

fairer and better lives

Justice Connect's strategy



introduction

Since Justice Connect began life in 1992, we have been at the forefront of building a culture where structured, collaborative pro bono work has become integral to the professional responsibility of every lawyer.

Over 25 years, Justice Connect has grown, and it has changed. But we have always been focused on the people and the community organisations we help.

We have had more and more impact, helping people access a system they have been locked out of or lost in, and by challenging and changing unfair laws.

We have long been leaders in integrating legal help into the broader social justice movement, using legal skills and the legal system to solve social problems.

The need for our help continues to grow. Government funding fails to keep pace with growing demand. More of the same will not be enough.

We've reviewed our strategy to ensure we remain relevant, sustainable and effective into the future.

We have drawn on our past successes, and the energy and vision of those who have been a part of Justice Connect for 25 years.

We've also envisioned new and better ways to work, and how we can have a greater impact.

This strategy is how we will build a fairer and more just world. It adds to what we do well, and points us to what we can do better for even more people.



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fairer and better lives

why we exist



Everybody deserves a fair chance at a better life.

This means a world that is just and fair; where systems are accessible by everyone and accountable to everyone, where people's rights are respected and advanced, and laws are applied fairly to all.

We know that many of life's problems often have legal solutions, but that too many people are locked out of the justice system, or lost inside it.

It could be a single parent unfairly evicted from public housing with no way of challenging the decision, an older person whose child has sold their home without their permission, or a local refugee support group lost in a sea of red tape.

Ensuring these people get access to legal help is crucial in building a more just world.

We use the law and the skills of lawyers to help people solve these life problems. To help navigate a complex system. To build a community of strong social justice organisations and to make the system fairer for everyone.

We do this in partnership with the wider legal, social service, and social justice sectors.

The people we help – and their stories – are at the centre of everything we do. We engage them both as users of our service and as active contributors to our work.

They are central to our work challenging and changing laws, as well as to service innovation and improvement.

This focus enhances our direct services, and our organisational presence and impact.

We believe in lawyers working for the social good. Working with us helps to broaden lawyers' worldview, and can weave them into a movement of people seeking fairer and more just outcomes.



THE SHORT STORY

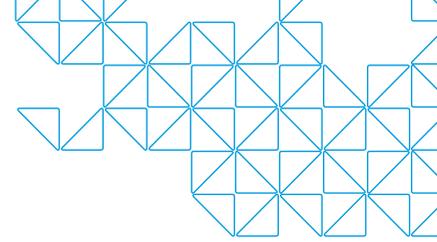
what we do - we're about impact

In all our work, we aim to make a positive impact on people's lives. This means building a fairer and more just world, where everyone has a fair chance at a better life.

We believe in measuring our impact, so we can understand how we are working, whether that work is truly effective, and where improvements can be made.

We have an impact in three ways:

- **Legal help** – connecting people locked out of the system, or lost in it with free legal help, directly from our team, or from barristers and lawyers from our partner law firms
- **Empowering people and communities** – by giving people and community groups the tools they need, we can help them navigate the legal system themselves. This makes them stronger. It allows us to focus on those who most need more intensive help
- **Challenging and changing unfair laws and systems** – unfair laws, policies, practices and perceptions can lock people out from accessing justice or making it unnecessarily confusing or stressful. By challenging and changing these laws and systems, we can have a real impact on the lives of the people we help.



how we work

We have five ways of working – our strategic approach:

1. **We collaborate**
2. **We reach out to meet need**
3. **We innovate**
4. **We follow the evidence**
5. **We learn and improve**

what we value

- ✓ **Passionate commitment** - we get out of bed every day because we want to make a difference
- ✓ **Practical professionalism** - we hold ourselves to the highest standards of professional practice, driven by the pursuit of practical outcomes for our clients
- ✓ **Generous collaboration** – sharing what we know and looking to work with others in all we do
- ✓ **Creative responses** – to find new solutions and to continually refine and improve what we know works

how we're organised

We are characterised by:

- a team of confident, energetic and creative people, who are supported to bring their passion and creativity to their work
- an adaptive organisational nature
- a commitment to learning and innovation in all aspects of our work
- an organisational size and structure, with processes that support us to be responsive and nimble funding that allows us to be creative and is connected to impact, not outputs
- We are clear about our destination, and creative about how we get there.

fairer and better lives

Justice Connect's strategy

how we work for impact

we reach out

We meet people where they live, to better provide them with the help they need.

we collaborate

We work with the right people and organisations to make an impact.

we learn and improve

We measure our own impact, we share our knowledge, and we work closely with the people we help.

we follow the evidence

We do what works. Based on the experience of our clients and analysis of our impact, we scale up existing projects or test new ideas.

we innovate

We value creative responses to entrenched problems. We embrace change to increase impact.

what we do for impact

legal help

We connect the people we serve with the help they need.

challenging and changing unfair laws

Unfair laws can lock people out from accessing justice. We work to change those laws and systems.

empowering people & communities

By giving people and community groups the tools they need, we can help them navigate a complicated system themselves.

what we're about

impact

We help as many people as possible, and we help each individual we can, as best we can.

what we value

passionate commitment

We get out of bed every day because we want to make a difference

practical professionalism

We hold ourselves to the highest standards, driven by the the desire to make an impact

generous collaboration

We share what we know and seek to work with others in all we do

creative responses

We find new solutions and to continually refine and improve what we know works



THE LONGER STORY

of what we do and how we work

we're about impact

We exist to give people a fair chance at a better life, and to build a fairer and more just world. This is what impact looks like.

When we meet people who in a moment of crisis and vulnerability, we provide them with intensive support to ensure they get a fair chance at a better life.

When we build self-help tools, we empower people to find their own way in the legal system. And when we change an unfair law, it can help thousands of people affected by that law.

what we do to make an impact

We connect people with the legal help they need

Life's problems often have legal solutions, yet millions of Australians either lack the resources to access legal help, or don't even know where to start. We connect them with free legal help.

We have deep, strong partnerships with Australia's best law firms and barristers, and harness their volunteer work to help people access justice.

We engage lawyers to solve social problems using the law. Our partnerships go beyond harnessing their legal skills. Working with us helps to broaden their worldview, and can weave them into a movement of people seeking a fairer and more just world.

We also offer free legal help ourselves, to people and community groups who need it, through our broad range of services.

better lives through better partnerships

Life's problems so often have legal solutions. Unfortunately, many people don't realise that a lawyer can help, or don't think they can afford one.

When someone has a problem like homelessness, or debt, or a violent family member, they probably don't think their problem is a legal one.

To them, the problem may be "I have no money, no house and no one to care for me" or "I'm scared to go home, but I also don't want to go into care".

That's why our Seniors Law team started our Health Justice Partnerships.

Many victims of elder abuse won't go to a lawyer, but will talk to a doctor.

By embedding a lawyer at cohealth, a community health service with several sites across inner Melbourne, we can be available to people who need help, and we can train healthcare workers to spot the signs.

This is an example of **innovative** thinking, supported by the **evidence**, leading to a **partnership** model which allows us to **reach out** and find people we help. We also empower healthcare workers while providing vital legal help.

Connecting people locked out of the justice system with legal help was the reason Justice Connect was founded in 1992.

In 2017, across all of our teams, we are providing legal information, advice and representation to over 6,600 people a year - and growing.

People like Mohammad, whose mother died while visiting from abroad. Then, while he was mourning, Mohammad found himself burdened with over \$30,000 in bills he had not been told about.

By connecting him with free legal help from a partner firm, much of that was waived, letting him get on with his life.

what we do to make an impact (cont)

We empower people and communities

We give people and not-for-profit community groups information and tools and skills to empower them to navigate the law.

This not only helps these people and groups. It builds knowledge, awareness and capacity which ripples out into the community, creating a virtuous cycle with people and community groups better prepared to navigate the legal system.

Our Not-for-profit Law Information Hub was accessed over 300,000 times last year by local organisations that are out there, working in the community.

Groups like Welcome to Eltham, which went from zero to 8,000 supporters almost overnight.

We offered them the skills they needed to grow, raise money and expand their work. In doing so we gave them the power and the capacity to do what they wanted - welcome new asylum seekers into their community, rather than navigate a complicated system without a map.

We challenge and change unfair laws and systems

Many laws, policies, practices and perceptions make it more difficult for people to access justice.

Changing these systems often has the greatest impact.

We work for change, in partnership with the legal, social service and social justice sectors.

We tell the stories of people locked out of the system – the people we help – and develop policy proposals that will help them get a fair chance.

We build connections across our services, and between us and our partners and supporters, creating a 'justice movement'.

Through the power of these connections and these stories, we make change where it matters.

When the City of Melbourne wanted to change laws to effectively ban homelessness in the CBD, our Homeless Law team jumped into action.

Working with the social justice sector and the Council, we made the case in private and public that this would only hurt people already in a vulnerable moment in their lives.

Today, the Council has announced it will not pursue its planned changes.

"IMPACT"

When Justice Connect speaks of "impact" we mean the differences in people's lives and civil society that result from our work. Impact includes the realisation of people's rights, improvements in their mental, physical and economic well-being, and the freeing up of the not-for-profit community to fulfil its missions.

We measure our impact

We are committed to measuring, demonstrating and replicating our impact.

We embrace incremental innovation and continuous improvement as being vital to our impact.

We pioneered impact measurement in the legal assistance sector through monitoring and evaluation underpinning our theory of change.

We use the theory of change to monitor our work, evaluate our impact and improve what we do.

By setting measures to monitor our progress, we are better able to understand how our programs work, where improvements can be made and to report on outcomes and impacts, not just outputs.

The questions which are central to this approach are:

- What is the change we are seeking?
- How will that change happen?
- What is our contribution to this change?
- How will we know if we have done this?

We produce our Impact Report each year to demonstrate the impact we make, and to ensure we are constantly building an evidence base to assess ourselves against.

how we work to have an impact

At Justice Connect, we aim to have impact. We exist to give people a fair chance at a better life, and to build a fairer and more just world. These are the ways we work when providing legal help, empowering people and communities, and challenging and changing unfair laws.

We collaborate

Our desire and ability to collaborate and partner is one of our key strengths. We are part of a broad and effective network, helping us connect people with the help they need and making us even better at our work.

We work with legal, social service and social justice organisations because we know this is how impact is achieved. This also helps us to better influence system change in the broader social service sector.



We reach out to meet need

Life's problems often have legal solutions, yet half of all Australians who have a legal problem never speak to a lawyer. People find themselves locked outside the system, or lost within it.

We believe an outward facing posture is the best way to engage the people who need help.

We reach out to people in their communities, and through our partners, to give them the right help at the right time.

We follow the evidence

Our work is centred in our evidence. This may mean developing new ways of working, or doing more of what we know works. Either way, this is based on the experience of our clients and analysis of the outcome of our work.

We challenge and change unjust laws when our research, experience and the data suggest those laws are not effective or fair.

We will continue to test our own impact against the best available evidence and research.

We are not afraid to change course if the evidence shows we can help more people in a different way.

We learn and improve

We learn and improve by continually evaluating our own impact, sharing our knowledge and engaging closely with the people we help.

We also improve by focusing on the growth and development of our people.

We ensure that our people are always gaining skills which contribute to our impact, and bring in new people with new skills who will help us be even more effective.

We innovate

Injustice abounds. There is more demand for Justice Connect's services than ever before. This means there are new ideas yet to be developed which will have a real impact, and we are determined to find them.

We value creative responses to entrenched problems. In a rapidly changing environment, we embrace change to increase impact.

We are not afraid of disruption. We are adaptive in the way we work, bringing the right skills to bear at the right time and on the right project.

We're here and always will strive to be a centre of excellence in the way that the law and lawyers can help people and contribute to social justice.

We will continue to incubate new programs and push the boundaries in pursuit of a fairer and more just world.



