

Under One Roof

12 months of increased access
to holistic legal services for
homeless or at risk Victorians



May 2020

ABOUT THE PROJECT

What is Under One Roof?

Since 2015, Under One Roof has been central to Justice Connect Homeless Law's (Justice Connect) multi-disciplinary, integrated legal services. Through innovative co-locations and targeted outreach with our key community-based partners, the Project provides an intensive combination of legal and social work assistance to some of Victoria's most vulnerable community members, who are otherwise likely to fall through the cracks.

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 experiencing or at risk of homelessness, the Project demonstrates the preventative impact of holistic legal and non-legal practices.

This year, we received 147 new legal enquiries through Under One Roof, representing a 137% increase from the Project's first year in 2015. Of these, 50% were provided ongoing holistic legal casework, 22% received tailored legal referrals, and 18% received specialised secondary consultations.

Building on Project learnings, we also recently completed our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Gender Diverse, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) Scoping Study, focusing on the delivery of culturally safe and accessible legal help to homeless or at risk Victorians who identify as LGBTIQ.

Connecting with more rough sleepers

People sleeping rough are more likely to come into contact with the law, but are less likely to seek help or be equipped to navigate the justice system. Recognising the importance of creating better access to legal help, we delivered the Rough Sleepers Outreach Pilot to gain a better understanding of the legal needs and barriers to seeking legal help faced by rough sleepers.

This flexible approach to service delivery enabled us to engage with more people who were sleeping rough than ever before, with the majority of them struggling with complex vulnerabilities including mental health issues and substance dependence. Due to this work, we received a 312% increase of new legal enquiries from rough sleepers this year, compared to the first year of the Project. By extending our outreach model and working more deeply with our longstanding Project partner, Launch Housing, we were able to increase our reach and impact for highly marginalised and isolated Victorians.



Creating stronger strategic partnerships

Over the last year, the significant increase in new legal enquiries clearly reflects the strength and growth of our strategic community-based partnerships.

Drawing on the success of our Launch Housing co-location at St Kilda, where a lawyer is embedded one day a week to provide wrap-around legal advice, secondary consultations and referrals, we have expanded our co-location to Launch Housing at Collingwood. This has allowed us to genuinely deepen our partnership and provide greater access to legal help for people facing housing insecurity, and the frontline community workers who support them.

Due to the ongoing success of our work with Sacred Heart Mission's Journey to Social Inclusion Program, which provides long-term assistance based on a housing-first model to people experiencing chronic homelessness, we have also expanded the Project's embedded partnerships to include Sacred Heart Mission's Greenlight Program. This has ensured that we can provide more legal and social work assistance to Victorians with complex and inter-connected needs, addressing their legal issues before crisis point and helping them to access or maintain safe housing.

Consolidating our impactful partnership with cohealth at Central City Community Health Service, we have also started an outreach legal clinic with cohealth at Footscray, particularly supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, and people who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

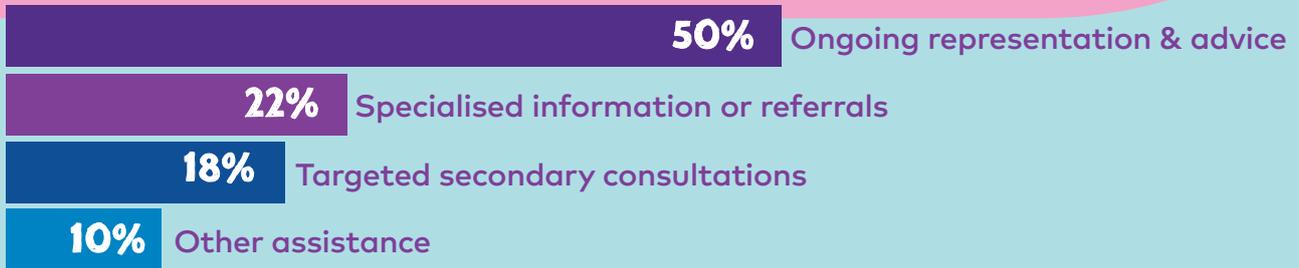
UNDER ONE ROOF

12 months of increased access to holistic services for homeless or at-risk Victorians

We provided wrap-around help to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness through:

147
new legal enquiries

LEGAL HELP PROVIDED:

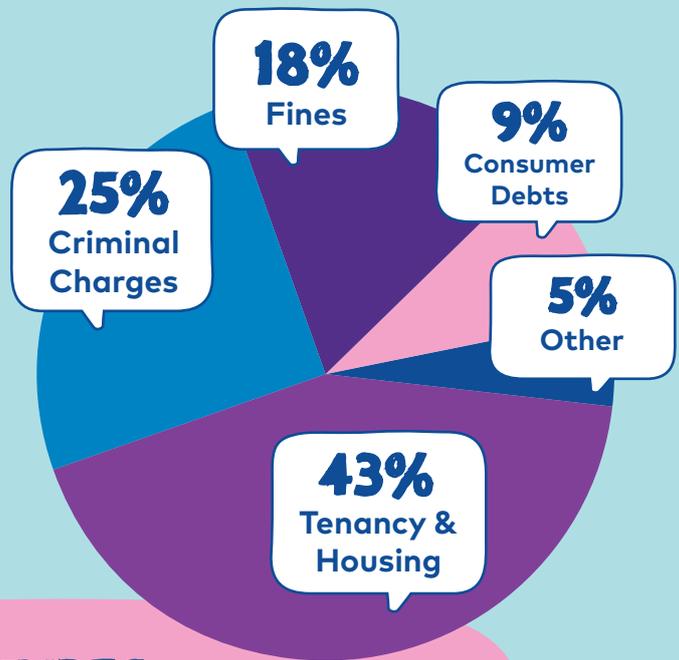


SINCE THE PROJECT STARTED IN 2015:

137%
Increase in new legal enquiries

312%
Increase in rough sleeper legal enquiries

LEGAL ISSUES:



HOUSING TYPES:



CAPACITY BUILDING FOR FRONT LINE WORKERS & PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

We collaborate closely with intensive case managers and housing workers in our partner agencies to build capacity on legal issues impacting their clients, and increase confidence in spotting legal issues to encourage early intervention and referrals for legal help. Demand for the Project's specialised training continues to grow. This year, we ran eight customised training sessions for teams at Launch Housing and Sacred Heart Mission. Three of these sessions were delivered online due to coronavirus (COVID-19) public health pandemic restrictions, including a session on the COVID-19 changes to tenancy laws.

We also recognise the importance of empowering community members to better understand their rights and where to get legal help. Over the last year, we delivered a range of information sessions for people sleeping rough, including in partnership with cohealth. Through these sessions, we offered people experiencing homelessness practical legal information and help, as well as opportunities for them to give direct feedback on their experiences with the justice system. In addition to offering evidence for our systemic advocacy, these community-based sessions continue to be central in shaping our service-delivery model, including our day-to-day casework strategies and our recent strategic review.

"Approachable great presenters with a lot of knowledge. Not only about their own service, but our service also, so their training could be well adjusted to our service needs."

Case Manager, Launch Housing – Tenancy Plus

"Excellent case studies relevant to our case management, simplified in a step by step process"

**Intensive Case Manager,
Sacred Heart Mission – Journey to Social Inclusion**

100%

of support workers said our training & written materials were excellent

94%

of support workers said the overall quality of our training was excellent or above average

UNDER ONE ROOF PARTNER FEEDBACK

"I appreciate the time Justice Connect takes to talk through matters with me and to break down issues, so that I understand what's going on. I am always impressed with the way the Justice Connect team communicates with participants - there's always a lot of care taken to adjust communication to suit individual needs and capacity."

**Intensive Case Manager,
Sacred Heart Mission – Journey to Social Inclusion**

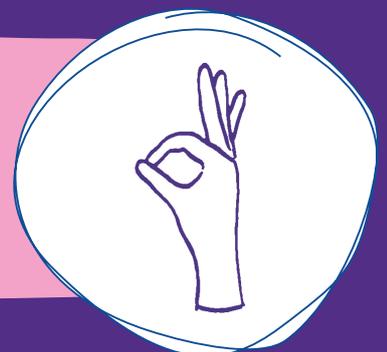
"We could not do our job as we do without your service – thanks you for everything you do for our clients!!"

**Housing Worker,
Launch Housing – Tenancy Plus**

"I've found Justice Connect to be incredibly helpful and easily the most valuable partnership our program has!"

**Intensive Case Manager,
Sacred Heart Mission – Journey to Social Inclusion**

85% of workers said having access to our lawyers has increased their understanding of legal issues that impact their clients.



DREW'S STORY

Aboriginal man with complex health issues exits rough sleeping and reunites with young son through outreach-based legal services

As part of our recent Rough Sleeper Outreach Pilot, our co-located lawyer met with Drew.* Drew is a 36 year old Aboriginal man who was badly hit by a vehicle in 2019. This caused his life to rapidly deteriorate, including being hospitalised for serious injuries, losing his job and relapsing. Drew's then partner (and mother of his four-year old son) also broke up with him, leaving him without a home and sleeping rough.

Our lawyer was able to build a relationship of trust with Drew over several weeks of regular outreach, and found out that he had five separate legal issues, including criminal charges, infringements and consumer debts.

Drew expressed his relief and happiness for our tailored legal help, and with this weight off his mind, he has better engaged with his Launch Housing outreach worker and has recently moved into short-term accommodation. Drew has also been able to focus on improving his relationship with his ex-partner, which has led to him spending some time with his son again.

**All client names in this report have been changed.*



ROUGH SLEEPERS OUTREACH PILOT

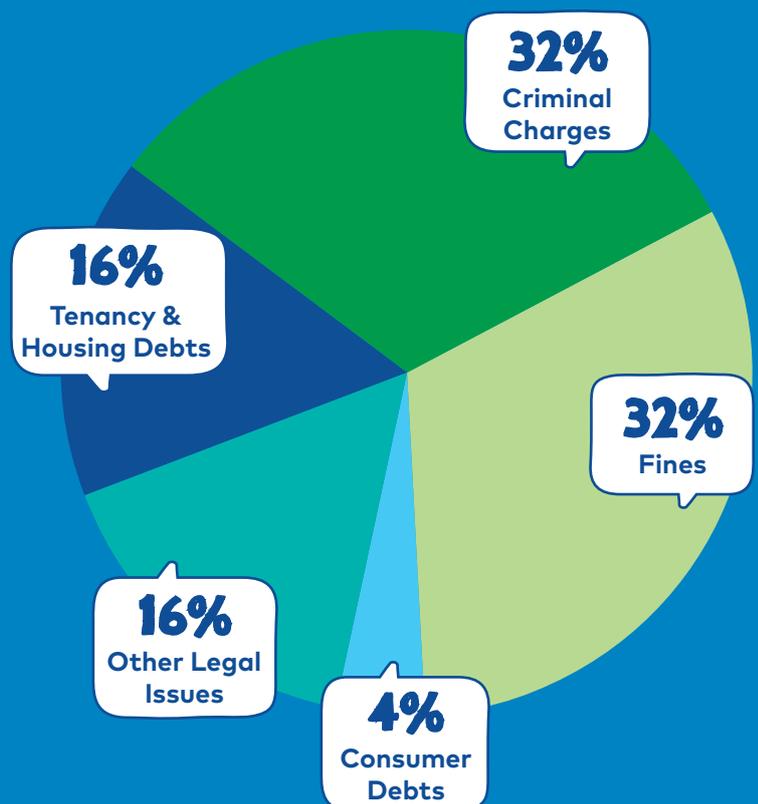
As part of our commitment to increasing access to legal help for rough sleepers, we conducted a six week Rough Sleepers Outreach Pilot to gain more understanding of the legal issues impacting rough sleepers and the barriers they face in getting legal help. Through this Pilot, our Under One Roof lawyer regularly joined Launch Housing's Rough Sleepers Initiative and Daily Support teams on assertive outreach across four inner-city local council areas.

We engaged with 16 clients, who had a total of 25 legal issues. Of these legal issues, 76% were within the scope of Justice Connect's ongoing casework services, and the other legal issues were addressed through targeted secondary consultations and legal referrals.

The Pilot confirmed that many rough sleepers have criminal charges and fines directly related to their experiences of homelessness. Most people sleeping rough didn't seek help with their legal issues, because they didn't know where to start, and faced multiple complexities including acquired brain injuries, intellectual disabilities, mental health issues and substance dependence. A disproportionately high-number of rough sleepers we engaged with identified as Aboriginal men (25%).

The Pilot also highlighted that consistency and trust is key when working with people who are isolated from the wider community and locked out of mainstream services and supports. It confirmed that more a flexible and dynamic approach to service delivery is needed to create accessibility and sustainable outcomes for people sleeping rough.

LEGAL ISSUES:



GARY'S STORY

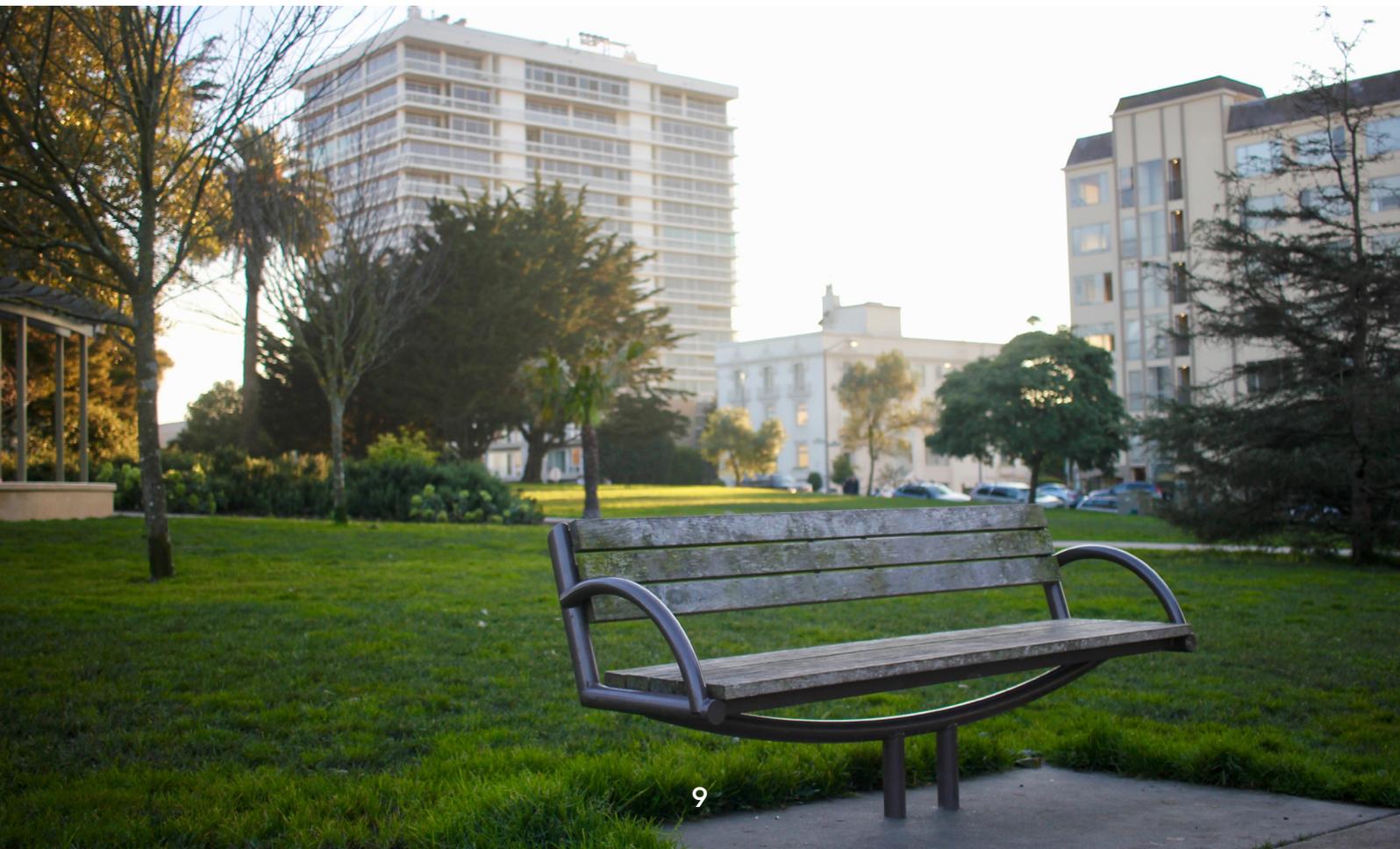
Chronically homeless man at risk of arrest accesses legal help for charges and fines through multi-disciplinary outreach

Gary* is a 37 year-old man who is currently sleeping rough in a park. He has struggled with mental health and substance dependence issues over the years, and has experienced extensive trauma while sleeping rough.

When we first met Gary through our Rough Sleepers Outreach Pilot with Launch Housing, he had an outstanding warrant for his arrest that was causing him significant anxiety. After building trust with Gary, we connected him to Justice Connect's senior criminal lawyer, who advised Gary about his rights and supported him to have the warrant executed. Gary was bailed and we are providing him with ongoing legal representation to resolve his criminal charges.

Based on our regular outreach, we discovered Gary also had \$26,000 worth of crippling fines. Our lawyer on outreach then worked closely with Gary, making sure he was comfortable and able to engage with Justice Connect's pro bono lawyers, who are now helping to have his fines reviewed based on his vulnerable special circumstances.

Due to these outreach-centred legal interventions, Gary's health and wellbeing has improved, allowing him to focus on working with his Launch Housing case manager, which has recently led to him securing a 'high priority' listing for long-term social housing.



LGBTIQ SCOPING STUDY

Research has universally acknowledged that homelessness and housing insecurity are insidious in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Gender Diverse, Intersex and Queer communities (LGBTIQ). The Pride Foundation found that LGBTIQ Victorians are around twice as likely to be homeless compared to the general population. However, there is currently scarce research into the legal needs of Victorian LGBTIQ people, particularly in the context of homelessness and housing insecurity.

Through the LGBTIQ Scoping Study, Justice Connect addressed this gap by conducting in-depth research and consultations about the legal needs of LGBTIQ people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This focussed on mapping the best ways to deliver targeted, culturally safe and accessible legal help to homeless or at risk Victorians who identify as LGBTIQ.

"LGBTIQ people often lack confidence in asserting their rights even if they know them"

– Consultation Contributor

17% of people who were rough sleeping in the City of Melbourne identified as LGBTIQ.

- cohealth Rough Sleeping Co-Design Project

34% of lesbian/gay people and 21% of bisexual people have been homeless compared to 13.4% of heterosexuals

– Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014

KEY FINDINGS: LINKS BETWEEN LGBTIQ STATUS, LEGAL NEEDS & HOUSING INSECURITY

Through our Scoping Study, we looked in-depth at national and international research on the legal needs of LGBTIQ people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, barriers to accessing services and best-practice service delivery models. We used those findings to test our assumptions using face-to-face consultations with 10 specialist LGBTIQ homelessness, legal, advocacy and training organisations, and surveyed over 50 frontline staff working with LGBTIQ clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Causes of homelessness and housing insecurity for LGBTIQ people in Victoria

Drawing on research and consultation findings, LGBTIQ homelessness and housing insecurity are caused predominantly by family violence, family breakdown, hate crimes, an acute shortage of safe and suitable housing options and poverty.

Due to discrimination and financial stress, many LGBTIQ people fall through the gaps of the housing and homelessness system, bypassing both private rental and social housing markets altogether. As a result, LGBTIQ people are at high risk of couch surfing, sleeping rough, squatting, and accessing crisis accommodation.

This was confirmed through our work over the last year with cohealth, as part of the Rough Sleeping Co-Design

Project, which found that 17% of people who were rough sleeping in the City of Melbourne identified as LGBTIQ.

LGBTIQ people in Victoria from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are also at higher risk of rough sleeping, noting the current shortage of culturally-tailored, homelessness-support services and that the majority of this cohort may be ineligible for social housing.

For LGBTIQ people who are currently housed, our Scoping Study insights have confirmed that the most common issues putting them at risk of housing insecurity are rental arrears, evictions (including unlawful evictions), discrimination by landlords, real estate agents or other tenants, as well as a lack of understanding of rental rights and a lack of confidence in asserting these rights.

Family breakdown and family violence were confirmed to be particularly prevalent factors in causing homelessness for younger LGBTIQ people, with many facing ongoing barriers to stable housing that are linked to long-term feelings of powerlessness, mistrust and rejection.

LGBTIQ individuals are more likely to have a first episode of homelessness before the age of 16. (GALFA LGBTQ Homelessness Research Project, 2017)

UNMET LEGAL NEEDS FOR LGBTIQ COMMUNITIES

Our Scoping Study looked closely at how the housing insecurity faced by LGBTIQ communities in Victoria also directly relates to key unmet legal needs.

Fines and criminal charges

Frontline staff who we surveyed identified fines, infringements and criminal charges as the most common legal issues they saw within LGBTIQ communities. LGBTIQ Victorians experiencing homelessness are often targeted and effectively criminalised for offences directly related to their circumstances of poverty, such as their conduct in public spaces and on public transport, which place them at real risk of becoming entrenched in the justice system.

Victims of crime

LGBTIQ victims of crime are less likely to report crimes to police due to mistrust and fear of police discrimination. Our consultation process found that trans Victorians experiencing homelessness also face disproportionate levels of hate crimes, and were most impacted by fear of police discrimination, leading them to rarely report incidents to the police. *"If some of my trans clients were to report the hate crime they faced, they would literally find themselves in the police station everyday."*

– Consultation contributor

Family violence

Family violence is one of the most prevalent legal issues affecting LGBTIQ communities. The majority of organisations involved in our consultation process shared that Victorian courts and the police are

ill-equipped or informed to safely and adequately deal with LGBTIQ-related family violence issues.

Discrimination

Discrimination permeates most aspects of life for LGBTIQ Victorians who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Throughout our consultations, it was clear that discrimination is endemic for this priority cohort, including in relation to government, workplace, social service, health and justice system interactions, which creates a primary barrier to accessing services and to achieving housing security.

Personal Identification

Legal name changes and acquiring identity change documentation were cited in our consultations as a considerable and recurring problem for the trans and non-binary communities. Contributors noted that this also creates a cascade of other problems for LGBTIQ Victorians using services where identification is required, including access to social security and other financial supports, housing assistance, education, and healthcare.

25% of respondents have been refused service on the basis of their LGBTIQ identity and are twice as likely to have experienced housing discrimination, compared to heterosexual people. (Australian Human Rights Commission National Consultation Report, 2015)

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING LEGAL SERVICES

Our Scoping Study emphasised that many LGBTIQ community members find it highly challenging to access mainstream services due to a variety of factors, such as fear of discrimination and feelings of anxiety and ineligibility. Previous negative experiences while accessing support services, such as unconscious bias, heteronormativity and misgendering, deter LGBTIQ people from approaching mainstream services.

"Fear of mainstream services not understanding the community's specific needs, or not affirming their gender identity." – Survey respondent

Adverse experiences can also exacerbate trauma and trigger mental health and substance dependence issues, which were identified in our consultations as creating further barriers to service-accessibility for LGBTIQ Victorians facing housing insecurity. These experiences can evoke feelings of worthlessness, which act to internally stop people from seeking or accepting help if they feel they 'don't deserve it'.

"Legal help feels overwhelming because it's so unfamiliar and intensifies feelings of discrimination" – Consultation contributor

Building on long-term findings through Under One Roof, difficulties in identifying issues as legal problems were found to be a central barrier in accessing legal help for homeless or at risk LGBTIQ people.

"People literally have no idea where to go [for legal help]" – Consultation contributor

ALICE'S STORY

Culturally safe legal and social work assistance helps trans woman sleeping rough to successfully exit the justice system and secure social housing

Alice,* who identifies as a trans woman, had been sleeping rough for over a year when her Launch Housing Rough Sleepers Initiative outreach worker linked her to Justice Connect for help with an upcoming Magistrates' Court hearing.

In Justice Connect's initial conversations with Alice, it became clear that she had multiple, unmet legal needs, which were directly related to her LGBTIQ status and her circumstances of housing insecurity.

Alice had recently been charged with a number of criminal law offences. The majority related to an alleged assault of two security guards, because they were transphobic and discriminated against her based on her gender identity. She had also received fines while living her private life in the public eye around the Melbourne CBD, and Justice Connect offered Alice specialised legal help to resolve them.

In her justice-system interactions before meeting with us, Alice had been regularly misgendered, including in court and police documents. During sentencing, Alice had genuine fears about potentially ending up in a male prison. Justice Connect's senior criminal lawyer worked closely with her to research the potential risks and strongly advocate to ensure that this did not happen. Given her negative experiences of the justice system, we used our understanding of the compounding risk factors and pervasive discrimination experienced by trans people, to work with Alice to affirm her gender and advocate on her behalf to get the best legal outcomes. Through ongoing criminal legal representation, which was integrated with social work supports from our Homeless Persons' Liaison Officer, Justice Connect successfully addressed all of Alice's charges without any jail time.

Justice Connect's culturally safe, integrated services ensured that Alice's legal problems were holistically resolved, removing barriers to exiting homelessness and helping her to secure a new social housing property.

BEST PRACTICE LEGAL SERVICES FOR HOMELESS OR AT RISK LGBTIQ VICTORIANS

Our Scoping Study has illustrated that LGBTIQ people are disproportionately represented in Victoria's homeless or at risk population, with many facing primary homelessness, such as rough sleeping, couch surfing and crisis accommodation. Alongside our longstanding Under One Roof work with rough sleepers, our consultation process has confirmed that LGBTIQ Victorians experiencing housing insecurity have multiple legal problems, which are compounded by uniquely complex barriers to accessing help.

Our research and surveys consistently identified that embedding a lawyer within a specialised LGBTIQ organisation, or within a trusted organisation where LGBTIQ people feel safe, is the most appropriate service model for Justice Connect's ongoing work with LGBTIQ Victorians. Co-location is an ideal service model for this cohort, because clients can engage in a spectrum of supports and have access to targeted assistance, such as supports for substance dependence, mental health and family violence, along with financial, housing and legal services.

An integrated model combines properly trained, culturally competent staff with a flexible service delivery model, which is crucial for reaching the most isolated and marginalised community members, particularly rough sleepers who identify as LGBTIQ.

"Overcoming barriers to accessing services means knowing where they can go for inclusive support where they will not feel/be discriminated against"
– Survey Respondent

As seen through both the Scoping Study and Under One Roof, working collaboratively with key partners also builds capacity for frontline workers to identify legal problems, so that homeless or at risk LGBTIQ Victorians can access culturally safe help to understand and assert their rights.

"Lack of knowledge from workers about most appropriate referrals is a barrier to accessing legal help for LGBTIQ people." – Survey Respondent

Drawing on the outcomes of both our Scoping Study and Under One Roof, we aim to further enhance Justice Connect's current integrated practice model, prioritising greater access for LGBTIQ rough sleepers to wrap-around, culturally sensitive legal help. By sharing learnings from this work with our partners, including Launch Housing, cohealth and Sacred Heart Mission, we will help more LGBTIQ community members to access or maintain safe housing. This strategic approach will also improve the confidence of LGBTIQ Victorians in engaging with mainstream services when dealing with legal problems, reducing their risk of becoming entrenched in the justice system.

OUR INTEGRATED RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Since early 2020, COVID-19 has placed a heavy burden on people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, particularly those sleeping rough. As a result, we have used Under One Roof's integrated model to develop innovative strategies, aiming to reduce the negative consequences of COVID-19 and provide access to the legal help needed by homeless or at risk Victorians. These collaborative approaches have included:

- Piloting a direct phone advice line for rough sleepers regarding interactions with police, fines and charges, particularly COVID-related fines, charges and police powers.
- Creating digital and hardcopy resources for rough sleepers on their rights under the new emergency powers, and how to get our help if approached by police, or if they get fines or charges;
- Training and resourcing frontline workers through our partnerships with Launch Housing, Sacred Heart Mission and cohealth around current emergency powers, how they directly impact on people experiencing homelessness and pathways for legal help;
- Drawing on Project casework and client evidence in advocating with government for fairer justice system approaches to people experiencing housing insecurity during COVID-19, which has directly contributed to better fines-related policies that reduce enforcement risks and stronger rental protections, including an eviction moratorium.

We are also working closely with our legal assistance, homelessness, housing and community-support sector partners to ensure rough sleepers get access to suitable, safe accommodation, and that they are able to stay securely housed during and after COVID-19.





"People that are sleeping rough are so disenfranchised and let down by the service system, the opportunity to bring the legal support to them, in a respectful manner, is just so beneficial."

**Assertive Outreach Worker,
Launch Housing - Rough Sleeper Initiative**

"If the lawyer hadn't been on outreach with me, that client never would have got help with their legal matters."

**Assertive Outreach Worker,
Launch Housing - Rough Sleeper Initiative**

"These things (legal issues) really weigh on you, and I wouldn't know where to start looking for help."

**Justice Connect client,
through Rough Sleeper Outreach Pilot**

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The ever-increasing demand for our assistance demonstrates the effectiveness of Under One Roof's embedded model in connecting homeless or risk Victorians to holistic legal services. With the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and the likely post-pandemic surge in people experiencing homelessness, providing a flexible, outreach-based and client-centred model of legal help has never been more important.

We see great potential to extend our integrated work with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, so that we can make sure that their legal and non-legal needs are effectively addressed, and they can access or maintain stable housing.

In particular going forward, we aim to:

- Deliver integrated, collaborative and culturally safe legal representation and social work support to Victorians experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including through regular outreach and increased co-location of Justice Connect staff at partner agencies. This will also significantly leverage our pro bono capacity, particularly for rough sleeping Victorians, by creating more frontline, trusted connection-points.
- Increase our customised education and engagement work with rough sleepers, including fact sheets, community-based information sessions, training sessions and digital engagement.
- Train and resource community sector workers, including those in Launch Housing's Rough Sleepers Initiative and Daily Support Team, to spot legal issues early and feel confident in supporting clients to access legal help.
- Undertake evidence-based evaluation and advocacy to improve service delivery processes, justice system accessibility and housing security outcomes, particularly by strategically responding to the impacts of COVID-19 on people experiencing or risk homelessness and the community's recovery process.

Under One Roof has significant scope to continue making a real difference to the lives of the hardest-to reach Victorians, highlighting the impact of integrated legal help in preventing and reducing homelessness.



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Funding and Partnerships

Justice Connect extends our sincere thanks to the Portland House Foundation for their significant and long-term support of Under One Roof, and the difference this continues to make for homeless or at risk Victorians.

We would also like to thank our key project partners Launch Housing, Sacred Heart Mission and cohealth for their invaluable collaborative work through Under One Roof to improve the lives of our mutual clients.

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IT'S TIME TO END
HOMELESSNESS

