



Annual Report

2019-2020

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Acknowledgement

The Welfare Rights Centre, its staff and directors acknowledge the First Peoples and traditional owners of the lands and waterways on which we and our clients across NSW work and live. The lands were never ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within our boundaries.

What Do We Do?

Image credit: Services Australia

The Welfare Rights Centre is a community legal centre specialising in social security law and family assistance law and its administration by Centrelink. We provide free legal information, advice and representation to thousands of NSW residents every year who are adversely affected by Centrelink decisions. Many people dealing with Centrelink have complex, intersecting issues in their lives that cause deep distress, including health, housing, safety, and financial pressures. Our work transforms people's lives. Accessing social security entitlements and challenging unfair debts alleviates financial hardship and prevents disadvantage that can span generations.

The Centre also provides education to improve knowledge and understanding about social security law in the community. We use the knowledge and experience we gain through our casework to advocate for reforms to the law and policy that would make the Australian social security system fairer for everyone. The Centre also provides assistance to the community through community education and training, law reform and lobbying.

We advise people about their social security rights, entitlements and obligations and assist people through the social security review and appeals system, including Centrelink internal review and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. We provide all initial advice by phone.

The Welfare Rights Centre opened its doors in 1983 as part of the community legal centre movement in Australia that began in response to scarcity of affordable legal assistance available to marginalised members of society. Originally co-located with Redfern Legal Centre, the Centre opened its own premises in 1985. Since then it has experienced changes in location, staff, funding sources, law and policy. Throughout these changes, the Welfare Rights Centre has remained the lead service agency in NSW for social security law and policy.

Chair's Message

If ever anyone needed to be reminded of the importance of the work of the Welfare Rights Centre, this was the time. Since March 2020, COVID-19 has caused havoc with employment and the economy, and the Welfare Rights Centre has been there to support, inform, advise and represent those who have been affected.

“Since March 2020, COVID-19 has caused havoc with employment and the economy, and the Welfare Rights Centre has been there to support, inform, advise and represent those who are affected.”

The Centre's workload – already chronically heavy – increased significantly, as did the complexity of the law and procedures that the staff have to work with. And, of course, the challenge for staff in maintaining

frontline services was greater as a result of having to work remotely.

Katherine Boyle and Natalie Ross – Executive Director and Principal Solicitor – have done outstanding work leading staff through these challenges, and staff have been remarkable in their commitment and dedication applying their skills to help people in need and distress.

I had the privilege of being elected to chair the Welfare Rights Centre Board only in November last year, so I have been on an especially steep learning curve. Although I have long experience working in the community legal sector, I have not had to understand the social security system in any detail; I was happy to leave that to the experts. Now I have seen the experts in action at the

Chair's Message

Welfare Rights Centre, and I know that our clients are in very good hands, for their legal and other needs.

While on that steep learning curve I have been really well supported by our knowledgeable and experienced Board members. In particular, the Deputy Chair, Clancy King, and Company Secretary, James Jankulovski, have been invaluable in their counsel, and their very able chairing of our governance and finance committees.

The Board has overseen rapid and very positive developments at the Centre. We have already had some success in seeking new ways of expanding and consolidating our funding, and we have significantly increased the profile of our services on social media and in the news media. Beyond our casework, we are collaborating with other agencies, most notably Economic Justice Australia, to engage with current policy issues.

Having been well served by our 2017-2020 Strategic Plan, we have been planning for the future. At the end of the reporting year we are well on track to adopting a new strategy for the Centre's work, underpinned by a powerful theory of social change. The new strategy will be supported by strategic and operational plans to ensure that we go into the next year with fresh ideas for achieving our vision of a fair, just and inclusive society where everyone has the resources they need to live a meaningful life.

Simon Rice

Chair



Executive Director's Message

Has there ever been a more profound or rapid change to social security law in Australia? Not in living memory. Until March 2019, our focus had been on robodebts and the Federal Court of Australia's explosive finding that the scheme was unlawful. But since late March 2020 and the shutdown of the NSW economy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal Government has introduced measures which demonstrate what our social security system could look like if its motivating principle was truly adequate income support so that all people have the resources they need to lead a meaningful life.

“The Federal Government has introduced measures which demonstrate what our social security system could look like if its motivating principle was truly adequate income support so that all people have the resources they need to lead a meaningful life.”

Welfare Rights Centre
Annual Report 2020

We saw the effective doubling of the unemployment benefit (the old Newstart Allowance rebadged as JobSeeker), one-off payments, waiting periods waived, income and assets tests eased, mutual obligations suspended, debt collection paused, and claims processes streamlined.

But not everyone has benefited from the changes. People who rely on pensions, such as Disability Support Pension and the Age Pension, did not receive a fortnightly increase. Waiting periods for people serving out Compensation Preclusion Periods were not paused, resulting in many cases of severe financial hardship. Many international students and temporary residents were not eligible for either



Executive Director's Message

JobKeeper or JobSeeker and have had to rely on charities to survive.

Nonetheless, the changes introduced made a profound difference to many people's lives. Families were able to afford fresh fruit and vegetables. People were able to properly heat their homes. People who would have otherwise been destitute and homeless had a safety net.

When we saw the queues outside Centrelink offices snaking around the block, we knew that many people who had never had to claim a Centrelink payment before may need legal information and advice about their rights and entitlements. In just over three months, the number of people accessing Centrelink payments in NSW more than doubled from around 224,000 to 470,000. To get information out to as many of these people as possible, we launched a social media information campaign to raise awareness in the community of the changes to social security law and provide information about how to contact the Welfare Rights Centre. We

sent out daily posts about the changes and directed people to our new website and our COVID-19 information page.

To respond to the increased demand for the Centre's legal services during the COVID-19 lockdown, we redirected our legal resources to our advice line from March until June 2020, leading to a significant increase in the number of people we assisted with advice and information during the peak of the pandemic. However, we expect the demand we have seen is just the tip of the iceberg. The lifting of the debt pause combined with rising unemployment is likely to drive demand for social security advice and representation even higher.

To meet the increased demand we have started to roll out a fundraising strategy. This met with some early success when in June, we were successful in an application to the Ecstra Foundation which, combined with a grant from the Collier Charitable Foundation, has

Executive Director's Message

funded our new and expanded Community Legal Education program and boosted our communication and awareness raising capacities. Thanks to Ecstra and Collier, we will be holding CLE workshops targeting community organisations on an almost monthly basis during 2020 and 2021.

A significant development at the Centre has been the splitting of the Coordinator/Principal Solicitor role into the new roles of Executive Director and Principal Solicitor. In July 2019, we welcomed Natalie Ross as our new Principal Solicitor. Natalie brings to the Centre over 30 years of experience in the community legal and public sector.

Staff at the Welfare Rights Centre have shown amazing resilience during the COVID-19 crisis. With less than 24 hours' notice we started working from home and delivering our services remotely, with no interruption to our services. Our solicitors and caseworkers responded with compassion and applied their expertise to our clients' social security issues, which in

many instances were highly complex and challenging to resolve. Their work is at the heart of all that we do at the Centre.

With so many people now relying on income support to survive the recession, the Welfare Rights Centre's role in defending and advocating for social security rights and entitlements is more important than ever. We're expanding our capacity to meet this demand and to advocate for a fair social security system that is a genuine safety net for all who need it.

Katherine Boyle

Executive Director

Image: Solicitor Julius Golab supervising volunteers during an advice shift.



Casework Practice

The Welfare Rights Centre has been at the forefront of helping those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic who need access to a Centrelink payment. We provide referrals, information, advice and representation for people in NSW who have a problem with Centrelink. With the great support we received from our volunteers, pro bono partners and community legal centre colleagues, we have provided services with no interruption during the COVID-19 crisis.

We have continued to prioritise the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our advice and casework. Our priority clients are people who have no Centrelink payment and no other means of support, people with unfair Centrelink debts, people with disabilities, people who have limited English language skills, people experiencing family or domestic violence, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Total
Number of
Clients:

1164



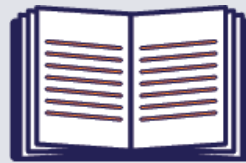
Referrals:

1104



Information:

950



Legal Task:

300



Legal
Advices:

1360



Representation
Services:

72

Service changes during COVID-19

In March 2020, the Centre commenced operating three advice shifts a week staffed directly by solicitors in response to the effects of COVID-19, increased demand and the temporary suspension of the volunteer program. We saw a peak in calls to our advice line in June 2020, likely because many people would have first claimed a payment in March and may not have experienced a problem with Centrelink until June, as well as growing community awareness of Welfare Rights Centre's services achieved through our expanded communications campaign.

Comparing the first three months of 2020 (1 January – 31 March) with the second three months (1 April – 30 June), we saw a 42% increase in the total number of clients assisted, a 26% increase in information provision to clients, a 41% increase in referrals, and a 45% increase in the number of legal advices provided.

The Centre was on the front foot in alerting clients to the changes in social security law, which included the temporary waiver of the Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period. In addition to launching our COVID-19 information campaign, we proactively re-contacted clients who had previously had their claim for a Centrelink payment declined because they were subject to the waiting period to inform them they may now be entitled to a Centrelink payment.

After lock down lifted in June 2020, the Centre returned to holding two advice shifts a week and gradually brought back volunteers to staff the advice line. At the end of the reporting period, the Centre is in the process of developing a new triage process to enable solicitors and caseworkers more time to dedicate to complex casework.

“As more job losses are experienced and social security law begins to tighten, many people who currently do not have a Centrelink problem will need our legal assistance.”

It is apparent that the bulk of COVID-19 related demand lies before us. As more job losses are experienced and social security law begins to tighten, many people who currently do not have a Centrelink problem will need our legal assistance. We also anticipate that Centrelink will re-examine decisions made during the COVID-19 period, which may see a rise in “sleeper problems” in the future.

Advice

As the COVID-19 measures unfolded, we saw a large number of clients seeking advice on eligibility for JobSeeker Payment. We received inquiries from many who had been stood down by their employer and needed access to a payment. We were also asked about the

differences between JobSeeker and JobKeeper, the new intent to claim provisions, and waiting periods. Throughout the reporting period, demand for assistance far exceeded our capacity by at least 25%.

Representing clients

The Centre represents clients in both their internal Centrelink appeals and appeals to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. There was a notable increase in the number of people contacting us who have a compensation preclusion period, a doubling the number of advices provided. These are complex matters both legally and from the perspective of the client's circumstances and require significant resources to achieve positive outcomes. Compensation Preclusion Period matters often involve clients facing issues of disability, homelessness, substance abuse and complex mental health conditions.

Disability Support Pension Clinic

Towards the end of 2019, we successfully re-launched our Disability Support Pension (DSP) Clinic with pro bono partners Hall & Wilcox. The DSP Clinic has undergone considerable change since it commenced as a clinic staffed by law student volunteers. Following an approach from Hall & Wilcox, the Clinic has now been revived and is staffed by pro bono solicitors. We thank Hall & Wilcox for increasing our capacity to deliver the DSP Clinic, and look forward to strengthening our partnership through 2020 and beyond.

Case study: Robodebt

Prior to the decision of the Federal Court of Australia which found that the methods used for calculating debts under the robodebt scheme were unlawful, the Centre had a case in the Social Services & Child Support (SS&CS) Division of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal testing the robodebt scheme. At the hearing, we argued that Centrelink had failed to provide any evidence that the debt was owed, and the onus was not on our client to disprove the existence of the debt. Unlike Centrelink, the Tribunal exercised its powers under the Social Security Act and obtained our client's payslips from her former employers. The payslips indicated that the majority of the income earned was during a period during which the client was not receiving a Centrelink payment.

The Tribunal member commented: "The tribunal finds it most curious that the Department made no attempt to ascertain [our client]'s actual earnings from the above two employers during the relevant period and instead merely apportioned the income over the relevant financial years".

The debt was referred back to Centrelink to recalculate the debt. Following recalculation, her debt of approximately \$9,800 was reduced to approximately \$1200.

Case Study: Family Tax Benefit Debt

Jenny is a single parent of three children who had experienced domestic violence before and after separating from her husband. Following her separation, she began receiving the Family Tax Benefit (FTB) and Parenting Payment. Two FTB debts were raised against her amounting to almost \$20,000. The debts resulted from an increase in her child support assessment that she had been deemed to receive. However, Jenny's ex-husband was erratic in his child support payments and she did not receive the full amount of child support she was entitled to. His volatility made it difficult for her to pursue him for arrears.

Jenny approached the Centre after she had been unsuccessful in her appeal to the Social Security and Child Support Division of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) to have her debts waived, and she had appealed to the General Division of the AAT. We advised Jenny to approach a Centrelink social worker to discuss the possibility of being retrospectively granted a partial exemption from the requirement to collect child support from her ex-husband, which would have the effect of reducing her debt. Unfortunately, the social worker was unaware of the ability of Centrelink to grant such exemptions retrospectively and declined to assist her. We then agreed to represent Jenny in her AAT appeal. Following correspondence and negotiations with the legal representative for the Department of Human Services, Jenny was granted a partial retrospective exemption from the maintenance action test, and her debt was reduced from \$20,000 to approximately \$2000.

Case Study: Reduction in Compensation Preclusion Period

Ron is an Aboriginal man with a long history of mental illness, drug and alcohol dependence, imprisonment and admissions to psychiatric units. He suffered a workplace injury during a brief period of employment and was awarded a modest amount of compensation that precluded him from Centrelink payments for approximately 15 months. He had recently been released from prison when he contacted us. He was homeless, unemployed and had spent all of the compensation money on food, rent and clothing. We represented him at the first division of the AAT. The Member decided to reduce Ron's Compensation Preclusion Period due to his special circumstances which meant Ron could receive Centrelink payment immediately. We had the benefit of considerable support from our client's parole officer.

Letter of thanks from a client

I cannot resist to write you this letter of thanks, being not only benefited by efforts of your esteemed organisation but as a co-worker in the field of community service who is really impressed by your dedicated involvements in attaining and achieving your target of legal help to needy.

This has reference to my case regarding a payment from Centrelink. This issue was handled by your esteemed Centre through your Solicitor Ms Donna Flood very impressively and by taking personal pains. No doubt she is devoted to her work.

I thank you and also grateful to Solicitor Donna for her applaudable efforts. It gave me not only confidence rather created respect in my eyes for Australian NGOs which are working in the field of community services.

I finish this letter by paying my hearty gratitude to your organisation and wish you all the best hoping that you will keep your struggle strongly in enshrining Human Rights and the Rule of Law.



Policy, Law Reform & Media

The Welfare Rights Centre undertakes the majority of its policy, law reform and media work in conjunction with Economic Justice Australia (EJA) (formerly the National Social Security Rights Network). EJA is the national peak organisation for community legal centres providing specialist advice about social security issues and rights. Our casework expertise provides valuable guidance to EJA regarding policy reforms and submissions to parliamentary committees, with the Centre's casework informing many of the research projects and media campaigns coordinated by EJA throughout 2019/20.

During the COVID-19 crisis, it was challenging for the Centre to keep up to date with the Federal Government's rolling announcements about changes to social

security law and Centrelink's procedures. We were fortunate to receive regular updates and support from EJA, which monitored and kept us abreast of the constant changes.

The COVID-19 social security changes

Centrelink's relaxation of social security laws, policies and procedures due to COVID-19 has provided a safety net for people during the crisis. However, these changes are temporary. It is our hope that the public's interest in Australia's social security system and the increased numbers of people relying on income support, leads to recognition of the importance of a fair and effective social security system for everyone

in our community and, in turn, a permanent increase in the rate of JobSeeker Payment.

Importantly, we believe we are seeing a decrease in the stigma associated with receiving Centrelink payments. Increased numbers of people on JobSeeker Payment may also highlight the many deficiencies in the operations of the job service providers with which unemployed people are compelled to engage.

Coronavirus Supplement

The introduction of the Coronavirus Supplement, at \$550 per fortnight, effectively doubled the rate of payment for unemployed people lifting thousands out of poverty. As the Supplement is to be reduced in September 2020 and finish on 31 December 2020, we have also been lobbying to Raise the Rate for Good and to keep or extend many of the other supportive changes introduced in response to COVID-19.

Mutual Obligations

Between March and August 2020, Centrelink's 'mutual obligations' requirements were temporarily suspended due to COVID-19, resulting in a welcomed relief in casework responding to payment penalties, suspensions and cancellations. Mutual obligations are, however, scheduled to be reintroduced in August 2020.

Suspension of debt recovery

In April, Centrelink suspended its debt recovery processes, which resulted in a slowing of casework in this area. We expect

that when Centrelink's suspension on debt recovery is lifted, there will be a significant increase in the number of people needing help with debts, and a consequent increase in demand for the Centre's services exceeding pre-COVID levels.

Waiver of Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period (NARWP)

In March, the Government announced it would waive the NARWP, which precludes new migrants from accessing Centrelink for many years, including people who have worked in Australia for a considerable period of time. When the waiver of the NARWP ends on 31 December 2020, many people will have their payments cancelled and will need to claim Special Benefit. If their claim is rejected they will need help appealing rejections of these claims.

We anticipate that we will need to do substantial messaging to ensure people are aware their payments will be cancelled on 1 January 2021, explain who may be eligible for Special Benefit and promote the need to claim Special Benefit before the end of 2020.

The Centre, in conjunction with EJA, has been advocating for the expansion of benefits to more visa subclasses. In particular, there has been significant advocacy work for those who were serving the NARWP before receiving Centrelink benefits.

Welfare Rights Centre reaches out to people who have no income

On 25 March, the Australian Government announced a number of important changes to Centrelink payments in response to the COVID crisis, including the temporary suspension of the Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period.

That was big news. We knew there were people in dire circumstances who had previously been told they wouldn't be eligible for a Centrelink payment for 4 years, but there was no way to identify who those people were and make sure they knew about the emergency measures. Services Australia made it clear they would not be proactively contacting people.

Welfare Rights Centre began promoting the suspension of the waiting period on social media but decided we needed to be more proactive than that.

The Centre's Principal Solicitor assembled a team including a number of secondees generously provided by the law firm HWL Ebsworth. They worked their way back through the Centre's client database to identify clients who we had previously advised were not eligible for Centrelink payments because of the waiting period.

After we had compiled the list of former clients, our pro bono solicitors began the process of contacting each and every one to let them know that the law had changed.

For some, that call was a game changer, as they had not previously known they could access JobSeeker or another appropriate payment during the COVID crisis.



Community Education & Engagement

Community Legal Education (CLE) is designed to increase awareness and understanding, and promote critical examination, of social security law and policy. Our CLE program provides information in a variety of formats, including presentations to community organisations and community workers, information displays, community events and factsheets. In addition, this year we began a process of embedding CLE in our social media strategy.

We aim to raise community awareness and increase the ability of clients to understand social security law and policy. We strive to create a climate for participating in and influencing social security law and policy-making processes and for pursuing law reform, through collective action where appropriate. We also aim to increase the ability of community workers to

understand social security law and policy, to identify when a client has a social security problem, and where appropriate, to assist their client with their problem.

CLE Program 2019-20

Over the last year, the Centre introduced a new Community Legal Education program covering Social Security Basics, Disability Support Pension, Carers Payment, Lump Sum Compensation Payments, Domestic Violence and Robodebts. Initially, CLE presentations were held face to face but we shifted to Zoom after COVID-19 restrictions were imposed.

Our CLE program is critical to maintaining our engagement with the community sector. It helps community workers

recognise a social security problem and provides information about how to resolve simple problems and when to refer clients to the Centre. Many of our clients are referred to us by community organisations who have participated in our CLE presentations.

COVID-19 Information Campaign

As COVID hit and the lines outside Centrelink offices grew, the Centre rapidly developed and actioned a broad-reaching community education campaign. The campaign's design was informed by the likelihood that many of those claiming Centrelink payments would not have previously claimed income support or had not claimed income support for some time, and consequently would have limited understanding of Centrelink processes and appeals mechanisms.

The campaign's key purpose was to ensure people in NSW were aware that they could seek independent legal advice from the Centre if their claim for a social security payment was rejected. Further, the campaign promoted the Centre's expertise, noting the Centre has a long record of successfully supporting people to appeal Centrelink decisions. The campaign's messaging was based around strong values including community spirit, strength and dignity, solidarity and hope.

The campaign resulted in a far stronger social media presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, with significant increases in reach and number of followers. Effective use of social media enabled provision of bite-sized community legal

education to both service providers and members of the community. This was particularly timely given rolling changes to Centrelink payments and eligibility requirement. The Centre gained media attention, including the Executive Director's appearances on the ABC's 7:30 programme, Life Matters and Background Briefing.

Factsheets

The Centre has collaborated with Economic Justice Australia in developing a new set of factsheets that explain peoples' rights and obligations and what to do if Centrelink has made an incorrect or unfair decision. Topics include domestic violence, relationship status, appealing Centrelink decisions, Centrelink debt, as well as the new factsheets covering bushfires and COVID-19.

New website launched

We launched our new website on 25 March 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 restrictions. We promoted current social security information via our COVID-19 information campaign, which led to strong interest in our website and an exponential increase in website traffic. From the date of launch until 30 June 2020, there were over 26,000 visits to our website, and over 16,000 unique views of our dedicated COVID-19 page.



New Client Interview Room

The Welfare Rights Centre offices underwent renovations to use the office space more efficiently and create a client interview room. Office renovations were completed while staff were working from home. The build went smoothly and was completed on time.

The biggest change this year was the need to adjust to social distancing requirements and working from home during the COVID-19 crisis. Fortunately, our IT system was already set up to accommodate this requirement and there was no interruption to our service. Although staff have been able to come into the office more frequently, we continue to have most client interactions over the phone.



Finances

The audited financial result for 2019-20 is a surplus of \$137,377. As at 30 June 2020, we maintain a healthy level of equity of \$439,176. However, going forward our expenses will exceed combined annual sources of income by approximately \$100,000. The Centre will be able to meet the shortfall in 2020-21 by applying this year's surplus.

The Centre receives its funding from a diverse range of sources in 2019-20. We received funding from State and Federal Governments, trade union and superannuation fund partners, philanthropic trusts and foundations, and donations. We also received very generous in-kind support

from our pro bono partners, helping make our work possible though the secondment of staff, volunteer engagement and donation of resources and facilities.

The Centre's full financial statements are available on request, and is also available from the Australian Charities Register, on the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission website, www.acnc.gov.au.

To meet the future funding shortfall and to increase our resources to meet the demand for our services, the Centre has embarked on a new fundraising strategy in partnership with Wendy Brooks & Partners, which has met with early success in obtaining funding for our CLE & Communications Program.



Our Staff

Katherine Boyle

Executive Director

Katherine has worked in the community legal sector, union movement, private practice and in the public sector for over 25 years. Prior to her current position, she was the Coordinator/Principal Solicitor at the Welfare Rights Centre. She currently leads the Centre's strategic planning and implementation, staff and organisational management, and policy and law reform. She volunteered at the Welfare Rights Centre in the 1990s.

Natalie Ross

Principal Solicitor

Natalie commenced as the Centre's Principal Solicitor in July 2019. She has worked and volunteered in the community legal sector for 30 years and was the Principal Solicitor at Inner City Legal Centre and team leader at Redfern Legal Centre. She has authored, edited and project managed many plain English legal publications. Before joining the Centre, Natalie worked as a generalist solicitor and clinic supervisor at Kingsford Legal Centre.

Daniel Turner

Senior Solicitor

Dan has worked in community legal centres for more than seven years. Starting as a volunteer at the Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre while still a student, he has now held many positions including intake officer, tenant advocate, solicitor and legal service

co-ordinator. Dan has also been on the board off CLCNSW for the past five years, and has a very broad range of experience both as a lawyer and manager in the CLC sector.

Donna Flood

Solicitor

Donna has worked in the community legal sector since 2012. Her role includes interviewing and advising clients, as well as representing them both to Centrelink and at the AAT. Over the last year, Donna's casework has routinely included getting people on appropriate Centrelink payments and successfully appealing debts. As well as her expertise in social security law, Donna has worked as a volunteer solicitor in both family law and general practice.

Julius Golab

Solicitor

Julius began working in the community legal sector while studying at the University of Wollongong and has been with the Welfare Rights Centre since 2019. His role involves advising and representing clients. Over the last year, Julius's work has included a focus on appealing Compensation Preclusion Periods for vulnerable clients to the AAT.

Juliet Dimond

Solicitor

Juliet worked temporarily at the Welfare Rights Centre from November 2019 to April 2020. Juliet has a strong background in volunteering at community legal centres and over the years has volunteered at various CLCs including Women's Legal Service, Redfern Legal Centre, Katherine Regional Aboriginal Legal Service, the Inner City Legal Centre and the Welfare Rights Centre. Juliet also has a background in government policy and law reform.

Sally Cameron

COVID-19 Information Campaign Lead

Sally has worked in numerous community legal centres, other community sector organisations and international agencies over the last 25 years, bringing wide ranging experience in community education and policy analysis to her role at Welfare Rights Centre. As the Information Campaign Lead, she coordinated the design and implementation of broad reaching community education campaign as an urgent response to the large numbers of people applying for a social security payment as a result of COVID-19.

Linda Forbes

Senior Caseworker

Linda joined us in April, working one day a week supervising our Disability Support Pension Clinic. This hands-on casework experience of the trials and tribulations of appealing DSP rejections has complemented her work as EJA's Law Reform, Policy and Comms Officer. Working at the Centre has been somewhat of a Groundhog Day experience for Linda. She worked at the Centre for 18 years from 1991 and prior to that, she worked in DSS's appeals and policy branches where she first developed an abiding

obsession about addressing issues affecting access to income security rights for people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrants and refugees.

Danny Shaw

Casework Consultant

Danny has over 20 years' experience in social security law and knows his way round the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. After leaving the Centre to start a career in criminal law, Danny returned to the Centre one day a week as a consultant for our complex casework, but has now started working full-time in criminal law. Danny's commitment to the Centre's clients and getting outcomes is legendary and we will miss him greatly.

Ben Jackson

Intake Officer

Ben helps clients access Welfare Rights Centre's services through management of our client intake procedures and supervision of volunteers and secondees. He brings a background in law and counselling to the role, having worked in legal, mental health, and homelessness services. Ben's expertise has strongly informed our intake procedures, ensuring an understanding of the complexity and diversity of people's experience guides interaction with our clients day-to-day.

Eric Chu

Office Administrator

Eric's background in project coordination and customer service is invaluable in his role as Office Administrator. His work includes undertaking administrative duties, maintaining office systems and supervising volunteers. Eric's efficiency and attention to detail have proven invaluable to the efficient operation of the Welfare Rights Centre's legal practice and community legal education program.

Guest Volunteer Profile!

Jessica Duan

Jessica has been volunteering at the Welfare Rights Centre since the beginning of 2019, working as a website enquiries and administration volunteer. She is currently completing her Juris Doctor from the University of Sydney and will be graduating at the end of 2020. Jessica's staunch belief in the importance of social security rights in the effective functioning of society has led her to be an excellent and committed volunteer and an invaluable asset to the team. Jessica likes hiking, rock-climbing, spicy food and hopes to run a marathon next year!

Our Board

Simon Rice

Chair

Simon is the Kim Santow Chair of Law and Social Justice at the University of Sydney Law School. He has been a solicitor and volunteer at Redfern Legal Centre, Principal Solicitor and Director of Kingsford Legal Centre, and a board member of many other legal centres. He has also been Director of the NSW Law and Justice Foundation, Chair of the ACT Law Reform Advisory Council, adviser to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, and a judicial member of the NSW Administrative Decisions Tribunal. Simon has practised, taught and written extensively on anti-discrimination and human rights law. Simon was elected the Chair of the Board at the Annual General Meeting in 2019.

Clancy King

Deputy Chair

Clancy is a former volunteer of the Welfare Rights Centre and has lived experience of dealing with social security law. She holds a Juris Doctor and a Bachelor of Arts in Communications and is a senior associate in the employment team at DLA Piper. Clancy joined the Board in December 2015 and became Deputy Chair in 2016.

James Jankulovski

Company Secretary

James is a senior associate in the disputes group at Herbert Smith Freehills. He holds a Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Science from UNSW. In 2017, James was awarded an Australian Institute of Company Directors' Not-for-Profit Scholarship and has since completed the AICD's Governance Foundations for Not-for-Profit Directors course. James was a volunteer at the Welfare Rights

Centre in 2014 and 2015 before joining the Board in April 2015 and being appointed Company Secretary in October 2015.

Lua de Burgh

Director

Lua is a former administrative secretary of the Welfare Rights Centre. She has experience dealing with social security law and Centrelink from a personal perspective. Lua has worked at George Community Housing, Hurstville, as a customer service officer and is an Aboriginal Yuin Nation woman with family ties to the south coast of NSW. She joined the Board in December of 2016.

Marc Hopkins

Director

Marc has worked in his current position as Professional Officer (Mental Health) at the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association for the past six years and has worked as a registered nurse in the mental health sector for over 30 years. His current role involves representing and promoting the professional interests of nurses and midwives'. He joined the Board in November 2015.

Scarlet Wilcock

Director

Scarlet is a Lecturer at the University of Wollongong School of Law. She is admitted as a solicitor in NSW and is former volunteer of both the Welfare Rights Centre and Social Security Victoria. She joined the Board in December 2015.

Laura Lombardo

Director

Laura is a special counsel in the pro bono team at Gilbert + Tobin. She was previously the Principal Solicitor at the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, a community legal centre specialising in public interest litigation. Laura joined the board in October 2016.

Sam Clay

Director

Sam is a Professional Support Officer with the NSW Teachers Federation. He has been the Federation's nominee on the Board since April 2018. Sam holds a Bachelor of Science with Honours, Bachelor of Laws and Graduate Diploma of Education from the University of New England. He completed his practical placement for his Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice with the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT in Wagga Wagga.

Valentine Tse

Director

Valentine is the Managing Director of a public practice accountancy firm with over 25 years' experience in financial control, taxation and wealth management. Prior to becoming self-employed, Valentine held positions of responsibility at Price Waterhouse, IAG, Zurich and Intech. He joined the Board in October 2017.



Thank you

The Welfare Rights Centre gratefully acknowledges members, partners, volunteers and donors who make our work possible.

For their support of the Welfare Rights Centre, we would like to thank:

- Members of our Trade Union Program: Independent Education Union, Teachers Federation, United Workers Union, NSW Nurses & Midwives Association, Public Service Association, and Sutherland Tradies;
- HESTA;
- Ecstra Foundation and Collier Charitable Fund; and
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Thank You

Our volunteers keep the doors open at the Welfare Rights Centre and help us in everything we do. A big Thank You!

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IFTHEKHAR, Fahid

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KAZMIERCZAK, Brendan

KUMAR, Lavanya

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LIM, Dal



Thank You

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