



Under One Roof

Three year snapshot

justice 
connect
fairer and better lives

Since 2015, our Under One Roof project has brought together experts across housing, social work, healthcare and the law to provide people with the holistic support they need to avoid or exit homelessness.

What is Under One Roof?

Under One Roof began as an innovative project of Justice Connect's Homeless Law service (Justice Connect) in 2015, co-locating a lawyer at Launch Housing (Launch) in St Kilda one day per week to genuinely deepen our connections with the housing, health and homelessness workers on site.

Under One Roof has been recognised by the Law Council of Australia's 2018 Justice Project report and the Victorian Government's 2016 Access to Justice Review as a best-practice model for people who are homeless or on the brink of homelessness. The project showcases holistic legal and non-legal practices working together to secure long term and sustainable outcomes for clients.

Helping Victorians who would otherwise slip through the cracks

Justice Connect recognises that homelessness inadvertently brings people into contact with the law, and that legal problems also create barriers to people accessing safe housing and exiting homelessness. In three years of Under One Roof, we received 210 enquiries and delivered face-to-face advice, tailored legal information and ongoing legal representation to homeless or at risk Victorians.

We have worked closely with the rough sleeping outreach workers at Launch to connect with this isolated and complex cohort, including going on outreach with the Rough Sleepers Initiative workers to speak with hard to reach clients and take the first steps to address their legal problems.

Under One Roof has also enhanced relationships with frontline homelessness agencies and caseworkers, delivering tailored legal information, education and referral pathways. The value of this work is seen through the 25% increase in enquiries between our first and third year of co-location.

Making a real impact for the most vulnerable through strategic partnerships

We have come together to form one powerful voice in calling for changes to unfair laws that place a heavy burden on our clients experiencing or at risk of homelessness, particularly around the regulation of public space.

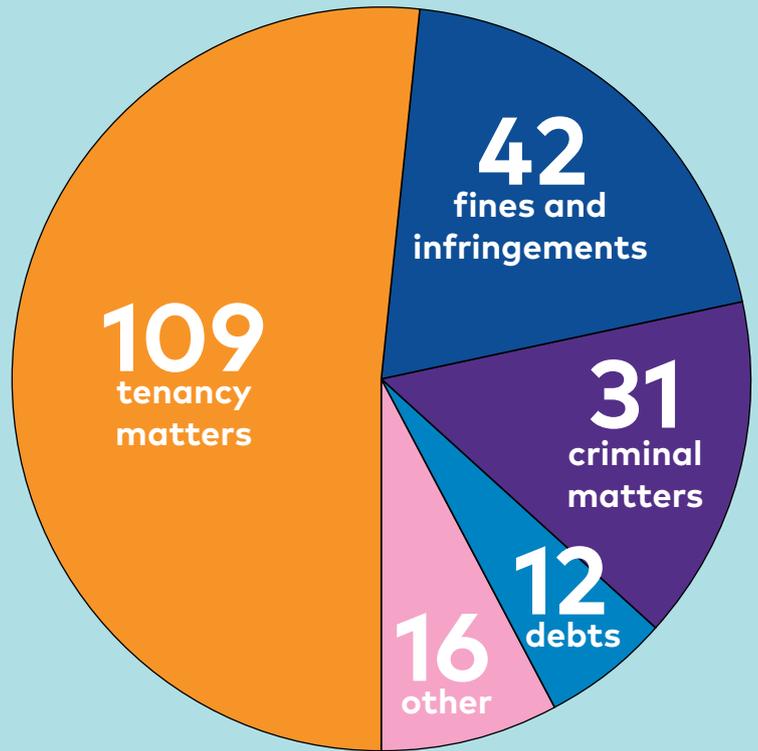
Our integral partnerships with Launch, cohealth and cross-sector allies joining to campaign for our Proposed Framework for Responding Effectively to Homelessness in the Melbourne CBD, successfully resulted in the City of Melbourne dropping proposed changes to local laws that would have effectively criminalised rough sleeping.

We have also leveraged our presence in Melbourne's metro-south to create strong connections and referral pathways with other local community services, particularly with Sacred Heart Mission's Journey to Social Inclusion (J2SI) program, which is delivering Victoria's first Social Impact Bond.



UNDER ONE ROOF

Here's a breakdown of some of the successes we've had over the past three years of our Under One Roof project:



We received **210** enquiries over three years

Of these, **128** were booked into ongoing legal help

42 were referred to other free legal services

and **39** received secondary consultations and support.

25%
increase in referrals between the first and third year of the project



and we've had a **50%** increase in referrals to our criminal lawyer

91% of case-workers believed that their clients achieved better outcomes due to seeking legal help through the co-location

88% of case-workers said that having a lawyer onsite increased their knowledge of legal issues affecting clients

88% of case-workers are more confident asking clients about legal issues because of the co-location

Connie's story

Connie, an Aboriginal single-mother of three experiencing discrimination, avoids eviction from public housing

Connie is an Aboriginal woman and the sole parent of three children in a Victorian Office of Housing (OOH) property.

One of Connie's children is hearing impaired, and the other two have mental and physical health issues, which cause them to express their emotions more loudly.

The OOH had obtained a compliance order against Connie, requiring her to prevent her children from making noise at a 'loud level audible to neighbours'.

A neighbour had been regularly abusing Connie on the basis of her Aboriginality and complaining about Connie and her children to the OOH. However, Connie was reluctant to report any incidents to the police, particularly due to intergenerational trauma.

Launch referred Connie to Homeless Law when she was facing eviction for allegedly breaching the compliance order.

Through Justice Connect's strong and continued negotiations, including based on the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, the eviction proceedings were withdrawn and a transfer to another public housing property was secured for Connie and her children.

Connie has expressed her immense relief that she and her children have avoided homelessness and are now able to live safely and free from their former neighbour's discriminatory behaviour.

*Connie's name has been changed.





"The co-location enables much smoother referral for representation for clients. [It] makes clients more trusting of lawyers if they're in the Launch office."

Launch Housing Caseworker

"Co-located and reintegrated models in particular create informal opportunities to develop strong trust-based relationships, to build mutual understanding of professional roles, and to gain interdisciplinary knowledge and skillsets."

The Law Council of Australia

"Justice Connect Homeless Law is the leader in the legal assistance sector in developing innovative models and new partnerships to meet the legal and non-legal needs of people experiencing homelessness. They are renowned for providing leadership in advocacy around the laws and regulations impacting those experiencing homelessness."

2017 Victorian Homelessness Achievement Awards for Excellence in Ending Homelessness for Adults

Three years of impact

Since 2015, Under One Roof has strengthened and consolidated the partnership between Justice Connect and Launch.

We have achieved joint-successes in helping Victorians experiencing or at risk of homelessness to secure holistic legal outcomes and we have collectively created a fairer and stronger community by influencing systemic change.

Through the project, Homeless Law has developed clearer pathways into legal services for clients who would otherwise face significant barriers to navigating the justice system.

Our detailed report, *Under One Roof: Three years of embedding legal services to make justice accessible for homeless clients*, evaluates the impact of our co-location model by analysing 210 referrals and outcomes, drawing on direct feedback from 21 Launch caseworkers, and sharing seven client stories.



Future directions

Building on the success of Under One Roof

Based on the evidence-based impact of our integrated practice model we will seek to create embedded partnerships with more community-based homelessness and health locations across Melbourne.

We will broaden our civil and criminal legal service impact and reach through innovative collaborations with Launch and cohealth.

In particular, we aim to:

- Deliver civil and criminal legal representation and social work support to Victorians experiencing at risk of homelessness, including through the co-location of Justice Connect staff at new Launch and cohealth sites.
- Train and resource homelessness, community and health workers to identify legal issues early, and support clients to seek help to resolve them.

- Embed specialist lawyers with the Launch Rough Sleepers Initiative team, and in cohealth's wrap-around health and social services. In this way we will support highly complex, isolated and homeless Victorians, addressing legal issues to improve access to safe and affordable housing.
- Create an empowerment and awareness-raising program around legal and human rights for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and their support workers.
- Undertake evidence-based evaluation and advocacy to improve service delivery processes, justice system accessibility and housing outcomes.

In providing intensive and holistic legal services to the hardest to reach Victorians, who would otherwise fall through the gaps of the justice system, Under One Roof is well-placed to collaboratively create safer and better lives for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Steve's story

Steve, a rough sleeper with cognitive impairment has \$8500 worth of fines withdrawn

Steve* was sleeping rough when his Launch Housing assertive outreach caseworker engaged him with Justice Connect service for help with his fines.

Steve had around 20 infringement warrants and 5 open court fines, totalling about \$8500, which mainly related to public transport offences incurred while he was homeless.

Steve had been experiencing homelessness since around 2007, sleeping rough, and moving in-and-out of a number of crisis accommodation properties and rooming houses.

Steve has significant complexities, including cognitive impairment caused by a head injury and trauma suffered as a child, long-term substance dependence issues and illiteracy.

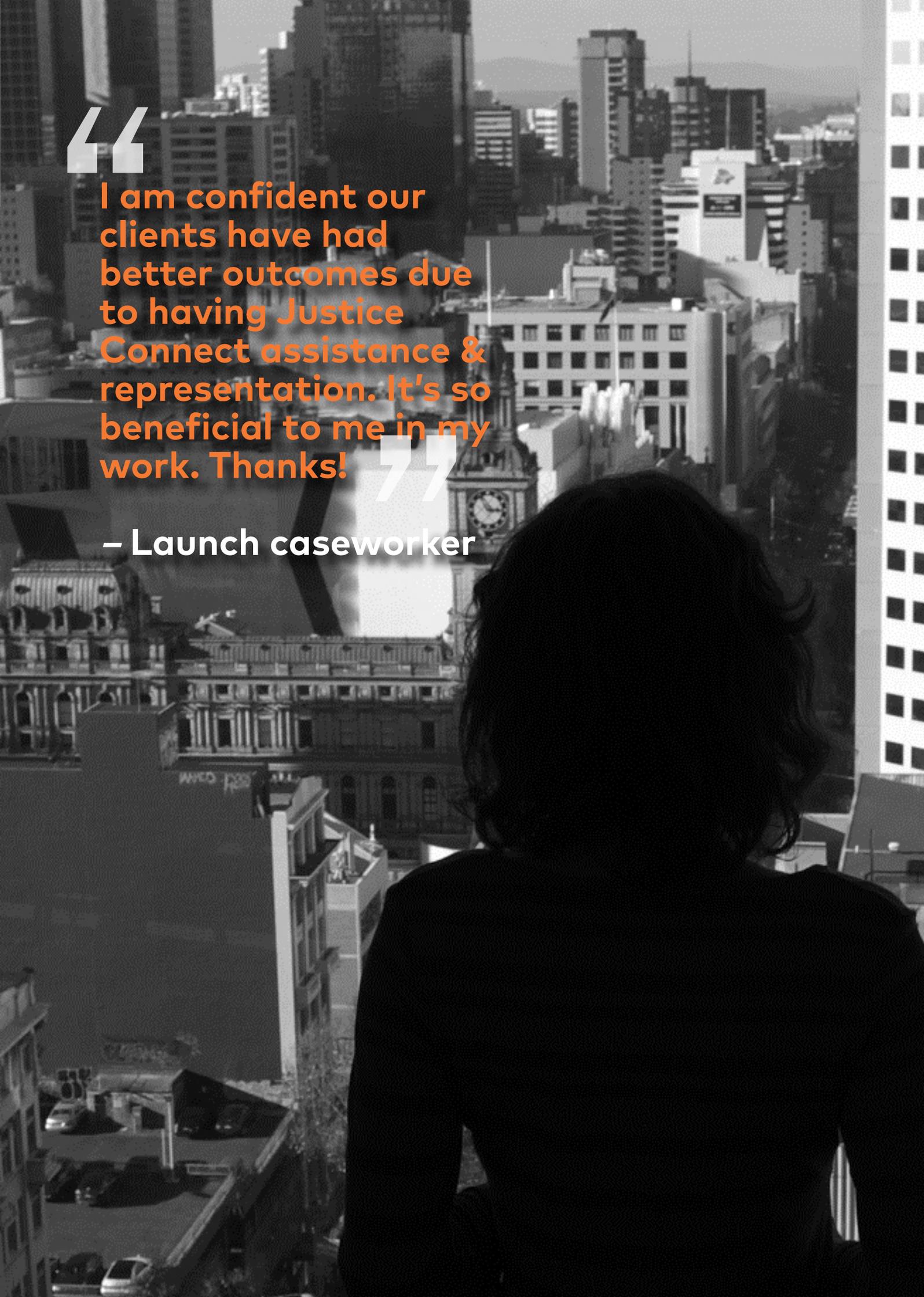
Justice Connect's lawyers made an application for review of his fines based on his special circumstances. The application was successful and the Magistrates' Court dismissed all of Steve's infringements unconditionally.

Justice Connect also helped Steve to deal with his court fines by converting them to community work, which he sees as an opportunity to re-engage with his community.

Since connecting with Justice Connect, Steve has exited homelessness into a public housing property. This stability has allowed Steve to focus on his health recovery and also progress reunifying with his young daughter, who had been in state care.

*Steve's name has been changed.



A black and white photograph of a city skyline, likely San Francisco, viewed from an elevated position. In the foreground, the dark silhouette of a person with shoulder-length hair is seen from behind, looking out over the city. The city features a mix of modern high-rise buildings and older, classical-style architecture. A prominent clock tower is visible in the middle ground. The sky is clear, and the overall atmosphere is one of a panoramic urban view.

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I am confident our clients have had better outcomes due to having Justice Connect assistance & representation. It's so beneficial to me in my work. Thanks! ”

– Launch caseworker

Contact

Cameron Lavery

Manager and principal lawyer, Homeless Law

cameron.lavery@justiceconnect.org.au
+61 3 8636 4412

Samantha Sowerwine

Principal lawyer, Homeless Law

samantha.sowerwine@justiceconnect.org.au
+61 3 8636 4470

Katie Ho

Senior project lawyer, Homeless Law

katie.ho@justiceconnect.org.au
+61 3 8636 4431



Funding and partnerships

Justice Connect takes this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to the Portland House Foundation for its generous and visionary funding of the first three years of Under One Roof.

This significant support has enabled Justice Connect to create innovative responses and extend our reach by pioneering new ways of responding to the legal needs of Victorians who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

We would also like to thank our key project partner, Launch Housing, for their valuable and ongoing collaboration in delivering this co-location project. It is a privilege to work side-by-side in improving and making a difference in the lives of our mutual clients.

ABN | 54 206 789 276
justiceconnect.org.au