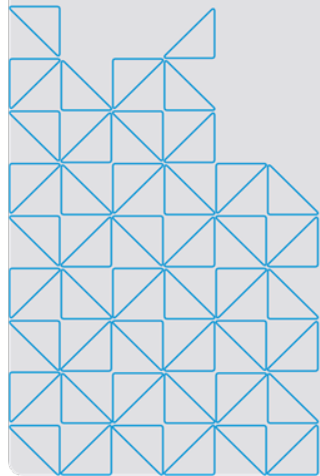




# Justice Connect

Fiona McLeay





**We are about access to justice through pro bono.**

**Our vision is a world that is fair and just – where systems are more accessible and accountable, rights are respected and laws are fairer.**



**We work towards this vision by partnering with pro bono lawyers to develop and strengthen pro bono capacity and strategically match this with unmet legal need.**

**We do this in three main ways:**



- 1. We build, support and engage a strong commitment to lawyers' pro bono responsibility.**
- 2. We deliver access to justice through pro bono legal services, to people experiencing disadvantage and the community organisations that support them.**
- 3. We challenge and change unfair laws and policies, using evidence from our case work and the stories of our clients to bring about reform**

# Justice Connect Programs



## **1. Referral Service**

## **2. Legal Services:**

- Homeless law
- Seniors Law
- MOSAIC

## **3. Not-for-Profit Law**

# Homeless Law Ballan Caravan Park Residents





## About Justice Connect

We provide access to justice through pro bono legal services, to people experiencing disadvantage and the community organisations that support them.

### Our story

Justice Connect was formed on 1 July 2013 with the merger of PILCH NSW (established in 1992) and PILCH Vic (established in 1994). PILCH NSW and PILCH Victoria were started by a small group of law firms and community legal centres who were committed to access to justice and the fostering of a strong pro bono culture among lawyers. These organisations played a key role in entrenching the concept of a structured and collaborative approach to pro bono work as part of the inherent professional responsibility of every lawyer. This is now a feature of the Australian legal profession. Tens of thousands of people, charities and community organisations have been the beneficiaries of the vision shown by the PILCHs' founding members and staff.

Justice Connect assists disadvantaged individuals who are ineligible for legal aid and cannot afford a lawyer, and community groups with public interest objectives, to obtain free legal assistance. We also undertake legal education and law and policy reform aimed at improving access to justice. We work closely with lawyers to build and strengthen a commitment to the pro bono ethos and to support them to undertake pro bono work. Justice Connect provides a professional, efficient and effective system for the provision of pro bono legal services, both for clients and for pro bono lawyers.

*I think it is essential for lawyers ... to have exposure to matters which raise core legal and human rights principles ... and to be reminded that the privilege of legal practice also carries with it social and ethical responsibility towards the community. Andrea Wookey, former secondee, Herbert Smith Freehills*

*Justice Connect is an organisation deserving of all the support it can get. It allows the underdog to be heard, to be given a chance at some justice. Justice Connect client*

### How we work

There are two core elements to our work. The first is assisting disadvantaged individuals to obtain legal assistance where they cannot afford a lawyer or obtain legal aid. Justice Connect receives and assesses requests for pro bono legal assistance from the public and refers them to pro bono solicitors and barristers through our **Referral Program**, which in Victoria includes lawyers who are part of the pro bono programs of the Law Institute of Victoria and the Victorian Bar.

A new initiative is the **Self-Representation Service**. Funded by the federal government over four years, it will provide free legal advice and assistance to people who are representing themselves in proceedings before the Federal and Federal Circuit Courts in NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and ACT. The service recognises the need to address the challenges faced by self-represented litigants, and the impact of these matters on the Courts. The service is expected to begin in July 2014.

Justice Connect is also known for the development of innovative and sustainable programs that target the unmet legal needs of particular client groups. Pro bono lawyers play a key role in providing legal advice, representation and training in these programs. Currently, we have four such programs:

- **Not-for-profit Law** - a specialist legal service for not-for-profit community organisations, providing information, training, advice and pro bono referrals, operating in NSW and Victoria
- **MOSAIC** (Migrant Outreach Services - Advice, Information and Community Education) - for recently settled migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in inner western Sydney
- **Homeless Law** - for clients experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, operating at nine outreach sites in Melbourne
- **Seniors Law** - for older clients with a legal issue associated with ageing, including elder abuse, operating at four outreach sites in Melbourne

Sometimes our work reveals laws or policies that cause or perpetuate disadvantage, or which are unduly complex. We engage with law and policy makers to help improve these laws. Our law and policy reform work is based on evidence drawn from our casework and uses the stories of our clients give them a voice and highlight the need for change.

## More about our programs...

### Referral Service

Legal aid commissions and community legal centres provide the bulk of free legal assistance to people who are unable to afford to pay for a lawyer. However, these resources are limited; as a result, there are many for whom legal assistance is inaccessible. Justice Connect receives over 2,000 requests a year for pro bono assistance from individuals and not-for-profit community organisations. We determine whether they can be assisted by a pro bono lawyer and where appropriate, match them up.

We work closely with legal aid commissions, community legal centres and state and federal government departments to connect with clients and to ensure that we are not duplicating work done by other service providers. We are also able to quickly mobilise and coordinate a pro bono response to a rapidly emerging unmet legal need. Justice Connect's referral work is funded by our law firm members and in Victoria, by the Law Institute of Victoria and the Victoria Bar.

### Not-for-profit Law - a specialist legal service for community organisations

**Not-for-profit Law** is a specialist service for not-for-profit community organisations (NFPs). It was launched in November 2008 and now operates in Victoria and NSW. Not-for-profit Law prioritises NFPs that help marginalised or disadvantaged people and those in rural and regional areas. It provides them with access to free or low cost, high quality, practical legal help via:

- specialist legal information webportal, based around the 'lifecycle' of an NFP group:
- telephone legal advice on discrete legal issues, staffed by expert Not-for-profit Law lawyers
- referring eligible NFPs for pro bono legal assistance from Justice Connect member law firms
- training programs for NFPs delivered face-to-face, including in rural/regional areas
- educational programs for lawyers working with NFPs to assist the legal profession to skilfully advise community organisations.

Not-for-profit Law builds the capacity of NFPs to be better run by helping their volunteers more readily understand and comply with their legal obligations thereby enhancing organisational governance, sustainability and effectiveness. This work helps maximise the use of limited NFP resources for achieving their mission – to help vulnerable people and build more socially inclusive communities. We are building our capacity to expand our service to include

NFPs in other states and RRR areas, including by use of webinars and other on-line tools.

### MOSAIC: Migrant Outreach Service – Advice Information & Community Education program

MOSAIC was established in 2013 to provide free legal support (information, advice, initial assistance, and representation) to disadvantaged and excluded migrant families in inner western Sydney. The service is located at the Metro Migrant Resource Centre in Ashfield. In addition to providing legal support, MOSAIC trains community leaders to provide support into their communities. It also works in close collaboration with a range of migrant service agencies.

MOSAIC was developed in response to a service gap identified by organisational research undertaken in 2011, and confirmed by settlement service providers such as the Metro Migrant Resource Centre and Settlement Council of Australia. The pilot phase of MOSAIC is coming to an end and we are working hard to consolidate and expand this successful program.

### Homeless Law

Homeless Law was established in Melbourne in 2001 to provide free legal assistance and advocacy to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Since its establishment, Homeless Law has assisted over 5000 people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Victoria. Homeless Law offers free legal services on a weekly basis at seven outreach locations around Melbourne and in Geelong. These locations are service provides which are already accessed by people experiencing homelessness.

Homeless Law also has the benefit of a full time social worker who provides clients with assistance with their non-legal needs, including through direct support and referrals. The social worker also works with lawyers to help build their capacity to assist clients with multiple and complex needs.

Our service model has been highly successful, including receiving numerous awards, and has been replicated across Australia.

### Seniors Law

In 2009, Justice Connect established a second outreach clinic in Melbourne, based on the Homeless Law model. **Seniors Law** assists vulnerable older Victorians with legal issues associated with ageing, with a focus on the prevention of, and response to elder abuse. Free legal services are provided by pro bono lawyers from Justice Connect member firms through four pro bono clinics at hospitals and health centres across metropolitan Melbourne.

#### To find out more about Justice Connect

Visit [justiceconnect.org.au](http://justiceconnect.org.au) or contact:

**Fiona McLeay**

Chief Executive Officer

Tel 03 8636 4405

[fiona.mcleay@justiceconnect.org.au](mailto:fiona.mcleay@justiceconnect.org.au)



