

# Annual Report

2018-2019



# Overview

Ballarat & Grampians Community Legal Service (BGCLS) is a not-for-profit organisation providing free legal advice and information to people who live, work or study in the Central Highlands and Wimmera regions of Victoria.

BGCLS participates proactively in collective and individual social justice issues which have an impact on people within the community by providing community development, community legal education, capacity building and law and policy reform projects based on the needs of our community.

BGCLS aims to address the unmet legal need and eliminate barriers to justice which exist for many disadvantaged members of the community. These barriers are reinforced by the high cost of private legal services, the restrictions on Victoria Legal Aid and the complexity of the law.

We actively work in partnership wherever possible, with government, Victoria Legal Aid and other publicly funded legal assistance service providers, pro bono contributors, the private legal profession, community services agencies and other community partners to ensure the best outcomes for their clients and community.

*"The challenge of social justice is to evoke a sense of community that we need to make our nation a better place, just as we make it a safer place." ~ Marian Wright Edelman*

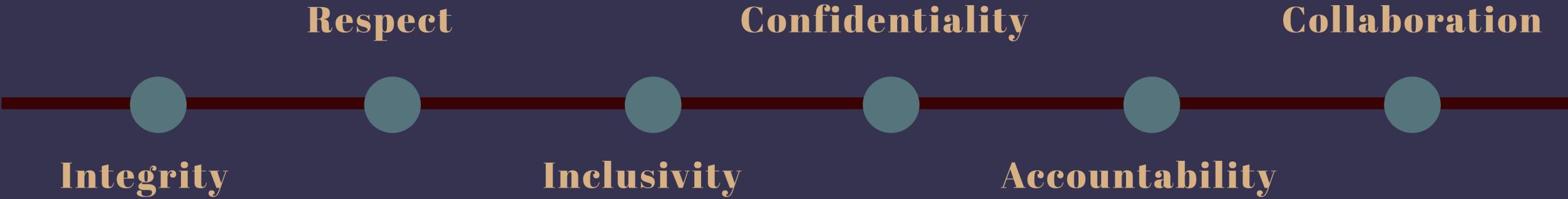
# Our Vision

*Striving for an informed community with access to justice through the law.*

# Our Purpose

*Providing high quality professional legal services, education, support and advocacy to promote inclusion and enhance collaboration.*

# Our Values



# CHAIRPERSON REPORT

The 2018-2019 year was one of change, most evident in the change of identity from Central Highlands Community Legal Centre (CHCLC) to Ballarat & Grampians Community Legal Service. This reflected the broader reach of the service and coincided with the long awaited establishment of new services at 5 Chancery Lane in the heart of the Ballarat CBD. The complexity of change created a range of opportunities and challenges that the staff and volunteers responded to with professionalism and dedication.

Some new opportunities have arisen for staff during the year with a number of role changes including Toni Thomas taking on the role of Principal Lawyer and Jacqui Lawrence as Project and Education Officer. The Team was joined by Bronte Maddaford as Lawyer for the Health Justice Partnership, by Melanie Wyatt as Generalist Lawyer and by Sallie MacDonald and Oskar Sewell-Lane in vital administrative roles. The BGCLS's legal staff have continued to provide a high level of service across diverse areas of law, providing support and assistance that have rightly earned them the respect of the legal profession and the broader community across the Grampians region. Lisa Buckland has continued to provide effective leadership as Centre Manager.

The Committee of Management acknowledges the departure of Alana Boyd who served as secretary through most of the reporting period.

The 2019-2020 year looks to be a sustainable one for the service as it continues to apply its Strategic Plan and exceed the targets of its generous funding sources. Planned expansions in Family Violence court days will present new challenges but it is clear the BGCLS will continue to provide an important suite of services to those in need in the Grampians region.

*Scott Sherritt - Chairperson*

# MANAGER REPORT

This year has been one of enormous transition and change for Ballarat & Grampians Community Legal Service, formerly Central Highlands Community Legal Centre (CHCLC).

In December 2019 after 18 months of building inspections and careful financial planning, CHCLC relocated to 5 Chancery Lane, Ballarat.

This new building provided for a much-needed expansion of space for staff, and a dedicated area for student placements.

Security was an important consideration when designing the fit out of the new reception and client areas and staff and volunteers have welcomed the changes. The new building is in the legal precinct and only a short walk to the local Courts.

Let it never be said that Community Legal Centres shy away from a challenge, as such, we took the opportunity of moving buildings to re-name and re-brand the service to Ballarat & Grampians Community Legal Service (BGCLS).

These substantial changes could not have come together without the time and commitment of the Committee of Management and the enthusiasm of staff to grow our service.

We often don't take the time to express our appreciation for a job well done, so I'd like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to each member of staff; you all do great work and should be proud of the difference you make to clients each and every day.

*Lisa Buckland-Manager*

# PRINCIPAL LAWYER REPORT

In addition to the change of name and building, 2018-2019 saw expansion of our legal services and team.

In collaboration with Grampians Community Health, BGCLS developed a Health Justice Partnership, which allows for expansion of our service into the Grampians and Western Victoria regions. The partnership is based around preventative legal services in order to address problems before they escalate. The partnership has meant that we have been able to develop a family violence duty service at the Horsham Magistrates Court, in addition to the existing family violence services in Ballarat Ararat and Stawell.

We have also had the opportunity to develop a family law duty service for when the Federal Circuit Court sits in Ballarat, this is a service that complements the existing family law duty service provided by Victoria Legal Aid.

Further, we have initiated a partnership with Ballarat City Council/Parent Place to provide legal advice and casework as part of a fortnightly drop in service. This service provides advice in the areas of family law and family violence.

Our team has grown to accommodate these new projects and we welcomed Bronte, Lynne, Melanie, Sallie and Oskar who have all settled in to the team very well.

As always it is a team effort to continue providing our services and reaching our targets each year and I thank all of our staff and Committee for their efforts and look forward to another productive and successful year ahead.

*Toni Thomas - Principal Lawyer*

# OUR STAFF

**Lisa**  
Manager

**Sallie**  
Administration Officer

**Annica**  
Lawyer

**Bronte**  
HJP Lawyer

**Toni**  
Principal Lawyer

**Oskar**  
Reception

**Caleb**  
Lawyer

**Melanie (Absent)**  
Lawyer

**Linda - Administration &  
Book-keeping**

**Lynne**  
Client Advocacy/Support

**Jacqui - Project &  
Education Officer**

**Gillian (Maternity Leave)**  
Lawyer



# OUR CLIENTS

**Our core activities this year were...**



2181

**Total Services**

1164

**Legal Advices**

137

**Legal Tasks**

628

**Duty Lawyer Services**

252

**Casework Services**

# WHO WERE OUR CLIENTS

## Demographics...



\*Priority age is under 25 & 65+

# COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION & LAW REFORM

This year we have had the privilege of engaging with many different groups within the communities that we service. Community Legal Education is an integral part of our vision; ensuring an equal society in which everyone is aware of their rights and has access to justice.

## *Youth*

We continued our crusade to inform and educate our Youth about sexting, bullying & age of consent and the legal impact these things can have on young people. We were also lucky enough to work with the parents at Yuille Park Community College which gave us invaluable insight into the challenges facing their children. We actively sit on both the working group and the panel of the *You The Man* performances that are delivered to Year 10 Students around Ballarat.

## *Life Planning*

Focusing on Wills, Powers of Attorney and Advanced Care Directives, we have a passion for ensuring that our ageing communities understand the impact of these documents and empowering them to take control and make decisions that affect their lives. This year we have ventured outside Ballarat to spread the message and we look forward to visiting even more communities in the year ahead.

## *Law Reform & Advocacy*

BGCLS was one of the member organisations in the *Ballarat Interagency Taskforce on Gambling Harm* promoting a community survey which sought the views of the Ballarat community on gambling. Submissions were also made by former Principal Lawyer, Hilary Russell, on this matter.

*In May 2019 we saw the departure of Jessica Frost-Camilleri who worked tirelessly to inform, educate and increase access to justice across our catchment; we wish her all the best in her future endeavours.*

# OUR PROJECTS

## LGBTQI+ Training: First of its Kind for the Region



Initiated in 2017, this project aimed to reduce stigma, encourage conversations and broaden understanding of the LGBTQI community. The full day training session with the cabaret performance in the middle to break up the day was well received by all participants.

"Extremely well done and pulls on the heart strings. Best event ever attended."

100%

Rated event overall as excellent or very good

97%

Motivated to improve their services response

"...[I learnt] the importance of making sure that as individuals, we do what we can to support the LGBT community, in the hope that collective change will happen!"

# MONITORING & EVALUATION



A word cloud on a teal background featuring various terms used by clients to describe their experiences. The most prominent words are 'helpful', 'friendly', and 'professional'. Other visible words include 'non-judgmental', 'kindness', 'respect', 'empathetic', 'supportive', 'reassurance', 'welcoming', 'knowledgeable', 'compassionate', 'informative', 'quick', 'free support', 'understanding', 'relaxed', 'calm', 'genuine', 'prompt', 'referrals', 'nice', and 'personality'.

Since 2016 BGCLS has engaged in an extensive monitoring and evaluation program. The program aims to gauge the overall success of achieving positive outcomes for clients and validate existing service delivery in achieving best practice.

In the 2018-2019 year we have continued to implement existing measurement tools and monitor the overall experiences of our clients, focusing not only on legal outcomes but overall client wellbeing.



"[I liked] the respect I got instead of being judged"



"Extremely helpful, from someone who had no idea where to start"

# LEGAL SERVICES

## Todd's story...

### Generalist Services

Our legal service evidences meeting community demand by now assisting members of our community whom find themselves charged with summary criminal matters. These clients could not otherwise afford private representation, and risk not being seen by an overburdened duty lawyer service, nor do they have the know how to self-represent.

The public purse also benefits from our assistance, in that it is common for unrepresented people to have their matter adjourned off so that they can obtain legal advice or to obtain supportive documentation. These delays add to the pressures of an already overburdened mention list within the Magistrates Court.

Todd\* presented with obvious mental health issues, however with the added complexities of no formal diagnosis or acknowledgement from the client that this exists. Because of this Todd found himself homeless; couch surfing and sleeping in parks.

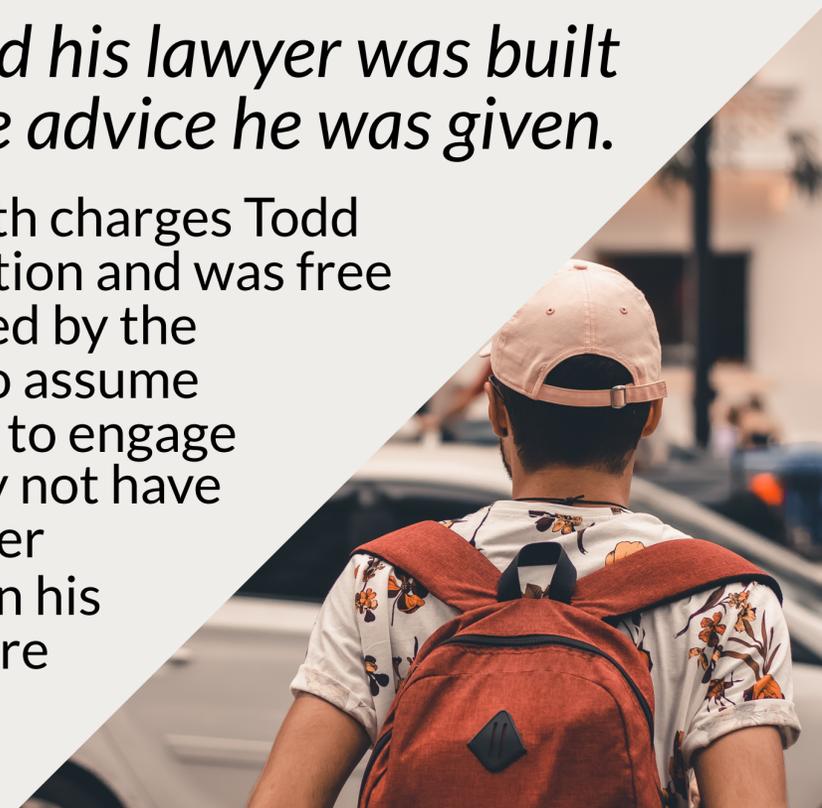
Todd was charged with theft and was subsequently charged with breach of bail after not showing up to the hearing both of which were clearly linked to the complexities in his life.

Upon initial instructions Todd requested our assistance in having the matter adjourned in order to contest the charges. Todd was advised that this was not in his best interests and the likelihood of success was slim.

*A rapport between Todd and his lawyer was built and he was able to trust the advice he was given.*

After entering a plea of guilty to both charges Todd received a nominal fine with conviction and was free to go. But for the assistance provided by the Community Legal Service it is fair to assume that Todd would have been unlikely to engage with other services and would likely not have attended the hearing date; his matter would snowball, ultimately ending in his arrest and detainment at some future date.

\*Case studies have been de-identified



# LEGAL SERVICES

## *Daniel's story....*

### Monthly Clinics

During the 2018/2019 financial year we continued the trial with monthly, area specific clinics for clients requiring assistance with divorce applications, Powers of Attorney and infringements. Whilst these clinics were successful and frequently booked out, it became evident that the wait for clients to see a lawyer was at times too long.

These clinics have therefore been replaced with a fortnightly drop in clinic. This allows clients who either have difficulty with committing to an appointment, or have an urgent matter, to attend on a more flexible basis. For clients wanting a booked time to see one a lawyer, this is still available.

### Prisons

BGCLS has continued to provide essential legal services to individuals currently serving a term of imprisonment at Hopkins and Langi Kal Kal Prisons.

Without our assistance, many of these legal matters would remain unresolved, lessening these individuals' chances of successfully re-integrating within our communities post serving their sentence.

Daniel\* sought our assistance for unfair dismissal and issues with respect to having their qualifications recognised up to the point of dismissal. Daniel has a disability that impacted on their capacity to deal with these issues on their own.

Daniel was feeling lost and overwhelmed.

We were able to assist Daniel to prepare for the conciliation conference and attend with them in an effort to decrease their anxieties.

Negotiations between the parties resulted in an agreement being reached. Daniel's previous employer agreed to pay out the notice period and provided them with both a letter of reference, and confirmation that a portion of the practical component of their qualification had been completed.

\*Case studies have been de-identified



# LEGAL SERVICES

## Angie's story...

### Family Violence

Our lawyers have continued to assist as duty lawyers in the Ballarat Magistrates' Court each Tuesday and Wednesday.

Due to the volume of Applications for Family Violence Intervention Orders the Court has been sitting additional days to ensure peoples safety is made paramount and their matters are dealt with in a timely manner; the importance of which was illustrated in Angie's story.

Our lawyers have assisted on these additional days to assist the Court to ensure matters are not adjourned due to parties being unable to receive legal advice.

We have also continued to provide Duty Lawyer services in Ararat & Stawell and with the addition of the Health Justice Partnership, this assistance now extends to Horsham Magistrates Court.

As a White Ribbon Accredited service, we understand the importance of continuing to provide these vital response services.

Angie\* lived in fear of her safety and her family's safety after witnessing the devastating effects that Tyler's behaviour had caused for her extended family.

After summoning the courage to apply for an intervention order Angie was told that her application lacked any real proof of family violence; she was given a delayed court date and no provision for an interim order as her matter was not deemed serious enough. Angie felt her situation was being minimised and had little hope of being supported at her future court date.

The court date came around and she was given the option to talk to the Duty Lawyer from our office. Having had such a negative experience in the beginning Angie was reluctant to continue with the application through fear of repercussion; but with the advice and support of the Duty Lawyer, she was able to prove to the Magistrate that both her and her family had been exposed to serious family violence and Tyler's behaviour was likely to continue if an order was not granted. A final order was granted for an extended period of time. Angie was incredibly grateful for our assistance:

"Your highly competent, caring and supportive approach on the day was outstanding" - Angie\*

\*Case studies have been de-identified



# COMPASS PROGRAM

The Compass program was designed to assist clients to connect with, and navigate, support services.

The Client Support and Advocacy Officer provided non-legal advice and assistance to 30 clients throughout the 2018-2019 financial year. Clients were assisted with a range of issues including family violence support, safety planning, and government pensions and disability support. Clients are case managed in collaboration with the Lawyers at BGCLS.



**Priority age\***

**14**



**Experiencing financial disadvantage**

**29**



**Identified as having a disability**

**7**



**Experiencing family violence**

**12**

\*under 25, 65+

# WORKING TOGETHER

The COMPASS program was implemented as a collaborative model of case management between legal and non-legal staff providing a holistic, wrap around service for clients. The program has fostered practice change within our legal services and improved overall outcomes and well being for our clients.

## *Ivy's story....*

Ivy has been married for 16 years and has two teenage children. Mike has always been the main bread winner and is well respected within his profession. Ivy has been subjected to verbal and emotional abuse for the entire marriage, the fear of the unknown always stopped her from leaving.

Ivy worked on a casual basis and knew that there was a lot to consider both financially and emotionally before making the decision to leave. Ivy had always remained private about her marital problems, but after the last incident she confided in her manager at work who advised her to seek legal advice.

Ivy acted on the advice of her manager and had an appointment with one of the lawyers at BGCLS and from there a referral was made to the COMPASS program. Together Lynne and Ivy were able to adapt a safety plan, considering things like technology and keeping important documents in a safe space away from the home.

After engaging with the COMPASS program, Ivy gained the confidence to confide in her parents who immediately offered financial assistance if needed and was able to come to an agreement with her Manager for permanent shifts.



# GRAMPIANS HEALTH JUSTICE PROGRAM

The Health Justice Partnership is a collaboration between the Ballarat & Grampians Community Legal Service and Grampians Community Health. The HJP allows a Lawyer to become immersed in the day to day functions of a Community Health Service, providing services to clients in the Grampians Region. In the 2018-2019 financial year, over 94% of Grampians Community Health workers identified improved experiences for their clients as a result of the program.



**Number of  
Clients**

**154**



**Experiencing  
financial  
disadvantage**

**131**



**Identified as having  
a disability or  
mental illness**

**40**



**Experiencing  
family violence**

**105**

# CLIENT STORY

## *Mia's story....*

Mia, a single mother of three, met Adam online. A short time after Adam moved into Mia's home, they married and Mia fell pregnant.

Adam convinced Mia to start a business as a sole trader, in her name alone, assuring her this was in her best interests as if they ever broke up she would have security.

With a 4 month old baby in her arms and 3 other children occupying Mia's thoughts, she recalls the agents from the credit company attending her home and having her sign forms they had filled out on her behalf.

**“I don't understand these things; my husband has had business with you before”.**

After the birth of their second child Adam began to get violent and eventually Adam ceased all contact with both Mia and his children. Adam had stripped Mia of her confidence and manipulated her into thinking she was to blame.

Four years had passed since Adam had left and Mia was served with numerous debt recovery notices totaling over \$30,000. Fearful she would lose her home, Mia ignored the notices.

A year later Mia presented at the Legal Service after being served with a Statement of Claim from the debt agency totaling almost \$20,000. Despite being a single mother to five school aged children and only having casual employment, Mia was not judgement proof as she owned her home.

After negotiations with the debt agency, it was agreed that the final debt would be reduced to 25% of the judgement amount and Mia could finalise the debt through a payment plan.



# HIGHLIGHTS OF 2018-2019



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New  
Values  
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Our Vision

Striving for an informed community  
with access to justice through the  
law.

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New  
Vision  
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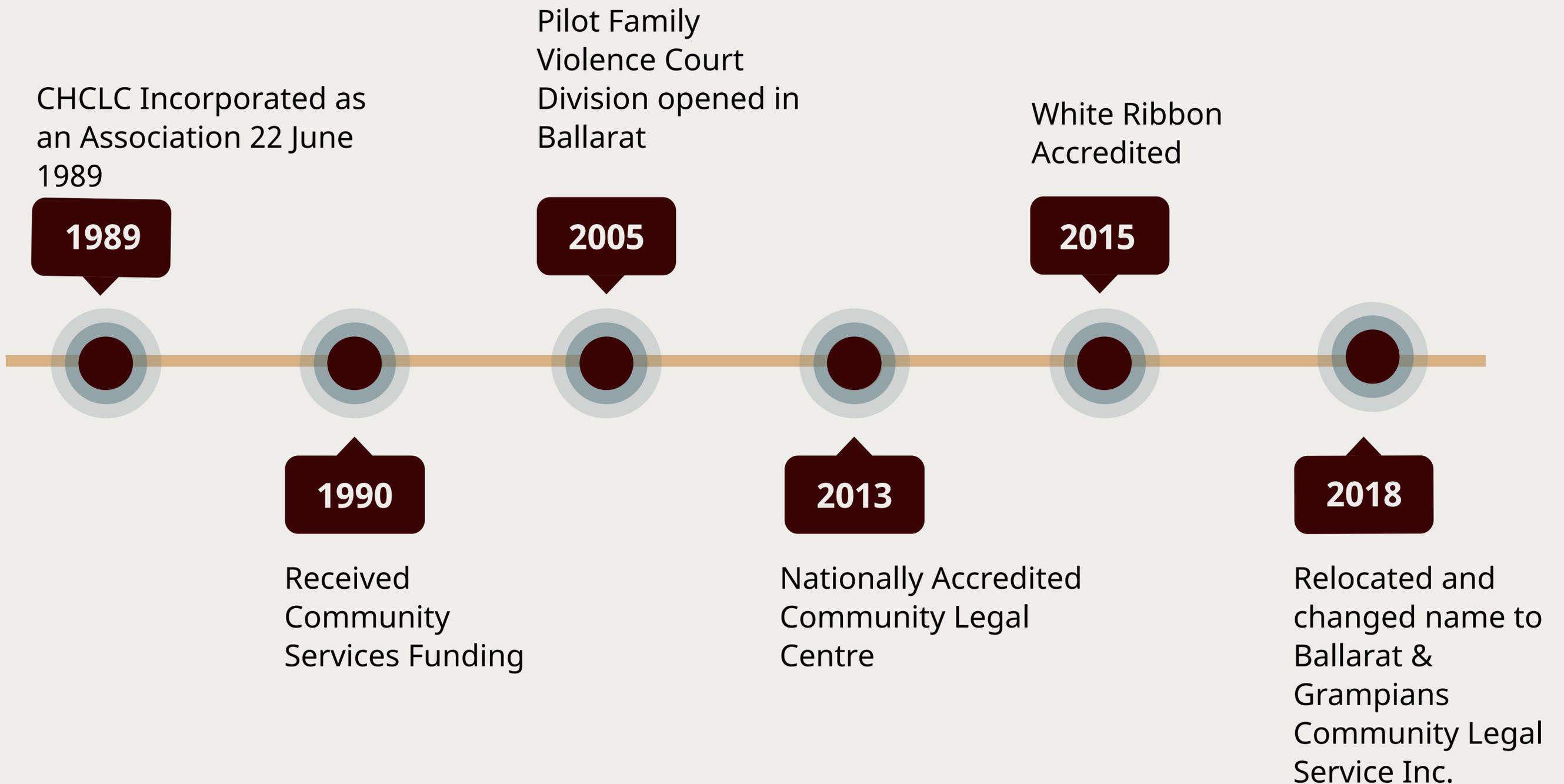
**BALLARAT &  
GRAMPIANS  
COMMUNITY  
LEGAL SERVICE**

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New  
Name  
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New  
Office  
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# CELEBRATING 30 YEARS



# VOLUNTEER & PRO-BONO SUPPORT

*No opportunity should be missed to highlight the important role of volunteers.*

BGCLS relies on volunteers, pro-bono lawyers and in-kind support to extend and enhance its services beyond its funded capacity.

Thank you to all of our wonderful volunteers and private law firms who have supported BGCLS and its clients this year.



*"Pro-bono is one of the most potent weapons in access to Justice"*

*-Supreme Court Justice  
Bernard Goodwyn*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ballarat & Grampians Community Legal Service gratefully acknowledge core funding and support provided by the Federal Attorney General and State Government which is administered by Victoria Legal Aid, as well as non core project funding provided by The Department of Justice and Community Safety.

BGCLS would like to acknowledge all of the stakeholders, partners and networks upon whom we rely on for engagement, referrals and collaborative projects.

*"A true architect is not an artist but an optimistic realist. They take a diverse number of stakeholders, extract needs, concerns, and dreams, then create a beautiful yet tangible solution that is loved by the users and the community at large. We create vessels in which life happens." ~ Cameron Sinclair*

# PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN INITIATIVES

*BGCLS is a proud CoRE Alliance member.*

The following information from Women's Health Grampians explains the program.

"The *Communities of Respect and Equality Alliance* is a partnership for organisations, businesses, clubs, groups and networks from across the Grampians Region that share a vision for safe, equal and respectful communities. All member organisations have committed to the vision and goals outlined in the *Communities of Respect and Equality: A plan to prevent violence against women and their children.*"



## **White Ribbon Accreditation**

*The Workplace Accreditation Program recognises workplaces that are taking active steps to prevent and respond to violence against women, accrediting them as a White Ribbon Workplace.*

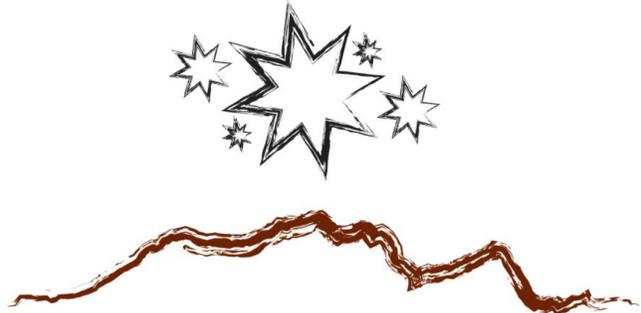
During the 2018-2019 year we maintained our accreditation as a White Ribbon Workplace. BGCLS continues to actively review our policies, procedures and strategic direction with a preventative lens.



# OUR COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT



From left to right: Scott Sherritt, Stephanie Carter, Bianca Anstis & Dianne Hadden



**BALLARAT & GRAMPIANS  
COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE**

## CONTACT US:

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Opening Hours: Mon - Fri 9am - 5pm  
 Wednesday Evening by Appointment

ACN: AOO18716c  
 ABN: 64 680 414 789



*Striving for an informed  
community with access to justice  
through the law.*



BGCLS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the region we service, their diversity, histories and knowledge and their continuing connections to land, water and community. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their Elders past, present and emerging.



BGCLS is committed to providing safe and inclusive legal and community services.

Proud to be part of:

