

Hunter CLSD Program Meeting

19.02.2026 | 10am-12pm | Mosaic, Charlestown

MINUTES

Present: Ben Nicholson (University of Newcastle Legal Centre), Rebecca Hadfield (Legal Aid NSW), Jacob Etherington (Senior's Rights Service), Toobah Choudhari (Hunter Community Legal Centre), Julie (Service NSW), Geoff Capelin (Hunters Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service), Erin (Settlement Services International) Sarah McFadden (Wesley Mission), Tracy Rodgers (Newcastle WDVCAS), Christelle Govender (The Place Charlestown), Kent Kingston (Justice Advocacy Service), David (Hopestreet), Lucy Hutchinson (Hopestreet), Kirsten Ashbrock (Hopestreet), Claudia Thorne (Legal Aid NSW), Fadi Baghdadi (Hunter Multicultural Communities), Rose Lamack (ALS NSW/ACT), Stephen Innes (AMEP), Yolanda D'Aquino (Legal Aid NSW), Sharni Bridge (Northcott), Julie Leto (Justice Advocacy Service), Sami Zakmil (Mosaic), Helen Larkin (Settlement Services International), Nissa Phillips (CLSD Regional Coordinator), Winnecke Baker (Legal Aid NSW), Mirja Colding-Moran (Mosaic), Eden Tan (Jenny's Place)

Apologies: Taylah Gray (Legal Aid NSW), Sandy Moran (Legal Aid NSW), Allie Towns (Embrace People and Place), Brett Cunningham (NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages), Shantell Bailey (Aboriginal Legal Service)

Agenda item	Discussion	Action/Outcome
1. Opening and purpose	<p>A. CLSD Program Objective: to work collaboratively to identify and address unmet legal and related non-legal needs of people in the Hunter region. We do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- making better referrals/ referral pathways- working on projects and devising new services, and- coordinating our efforts. <p>B. Meeting Objective: To strengthen professional relationships between legal and frontline community services supporting culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in the Hunter by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifying opportunities to collaborate to improve legal outcomes for local CALD communities.• Relationship building; for people to get to know one another and work towards partnerships.• Listening to staff from Mosaic Multicultural Connections, Settlement Services International and Newcastle Domestic Violence Resource Centre, as well as other attendees talk about their work with CALD clients and the main legal problems that they are seeing, including emerging trends.	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening to staff from local legal assistance services talk about the problems that they can help with directly and support referrals. 	
<p>2. CALD services guest speakers: Mosaic Multicultural Connections, Settlement Services International (SSI) and the Multicultural Case Worker at Jenny's Place</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Mirja – Manager of Settlement Casework Team, Mosaic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mosaic is funded by the Department of Home Affairs to provide settlement support during peoples' first 5 years living in Australia. Staff provide low-medium intensity casework to support people to navigate access to housing, education, employment, local systems and services, and day to day life. Welcome referrals from other services and people can self-refer. <p><i>Top legal issues clients experience</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff are seeing increasing complexity where clients have multiple legal problems. Domestic and family violence, misunderstanding of traffic law, and questions about immigration (clients have family overseas that they would like to bring to Australia and many need help navigating paths to citizenship). This is a big gap as there is no local free or pro-bono service. Legal Aid NSW, RACS and IARCS are often at capacity and clients cannot afford private lawyers. <p><i>Mosaic Family Support Project</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing funding from DCJ for 3 caseworkers to support families with parenting support and casework. These caseworkers are working with a complex interplay of cultures. 80% of referrals are for women and relate to safety in their relationship and child protection. Common to hear that clients want the violence to stop but don't want to leave their relationship. Trying to provide greater education to men during orientation. Many people come from patriarchal cultures. Mosaic chairs the multicultural action group. There are subgroups on family and domestic violence, education and training, and social cohesion. <p style="text-align: center;">Helen Larkin – Settlement Services International Newcastle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work under the humanitarian settlement framework; resettlement of humanitarian entrants during their 1st year of settlement. 	<p>Action: contact Mirja at Mosaic if you would like to join the Multicultural Action Group (MAG).</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with clients for 12-15 months towards mutually agreed outcomes. Clients are then referred to Mosaic for further support. - Common issues are accessing housing, transport and health services. - Relocating is a steep learning curve, and it takes a very long time to learn everything, especially local laws. - Challenge is that most mainstream services don't adequately cater for or reach CALD clients. - Like having information sessions, especially if they respond to a trend SSI is seeing. <p><i>Top legal issues clients experience</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to housing; placing people in sustainable tenancies is one of the hardest jobs because they have no rental history and rely on Centrelink. Maintaining tenancies is also challenging. Unsure of a single solution but more support in this area is welcome. - Ongoing need to for legal education about different marriage laws and divorce. Previous training with Hunter CLC was very successful and want to continue this partnership. - More work to be done around family law as cultures have different norms. <p style="text-align: center;">Eden Tan - Multicultural Caseworker, Jenny's Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support clients with casework, safety and exit planning and victims' services applications. Current wait time for support from the outreach team is 4-6 weeks. - Jenny's place has 2 refuges; 1 for families and 1 for single people. - Clients face significant intersecting disadvantage because of their visa status, language barriers, financial disadvantage. - Would like to introduce programs for clients; interested in legal education in a casual setting. - Have received support with the domestic violence visa provisions from Rupert Legal in Redhead. <p><i>Top legal issues clients experience</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not necessarily a lack of services but there can be a lack of understanding. Sometimes clients are referred to the wrong service because staff assume they need visa support, when they really need help with family law and domestic violence. Have also been turned away because a client didn't have an existing matter/immediate safety concern but still needed advice. 	
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<p>3. Legal assistance guest speakers:</p> <p>Hunter Community Legal Centre, followed by Legal Aid NSW Domestic Violence Unit and Civil Team (10 mins each)</p>	<p>Yolanda D’Aquino – Legal Aid NSW Domestic Violence Unit/Community Legal Education</p> <p>1800 979 529 – DVU hotline or email domesticviolenceunit@legalaid.nsw.gov.au</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Domestic Violence Unit is the biggest specialist team at Legal Aid NSW with 80 employees. - The team is multidisciplinary with lawyers working alongside caseworkers, mental health workers and financial counsellors. - Work across apprehended domestic violence orders (ADVOs) family law, and care and protection cases. - Definition of family violence used by the unit is extremely broad. It encompasses physical and psychological abuse, financial abuse and systems abuse like threatening to cancel someone’s visa or to turn them into immigration. <p><i>Key services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide advice mostly by phone and at some Local Courts for ADVO matters. - Prioritise clients for ongoing help who have cases before the Family or Local Court. - It’s a <i>screened unit</i> which means that both parties can be represented by Legal Aid NSW. - Conduct risk assessments, safety planning, victims’ services applications for ongoing clients and can sometimes help with reviews. <p><i>Key supports for CALD clients</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal Aid NSW funds interpreters on the phone or in-person for all interactions. - Lawyers can adjust appointments to be longer for clients with language barriers. - Resources about topics like divorce, immigration, traffic law, fines are available in multiple languages to download and to order for free from the Legal Aid NSW website under <i>Ways to Get Help > Publications and Resources</i> <p><i>Misidentification of women as the perpetrator</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concern about the number of women being misidentified as perpetrators of domestic violence. - Being identified as a perpetrator could have ramifications for someone’s immigration status. - Anyone misidentified needs legal advice and the DVU will accept a referral. 	<p>Action: CLSD Program Unit follow-up on delivery of the traffic offenders' program in other languages. Is this done anywhere in NSW?</p> <p>And SHLV policy for visa holders.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - August 2025 report from Victoria by Lauren Caufield at Beyond Survival and Dr. Malins at RMIT highlighted misidentification and the racial profiling that often accompanies it: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harm in the Name of Safety — Flat Out Inc. - And a news item covering it: For too many victims of family violence, police harm more than help, new research finds - ABC News <p style="text-align: center;">Rebecca Hadfield – Legal Aid NSW, Newcastle Civil Law Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workers and clients can call the Newcastle office civil branch (02) 4929 5445 - The team includes 4 generalist lawyers and 1 specialist homelessness lawyer. - 60-70% of matters coming in are about housing; terminations, repair and bond issues. - Can also help with consumer law problems like buying second hand vehicles, credit and debt, fines, discrimination employment issues (underpayment, unfair dismissal, unpaid superannuation) and victims’ services appeals. - Most advice provided by phone but can do face to face appointments too. <p style="text-align: center;">Toobah Choudhari – Principal Solicitor Hunter Community Legal Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concerned that legal services aren’t reaching the most vulnerable clients. People are welcome to contact Toobah directly for assistance and to raise concerns about service delivery for all clients but especially CALD clients. - Hunter CLC is interested in working differently to better support CALD clients in the Hunter. - Hunter CLC provides advice regarding apprehended domestic violence orders at Belmont Local Court on Monday, Newcastle Local Court on Tuesday, Raymond Terrace Local Court on Wednesday and Maitland Local Court on Thursday. - Raised concern that the Traffic Offenders Program isn’t delivered in different languages and it is unclear if people can access interpreters. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Hunter Community Legal Centre</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(02) 4040 9120</p>
<p>Brainstorm: Improving Access to Justice in the Hunter for CALD communities.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Brainstorming Service Improvements for CALD Clients</p> <p>Group 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create legal subgroup of Multicultural Action Group. - Mainstream interpreter use. - Train staff to become advocates. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnerships to provide pro-bono immigration advice and assistance in the Hunter. <p>Group 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invite housing providers to a future CLSD Program meeting to encourage ongoing and early engagement. - All services adopt ‘no wrong door’ policy so referrals are always made to a service that can help. - Promote early referrals to legal advice. <p>Group 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information sharing and coordinated advocacy: between Legal Aid NSW, CLCs, women’s refuges, WDVCS and community services around the experiences of CALD women with DFSV, particularly around misidentification as a perpetrator. Legal services see this internally and it would be helpful to know what other services are seeing to better understand the issues and advocate for service improvements. – Outreach: attend existing groups but don’t use the words law or legal or lawyer in the advertising, start casually over a cup of tea or an activity and build trust overtime, don’t share resources with legal branding, meet people where they are in settings that are comfortable for them. – Clearer communication of court outcomes: people have lots of difficulty understanding orders, the example was shared of 2 people with a seemingly similar problem receiving different court outcomes. 	
<p>5. Next meeting</p>	<p>Our Q2 meeting is on Thurs 21 May 2026. The theme is ‘older persons and the law’.</p>	