

# Making the law work for good

Annual Report 2019–20

**In the face of rising unmet legal need, Justice Connect designs and delivers high-impact interventions that increase access to legal support and progress social justice.**

We believe in a fair and just world where people and communities are supported to engage with and fully participate in our legal and social system and avoid the negative impacts on their wellbeing or organisational health that flow from unresolved legal problems.

Justice Connect acknowledges the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation, and the Gadigal peoples of the Eora Nation as the traditional owners of the land in which we meet and work. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and pay our respects to Elders past and present.



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# Letter from our CEO

## Chris Povey

**An organisation's capabilities, resilience and infrastructure get put to the test when it suddenly faces crisis. This year has been exceptionally tough for our community, our clients and our sector. Yet Justice Connect has managed to achieve one of our most impactful years all thanks to the incredible tenacity and creativity shown by our staff, and the support provided by our funders and pro bono network.**

There are key moments from this past year that I won't forget.

On New Year's Day, I was at a camping ground in Venus Bay with my family. I woke up early to a text message that advised the Disaster Legal Help Victoria emergency protocol was being activated after swathes of the country had been cloaked in toxic smoke. Disaster Legal Help Victoria had been established during the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009 to help the sector respond to natural disasters. By 9:00 AM that morning I was on a call with colleagues from Victoria Legal Aid, Law Institute of Victoria, Victorian Bar, the Federation of Community Legal Centres and others. It would be the first of many conversations organised across Victoria and New South Wales to help the profession respond to legal need in bushfire affected communities. Within a matter of weeks our teams set to work to build new digital tools to help onboard law firms onto our Pro Bono Portal to connect bushfire affected communities with free legal help quickly and efficiently.

In March, Justice Connect set to work developing a new two-year strategy. I vividly remember one particular workshop. Members of our senior leadership team were sitting around our boardroom table while directors dialled in. We had some key decisions to make, yet as we started to step through the supporting material it was clear our minds were distracted. The country was beginning to experience the rapid transmission of COVID-19. We all sat there receiving a steady

stream of texts and updates about the virus, and the impending workplace closures. Within a matter of days, we closed the doors to our offices in Melbourne and Sydney and our staff began working and delivering services remotely.

While many organisations were busy grappling with the challenges of a remote workforce, we were able to immediately transition our services to remote delivery. We used our existing online infrastructure from our intake and referrer tools, Pro Bono Portal and our cloud-based case management system. This ensured there was no interruption to our service delivery.

Justice Connect rode the early shockwaves by intervening in areas where we could have the most impact. We rapidly responded to not-for-profit organisations reaching out for legal support and delivered specialised training to thousands of workers online. We played a key role in influencing landmark Victorian housing and tenancy rights transformation in a period of weeks. We redesigned and relaunched our self-help tool 'Dear Landlord' so that it could help Victorian tenants navigate the changing legal landscape.

As COVID-19 progressed, we witnessed society being dramatically reshaped. People and organisations were searching for information online in large numbers. We undertook data analysis to identify legal trends and pinpoint the issues people were searching for online. We responded by rolling out a consumer outreach program and developing new online resources



across our services. We delivered targeted digital marketing to make sure that our resources were reaching people who needed them and increased the use of our self-help resources by 470%.

We also launched a pilot of our online legal clinic Justice Connect Answers, which filled a gap as drop-in services closed due to lockdown restrictions. Our broad network of pro bono lawyers across Australia are now able to efficiently provide free legal advice to people online via our new platform, making location a barrier of the past.

It wasn't only the high-profile projects that made an impression, it was also hearing from the team about our service delivery and how they were finding new ways of doing things. Crisis became a catalyst for progress in closing the justice gap. We lead cross-sector work to improve people's experience looking for legal help. We worked in partnership with the University of Melbourne to

build an AI model that can diagnose legal problems in natural language. We advocated for fundraising reform across state and federal jurisdictions, and promoted checks and balances for new digital witnessing laws. We were consistently in the negotiating room, building partnerships and identifying opportunities that would improve the wellbeing of the communities we support.

We're excited to launch into the new year with a new strategy in which we clearly state our commitment to facing up to unacceptably high levels of unmet legal need by designing and delivering high impact interventions to increase access to legal support and progress social justice. Across all our work we recognise a rising volume of people and organisations needing help, new complex legal problems exacerbated by climate change, and an organisation-wide focus on using digital innovation and strategic engagement to achieve the deepest and broadest impact.

Justice Connect rode the early shockwaves by intervening where we could have the most impact.

# Letter from our Chair

## The Honourable Marcia Neave AO

**This is my first year as Chair of Justice Connect. I was delighted and honoured to lead the Board in 2020. I have always been impressed by Justice Connect's role in closing the justice gap by linking people and organisations with legal problems to the help they need. As a former law reformer, I've witnessed Justice Connect build a legacy of advocating for changes to unjust laws and systems.**

The Board, Chris Povey and Justice Connect's staff have faced significant challenges this year. From January 2020, Justice Connect has been called on to respond to the diverse and complex legal needs of people who suffered huge losses in the bushfires across Victoria, New South Wales and the ACT. At that time our Pro Bono Portal was already in full use by our member firms. By quickly expanding access to the portal, Justice Connect has helped people in bushfire affected regions find lawyers with the local knowledge and specialist skills necessary to advise them on their legal problems and help rebuild their lives. It's exciting to now witness how we're on the way to launching our Global Pro Bono Portal pilot with our partners in the UK and Ireland.

In 2020 the whole community has also had to face many legal issues arising as a result of COVID-19 and the necessary measures taken by government to prevent its spread. Problems which have required targeted legal responses include the effects of increased family violence on women and children, loss of employment, difficulty in paying rent and consequential threats of eviction and homelessness.

Justice Connect continues to deliver fully integrated legal services that respond to the needs of our clients. The organisation's human-centred design approach means we build the right tools and design services that are fit for purpose.

Our services confront some of the biggest challenges that people are facing. These include homelessness, unemployment and elder abuse. But our work is not just confined to assisting individuals. We also run the only comprehensive legal service for not-for-profit organisations. Many not-for-profits which provide outreach to people who need help have also looked to Justice Connect for legal advice, resources and training. It's more important than ever that we support the social services and charities sector during a time when the community is turning to them for help.

As well as investing in digital innovation, confronting an increased demand for legal help, and harnessing the power of pro bono, Justice Connect has been working on designing and implementing a new strategy.



Its objectives include scaling up and extending our services, so they can meet the huge unmet demand for legal services in the community. Building strategic partnerships with many other organisations to increase our effectiveness and ensuring we operate effectively and are financially sustainable for the future. As a result of this work, I believe we are well-placed to meet the challenges which will arise in the next few years.

I thank Chris Povey for his support and hard work. I want to also thank all Board members and particularly Ms Nicky Friedman for shepherding the organisation in her role as Acting Chair.

And of course, I want to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of all members of Justice Connect's staff, who are totally committed to our goals of increasing access to legal support and achieving social justice.

Justice Connect continues to deliver fully integrated legal services that respond to the needs of our clients. The organisation's human-centred design approach means we build the right tools and design services that are fit for purpose.

# Who is Justice Connect?

**Each year millions of Australians will have a legal problem and only half will access any form of assistance. Community organisations also grapple with the law and struggle to access legal support.**

In the face of rising levels of unmet legal need, we design and deliver high impact interventions to increase access to legal support and progress social justice.

We are committed to taking an impact-focused approach, applying research and design principles to develop our products and services to ensure they make a tangible difference for our clients and sector peers.

We deliver services that assist both people and community organisations. Those we assist often struggle to navigate the law, are unable to use the law in their daily lives and experience the impacts of harsh and unjust laws. We aim to prevent and to solve legal problems so that we can prevent the negative impacts on people's lives and organisations and empower the community to use the law as a force for good.

Given the scale of the challenges we address, we use digital innovation to extend our reach and

impact, supporting us to be more efficient and accessible, while helping us capture and use data to better understand legal need and structural issues.

We also harness the extraordinary pro bono contributions of over 50 member firms and the barristers we work with across the country. We direct pro bono effort through our innovative service models to ensure that pro bono hours deliver real impact for the community.

Beyond service delivery, we work on strategic interventions to help address the system-level drivers of legal problems and barriers people face when engaging with the legal system. By addressing root causes of flawed or unfair laws and poorly designed systems, we prevent the long-term challenges that people and organisations continue to face.

Our creative staff drive us forward with a commitment to evaluation and iteration that ensures our impact increases year on year.

By addressing root causes of flawed or unfair laws and poorly designed systems, we prevent the long-term challenges that people, and organisations, continue to face.

## Crisis as catalyst for progress

**Everyone had to face compounding crises in the past year. From the bushfires to the outbreak of COVID-19, we've seen increased legal need and new cohorts of people struggling to get by. Our investment into a new customer relationship management system, cloud computing and the success of our Gateway Project products meant that we were able to keep all our services running, as well as provide new and targeted support where it was needed the most.**

By October 2019, Justice Connect had launched the three cornerstone products developed through our Gateway Project: an intelligent online intake and triage tool to help people quickly and easily understand their eligibility for our services and apply online, a referrer tool that supports our sector colleagues refer clients directly into our system and reduces referral drop-out, and a Pro Bono Portal to efficiently match and refer clients with our network of 10,000 pro bono lawyers.

In September, we were unaware that a season of devastating bushfires, closely followed by a global pandemic, would put our services and infrastructure to the test.

When the bushfires hit, Justice Connect agreed to coordinate the pro bono response in both Victoria and NSW. We developed a tailored inbound referral pathway enabling frontline responders to send people and organisations to Justice Connect for legal help, and we used the Pro Bono Portal to deliver efficient placement of cases with pro bono lawyers. 110 firms joined the Portal in response to the bushfire crisis, bringing the total number to 160 registered firms.

While many organisations were forced to reduce services offered when COVID-19 restrictions were introduced, we were able to maintain all our services with our digital infrastructure, and quickly worked to launch new services designed to respond to emerging needs and to the increasing number of people seeking help online.

Our Not-for-profit Law program provided training to thousands of not-for-profit representatives by webinar, we published new resources and interactive tools that received hundreds of thousands of views, and we launched our new online legal clinic Justice Connect Answers, designed to connect pro bono lawyers working from home with people across Australia seeking advice for their legal issues.

By taking a human-centred design approach to our crisis response, we were able to respond directly to the needs of the individual and community organisations in the context of the challenges exposed by each crisis. Our service data for the financial year reflects how we continue to meet new legal need in the community, both by sustaining and expanding our services.

The nature of compounding crises such as the bushfires, COVID-19 and recession mean that the demand for legal help will likely remain high for years to come. We're working to ensure that we continue to have the right infrastructure in place, collecting the right data, as well as monitoring, evaluating and iterating our services. We'll continue to analyse and respond to the dynamic emerging issues and service preferences of the communities we're seeking to assist.



# Our impact in numbers

Communities have dealt with bushfire, COVID-19 and an economic recession. We know that these events are causing and will continue to drive increases in legal need while our legal system and legal services ecosystem is already overwhelmed.

In this context, we have delivered significantly more services compared to like services in the year prior. We have also undertaken new work scaled by digital strategies that has reached three times as many people compared to the previous year.

The services we provide both individuals and community organisations range from online self-help resources and tools, training, discrete assistance and ongoing representation. In its second year, our Gateway Project has continued to improve our intake and referral pathways, making it more efficient to provide the right legal support to people at the right time.

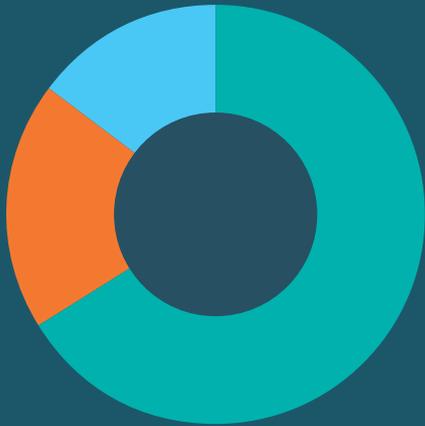


We referred 98 bushfire related matters

Many of our programs run training sessions for consumers, professionals and member firms to improve capacity across the legal ecosystem. We run training for non-legal professionals to help them spot and manage legal problems experienced by people they work with, as well as specialised training for pro bono lawyers.

Our Not-for-profit Law program runs our largest training program designed to help community organisations manage legal issues they face. Training for community groups is delivered through our social enterprise NFP training as well as through free public training sessions.

How many people attended our training sessions?



<u>Consumers</u>	<u>Non-legal professionals</u>	<u>Lawyers</u>
<b>5,939</b>	<b>1,703</b>	<b>1,316</b>

Total  
**8,958**



Overall unique page views for Justice Connect's website



Overall unique page views for Justice Connect's Not-for-profit Law website



As COVID-19 restrictions were introduced, more people and community organisations were seeking legal advice online. We responded to this spike in engagement with targeted consumer outreach across a range of channels. Our objective was to reach key people in the digital ecosystems they were comfortable using such as online hubs, closed communities, social media and search engines. We built pathways from these resources into our other services via our intake tool or directly to our online legal clinic Justice Connect Answers.



**Number of unique page views for our self-help resources for individuals**

### Top 6 self-help resources for community organisations

1. Governance and legal duties of office holders
2. Choosing a legal structure
3. Rules or Constitution
4. Setting up your organisation
5. Memoranda of Understanding
6. Fundraising

### Top 6 self-help resources for individuals

1. How the New South Wales Government's Emergency Restrictions on COVID-19 (Coronavirus) work
2. How the Victorian Government's Emergency Restrictions on COVID-19 (Coronavirus) work
3. Joint Debts and assets in Bankruptcy
4. How does COVID-19 affect Victorian Renters
5. What to do if you've been sexually harassed
6. How to claim unpaid wages over \$20,000





We leveraged  
45,249 pro  
bono hours

Valued at  
\$18,099,200  
in contributions

## Supporting communities affected by the bushfires

**The 2019 bushfires that spread across Victoria and New South Wales left entire communities devastated. We knew from responding to the Black Saturday fires in 2009 that legal need wouldn't just disappear in the wake of the disaster. Natural disasters tend to compound existing issues while also creating new and urgent problems. In response to the crisis, we worked creatively with the pro bono community, unlocking capacity and working closely to allow the profession to step up when the community needed them most.**

We recognised that the well-being of communities was intrinsically linked with the well-being of the small businesses in those communities. We ensured that small businesses, farms and primary producers could continue to access legal assistance by broadening our eligibility requirements.

Community organisations and charities also played a pivotal role in the bushfire response. We provided tailored legal services and resources for those organisations grappling with the pressures of the natural disaster. We helped community organisations understand their governance and legal obligations quickly and effectively so they could spend more of their time and resources helping people on the ground.

We worked as part of Disaster Legal Help Victoria alongside Victoria Legal Aid, the Federation of Community Legal Centres, the Law Institute of Victoria and the Victorian Bar. In New South Wales, we supported the Disaster Response Legal Service alongside NSW Legal Aid, Community Legal Centres NSW, NSW Bar Association and Law Society NSW.

These working collaborations exemplify what the sector can achieve when we work together, apply best practice approaches, and continue to be responsive to the needs of the community.

We helped introduce local law firms, our member firms and community legal centres to the full capabilities of our award-winning Pro Bono Portal. By leveraging our technology, we were able to increase the number of law firms providing free legal support while also streamlining a process that was traditionally complicated and time intensive.

To roll out our response, we created expression of interest portals for interested firms, which we promoted online and through our existing networks. We delivered a tailored referral tool, which enabled frontline services to refer individuals, community groups and small businesses to our services. We adapted and improved the Pro Bono Portal, to ensure it was equipped to take on bushfire pro bono referrals at scale.

We onboarded a further 110 law firms in addition to our existing member firms, bringing the total to 160. Between January and June, we increased the number of pro bono referrals that we made by 50%. Many of the new firms were based in the same regional areas affected by the bushfires, so had deep connections with the local community. They provided culturally sensitive services to the clients we referred. Cases that needed specific legal specialisation were also efficiently matched with suitable law firms.

## James's story

**For over a decade, James\* had lived and worked on a large rural property under verbal agreement with the landowner. He took care of the property and livestock and, in return, was able to live in his mobile home on the land. The landowner covered expenses such as utilities and insurance. While the landowner also had a property on the land, he didn't live there and stayed primarily in Melbourne.**

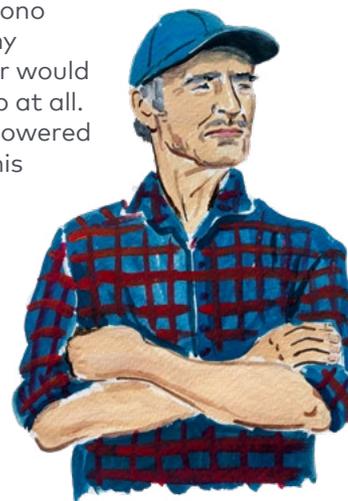
When the bushfires ravaged the area on 30 December 2019, James's mobile home was completely destroyed. The fires also took the landowner's property and the garage, which was filled with James's belongings. He lost his motorbike, generators, farm equipment and all his personal belongings. The landowner asked James to make a list of everything he lost. When he did, his list added up to a total of \$156,000 worth of contents.

Shortly after, the landowner told James that he was getting an insurance payout of \$300,000 and that he would be keeping all of it to build a bigger house. James was confused — the payout seemed much larger than the landowner's house was worth, but the landowner made no mention of the insurance on James's belongings. James was certain that the landowner had used his list of contents towards getting the payout.

James confronted the landowner which only caused the breakdown of their communication completely. James moved off the landowner's property to live with his mother in eastern Victoria. While he didn't want to return to the property, James wanted his share of the insurance payout, so he could buy a small piece of land and mobile home to live in.

James reached out to Victoria Legal Aid, where he was referred to Justice Connect for pro bono legal help. We were able to connect James with lawyers at Hibbert & Hodges using our award-winning Pro Bono Portal. Hibbert & Hodges is a regional firm that signed up to our coordinated bushfire response so they could help provide legal services to impacted communities. James was thrilled, as the law firm was only a few minutes away from his mother's house.

The lawyers were able to help James write a letter of demand to the landowner, asking for what James was owed. James was thankful to be connected with local lawyers who could better understand and support him. Without our pro bono portal technology, many people like James never would have received legal help at all. Hibbert & Hodges empowered James to understand his rights and take action. With the support of a regional law firm behind him, James felt empowered to stand up to the landowner and tell his side of the story.



\*Names changed

# Unlocking the potential of pro bono

**When crisis hit, our members stepped up, playing a central role in the pro bono response to the bushfires and COVID-19. This year saw us launch projects aimed at unlocking the potential of pro bono legal services and making sure communities were able to access the legal system despite the challenges.**

Justice Connect made our Pro Bono Portal available to support a broad cross sector response to the bushfires. This involved permitting non-member firms to use the Pro Bono Portal for the purposes of browsing and accepting referrals related to the bushfires and COVID-19. In addition to the 50 members firms already using the Portal in January 2020, we onboarded a further 110 firms, predominantly in bushfire affected rural and regional areas.

When COVID-19 started to drive further increasing demand for legal help, we were well positioned to continue to deliver a scaled-up pro bono response with the Pro Bono Portal supporting high volumes of referrals to firms.

In the new year we will build on these foundations by running a pilot providing community legal centres with direct access to the Pro Bono Portal so that they can connect efficiently and directly with the huge pool of pro bono lawyers engaged on the platform.



While lawyers continued to work in our clinics, produced online self-help resources and participated in secondments to Justice Connect, we also launched several projects that would utilise the power of pro bono in new and creative ways.

Our online legal clinic online legal clinic, Justice Connect Answers, allows lawyers to provide legal advice

to eligible clients regardless of their location. This was especially helpful for people under COVID-19 restrictions, and anyone with mobility or accessibility requirements.

We're also involving our pro bono network in one of our cutting-edge technology projects. Lawyers in our network are helping us train an artificial intelligence natural language processor to diagnose legal problems in natural language. We have built a game that participating lawyers can play to help us annotate the data and teach our model.

The AI model, being developed in partnership with the University of Melbourne School of Computing, will provide a new tool to help us better connect people in online settings with targeted and relevant information and services.

We continue to deliver on our commitment to build capacity across the profession by providing training for lawyers and new barristers. Our training covers substantive law and procedure, while allowing commercial lawyers to provide legal assistance to community members experiencing crisis.

**When crisis hit, our members stepped up, playing a central role in the pro bono response to the bushfires and COVID-19.**

## A safe home during the pandemic

**Our Homeless Law service offers people facing homelessness support from both lawyers and social workers. By delivering both legal and social work services, we can help solve not only immediate legal problems, but also address the co-morbid financial, employment or housing problems faced by our clients.**

Louise\* worked in hospitality for over seven years. She was good at her job, and as a single mother, she relied on it to support her three children. Her eldest daughter, Nicole\*, has an autoimmune condition.

COVID-19 related restrictions meant that many businesses had to either run at reduced capacity, or close completely. The café Louise worked for was one of those affected and, like many women who were disproportionately affected by the recession, Louise lost her job. Louise didn't know how she was going to pay rent without work.

Louise was worried. She had experienced homelessness when she was young and didn't want her children to have the same experience. She was especially concerned about her daughter Nicole, whose autoimmune condition meant safe and secure accommodation during the pandemic was particularly critical.

When Louise fell behind in rent, her landlord applied to VCAT to evict her. The eviction moratorium hadn't been introduced in Victoria yet, and Louise wasn't sure where to go for help.

**This integrated approach empowered Louise and supported her to secure a suitable, long-term public housing property.**

\*Names changed

Thankfully, she was put in touch with Justice Connect by VCAT. When Louise initially spoke to us, she was back on the brink of homelessness, and expressed significant concerns about the potential risks to her daughter's health.

We advised Louise about her legal rights and tenancy options. We helped her negotiate new terms with her landlord and successfully prevented her from being evicted into homelessness. Our social workers collaborated closely with other specialist workers to develop a plan for Louise and her three children. We helped her access government support, look for new employment and find longer-term accommodation.

This integrated approach empowered Louise and supported her to secure a suitable, long-term public housing property. Our social worker also helped Louise access brokerage funds to cover removalist costs, so all of Louise and her family's belongings could be moved without any additional financial strain. Louise expressed her gratitude for this smooth transition into a new home where the whole family's wellbeing could be properly maintained.

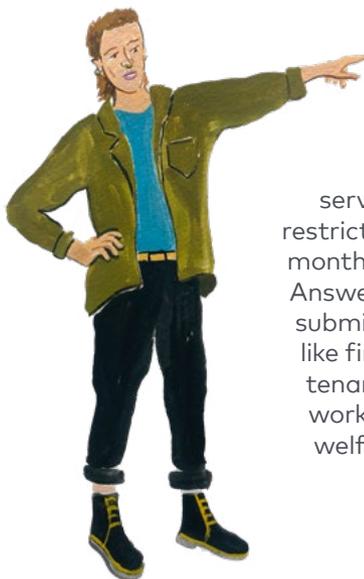


# COVID-19 pandemic and high legal need

**The legal services sector experienced major upheaval due to COVID-19 at a time when more people than ever needed assistance. As soon as the country experienced its first outbreak, we launched a targeted and data-driven response to meet rising legal need. The traditional model of face-to-face engagement became swiftly obsolete, leaving people with only their internet connection and devices to seek information and help. Our objective was to reach people in the digital ecosystems they were most familiar with while identifying new opportunities to improve access.**

We witnessed an almost immediate demand for help in matters related to employment and debt, a new cohort of people facing eviction into homelessness, and community organisations grappling with a range of complex problems related to fundraising and supporting volunteer staff. Inconsistent communication from federal and state authorities at the beginning of the pandemic caused widespread confusion, at a time where people were trying to navigate new laws and regulations related to the basic necessities of life.

We expanded our existing services, while looking to new ways to extend our reach through online self-help resources, application development, and digital innovation. Our



online legal clinic Justice Connect Answers filled a gap created by the closure of many drop-in legal services due to COVID-19 restrictions. In its first three months, Justice Connect Answers had 146 questions submitted covering issues like financial troubles, tenancy, discrimination, work rights and social welfare.

We published a wide range of self-help resources that explained the implementation of emergency powers laws in every state, work rights during COVID-19 and supported people to navigate tenancy issues in Victoria.

We transformed our existing not-for-profit training service into a webinar model and continued to support organisations navigating the unprecedented crisis. We developed and delivered 7 free webinars on COVID-19 issues between March and May 2020 attracting 1636 participants.

We relaunched our Dear Landlord self-help tool to support Victorian renters negotiate rent reductions with their landlords and avoid eviction. Dear Landlord was able to guide users by providing the necessary information and producing relevant tailored documentation needed to successfully negotiate a rent reduction. This was particularly aimed at a new cohort facing homelessness due to financial stress, unemployment and other issues.

**We expanded our existing services, while looking to new ways to extend our reach through online self-help resources, app development, and digital innovation.**

## We used our experience to advocate for systems-level changes wherever there were consistent policy gaps or unfair laws.

The pandemic put older people at particular risk of abuse. Older people were separated from community, support workers and family more than ever before, and often trapped inside their homes with their abusers. We know through our Seniors Law service that making or revoking Enduring Power of Attorney and Appointment of Enduring Guardian documents can prevent elder abuse. However, existing laws meant an attorney had to physically witness someone signing these documents. This became impossible under COVID-19 restrictions.

We called on governments to enact emergency laws to allow witnessing of execution of legal documents via videoconference during COVID-19 and advocated for appropriate safeguards to help prevent the misuse of remote witnessing to facilitate unwilling document execution or execution under duress. By allowing witnessing via videoconferencing, we were able to ensure older people could execute documents and assert their rights remotely.

We monitored our work and used those insights to provide evaluative and iterative responses to legal need. We leveraged pro bono where possible and — knowing that pro bono can't meet the scale of legal need alone — leveraged technology to extend our reach.

We used our experience to advocate for systems-level changes wherever there were consistent policy gaps or unfair laws. We advocated for Victoria's eviction moratorium, increases to debt limits and protections for volunteers. We submitted 13 recommendations in the PAEC Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic including better communication about restriction laws, more support for people at risk of homelessness, and a reduction in the compliance burden for community organisations.

By the end of FY2019-20, and by comparison with the previous year, we had online requests for assistance grow by 30%, website traffic grow by 42%, engagement with our online information resources grow by 500%, webinar attendees grew by 570%, and the number of firms we work with more than tripled.

# Scaling our impact by supporting the not-for-profit sector

Justice Connect's Not-for-profit Law program provides Australia's only comprehensive legal service for community organisations.

Our tiered service model helps us to reach as many organisations as possible, while providing intensive assistance to organisations offering critical services to the community.

We assist not-for-profit organisations through information, training, legal advice and pro bono referrals. Our aim is to help resolve their legal issues and improve their efficiency, effectiveness and community impact.

This year proved particularly challenging for the not-for-profit sector. Some organisations experienced legal issues directly related to the bushfire and COVID-19 crises, while many further grappled with the ripple effects of the crisis. While the sector has grappled with its own operational challenges, people and communities have turned to community organisations for support.

We have worked to provide as much assistance as possible to ensure that legal problems do not hold community organisations back from making important decisions and from running critical services.



We supported frontline responders during the bushfire crisis, so they could spend less time on paperwork and more time helping those in need.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, community groups were confused and unsure about their responsibilities. From March, we created a new suite of free self-help resources, adapted our

training services rapidly and offered free webinars covering the most pertinent issues organisations were facing. They included employment and volunteering law, workplace health and safety, running AGMs remotely, contracts, privacy and cybersecurity. Beyond our COVID-19 sessions, in 2020 alone we ran 44 training sessions attracting 3436 attendees covering topics including getting started, auspicing, tax concessions, board member duties, social media and managing volunteers.

We helped Aboriginal Land Councils understand their legal obligations and responsibilities to their volunteers and members and helped them adapt to remote ways of working.

We have helped a range of community organisations grapple with issues relating to volunteer and employee workforces from safety concerns to stand downs. We have also assisted organisations facing this tough financial landscape. This will be a challenging forthcoming year for fundraising, with predictions of future funding contractions for the sector. This makes our advocacy campaign to fix Australia's outdated fundraising laws even more vital and urgent.

The precarious financial circumstances facing the sector, together with heightened levels of risk, mean that many boards and committees need support to consider changes to their organisations' operational models and corporate structures. Others need help to scale their operations in the face of rising demand or new opportunities particularly in the digital space.

We will continue to work to support the community sector, whose efforts are more critical now than ever.

## Helping frontline charities navigate their legal responsibilities

**When the bushfires started, community organisation Recovery Ready Communities (RRC) needed to attain charitable status quickly so they could offer rapid frontline support to bushfire affected regions. Thankfully, Justice Connect's Not-for-profit Law program was there to help.**

RRC is a small regional organisation that works directly with communities in the wake of natural disasters. It needed to step up and engage with vulnerable communities across Victoria. However RRC quickly realised it was going to be difficult to be accepted by new communities and councils without the legal 'tick of approval' as a registered charity. RRC had little time to waste when the bushfire season first started in 2019.

While RRC's Business Development Manager Wayne was no stranger to applying for charity status, RRC's application was initially knocked back. The complexity of the not-for-profit legal environment was a barrier for RRC. Wayne was feeling dejected and frustrated. A former engineer, Wayne reflected "I could build a bridge without this much regulation!"

The RRC team contemplated paying for legal services but were concerned about diverting the organisations resources away from frontline work. They discovered our Not-for-profit Law program just in time to apply for free legal advice online.

**"It was a great feeling to have someone else take on the burden of applying for charity status."**

We were quick to respond. Over several consultations, our lawyers advised RRC how to maximise its chance of achieving charity status and supported the organisation to re-apply.

RRC's application was accepted and the organisation became a registered charity just as the horrific reality of the bushfires set in.

Wayne felt encouraged and relieved:

"It was a great feeling to have someone else take on the burden of applying for charity status. I could wipe my brow and say, thank goodness someone who knows more than me is looking at this ... It's a level of stress that's good to get rid of."

As a registered charity, RRC was able to support local communities in the aftermath of the bushfires, empowering them to start the recovery process themselves. Without charity status, Wayne reflected that "we would've wasted six months" and many communities would have been hesitant to accept the RRC support.

In East Gippsland, RRC liaised with local government and emergency services to coordinate relief quickly and effectively. Meanwhile in Apollo Bay, RRC worked with local community leaders to help them identify ways to protect their most vulnerable in the event of future disaster. As a result, they successfully applied for a \$300,000 grant to build a community-owned facility that will help local people be more disaster-prepared and recovery-ready.



# Digital innovation and transformation

**This financial year, Justice Connect continued to make significant progress on our digital products and projects. We finalised our Gateway Project and started to extend its impact both locally and globally. We reached the final stages of our end-to-end digital transformation and launched new program-level innovations.**

By October 2019 we had fully released all three cornerstone products of our Gateway Project. The Gateway Project was awarded two prestigious design awards, a Gold Good Design Australia Award in Social Impact and the Victorian Premier's Design Award in Service Design (best in class). Both awards recognised Justice Connect's sophisticated approach to designing user-centred technology and recognised the significant impact of the products to date.

Since our intake tool started taking applications in 2018, we've collected a unique and large data set suitable for training an AI model to diagnose legal problems in natural language. We partnered with the University of Melbourne School of Computing on a cutting-edge project to create Australia's first legal diagnostic AI. 200 lawyers from our member firms are now helping us annotate our data to train our AI model.

The model will ultimately assist people to articulate their problem and help Justice Connect — and the legal assistance sector more broadly — to better match services and resources to people in online settings.



This year we were able to take our Gateway Project to new heights with two new projects that extend the impact of our Pro Bono Portal both locally and globally. Locally, we undertook research to better understand the appetite of law firms and community legal centres (CLCs) to use the Pro Bono Portal in their interactions. With positive responses and funding secured, Justice Connect will launch a pilot to provide CLCs with direct access to the platform in FY2020-21.

**Our referrer tool supported increased inbound referrals from sector colleagues, with 325 referrals made this financial year**

And at a global level, after receiving extensive international interest in the Pro Bono Portal, we researched potential uses of the Portal across international pro bono ecosystems. With assistance from international organisation PILnet, we worked with firms and clearing houses around the world to better understand challenges and opportunities in different pro bono contexts.

# We expanded our existing services, while looking to new ways to extend our reach through online self-help resources, app development and digital innovation.

Our research validated the value of our platform, and with secured funding we're now working to make our Pro Bono Portal available to our peers around the world.

We have continued to make significant progress in our broader digital transformation efforts, too. We have configured and customised Microsoft Dynamics to be a client and stakeholder management system that integrates with our Gateway Project products. We will go live with end-to-end business processes linking our products and providing an improved client experience from late November 2020.

Our digital work extends far beyond our Gateway Project products, with many innovative technology projects on foot across our services. In March this year, we commenced a pilot for our new online legal clinic Justice Connect Answers. When COVID-19 started rapidly changing the legal landscape, we updated our Dear Landlord application to assist Victorian renters negotiate with their landlords. We also developed an application that supports not-for-profits to navigate the complex corporate income tax landscape and reconfigured our Getting Started application to help community groups choose an appropriate legal structure.

**Our Head of Innovation and Engagement, Kate Fazio, was also awarded 'Best Accidental IT Person' in the 2019 Australian Not-for-profit Technology Awards, and the Telstra Business Women's Award in the For Purpose category (Victoria), recognising her leadership of Justice Connect's Gateway Project and digital transformation work.**

## Strategic engagement

**Justice Connect is committed to leveraging our insights, evidence and expertise to achieve structural and system-level change. We advocate for better laws and policy, as well as better service design and ways of working. We do this in acknowledgement of the extent to which people and organisations are affected by laws as well as how the justice system and legal services sector operates.**

Alongside our rapid response work, we continued to strategically progress our targeted, long-term campaigns this year.

As a member of the Charities Crisis Cabinet, we have been at the forefront of the most important issues for the sector, including pressing on with the #FixFundraising campaign. The need for fundraising reform became even more urgent with charities having to rely on online giving campaigns when face-to-face events became impossible. Australia's fundraising regulations are outdated for the digital age and difficult to navigate. We've built a strong coalition of supporters who are coalesced around an implementable solution. We also identified gaps in the protection of volunteers (not covered for COVID-19 by workers compensation or 'accident' insurance) and have worked with the peak bodies for volunteers to advocate for solutions at state and federal levels.

We contributed extensively to Victorian tenancy reform. When COVID-19 saw a new cohort of renters facing housing insecurity, we carried out advocacy around specific measures related to COVID-19. Working with our partners, we successfully advocated for Australia's strongest residential tenancy protections during COVID-19, including an eviction moratorium in Victoria and increased financial supports for renters who have been impacted by the pandemic.

We know that in order to end homelessness, we need more housing. This year, we consistently advocated for more social housing with supports through the Make Social Housing Work and Everybody's Home campaigns. In May, we launched Make Social Housing Work as part of the Victorian Housing Peaks alliance. This evidence-based blueprint urged the Victorian Government to build

and buy 6,000 social (public and community) housing properties every year for 10 years, so that all Victorians have a safe, stable place to live. We've recently seen significant commitments from the Victorian Government to increase social housing stock.

We're also advocating to make legal services easier for people to find and navigate. Justice Connect leads cross-sector work to improve the legal services ecosystem for people trying to connect with legal help. We convene the Victorian Justice Navigation Working Group, with members from across the Victorian legal assistance sector, government, academia and funders. Through this group we share research, insights and work collaboratively to deliver a better whole-of-sector response to the unacceptably poor experience faced by people looking for legal help.

Like in previous years, we continue to engage in policy reform by making submissions to all levels of government. This year we have submitted to the National Inquiry into Workplace Sexual Harassment, Royal Commission into Aged Care, NSW Department of Customer Service in response to the draft Community Gaming Regulation 2020 Federal Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia, Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, Victorian Government's Sentencing Act Reform project, and the PAEC Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. We also contribute to the Infringements Working Group position paper to the Fines Reform Advisory Board, making 10 evidence-based recommendations to ensure the fines systems is more effective, accessible and fair for all Victorians. Our extensive expertise as well as our cross-jurisdiction insights makes us well placed to propose new solutions to complex problems and rising legal need.

## Digital witnessing helped older people like Farhan assert their rights during the COVID-19 pandemic

**Embedding legal help in a healthcare setting allows us to reach out to older people and empower them to assert their rights. By advocating for the introduction of digital witnessing of document execution, we continued to provide this critical support during times of crisis.**

Farhan\* is an older man who lives with his partner Paul. He was on the list for a heart transplant, which he urgently needed. Without it, he would have likely only had six months to live.

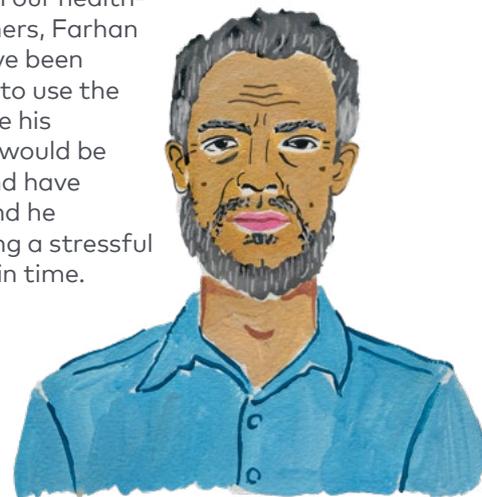
Farhan had experienced a long history of homophobia directed at him by his family. As a result of Farhan's sexuality, he hadn't spoken to his family in years. When he mentioned this to a social worker at Saint Vincent's Hospital, she reached out to Justice Connect through our Health Justice Partnership. Farhan's health worker recognised that Farhan urgently needed legal documents to ensure that if his health deteriorated, Farhan's partner Paul would be able to make decisions on his behalf instead of his biological family. With our legal help, Paul was granted a Power of Attorney and appointed as an Enduring Guardian with carefully defined authorities.

Unfortunately, right before he was due to have his transplant, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. As Farhan's immunity was compromised due to his upcoming transplant, he was unable to leave his home and couldn't execute these documents face to face. Thankfully, through our advocacy efforts, we had ensured that important documents such as Powers of Attorney and appointment of guardianship documentation could be executed

and witnessed by a remote witness using digital channels. This ensured that people like Farhan could be empowered to execute these documents from the safety of their own home without requiring person-to-person contact.

After we drafted the documents for Farhan and Paul, we set up a time for Farhan to execute them and have the execution witnessed via a telehealth digital platform. Farhan was able to entrust his partner as his guardian and have peace of mind in the worst-case scenario.

The day after his documents were finalised, Farhan's heart transplant was a success. He spent some time in ICU feeling "on top of the world", before going back home with Paul to recover. Without digital witnessing during the COVID-19 pandemic and our approach of integrating legal services with our health-justice partners, Farhan wouldn't have been empowered to use the law to ensure his preferences would be honoured and have peace of mind he needed during a stressful and uncertain time.



\*Names changed

# Our people

There is an entire community of people who make our impact possible.

## Staff

Our work is conducted by 80 staff across Australia. Our whole team moved to remote working and pivoted our service delivery overnight due to COVID-19 restrictions. We are very proud and grateful for their efforts.

## Secondees

Our member firms offer invaluable support to our initiatives by providing secondees for three to six month periods. These partnerships are critical to our capacity to offer the community meaningful and effective legal services.

## Volunteers

Our Volunteers include a diverse range of professionals, law students and practical legal trainees. We extend our thanks to them for their commitment and service.

## Pro Bono Lawyers

Our network includes 10,000 pro bono lawyers who offer their time, expertise and dedication to help people and community organisations resolve their legal matters. They are at the heart of our work.

## Our Patrons

We offer a special thanks to our patrons whose support and commitment to our organisations has been vital to engaging new supporters and beneficiaries alike.

Gillian Triggs

Ruth McColl AO

Robert Fitzgerald AM

## Board

We are governed by an independent, skills-based volunteer Board whose commitment to the organisation is crucial to our success.

### Our Directors for 2019-20 were:

Marcia Neave (Chair)

Gordon Renouf (Deputy Chair)

Nicky Friedman (Director)

Tristan Cutcliffe (Director)

David Bardsley (Director)

Richard Wilson (Director)

Simon Lewis (Director - retired March 2020)



# Our members and secondees

## Member Firms

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Abode Migration Lawyers  
Advocacy & Rights Centre Ltd  
Allen & Overy  
Allens  
Arc Justice  
Arnold Bloch Leibler  
Arnold Dallas McPherson  
Ashurst  
Baker McKenzie  
Banki Haddock Fiora  
Barry Nilsson Lawyers  
Bartier Perry  
Beaumont Legal Services  
Carroll & O’Dea  
CIE Legal  
Clayton Utz  
Clearly Legal  
Clifford Chance  
Clyde & Co  
Colin Biggers & Paisley  
Corrs Chambers Westgarth

DLA Piper Australia  
Doogue O’Brien George  
Federation of Community  
Legal Centres (Victoria)  
Fragomen  
Francis Abourizk Lightowlers  
Hall & Wilcox  
Herbert Smith Freehills  
Hive Legal  
Holding Redlich  
Inner Melbourne Community  
Legal  
Job Watch Inc  
Johnson Winter & Slattery  
Justin Moses  
K & L Gates  
King & Wood Mallesons  
Lander & Rogers  
Law Institute of Victoria  
Maddocks  
Makinson d’Apice

Maurice Blackburn Lawyers  
McCabe Curwood Lawyers  
McCullough Robertson Lawyers  
Minter Ellison  
Moulis Legal  
Nicholes Family Lawyers  
Norton Rose Fulbright  
PepsiCo  
Public Interest Advocacy  
Centre (PIAC)  
Robinson Gill  
Russell Kennedy  
Sorbus Legal  
Sparke Helmore  
Thompson Geer  
Victorian Bar Council  
Webb Henderson  
White & Case  
Women’s Legal Service  
Woolf Associates  
Wotton & Kearney

## Secondees

---

Alexander Armstrong-Millar,  
Hall & Wilcox

Monique Failla, Maddocks

Claudia Kernan,  
Herbert Smith Freehills

Jacqueline Morgan, Allens

Gerard Papas, Allens

Breigh Smith,  
Herbert Smith Freehills

Maddison Smith, MinterEllison

Shayne Solin,  
Allens

Isaac St Clair-Burns, Allens

Keren Stuk, MinterEllison

Romany Tauber, Australian  
Government Solicitors

William Wong,  
Allens

**We'd like to thank the following members who participated  
in our online legal clinic Justice Connect Answers:**

Norton Rose Fullbright

Makinson d'Apice Lawyers



# Our finances

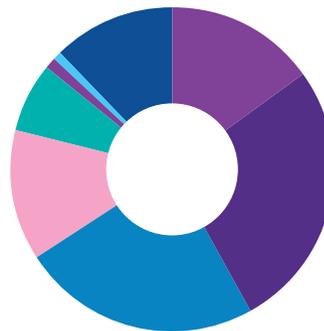
The audited financial result for the 2019-20 financial year is a surplus of \$414,214, representing 4.4% of our annual income. At 30 June 2020 we maintain healthy net assets and retained earnings of \$1,580,866. We have continued to diversify our funding sources and increase the number of funding partners, seeing our income grow on 2018-19 by 27% to \$9,359,846 including the JobKeeper wage subsidy and one-off COVID-19 related funding.

This is a positive financial picture in part made possible as a result of both government and philanthropy identifying a need to support the community sector to respond to increased demand arising from both bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Justice Connect will continue to take a careful approach to our financial position as our environmental scanning has pointed to major increases in legal need at the same time as government and philanthropic funding sources are likely to be under sustained pressure.

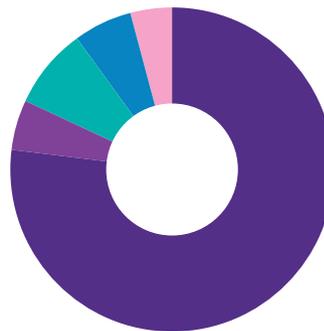
In 2019-20 we received funding from the sources shown in the charts. We also received very generous in-kind support from our members and other partners which assisted in making our work possible with secondment of staff, volunteer engagement and donation of resources and facilities.

## Income



Federal Government **15%**  
State Government **27%**  
Philanthropic **24%**  
Fee for Service **13%**  
Membership Fees **7%**  
Fundraising **1%**  
Investment Income **1%**  
Other **12%**

## Expenses



Employee **77%**  
Administration **5%**  
Occupancy **8%**  
ICT **6%**  
Direct Program **4%**  
Fundraising **0%**

## Thank you to our supporters

We couldn't have done it without the help from our donors, member firms and in-kind supporters

This year we found ourselves responding rapidly to disasters. We needed to adapt quickly in order to be effective. While many organisations were forced to close their doors, we continued to run all our existing services as well as offer new ones.

We couldn't have done it without the help of our supporters. Whether through donations or in-kind contributions, our entire community pulled together to provide legal help when people needed it the most.



# Our funders and partners

Justice Connect's high-impact interventions for individuals and community organisations is made possible by the financial contributions from our valued funders and partners.

Australian Government Attorney  
General's Department

City of Melbourne

Consumer Affairs Victoria

Court Services Victoria

### Equity Trustees

- Truby & Florence Williams  
Charitable Trust

Helen Macpherson Smith Trust

Launch Housing

Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation

New South Wales Attorney  
General's Department

New South Wales Department  
of Communities and Justice

New South Wales Department  
of Social Services

### Perpetual Trustees

- H & L Hecht Trust
- Ian Rollo Currie Estate Foundation
- Rowe Family Foundation

Portland House Foundation

Ross Trust

Senior's Rights Victoria

StreetSmart Australia

The Ian Potter Foundation

The Myer Foundation

The Shine On Foundation

Transport Accident Commission

Victoria Law Foundation

Victoria Legal Aid

Victorian Department of  
Health and Human Services

Victorian Department of Justice  
and Community Service

Victorian Department  
of Premier and Cabinet

Victorian Government Community  
Support Fund

Victorian Legal Services Board



## Other thanks

**Justice Connect receives help in many ways from people and organisations, whether through reduced fee services, access to facilities, research, joint advocacy, and through service delivery partnerships.**

Australian Centre of Philanthropy and Non-profit Studies	LawWorks
Caulfield Hospital and Community City of Yarra	Melbourne City Mission
cohealth	New South Wales Council of Social Service
Committo	Pat Stragalinos
Community Council of Australia	PILA
Corrs Chambers Westgarth	PILnet
Council on the Ageing Victoria	Piper Alderman
Council to Homeless Persons	Pollen Digital
County Court of Victoria	Pro Bono Australia
Dame Phyllis Frost Centre	Public Interest Advocacy Centre
Database Consultants Australia	Sacred Heart Mission
Emma Pritchard	Samurai AV
Equality Australia	Social Ventures Australia
Ernst & Young	Social Traders
FAL Lawyers	Springvale Neighbourhood House
Federal Court of Australia	St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne
Fitted for Work	St Vincents Health Network Sydney
Fundraising Force	Supreme Court of Victoria
Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand	The Big Issue Street Soccer
Health Justice Australia	Uniting War Memorial Hospital, Sydney
Health Service, Alfred Health	Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
Herbert Smith Freehills	Victorian Bar
Human Rights Law Centre	Victorian Council of Social Service
Jacob Komesaroff	Viola Design
Jo Szczepanska	Volunteering Australia
Lanrex	Volunteering Victoria
Law Institute of Victoria	

**Justice Connect gratefully recognises the many committed individuals who support our work with their generous contributions.**

Peter Allan	Fiona and Angus Mcleay
Wendy and Rod Brooks	Norman O'Bryan and Sue Noy
Julian Burnside and Kate Durham	William Pitt
Erdi Foundation	Janet Rice
Mitzi and George Gilligan	Andrew and Kerry Stephenson
Anton and Jenny Gaudry	Richard Taylor & Chaman Sidhu
Professor Lesley Hitchens	Anonymous
Will and Jennie Irving	Anonymous
Josef team	Anonymous

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