

MRCLC's management committee is comprised of seven members from an array of professions, including legal and accounting backgrounds. It is committed to diversity within its membership. At present, half of our management committee are female. Our management committee is governed by sixteen (16) policies that strive to ensure our committee acts ethically, transparently, and efficiently.

About Us

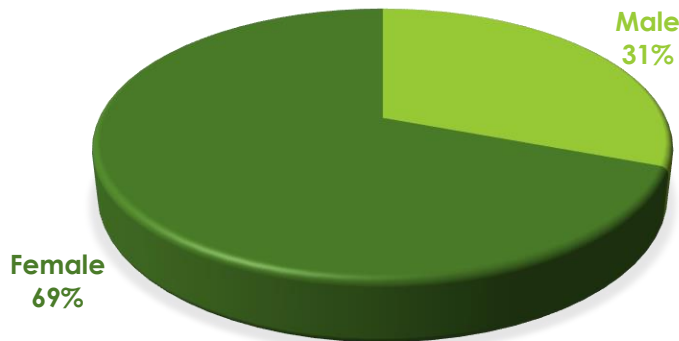
Our Clients

The MRCLC assisted 1,122 clients*

*Excludes Community Legal Education (CLE) attendees.

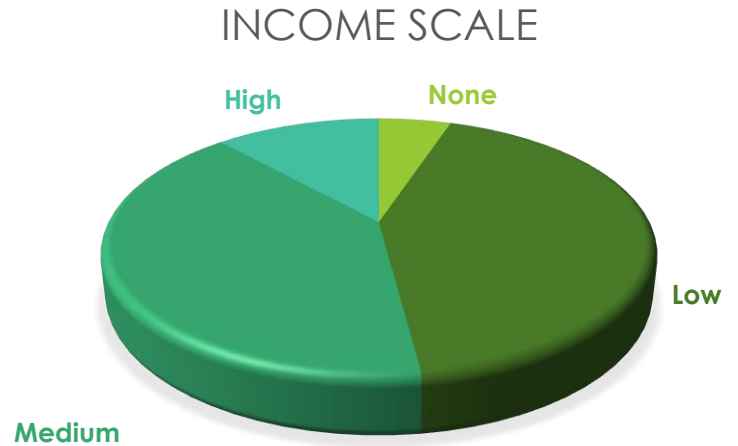
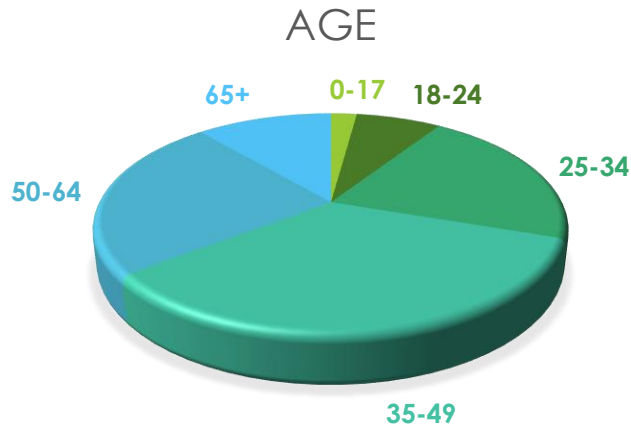
Informations	134
Referrals	4,063
Legal Advice	1,658
Legal Tasks	108
D&FV Duty Lawyer	186
Cases Opened	45
Cases Closed	43
CLE Resources & Publications	8
CLE Presentations	16

GENDER

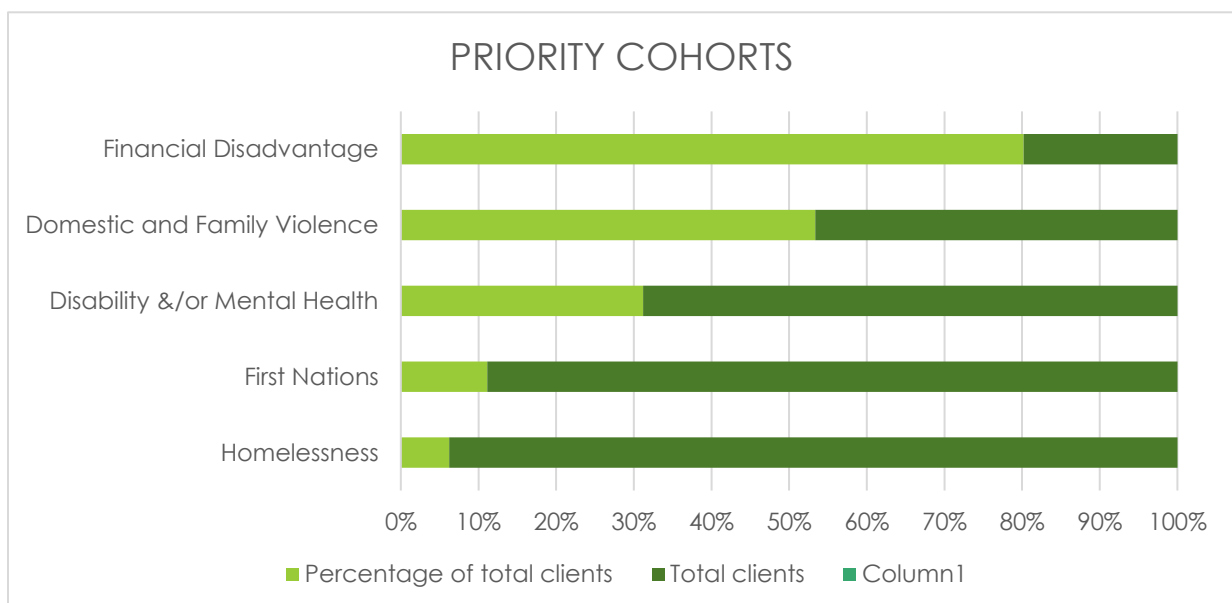


About Us

Our Clients



Income scales (per annum):
Low: below \$26,000
Medium: between \$26,000 and \$52,000
High: above \$52,000



About Us

Management Committee

Our Management Committee members volunteer their time and expertise to guide the strategic planning and direction of the Centre. The Committee meets monthly to review the Centre's operational and financial reports, providing guidance and feedback.

President

Justine Sturgiss

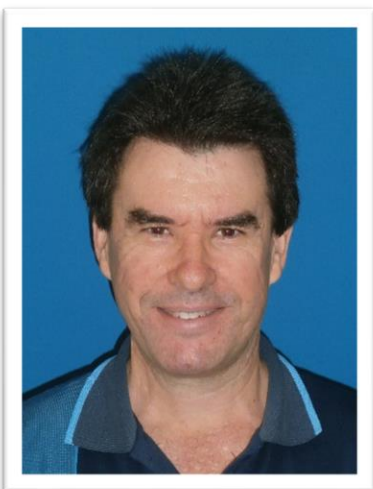


I started with MRCLC in 2017 as a committee member and was appointed President in 2022. I currently work as a family lawyer at Wallace and Wallace Lawyers and have always had a keen interest in law and helping others.

I have previously worked as a Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner (Family Mediator) in the community sector, as well as various legal roles in the private sector. MRCLC has allowed me to combine these two values and I hope that I can lead the committee to continued success. I value that the MRCLC supports our local community with providing legal advice to those who may find it difficult to pay a private law firm and they do so with incredible care and ability. I would encourage others to join our committee. It's valuable, fun and a great team to work with.

Treasurer

Mark Armstrong



I have performed the role of Treasurer since September 2017. I was a member of the management committee for three years after joining the organisation in November 2014. I was initially interested in applying my knowledge and skills for the benefit of our community, but later found that being part of such a diverse and cohesive leadership team was equally compelling, and my involvement continues to be very rewarding and satisfying.

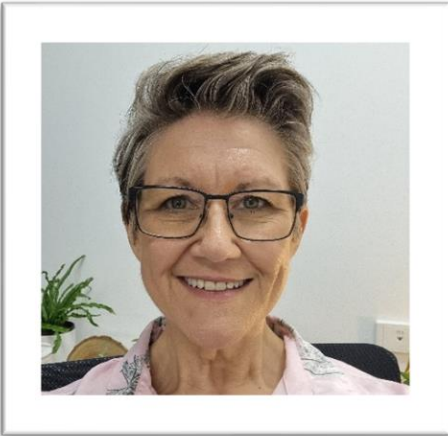
I am CPA and CA qualified and previously served on the Mackay Branch Council of CPA Australia for six years from Jan 2010 to Dec 2015. I have over 30 years' finance and audit experience in large Queensland organisations; in the industry sectors of energy, financial services and local government. On a personal note, I also enjoy playing squash and musical instruments, bushwalking, travelling and spending time with my family and friends.

About Us

Management Committee

Secretary

Karen Bonham



Currently Secretary of the MRCLC Management Committee and the Community Development Manager at MADEC Ltd, a focus on community connection, inclusion, education, and access to appropriate services is at the core of my professional and personal passion. As a previous employee of MRCLC in 2008, I've seen firsthand the potentially life changing outcomes for people when they have access to appropriate legal support and the Team at MRCLC continue to excel at compassionate human connection and excellence in individualised practice. Thank you! The MRCLC is one of a network of community-based organisations in my scope of representation that are relevant to the work of MADEC Ltd, but more importantly for broader community need. Service provider awareness and capacity to inter-refer/case conference proactive and individualised solutions for the most vulnerable in our community is the service thread, while offering ways to ensure people know where and how to access services, is the overarching focus. I'm grateful for the opportunity to participate in genuinely community and people focussed education and empowerment programs through the MRCLC and play some small part in ensuring equitable access to legal services for members of community in need.

Ruth Wegner



I first became involved in committees and community organisations in 1982. Since that time, I have been involved with Mackay Host Lions Club Sugartime Quest, National Heart Foundation, Miss Australia Quest, The Variety Club, Crimestoppers, Junior Rugby League, Mackay Family Care & Community Support Assoc and Mackay Sexual Assault Assoc.

In 2002, I commenced work with Legal Aid Queensland and have been on the MRCLC management committee since then, when it was under the auspice of George St Neighbourhood Centre, now known as The Neighbourhood Hub. I have withdrawn from the committee at times over the years where my work with LAQ presented a conflict of interest. I value the MRCLC as it is a great asset to our region, offering free legal assistance.

About Us

Management Committee

Jason Kirkpatrick



I joined the MRCLC Committee in 2021. I had previously gained work experience as a Law Graduate at MRCLC in 2017, so I have an appreciation of the hard work MRCLC does. I am currently a Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner at CatholicCare Central Queensland and am the current Family Law Pathways Officer for the Mackay/Whitsunday region. I am enjoying being on the MRCLC committee and am grateful to be a part of the committee because of the fantastic service they provide for the region.

Lucy Guye



I am employed locally as a family law solicitor and started with the MRCLC as a volunteer solicitor in 2021. I then joined the MRCLC as a committee member in 2022. I have always had a passion for helping those in need, having previously volunteered at a legal clinic with another CLC during university.

It's important to me that services like the MRCLC are available to our community and I'm glad that I'm able to assist alongside the rest of the committee members and staff.

About Us

Damon Boswell



I recently joined the MRCLC Committee in September 2023. In addition to joining the committee, I have volunteered at the legal advice evenings run by the MRCLC since July 2022. I was admitted as a solicitor in April 2022. Prior to my admission, I worked locally as a law clerk. Privately I primarily practice in litigation and dispute resolution. Volunteering at the MRCLC as a solicitor on advice evenings has given me an appreciation for the services the MRCLC provides. I am looking forward to my future involvement with the committee and the MRCLC.

Other Management Committee members

Daniel Lane

Our Staff

Jessica Brake

Manager and Principal Solicitor

Simone

Solicitor

Vanessa

Solicitor

Rikki

Solicitor

Maria

Solicitor

Janice

Senior Administration Officer

Katie

Administration Officer

About Us

Our Reconciliation Journey

MRCLC's reconciliation journey commenced in 2022. We established our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) working group, which is still comprised of four staff members, the President of our management committee and a First Nations representative. Our Reflect RAP was endorsed in 2022 by Reconciliation Australia, and we have continued to take action towards its objectives and goals.

This year, we participated in our first Close the Gap event, developed resources for staff to educate ourselves on cultural protocols, including Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, made the office and boardroom a little more inviting, and created our own First Nations Artwork shirts designed by an Aboriginal artist, to name just a few things our RAP working group achieved.

MRCLC is excited to continue with its reconciliation journey. It is hoped that the continuation of this journey will improve access to justice to First Nations clients in MRCLC's service area. We do this, and continue to do this, by offering a service that is culturally sensitive.

MRCLC recently submitted our next RAP, being our Innovate RAP. Per Reconciliation Australia, an Innovate RAP focuses on "developing and strengthening relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, engaging staff and stakeholders in reconciliation, and developing and piloting innovative strategies to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples". Our RAP working group looks forward to strengthening existing relationships and establishing new ones with First Nations groups and peoples in the Mackay, Whitsunday and Isaac areas.

MRCLC recently started working on its Innovate RAP and is looking forward to continuing on its reconciliation journey in the years to come.

MRCLC hopes that our reconciliation journey will allow us to:

- Provide education and training to our staff to build on our existing cultural safety knowledge
- Develop stronger working relationships with First Nations organisations, particularly those in the Whitsunday and Isaac regions
- Increase awareness of our services to both First Nations clients and First Nations-specific service providers in our area
- Provide greater opportunities to First Nations people, particularly in relation to volunteer opportunities and exploring more opportunities for engaging First Nations business

About Us

Our Volunteers

The Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre acknowledges the invaluable contribution of volunteers during the 2022-2023 year. Their commitment enables the Centre to assist more vulnerable Queenslanders than would otherwise be possible.

We thank you for your continuing involvement!

Legal Advice Evenings

144 advices were provided by volunteer solicitors at our Legal Advice Evenings!

Solicitors

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| - James Bailey | Wallace and Wallace |
| - Damon Boswell | Macrossan and Amiet |
| - Richard Callaghan | Kelly Legal |
| - Laura Clout | McKays Solicitors |
| - Jenna Cruikshank | Maurice Blackburn |
| - Grace Harrison | Statewide Family Law |
| - Lucy Guye | Macrossan and Amiet |
| - Adam Harvey | Harvey Legal |
| - Jessica Kay | Macrossan and Amiet |
| - Jetta Livson | McKays Solicitors |
| - Kyla Marshall | Parker Law QLD |
| - Justine Sturgiss | Wallace and Wallace |
| - Danielle Woodward | Wallace and Wallace |

You'll find more information about our Legal Advice Evenings on page 49 of this report

About Us

Executive Reports

President's Report

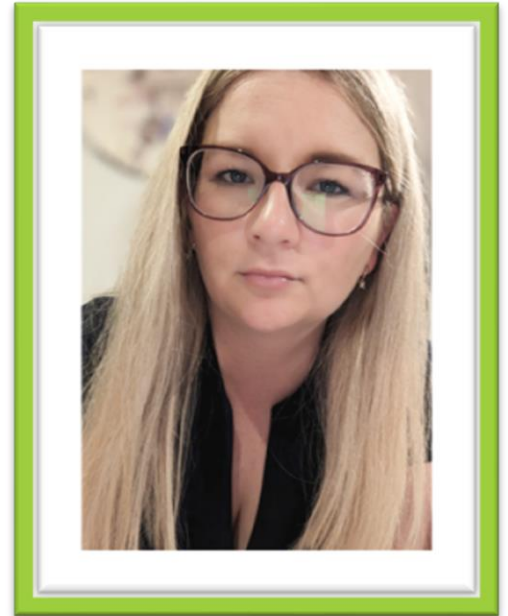
Whenever I commence preparing my President's report for the year, I like to look back upon what I wrote the previous year, and see what has changed since that time. Last year, one of the major issues we faced was service delivery within the background of the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic. I am relieved to say that this year, my report will not be littered with words such as 'coronavirus' and 'mask mandates' and I am very grateful for that.

The Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre (MRCLC) has accomplished some incredible feats this year and I could not be prouder than to be the person who gets to share these with you all. The MRCLC was incorporated on 24 July 2003, so this will be the centre's 20th year of operation!

The centre held its first Annual General Meeting (AGM) in October 2003 and the Centre was officially opened by the Honourable Rod Welford MP Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, and Tim Mulherin MP Member for Mackay, on Wednesday 10 December 2003. The plaque commemorating this opening is held within the office and serves as a daily reminder of the long-continued success that the centre has achieved.

The first advice appointments were provided to the Mackay community in February 2004 and as the years progressed, the centre grew from volunteer solicitors providing advice through legal advice evenings, to the employment of a full-time solicitor and administration officer in 2005. In 2011 the centre commenced outreach services to Proserpine and Cannonvale. The centre now has a Manager and Principal Solicitor, four solicitors, two administrative staff, a management committee, a Reconciliation Action Plan committee and 13 volunteers who generously donate their time and expertise to our Legal Advice Evenings. The offering of outreach services continued throughout the years, and these services now extend to Bowen, Moranbah, and Sarina, as well as continuing outreach to Proserpine and Cannonvale.

A centre does not celebrate 20 years of operation without the continued support of the staff, management committee and volunteers both past and present. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank each and every one of you for your contributions towards the successful running of this crucial service to our community.



The MRCLC recently received accreditation renewal from Community Legal Centres Australia for a four-year period. The National Accreditation Scheme is an industry-based certification process that supports and recognises good practice in the delivery of community legal services. MRCLC were the first centre in Queensland to receive a four-year accreditation in September 2023, as opposed to the standard three-year accreditation that is normally provided. There are many community legal centres within Queensland that are much larger than the MRCLC. The fact that our centre was recognised as being the only community legal centre within all of Queensland to consistently pass quality assurance to such a high level is an incredible accomplishment. This could not have been achieved without the strong leadership and expertise of our long-standing Manager and Principal Solicitor, Jessica Brake.

Another great accomplishment for the MRCLC was the commencement of our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). Our reconciliation journey commenced last year and after launching our first Reflect RAP at the AGM last November, the centre is proud to announce that we are in the process of finalising our next Reconciliation Action Plan which is the Innovate stage. For context, there are four RAP types, Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate. The Reflect RAP helps prepare an organisation for reconciliation proposals in future RAPs and means a commitment to developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, deciding a vision for reconciliation and exploring the centre's sphere of influence. The innovate stage of a RAP generally runs for two years and allows the centre to gain a deeper understanding of its sphere of influence and how to establish the best approach to advance reconciliation. These plans take a lot of time and commitment by both the RAP committee and the MRCLC staff to ensure that what we commit to doing is actually accomplished. The Innovate RAP is in its final stages of completion and once approved, I would encourage everyone to have a read. It is not just a document to our centre, it is a commitment to reconciliation.

The MRCLC survey results for 2023 were once again outstanding. This is a great testament to the amazing work that the staff and volunteers do each and every day. All surveyed participants stated that the legal centre staff listened to their problems in a friendly and respectful manner, and they would recommend this legal centre to others. The participants were also given the opportunity to provide further comments. I would like to include a couple of the statements within my report, I feel that these statements show just how important these services are to the community:-

"Appreciation for this service is strong, without it, I would be an utter mess, confused and frustrated."

"MRCLC...were fantastic. Went above and beyond what I would expect from a free service. We are so lucky to have this service and I will recommend to others."

The MRCLC also continued strong partnerships with our funding partners. Legal Aid Queensland extended our Service Agreements for the Mental Health Review Tribunal (MHRT) and the

Domestic and Family Violence Duty Lawyer service and commenced funding for the Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS). The Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney-General and the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department renewed our Community Legal Services Program (CLSP). The MRCLC was also funded, along with three other community legal centres, to provide legal assistance under the Queensland Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Service (QSHADS). This funding is from the Commonwealth Government and allocated to MRCLC by the Queensland Government pursuant to a tender process. Without this funding, our centre would not be able to provide these much needed services.

This year provided challenges to services and the community by what seemed to be constant increasing inflation and the ever rising cost of living. The impact upon our centre was twofold – our funding did not increase to meet the rate of inflation, and more families required our support due to increasing financial pressures. In saying this, our centre remains financially viable once more due to the incredible work that our Treasure, Mark Armstrong does every year in conjunction with Jessica. There is a reason why Mark has been our long standing Treasurer and we are eternally grateful for his time and expertise in this area.

We sadly had to say goodbye to two very valuable members of staff and committee this year. Jasmine Rekowski, a long-standing committee member, including some terms as Secretary, stood down from the committee late this year to welcome the birth of her beautiful baby girl. Secondly, Rikki Wilson, one of our full-time solicitors has recently announced her resignation. Rikki recently married and has decided to take some time to travel the world with her husband. Thank you both for your time and commitment to the centre, you were both invaluable assets and we wish the two of you all the very best. To that note, we also welcomed some new members to our management committee – Lucy Guye, Daniel Lane and Damon Boswell. We thank you all for your volunteered time and service and we are excited to welcome our new members to the committee!

To the existing committee members, Mark Armstrong (Treasurer), Ruth Wegner, Karen Bonham, and Jason Kirkpatrick, thank you once again for your incredible work this year on the committee. Volunteering is a sacrifice that each of you make every single month and I am once more eternally grateful for your support of me and your commitment to the centre: "Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they have the heart" – Elizabeth Andrew.

My report last year foreshadowed rising inflation and how the economy could rebuild after years of existing through a pandemic. It seems we are still on the uncertain rollercoaster of 'is another rise looming' and I can see that we as a community are struggling with this. This is why the MRCLC is such an important service to the Mackay, Whitsunday and Isaac regions. Legal service will continue to be provided to those who require the assistance and it will continue to be provided to the high standard that it has been for over twenty years.

Executive Reports

Treasurer's Report and Financial Statements

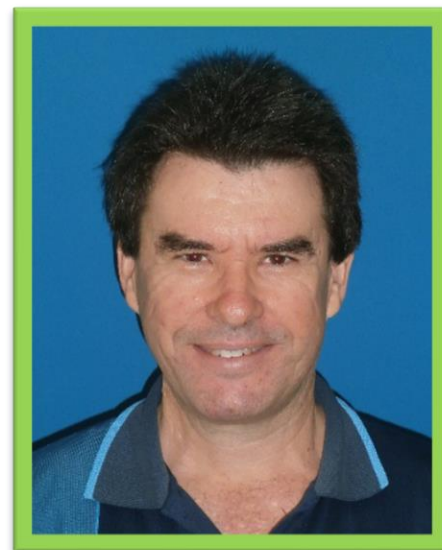
The financial performance and financial position of the centre were sound and in accordance with strategic and operational plans. Grants/subsidies were increased for all programs, but were less than the Consumer Price Index and associated operational costs of the Centre. These included Community Legal Services Program (CSLP) and Queensland Statewide Tenant Advice and Referral Service (QSTARS), which reduced the operational capacity of the Centre in real terms. Funding of the new Queensland Workplace Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Service (QSHADS) was also received during the year.

The organisation was solvent throughout the year and all expense were paid as and when they fell due. Grants funding and contract revenue were up to date and recorded in the accounts. All compliance activities were completed, including superannuation and taxation payments, bank reconciliations and funding acquittals.

Total income increased by around \$70,000 (9% of total revenue) and amounted to more than \$850,000. The main changes in funding over the past year pertained to Commonwealth funding for the new QSHADS program which amounted to about \$158,000 (with \$93,000 earned in this financial year - 11% of total revenue) and cessation of Covid-19 funding of about \$50,000.

Government funding (Commonwealth and State) for recurrent CLSP activities increased by almost \$21,000 (4.4%) and amounted to approximately \$489,000 (57% of total revenue). Some of this funding was carried forward into next financial year, in the amount of approximately \$22,000 (2.6% of total revenue). Contractual Income from QSTARS increased by almost \$14,000 (7.0%) and amounted to about \$207,000 (24% of total revenue) and income from Mental Health Review Tribunal (MHRT) and Domestic and Family Violence Duty Lawyer (DFVDL) programs increased by about \$13,000 (1.5%) and were more than \$55,000 in total (6.5% of total revenue).

Total expenditure increased by approximately \$46,000 (6%) in accordance with available funding, which was applied proportionately to deliver the services of each program and amounted to almost \$840,000. The main change in costs related to increased employee costs to achieve service obligations, which rose by approximately \$19,000 (3%) and was more than \$630,000 in total (75% of total expenses). Accommodation costs increased by more than \$8,000 (10%) and amounted to about \$92,000 (11% of total expenses).



Treasurer Mark Armstrong

At the end of June 2023, the Centre held total cash holdings of approximately \$456,000 and delivered an operating surplus in the region of \$15,000, having successfully delivered on our programs and improving business processes throughout the year. The cash holdings were partially committed to liabilities of approximately \$226,000 which related to employee entitlements (\$92,000) and other creditors (\$134,000). Nett current assets were approximately \$278,000, which included current liabilities of around \$182,000 that were expected to be paid in the forthcoming year. Non-current liabilities of about \$44,000 related to long service leave entitlements that were expected to be paid beyond the next 12 months. Net assets and members' funds amounted to approximately \$241,000 and equated to about 3.5 months of operating expenses.

Financial Risk Management

The centre undertook to provide reliable and accessible legal services that were delivered professionally. Supporting business processes were designed to deliver quality outcomes and minimise business risks. Key risk areas that could result in significant financial impacts included accidental injury, property access/usage, business operations, legal advice, association arrangements and electronic business systems. Accordingly, insurance policies were held to manage those risks:-

- WorkCover accident;
- Voluntary worker's personal accident;
- Property loss/damage and business interruption;
- Public liability and products liability;
- Professional indemnity;
- Association liability; and
- Cyber operations and interruption.

Financial Governance

Financial reports were prepared by an independent professional bookkeeping business, Blitzin Books, and reviewed against operational plans each month by the Manager/Principal Solicitor and Management Committee. Financial transactions were processed in accordance with delegations of authority that were clearly defined in the centre's policies and procedures. Business operations were underpinned and supported by a comprehensive framework of internal control which included effective segregation of financial duties and reconciliations of accounts. The financial systems, processes and organisation of the centre were designed to provide a high level of financial assurance to stakeholders.

Organisational Governance

The centre is governed by a comprehensive suite of policies and procedures that clearly articulate the organisation's objectives, structure, roles and responsibilities, professional standards and operational requirements including business continuity arrangements. They were originally developed from a framework of generic policies and procedures at the time of incorporation in 2003 and later restructured into the current more comprehensive suite in 2016. All policies and procedures are systematically reviewed and updated by the Management Committee throughout the year to ensure they continue to be relevant and appropriate. The higher-level scope of key policies and procedures include:- organisational purpose, structure and relationships; code of ethics and conduct; professional standards; managing records and information; external communications; and cultural safety.



Mark Armstrong
Treasurer

TREASURER'S REPORT 2022-2023

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

ABN: 70 166 231 202

Financial Statements

For the Year Ended 30 June 2023

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

ABN: 70 166 231 202

Contents

For the Year Ended 30 June 2023

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Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

ABN: 70 166 231 202

Income Statement For the Year Ended 30 June 2023

	2023 \$	2022 \$
Income		
Commonwealth CLSP income	198,097	194,953
Less: Unexpended grant funding CLSP	(21,834)	-
COVID 19 funding income	-	50,429
DV duty lawyer	21,935	18,425
MHRT program	33,250	23,617
Other grant income	29,782	25,442
QSHADS Program income	157,803	-
Less: Unexpended grant funding QSHADS	(64,376)	-
Provision for services	2,281	2,753
State CLSP income	291,094	273,603
QSTARS income	209,739	193,084
Less: Unexpended grant funding QSTARS	(3,061)	-
	854,710	782,306
Expenditure		
Communications	9,521	8,985
Computer expenses	13,010	12,307
Depreciation and amortisation expense	5,733	10,768
Finance, audit and accounting fees	20,440	17,498
Insurance	5,002	2,108
Library, resources and subscriptions	20,349	20,407
Low value assets immediate write off	1,044	1,520
Office overheads	4,863	3,382
Oncosts	(6,021)	12,750
Other premises costings	20,421	15,980
Committee expenses	12	592
Programming and planning	11,635	7,356
Rent	71,306	67,476
Salaries	578,238	546,633
Staff training	12,277	4,219
Sundry expenses	238	487
Superannuation contributions	60,431	54,663
Travel	11,480	7,187
	839,979	794,318
Income tax expense	-	-
Surplus after income tax	14,731	(12,012)

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

ABN: 70 166 231 202

Statement of Assets and Liabilities

As at 30 June 2023

	Note	2023 \$	2022 \$
Assets			
Current assets			
Cash and cash equivalents	2	456,164	361,251
Trade and other receivables	3	-	300
Prepayments	4	3,563	3,816
Total current assets		459,727	365,367
Non-current assets			
Plant and equipment	5	8,264	13,997
Total non-current assets		8,264	13,997
Total assets		467,991	379,364
Liabilities			
Current liabilities			
Trade and other payables	6	29,550	44,483
Provision for annual leave	7	47,588	45,156
Other liabilities	8	104,593	21,056
Total current liabilities		181,731	110,695
Non-current liabilities			
Provision for long service leave	7	44,740	41,880
Total non-current liabilities		44,740	41,880
Total liabilities		226,471	152,575
Net assets		241,520	226,789
Members' funds			
Retained surplus	9	241,520	226,789
Total members' funds		241,520	226,789

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

ABN: 70 166 231 202

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 30 June 2023

1 Summary of Significant Accounting Policies

Basis of Preparation

The financial statements cover Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc as an individual entity. Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc is a not-for-profit Association incorporated in Queensland under the *Associations Incorporation Act (QLD) 1981* ('the Act'). The committee has determined that the association is not a reporting entity.

The financial statements have been prepared on an accruals basis and are based on historical costs modified, where applicable, by the measurement at fair value of selected non-current assets, financial assets and financial liabilities.

Significant accounting policies adopted in the preparation of these financial statements are presented below and are consistent with prior reporting periods unless otherwise stated.

(a) Income Tax

The Association is exempt from income tax under Division 50 of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*.

(b) Revenue and other income

Revenue is recognised when the amount of the revenue can be measured reliably, it is probable that economic benefits associated with the transaction will flow to the Association and specific criteria relating to the type of revenue as noted below, has been satisfied.

Revenue is measured at the fair value of the consideration received or receivable and is presented net of returns, discounts and rebates.

Grant revenue

Government grants are recognised at fair value where there is reasonable assurance that the grant will be received and all grant conditions will be met. Grants relating to expense items are recognised as income over the periods necessary to match the grant to the costs they are compensating. Grants relating to assets are credited to deferred income at fair value and are credited to income over the expected useful life of the asset on a straight-line basis.

Interest revenue

Interest is recognised using the effective interest method.

Rendering of services

Revenue in relation to rendering of services is recognised depending on whether the outcome of the services can be estimated reliably. If the outcome can be estimated reliably then the stage of completion of the services is used to determine the appropriate level of revenue to be recognised in the period.

If the outcome cannot be reliably estimated then revenue is recognised to the extent of expenses recognised that are recoverable.

Subscriptions

Revenue from the provision of membership subscriptions is recognised on a straight line basis over the financial year.

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

ABN: 70 166 231 202

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 30 June 2023

1 Summary of Significant Accounting Policies

(c) Goods and services tax (GST)

Revenue, expenses and assets are recognised net of the amount of goods and services tax (GST), except where the amount of GST incurred is not recoverable from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). In these circumstances, the GST is recognised as part of the cost of acquisition of the asset or as part of an item of the expense. Receivables and payable in the statement of assets and liabilities are shown inclusive of GST.

(d) Property, plant and equipment

Each class of property, plant and equipment is carried at cost or fair value less, where applicable, any accumulated depreciation and impairment.

Items of property, plant and equipment acquired for nil or nominal consideration have been recorded at the acquisition date fair value.

Depreciation

Property, plant and equipment, excluding freehold land, is depreciated on a reducing balance basis over the assets useful life to the Association, commencing when the asset is ready for use.

Leased assets and leasehold improvements are amortised over the shorter of either the unexpired period of the lease or their estimated useful life.

The depreciation rates used for each class of depreciable asset are shown below:

Fixed asset class	Depreciation rate
Office Equipment	37.5%
Computer Equipment	37.5% - 100%
Leasehold improvements	2.5%

At the end of each annual reporting period, the depreciation method, useful life and residual value of each asset is reviewed. Any revisions are accounted for prospectively as a change in estimate.

(e) Cash and cash equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents comprises cash on hand, demand deposits and short-term investments which are readily convertible to known amounts of cash and which are subject to an insignificant risk of change in value.

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

ABN: 70 166 231 202

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 30 June 2023

1 Summary of Significant Accounting Policies

(f) Accounts receivable and other debtors

Accounts receivable and other debtors include amounts due from members as well as amounts receivable from donors. Receivables expected to be collected within 12 months of the end of the reporting period are classified as current assets. All other receivables are classified as non-current assets.

(g) Employee benefits

Provision is made for the Association's liability for employee benefits arising from services rendered by employees to the end of the reporting period. Employee benefits that are expected to be wholly settled within one year have been measured at the amounts expected to be paid when the liability is settled.

Provision for long service leave includes accrual for all employees from their date of employment and as a result the liability includes amounts that the Association has no legal obligation to pay.

(h) Contract Liabilities

Contract liabilities represent the association's obligation to transfer goods to a customer or complete services for a customer and are recognised when a customer pays consideration, or when the company recognises a receivable to reflect the unconditional right to consideration (whichever is earlier) before the company has transferred the goods to the customer or completed the specified services for the customer.

(i) Accounts payable and other payables

Accounts payable and other payables represent the liability outstanding at the end of the reporting period for goods and services received by the association during the reporting period that remain unpaid. The balance is recognised as a current liability with the amounts normally paid within 30 days of recognition of the liability.

2 Cash and cash equivalents

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Cash at bank	37,341	45,481
Short-term deposits	418,823	315,771
	<u>456,164</u>	<u>361,252</u>

3 Trade and other receivables

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Current		
Trade receivables	-	300
	<u>-</u>	<u>300</u>

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

ABN: 70 166 231 202

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 30 June 2023

4 Other assets

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Current		
Prepayments	3,563	3,816
	<u>3,563</u>	<u>3,816</u>

5 Property, plant and equipment

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Office equipment		
At cost	9,434	9,434
Accumulated depreciation	(7,037)	(6,147)
	<u>2,397</u>	<u>3,287</u>
Computer equipment		
At cost	44,811	44,811
Accumulated depreciation	(38,944)	(34,102)
	<u>5,867</u>	<u>10,709</u>
Total property, plant and equipment	<u>8,264</u>	<u>13,996</u>

6 Trade and other payables

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Current		
Trade payables	3,785	4,823
GST payable	23,922	19,391
Portable LSL payable	1,843	-
Wages accrual	-	20,269
	<u>29,550</u>	<u>44,483</u>

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

ABN: 70 166 231 202

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 30 June 2023

7 Employee benefits

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Current		
Provision for annual leave	47,588	45,156
	<u>47,588</u>	<u>45,156</u>
	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Non-current		
Provision for long service leave	44,740	41,880
	<u>44,740</u>	<u>41,880</u>

8 Contract Liabilities

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Current		
Government income received in advance	104,593	21,056
	<u>104,593</u>	<u>21,056</u>

9 Retained surplus

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Retained surplus at the beginning of the financial year	226,789	238,798
Net surplus/ (deficit) attributable to members	14,731	(12,009)
Retained surplus at end of the financial year	<u>241,520</u>	<u>226,789</u>

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

ABN: 70 166 231 202

Statement by Members of the Committee

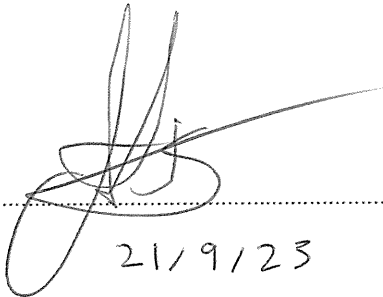
The committee has determined that the Association is not a reporting entity and that this special purpose financial report should be prepared in accordance with the accounting policies outlined in Note 1 to the financial statements.

In the opinion of the committee the financial report as set out on pages 1 to 7:

1. Presents fairly the financial position of Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc as at 30 June 2023 and its performance for the year ended on that date.
2. At the date of this statement, there are reasonable grounds to believe that Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc will be able to pay its debts as and when they fall due.

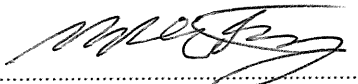
This statement is made in accordance with a resolution of the committee and is signed for and on behalf of the committee by:

President.....



21/9/23

Treasurer



21/9/23

Dated this 21st day of September 2023

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

Independent Auditor's Report to the members of Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

Report on the Audit of the Financial Report

Opinion

We have audited the accompanying financial report, being a special purpose financial report of Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc (the Association), which comprises the statement of assets and liabilities as at 30 June 2023, the income statement for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies, and the statement by members of the committee.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial report of the Association for the year ended 30 June 2023 is prepared, in all material respects, in accordance with the Associations Incorporation Act (QLD) 1981.

Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report* section of our report. We are independent of the Association in accordance with the auditor independence requirements of the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 *Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants* (the Code) that are relevant to our audit of the financial report in Australia. We have also fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Emphasis of Matter - Basis of Accounting

We draw attention to Note 1 of the financial report, which describes the basis of accounting. The financial report is prepared to assist the Association in meeting the requirements of the Associations Incorporation Act (QLD) 1981 (as amended by the Associations Incorporation and Other Legislation Amendment Act (QLD) 2007). As a result, the financial report may not be suitable for another purpose. Our report is intended solely for the Association and should not be distributed to or used by parties other than the Association. Our opinion is not modified in respect of this matter.

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

Independent Auditor's Report to the members of Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc

Responsibilities of Committee

The Committee is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial report in accordance with the Associations Incorporation Act (QLD) 1981., and for such internal control as the committee determines is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial report is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, the committee is responsible for assessing the Association's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the committee either intends to liquidate the Association or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

The committee are responsible for overseeing the Association's financial reporting process.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of this financial report.



Paul Hinton - CA
Director

Date: 01/09/2023

Our Programs

Funding Streams

The Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre acknowledges and appreciates the financial support we receive. This enables us to provide much needed legal services to vulnerable and financially disadvantaged members of the community.

The Centre currently operates the following programs.

1. Community Legal Services Program

Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney-General and the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department

2. Queensland Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Service

Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and allocated by Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney-General.



3. Mental Health Review Tribunal Representation Service

Legal Aid Queensland

4. Domestic and Family Violence Duty Lawyer Service

Legal Aid Queensland



The Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre acknowledges and appreciates the financial support we receive. This enables us to provide much needed legal services to vulnerable and financially disadvantaged members of the community.

5. Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS)

Legal Aid Queensland

6. Queensland Statewide Tenant Advice and Referral Service (QSTARS)

Tenants Queensland Inc., as funded by the Queensland Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy.



7. Elder Abuse Prevention and Support Service (EAPSS)

Relationships Australia Queensland, through funding from the Queensland Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy.



8. Mandatory Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse Community Legal Education presentation with Bravehearts



Our Programs

Community Legal Services Program (CLSP)

National Legal Assistance Partnership

Funding for community legal centres under the Community Legal Services Program (CLSP) is administered under the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP). The current NLAP began in July 2020 and will end in June 2025. Funding is provided by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and the Queensland Government's Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG). The purpose of the NLAP is to provide legal assistance services to vulnerable and disadvantaged people who can otherwise not afford private legal services. These legal services equip clients with the knowledge and resources to help them engage effectively with the justice system to realise their rights and address their legal issues.

The funding received under the CLSP is MRCLC's main source of funding and under this program the MRCLC operates its generalist legal program where clients can access legal services on various areas of law, including family law (divorce, parenting and property settlement matters), credit and debt matters, motor vehicle accidents, neighbourhood disputes and consumer disputes.

In 2022, MRCLC was successful in obtaining funding to deliver services under the Queensland Workplace Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Service. This new funding is used to provide legal services to clients experiencing sexual harassment and/or discrimination in the workplace. Service delivery under this program commenced in October 2022.

Legal Advice and Assistance

The CLSP is MRCLC's generalist legal program. Clients seeking assistance under this program are means-tested to ensure that service delivery is targeted towards vulnerable members of the community.

MRCLC delivers its services to individual clients in three ways:

- From our office in Mackay during business hours;
- By volunteer solicitors at our Legal Advice Evenings; and
- At outreach locations in Bowen, Cannonvale, Proserpine, Sarina and Moranbah.

Under the CLSP MRCLC also provides referrals, informations (such as the provision of brochures and fact sheets), as well as community legal education to groups.

CLSP Deliverables

In the 2022-23 year, the MRCLC provided 3,111 services to the community.

Achieved			
Information	98	CLE presentations	10
Referral	2,249	CLE resources	3
Legal Advice	711	Closed ongoing services	35

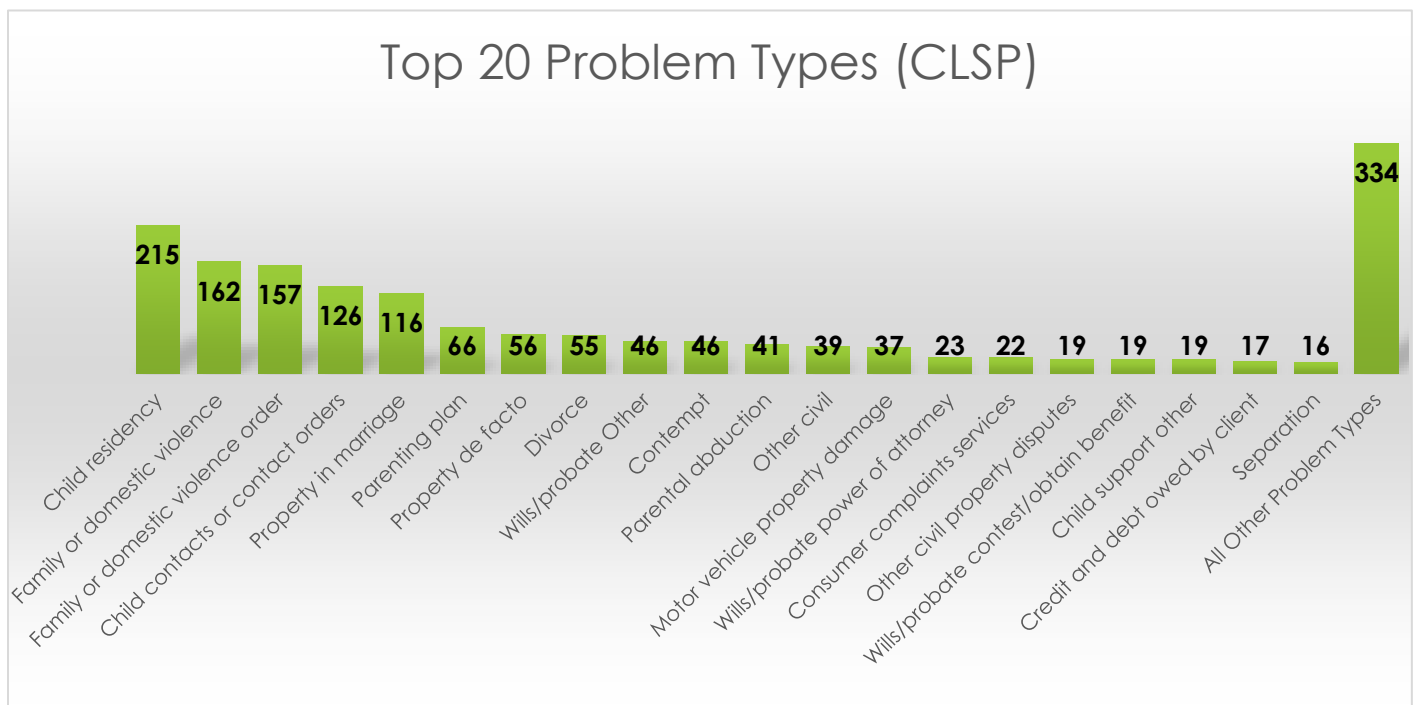
Service Delivery for Legal Advice

Achieved			
MRCLC Staff (delivered at office)	681	Outreach – Sarina*	8
Volunteers	144	Outreach – Whitsundays*	57
		Outreach – Moranbah*	13

*(Additional advices and/or casework clients may have also been provided under other programs)

Advice by top 20 problem types

Note: there may be more than one problem type for each advice. For example, an advice might be on both divorce and property settlement.



Our Programs

Queensland Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Service (QSHADS)

In 2022, MRCLC commenced its Queensland Workplace Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Service (QSHADS) program. The QSHADS program is an extension to MRCLC's existing NLAP CLSP Service Agreement. MRCLC is one of four Community Legal Centres in Queensland to receive funding to deliver services under the QSHADS program.

The QSHADS program provides free legal services to eligible people in Queensland experiencing sexual harassment and/or discrimination in the workplace. MRCLC provides information, referrals, legal advice, task work and casework to clients. MRCLC is directing part of this funding towards delivering Community Legal Education (CLE) to employers to make them aware of their legal obligations. In the 2022-23 financial year, MRCLC delivered CLE sessions to employers and community organisations throughout its service region. These include attendees at the Dysart Interagency meeting, staff at Whitsunday Counselling and Support, and staff at the Catholic Care office in Mackay.

In the 2022 – 2023 year, MRCLC provided **545** services in total under this program.

Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS)

MRCLC entered into a contract with Legal Aid Queensland to deliver the Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS). Under this program, MRCLC provides legal services to clients that have urgent family law matters and there is domestic violence between the parties. The first matter has arisen in the current financial year. We anticipate this program will expand substantially over this financial year.

The FASS program is beneficial, as it provides a quality and accessible legal service to those with urgent legal matters. These clients are often unable to afford urgent assistance from a private legal practitioner. The FASS program aims to address this service gap and increase access for vulnerable clients' access to justice.

Our Programs

Queensland Statewide Tenant Advice and Referral Service (QSTARS)



In 2015, Tenants Queensland (TQ) commenced the Queensland Statewide Tenant Advice and Referral Service (QSTARS). QSTARS is a free service and aims to provide all residential tenants and rooming accommodation residents in Queensland with high quality, free, independent and accessible tenant advisory services that assists tenants to manage and sustain their tenancy.

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre is one of seven partner organisations providing regional service delivery of the QSTARS program since commencement.

Over the 2022-23 year, our Centre provided **4,607 instances of service** and **2,179 hours of assistance** to vulnerable clients under this program. We provided **644 advices, 76 legal tasks** and **816 referrals** to vulnerable tenants throughout Queensland under this program.

QSTARS aims to:

- Increase Queensland renters' understanding of tenancy issues, and their ability to understand and exercise their tenancy rights and responsibilities
- Empower and build the capacity of Queensland renters to take action on their own to resolve issues relating to their tenancy
- Increase tenants' capacity to maintain their tenancies and reduce their risk of homelessness
- Provide the minimum amount of intervention to facilitate the most positive outcome achievable for the person regarding their tenancy matters
- Reserve the highest level of resources and assistance for vulnerable and disadvantaged renters who require more intensive support to achieve the most positive outcome in regard to their tenancy matters, and
- Provide a well-integrated network of QSTARS service providers through which high quality and consistent services are delivered.

2023 has been a challenging year for renters in Queensland. At the end of the 2021-22 financial year, almost 39% of renters in Queensland reported that they were experiencing rental stress¹. With the rental vacancy rate falling to an average of 0.9% in Queensland and even lower in our service area over the past financial year², and rent increases of up to 25%³ in the Mackay area, sustaining tenancies became more challenging for renters in Queensland.

The QSTARS program provides renters throughout Queensland with accessible legal advice and support to help them navigate the legal system. MRCLC aims to equip its clients with the knowledge and resources to address the power imbalance that exists between landlords and tenants. This information helps to sustain both current and future tenancies.

MRCLC has established effective working relationships and referral pathways with other organisations. These relationships allow us to holistically address a client's legal issue and make referrals to other organisations to meet the client's non-legal needs.

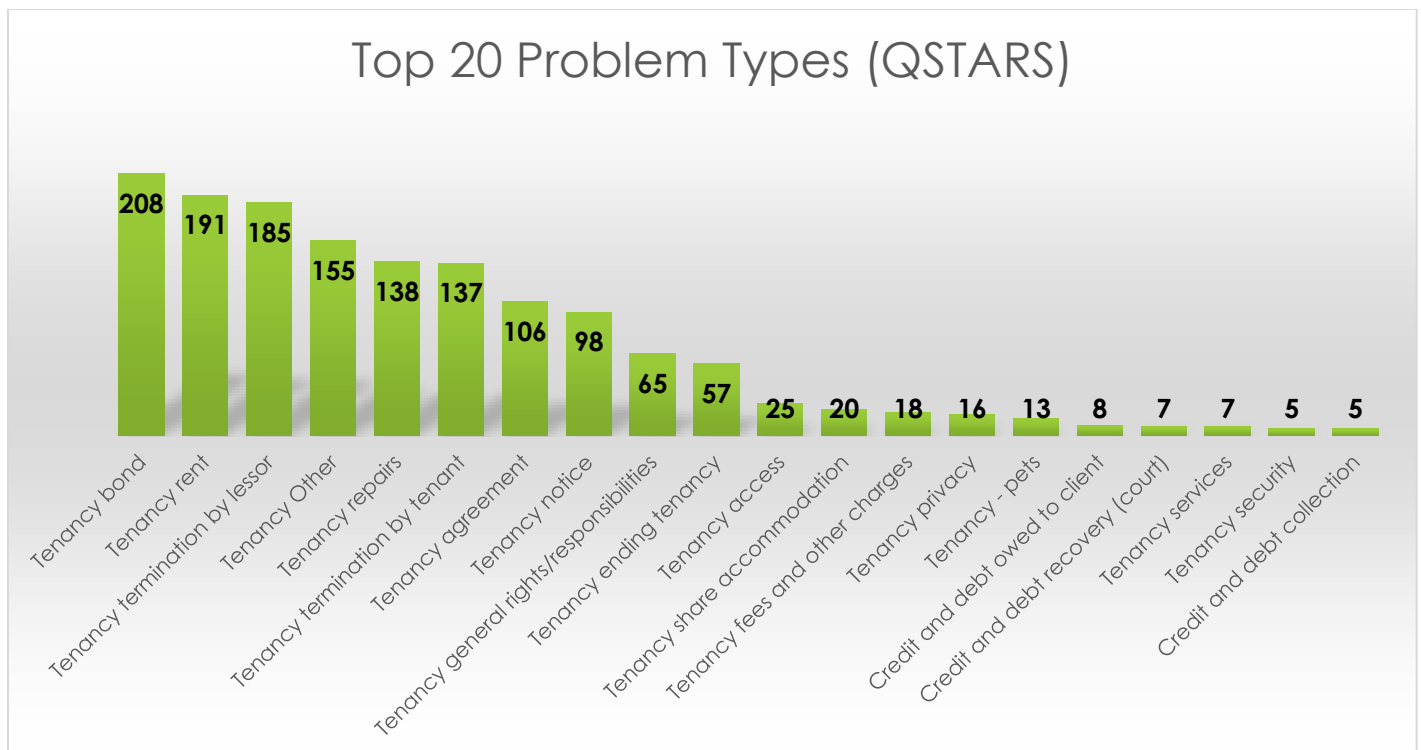
Source 1: <https://s3.treasury.qld.gov.au/files/Housing-affordability-background-paper-for-summit.pdf>

Source 2: <https://www.reiq.com/resources/media-releases/queensland-is-still-worlds-away-from-a-healthy-rental-market>

Source 3: <https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/mackay/property/new-data-reveals-rent-price-changes-across-mackay-isaac-whitsundays/news-story/c1c6d0cf1082fe19259e1357abaedbc3>

Advice by top 20 problem types

Note: there may be more than one problem type for each advice. For example, advices delivered on termination by lessor may also include advice on bonds.



Tenancy Law Reform

MRCLC is a supporter of the Make Renting Fair in Queensland ([MRFQ](https://makerentingfairqld.org.au/)) campaign – an alliance made up of over 50 supporter organisations. MRFQ supports and advocates for better renting laws in Queensland. This includes basic standards for housing, limiting rent increases, removal of without grounds termination, allowing minor modifications to improve safety and disability accessibility, and making bond returns fair so that a lessor is required to produce evidence of their claim for the tenant's bond. More information can be found on their website at: <https://makerentingfairqld.org.au/>.

Tenancy Case Study

At the start of 2023, Jenna* inspected a property that was advertised on Facebook as a self-contained unit for \$650 per week. When she inspected the property in person, she was a little surprised to find the “unit” was not actually self-contained or even ready to move into. The lessors reassured Jenna they were carrying out works and the unit would be fully habitable and self-contained before she would move in. Jenna relied on the lessors' promise and agreed to rent the unit. She paid a little over \$5,000 for a bond and 4 weeks rent in advance. Like many renters in Queensland, Jenna was desperate to find a home to live in.

Jenna made all of the usual arrangements to move into the property on the agreed date. When she arrived, she was shocked to find the unit was not self-contained, was not clean, and the lessors' personal belongings were in the rooms. Jenna spoke with the lessors at the property, and they agreed to refund her bond and rent paid in advance. The lessors gave Jenna \$200 and told her they would pay the balance at a later date.

Jenna had nowhere to live and had to make last-minute arrangements to stay in an AirBnB property. The lessors then refused to refund the rest of Jenna's money and ignored all of her requests for payment.

MRCLC advised Jenna to lodge an Application in the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) for the bond and remainder of the rent paid in advance. MRCLC assisted Jenna with her QCAT Application, as well as her submissions and evidence. As the lessors never lodged

the bond with the Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA), MRCLC also advised Jenna to lodge an investigation kit with the RTA.

At the hearing, the Tribunal found in Jenna's favour and ordered the lessors to pay her the outstanding balance as well as reimbursement for the filing fee. Whilst the outcome at QCAT is a win for Jenna, the lessors have not complied with the QCAT Decision and she is still out of pocket.

MRCLC has provided Jenna with some advice about taking further steps and enforcing the QCAT Decision. Jenna is still waiting for the RTA to advise her of the outcome of their investigation.

Jenna is just one of the many Queensland renters impacted by the state-wide rental crisis that MRCLC has assisted.



MRCLC attended the 2023 Homeless Expo to promote our programs, particularly the QSTARs program, to attendees and other service providers.

Our Programs

Domestic and Family Violence Duty Lawyer Service

The MRCLC provides a duty lawyer service for domestic and family violence matters in the Mackay Magistrates Court. We are part of a panel of preferred suppliers providing this service and have been doing so consistently since October 2015.

The duty lawyer service ensures unrepresented parties in domestic and family violence matters are provided with free legal advice on the day of their court matter. As part of the service our duty lawyers can also provide court/legal representation for vulnerable clients.

The duty lawyers ensure that the clients are informed of their options, whether they are applying for a protection order or responding to the application, and are informed of the court processes depending on how they choose to proceed. The duty lawyer is also able to identify other legal issues the clients may be facing, or legal issues that are likely to occur. The holistic service provided by the duty lawyer equips clients with knowledge, support, and referrals to appropriate service providers.

As a duty lawyer, I have attended to clients that appear in court and who have no insight into the ramifications of a protection order. Some clients are not financially able to obtain legal advice prior to their court matter. I am happy to be part of this duty lawyer service as it is somewhat an extension of the MRCLC's objectives in providing free and accessible legal service to the disadvantaged and marginalised members of our service areas.

~ Vanessa

In the 2022 – 2023 year, MRCLC provided **186** duty lawyer services under this program.

Our Programs

Mental Health Review Tribunal Representation Service

Since 2017, our Centre has provided representation services to clients appearing in the Mental Health Review Tribunal. We undertake this service as a preferred supplier of Legal Aid Queensland in relation to people referred to us by Legal Aid or the Tribunal.

Anyone appearing before the Tribunal can seek legal assistance with their review. However, the following people are automatically appointed a legal representative:

- Someone on a Forensic order, or where the Attorney-General is to appear or be represented
 - A person subject to an application for Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)
 - Minors (people under 18) on a Treatment Authority

Our process

Once a referral is received, our solicitor will make contact with the client, meeting in person to provide them with legal advice before their Tribunal review date. Clients are able to express their views, wishes and preferences in relation to their treatment and we will assist them to relay this to the Tribunal at the hearing. If we are not able to obtain their views, wishes and preferences, submissions in relation to the best interests of the clients will be put

forward. Some clients do not want assistance or do not believe they need legal representation. Clients may also lack the capacity to give legal instructions to a solicitor. However, the program ensures that all clients within the abovementioned categories have access to legal representation and can participate more fully in the decision-making around their mental health care and treatment.

~ Vanessa Pranjivan

In the 2022 – 2023 year, MRCLC provided **33** services to clients under this program.

Our Programs

Elder Abuse Prevention and Support Service (EAPSS)



MRCLC began providing services under the EAPSS program in September 2020. We partner with Relationships Australia Qld (RAQ) to deliver this service. The EAPSS program has been designed to provide legal advice to elderly people experiencing or who are at risk of experiencing elder abuse. Our services under the EAPSS program are available to people over the age of 60, or where a client identifies as First Nations, over 50 years old.

What is elder abuse?

Elder abuse is not just physical abuse. It can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and financial abuse, as well as neglect and abandonment. An older person may not understand that what they are experiencing is actually elder abuse, be unaware of the services and support available to them or may be embarrassed or scared to seek help. The perpetrator of the abuse is often a family member that they rely upon, so it can often be difficult for them to obtain assistance.

If someone is concerned about an older person, they can contact EAPSS. They are not required to be a friend or family member of the older person.

How do we help?

Elder abuse is not uncommon. RAQ estimates that between 2 and 14% of elderly people experience elder abuse. Under the EAPSS program, MRCLC provides information, referrals and legal advice.

MRCLC can provide legal advice to elderly people experiencing elder abuse. This can either be a once-off or ongoing, depending on their legal situation. We can also make referrals to other organisations, like a free counselling service.

Our staff have experience in assisting elderly people who are victims of elder abuse. We aim to create an environment where elderly people feel safe and heard.

EAPSS Case Study

Robert* was referred to the MRCLC for advice under our EAPSS program by Relationships Australia Queensland. Robert and his wife Susan* had moved into aged care from their home in Mackay. The home was in Susan's name. Robert wished to return to their home with Susan.

Robert and Susan had appointed Susan's daughter Pauline* as their attorney under their Enduring Power of Attorney. Robert was concerned about Pauline's actions and appointed a friend, Andrew*, as his attorney instead. Andrew informed him that Pauline had transferred ownership of the house to her own name. This change in ownership was confirmed by a title search.

MRCLC wrote a detailed letter of advice to Robert, setting out his options. MRCLC also advised Robert to apply to LawRight for assistance as they may be able to find him a law firm willing to act on a pro bono basis. His support worker at RAQ assisted him with that application.



MRCLC attended the 2023 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day at the Mackay Expo and Convention Centre

Our Programs

Outreach

MRCLC offers an Outreach service to offer face to face legal advice for clients residing outside of the Mackay area. Our solicitors travel to Bowen and Cannonvale (Whitsunday Regional Council area), Moranbah (Isaac Regional Council area) and Sarina (Mackay Regional Council area). Clients can book appointments to see a solicitor for face-to-face legal assistance.

This service is particularly beneficial for elderly clients, clients with a large volume of documents, or clients that may speak English as a second language. Casework clients who do not reside in the Mackay area can also be seen at Outreach.

Whitsundays region - Bowen, Cannonvale and Proserpine

We travel to the Whitsundays once a month to provide legal advice. We typically travel on the fourth Thursday and Friday of each month. We provide advice from the Bowen Neighbourhood Centre on the Thursday. On Friday, appointments are held at the Whitsunday Counselling and Support service in the morning and at the Proserpine Community Centre in the afternoon.

Total outreach advices for Whitsundays in 2022-23: 57 CLSP, 3 QSTARS and 2 QSHADS.

Mackay region – Sarina

On the third Tuesday of each month, a solicitor travels to the Sarina Neighbourhood Centre to provide advice. This date coincides with the Sarina interagency meeting, which presents an opportunity for MRCLC to promote our services to other community organisations and learn more about services available to our clients in the Sarina area.

Total outreach advices for Sarina in 2022-23: 8 CLSP.

Isaac region – Moranbah

A solicitor from our office travels to Moranbah on the second Wednesday of each month to provide legal services to eligible residents. We deliver these services from the Moranbah Youth and Community Centre. As Moranbah outreach falls on the same day as the Moranbah interagency meeting, our solicitor is able to attend to discuss the services that MRCLC can offer to clients and other community organisations, such as community legal education.

Total outreach advices for Moranbah in 2022-23: 13 CLSP and 1 QSTARS.

Our Programs

Legal Advice Evenings

Legal Advice Evenings have been an integral part of our service since the inception of the MRCLC in 2004. The MRCLC began as a voluntary service at the Neighbourhood Hub (formerly George Street Neighbourhood Centre). Local solicitors, barristers, social workers and coordinators (who oversee the evening) volunteered their time to facilitate the provision of free legal advice to vulnerable residents of the Mackay community. Legal Advice Evenings continue to be a part of MRCLC's service delivery to this day. Evening appointments allow for local solicitors to volunteer their time, knowledge, and expertise to our service.

Currently, these evenings occur twice a month. On the first Wednesday of the month, advice appointments for family law are booked. On the third Tuesday of each month, the general legal advice evening is run. At the end of the 2022-23 financial year, MRCLC had 13 solicitors volunteer their time at our Legal Advice Evenings. We thank our committed staff who also volunteer their time to further service the needs of the community by attending the Legal Advice Evenings.

In the 2022-2023 year, the MRCLC provided **144** legal advice appointments at our legal advice evenings.



We thank all our
amazing volunteers who
contribute to this service!

Our Programs

Community Legal Education

MRCLC delivers Community Legal Education to the general public to disseminate legal information on a wide range of topics. Community Legal Education topics are usually selected for their relevance to a broad cross section of the community. For example, MRCLC provides community legal education sessions on wills and estates in Queensland.

In the 2021-22 financial year, MRCLC applied for and received funding through Legal Aid Queensland's CLE collaboration fund. This application was made with Bravehearts, a not-for-profit organisation. This funding was used to deliver CLE sessions on the laws pertaining to the mandatory reporting on sexual offences against children. These sessions are delivered to relevant community organisations to inform them of their legal obligations to report any sexual offences against children that are disclosed in the course of their employment.

2022

July – Simone presented a CLE to the Mackay Women's Group at the Mackay Women's Centre on the Enduring Power of Attorney process in Queensland.

September – Jessica delivered a CLE in Nebo on the on the recent mandatory reporting of

child sexual offence laws in Queensland as part of the Nebo Community and Health Day.

October – Jessica presented a CLE to the attendees of the Mackay Interagency meeting on the new mandatory reporting laws in Queensland.

2023

May – Vanessa presented a CLE on parenting matters to the staff members at the Mackay office of CatholicCare (formerly Centacare).

May – Rikki delivered two CLEs on tenancy laws in Queensland as part of the Better Together Housing initiative.

May – Rikki delivered a CLE at the Dysart Interagency meeting about recent changes to the Fair Work Act and other workplace laws under the QSHADS program.

June – Simone presented a CLE on elder abuse at the International World Elder Abuse Day event that was held at the Mackay Entertainment and Convention Centre.

In the 2022-2023 year, the MRCLC provided CLE sessions to **331 people!**

Our Programs

Community Engagement

MRCLC uses community engagement events to make the broader public aware of our organisation and the services that we offer. These events allow MRCLC to engage with people residing in our service area that may not be aware of our existence and to inform them the assistance that we can provide. MRCLC hopes to continue to attend events in the more remote regions of our service area to increase awareness of our services.

Throughout the 2022-2023 year, the MRCLC attended a wide range of community events. Staff attended Moranbah, Dysart, Sarina, Whitsunday and Mackay interagency meetings as well as Binbi Tok Olgeta meetings. Community engagement events attended by our staff include:

8 July 2022	Staff held a stall at the NAIDOC Family Fun Day.
12 August 2022	Jessica and Simone held a stall at the Mackay Disability Support Expo.
8 September 2022	Jessica attended the Nebo Health and Community Day.
12 October 2022	Jessica and Janice held a stall at the Mackay Seniors Expo.
13 December 2022	Janice and Maria held a stall at the Deadly Choices event in Dysart.
16 March 2023	Katie and Maria held a stall at the Closing The Gap Day event at the Andergrove Community Hall.
15 May 2023	Jessica, Simone and Vanessa attended the Family Law Pathways Network Domestic Violence Hypothetical at the Mackay Entertainment and Convention Centre. Simone was a panel member for a session.
18 May 2023	Rikki and Janice held a stall at the Dysart Youth Expo.
31 May 2023	Jessica and Rikki held a stall at Mackay Regional Council's National Reconciliation Week Event.
8 June 2023	Jessica and Maria held a stall at the Mackay Homeless Expo at the CQU Mackay City campus.

NAIDOC Family Fun Day 2022



Manager and Principal Solicitor Jessica Brake and Ruth Wegner from our Management Committee and Legal Aid attended the 2022 NAIDOC Family Fun Day

The NAIDOC Family Fun Day was held at Queens Park in July 2022. The Family Fun day is a great opportunity for First Nations people to meet with local service providers and to promote our service to the broader community.

National Reconciliation Week 2023

Solicitor Rikki Wilson attended the National Reconciliation Week Event held at the Mackay Regional Council grounds.



MRCLC attended Mackay Regional Council's National Reconciliation Week Event.

Interagency and network meetings

MRCLC uses interagency network meetings as an opportunity to promote its services and inform other service providers and government agencies about any changes to our service delivery, including new programs. MRCLC also attends interagency meetings to learn about other services and support programs that are available to our clients. Knowledge of these services allows MRCLC to holistically address client's legal issues.

Our Centre attends numerous interagency and network meetings to connect with services and understand the needs of the region. These have included:

- Binbi Tok Olgeta (Binbi – Aboriginal word: Good / Tok – Torres Strait Islander Creole: Talk / Olgeta – Bislama (official language of Vanuatu): Everyone).
- Interagency meetings for Mackay, Sarina, Whitsundays, Moranbah and Dysart.
- Community Legal Centres Queensland and North Queensland Law Association conferences; court services meetings and Mackay Regional Legal Assistance Forums.
- Community AGMs and Committee meetings, including Lowanna House and Mackay Women's Centre.

Interagency network meetings attended by our staff include:

13 July 2022	Fleur attended the Moranbah Interagency meeting.
1 August 2022	Fleur attended the WING Interagency meeting via Zoom.
30 September 2022	Simone attended the Lowanna House management committee meeting.
18 October 2022	Rikki attended the Sarina Interagency meeting.
6 December 2022	Simone attended the Binbi Tok Olgeta meeting.
22 February 2023	Rikki attended the Moranbah Interagency meeting.
7 March 2023	Jessica attended the Binbi Tok Olgeta meeting.
9 May 2023	Rikki attended the Dysart Interagency meeting.

Our Programs

Case Studies

Case Study 1 – Damaged mobility scooter (CLSP)

Margaret* is a 70-year-old woman who relies on the use of a mobility scooter. Margaret was using her scooter on the footpath when a car reversed into her. While she did not sustain an injury, her mobility scooter was damaged. As an aged pensioner, Margaret was unable to afford the repairs herself. Margaret was told by the motor vehicle driver that he intended to make a claim on his insurance to repair his car and her scooter. When he failed to do so, Margaret came to MRCLC for advice.

MRCLC sent a letter of demand to the driver with quotes to repair the scooter that Margaret had obtained. The driver then attended the MRCLC office and said he believed Margaret was at fault and he would not pay for the damage to her scooter.

Margaret maintained that the driver was at fault. MRCLC wrote a letter of demand to the driver's insurer to have the damage to Margaret's scooter repaired. The driver's insurer said that both parties were at fault for not paying attention and that they would not pay her claim.

Margaret then instructed MRCLC that she wished to take the matter further. MRCLC prepared a QCAT Application for the damage to her scooter, seeking the driver to pay for the repairs. When it came time for mediation, the driver declined to participate.

The driver's insurer then contacted MRCLC and offered to settle the claim. They were agreeable to paying Margaret the amount she had originally claimed in her QCAT Application. Margaret was satisfied with this outcome, and provided her bank account details for MRCLC to forward to the driver's insurer for payment. MRCLC instructed Margaret to wait to receive the funds in her bank account before withdrawing her QCAT Application.

Without MRCLC's assistance, Margaret's mobility scooter may not have been repaired, or she may have sustained significant financial hardship if she had to pay for the repairs herself.

Case Study 2 – Domestic and Family Violence (Domestic Violence Duty Lawyer)

The Police were called to a domestic dispute at a residential property. With information provided to them at the time, the Police decided to issue a Police Protection Notice naming Jeanette* as the Respondent.

Jeanette has a severe intellectual disability, resulting in her having the mental capacity of a pre-teen child and the inability to control her behaviour.

Jeanette did not attend the first court date of this application and a Temporary Protection Order was made by the Magistrates Court.

The MRCLC assisted Jeanette and provided her with legal representation at her next court attendance. We assessed she did not have capacity to appreciate a Protection Order or comprehend the severity of a breach of the Protection Order. We sought, and sighted, confirmation from medical practitioners of Jeanette's mental capacity and other disabilities.

The MRCLC negotiated with the Police to consider withdrawing their application given Jeanette's disabilities. In the Magistrates Court we submitted there should be a suspension of the Temporary Protection Order pending the review by the Police of their application. The Temporary Protection Order was suspended, and the Police eventually withdrew their application.

* real names not used.

The Future

Service Development

During the 2022-2023 year, MRCLC:

- Commenced the delivery of services under the new Queensland Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Service (QSHADS) program to vulnerable Queenslanders experiencing issues in the workplace. We look forward to assisting workers in the future, and hope that our promotion of the service, and our community legal education on sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace, sees the expansion of this service.
- Launched our first official Reconciliation Action Plan and continued upon our reconciliation journey. Our RAP working group recently drafted and submitted our Innovate RAP to Reconciliation Australia. We are excited to continue with this journey and to improve outcomes and access to justice for First Nations people.
- Delivered community legal education to a record number of people. In the 2021-22 financial year, MRCLC delivered CLE to 83 participants. In the 2022-23 financial year, this number increased to 331 people, an increase of almost 300%. We will continue to provide community legal education on topical matters.

Conclusion

The Mackay, Whitsunday and Isaac Regional Council areas, containing a population of approximately 180,000 people over an area of 90,140 square kilometres, are serviced by the Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre Inc (MRCLC). We are the only generalist community legal centre in this area.

The statistics contained within this report demonstrates the ongoing need for a free, accessible and quality legal service in our service area. This is particularly the case in the remote pockets of our service area, where disadvantage is amplified. Even though we have assisted 1,122 people, there are still people being turned away or not able to gain the assistance and support they need due to service demand.

Nevertheless, the MRCLC was able to significantly assist our community through the provision of community legal education, 1,658 advices, 108 legal tasks, 186 D&FV duty lawyer services and by working on 43 ongoing casework files. We will continue to provide these services to ensure that the most vulnerable have access to justice.

Over 20 years of operation the MRCLC has truly made a significant difference to many people's lives in the region. We endeavour to continue the great work for the next 20!