



northern suburbs  
community  
legal centre

annual report  
2019-2020





northern suburbs  
community  
legal centre

## vision

Leading in community social justice.

## mission

Provide innovative and dynamic services to enable justice for clients and the community.

## values

### person-centred and holistic

People are at the centre of our activities.

### respect

For each other and the right of everyone to make their own choices.

### inclusive

Working actively to reduce barriers to access and improve outcomes across different communities.

### safe and open communication

We listen and respect the value of all our clients, communities, staff and stakeholders.

### excellence

Commitment to improve justice through evidence based services that are integrated and focused on empowerment.

### compassion and appreciation

To all those we work for and with.

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The audited financial statement has not been included in this version of the annual report. You may request a copy by contacting us, or viewing on *The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission* website.

NSCLC acknowledges the traditional Indigenous owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, culture and community. Our offices are located on land of the Aboriginal Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, the traditional custodians of this land. We pay our respects to elders past and present.

## message from the chair

This year has been an exciting new chapter for the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre. Reviews of existing systems have resulted in changes which have strengthened the team and positioned the centre to provide service delivery in an even more responsive and flexible manner. The chief executive officer, Kathy Blitz-Cokis, in conjunction

with the Board, have also worked to put into place several initiatives over the year including in August a strategic planning day.

During this process staff and Board reflected on our current strategy and reviewed the current and potential future organisational and sector environment. This resulted in the development of our new exciting strategic plan

that spans the next five years. We will continue to focus on creating opportunities whilst providing stability and encouraging growth.

Throughout the year, we have had continued success in expanding our services and delivering on all our contractual obligations. In addition, the increased presence and participation of the Centre across the sector and throughout various networks through the work of the new CEO and senior staff has proven successful for both clients and the community.

The Centre was agile in the response to the pandemic and was able to provide some continuity and accessibility for people despite the difficulties posed. Our clients are mostly vulnerable, from many different backgrounds, circumstances and with varying abilities. It was our priority to ensure they could reach out and speak with someone when they needed to.



• Jennifer Hannan

There have been many highlights which are covered in more detail throughout the report. I am particularly pleased however with our new strategic plan, developing systems and policies to support our clients and staff, the provision of additional funds to further support those who are victims of violence and those dealing with elder abuse.

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Board of Management to thank the wonderful staff and volunteers of NSCLC for their energy, commitment and ongoing work. I would also like to thank the Board for the time, energy and expertise that they provide to our organisation.

The work of the centre is important, essential work and we are privileged to have a dedicated, professional team.

– Jennifer Hannan AM



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# message from the chief executive officer

As chief executive officer, there are many memorable moments over the course of the year. We faced some challenges, unpredictable at times but with many successful outcomes. Overall, the Centre contributed to a multitude of benefits across our community. This is evident each day when I hear the stories, commitment and investment of staff and volunteers. The photographs throughout this report tell a story and as I reflected on each one, I was reminded of how exceptional the work has been and the core of what drives the organisation.

I extend my absolute gratitude and thanks to each member of the Board of Management and Jennifer Hannan as

the Chair. The Board provided a supportive environment, coupled with clear guidance. This created open discussion where many ideas and plans were able to take shape and progress.

Towards the end of 2019, a key event for us was the development of the new strategic plan (2019-2023). We decided on our vision, 'leading in community social justice', which also heralded a new beginning. Our values particularly resonate with me and provide a solid foundation for the type of organisation we strive to be.

We established a presence in several areas this year that recognises the tireless work of staff. This ranged from the nomination of a volunteer for the Seniors Awards week, our Older People's Rights Service, Senior Solicitor,

nomination for Senior Woman Lawyer of the Year and our Principal Solicitor being an executive member of the WA Community Legal Association. We were invited to be witnesses at a state government parliamentary inquiry, following the submission of our comprehensive report and, received a

multitude of positive client messages where we made a difference. Our networks and partnerships also excelled. We became partners in several projects ranging from research, education across our diverse community, a new health-justice partnership and a community of practice.

There is no doubt that the world-wide health crisis presented tough and trying

times for the mobilisation of our workforce and the impact on our clients. We pulled together and continued to provide modified services to the best of our ability.

The situation highlighted the resilience of the organisation and enforced the need to be progressive, striving for excellence in our systems.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the patience, hard work and collective unity from my staff. Each person has contributed to the organisation's evolvment and footprint. There has been change and I want to thank people for taking the leap with me. We are in this together and will continue to create a service that is effective, meaningful and of great value.

**Kathy Blitz-Cokis**  
Chief Executive Officer



• Kathy Blitz-Cokis

# our people

## Board of Management

Jennifer Hannan AM	Chairperson
Diana MacTiernan	Deputy Chairperson
Michael Klimek	Secretary
Allison Lennard	Treasurer
W Rupert Johnson	Member
Richard Klimek	Member
Toby Nisbet	Member
Tracey Negus	Member
Gaelle Gouillou	Member



## Volunteers

Alan Gomes	Kristy Hill
Tracey Breedt	Helen Hotai
Kathryn Goldie	Indira Santi
James Michelin	Klara Koch
Emma Black	Robyn McMillan
Katherine Watkins	Madhuri P Sinha

## Staff

Kathy Blitz-Cokis	Chief Executive Officer
Louellyn Gane	Principal Solicitor
Anne Kendall	Client Service Officer
Rachael Orr	Client Service Officer
Sarah Webley	Client Service Officer
Kate Thorp	Client Service Officer
Phillip Plato	Systems Coordinator
June Singh	Finance Officer
Fran Ottolini	Senior Solicitor
Nicholas Snare	Senior Solicitor
Fleur Leishman	Senior Solicitor
Kim Broughton	Senior Solicitor
Vicki Edwards	Solicitor
Julie Hona	Solicitor
Laura Post	Solicitor
Mary Martin	Tenancy Advocate & Financial Counsellor
Paul Harrison	Tenancy Advocate
Gaynor Noonan	Team Leader/ Client Health Advocate
Marissa Martin	Communications and Volunteer Coordinator
Camille Grubba	Communications and Volunteer Coordinator
Amy Burgess	Social Worker/ Client Advocate
Arielle Carignan-Perron	Social Worker/ Client Advocate



*“The value of our organisation is that it is made up of passionate, professional and talented individuals, who are all extraordinary in their commitment to their respective careers, our clients, our community and our organisation.” – Staff quote*

## our volunteers

At the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre (NSCLC) we understand the value of volunteers to both the organisation and local community. We have a range of volunteers all with their own unique skills, experience and knowledge who give up their time freely to support our vision and programs.



- Volunteers: Jan and Peter – Seniors Award lunch.

### Older People's Rights Service – Volunteers

A group of peer volunteers who advocate for the protection of older people's rights by providing information to others in the community on issues relating to elder abuse and ageism, as well as promoting positive ageing strategies.

OPRS volunteers contributed their time supporting and facilitating a variety of projects. These include: the 'Purple Road'; community awareness events and exhibitions; community partnerships and network meetings. This year we were privileged to have the following people involved: Judy Joukador, Pauline Simpson, Joy Emmeluth, Mary Kepert, Karen Reed and Evaline Bailey, Jan Watts.

### Seniors at Risk Register

The Seniors Addressing Risks at Home program – SARaH, formerly Seniors at Risk Register, is operated by trained volunteers who make weekly calls to older people at risk of isolation and who appreciate a social chat. The primary reason for establishing SARaH was to reduce the risk of abuse and crime to seniors in their own home and thereby maintaining their personal and financial security. In response to the COVID-19 lock-down, a web application was developed to facilitate our volunteers continuing their good work safely from their homes.



- Volunteers, staff and local member of parliament Jannine Freeman at the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2020.

Thank you to all our volunteers for their tireless energy, expertise and time.

## our partners

### Funding

- Commonwealth Government, Attorney General – CLSP Program–Generalist Funding
- Commonwealth Government, Women’s Safety Package SDVU/Health Justice Partnership
- Department of Communities – Older People’s Rights Service (OPRS)
- Department of Justice (WA) Criminal Confiscation Grant Program
- Department of Justice (WA) – Joondalup Respondent Duty Solicitor Service
- Department of Mines, Industry Regulation & Safety – Tenancy Advice and Education Services (TAES)

### Pro Bono Partners

- Baily Family Law
- Bloxham Legal
- Hartrey Legal
- Klimek & Wijay Family Lawyers
- Saxon Legal
- Walters O’Sullivan Lawyers

### Partnerships

- City of Bayswater
- City of Subiaco
- Communicare
- Edith Cowan University
- Ishar Multicultural Women’s Health Centre
- Joondalup Health Campus
- Legal Aid Commission of WA
- McCusker Centre for Citizenship
- Spiers Centre
- Southern Communities Advocacy and Legal Education Service
- University of Western Australia – Social Care and Social Ageing Living Lab
- University of Western Australia – Mediation Unit
- Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services
- Women’s Community Health Network WA



*“Being part of an organisation that is committed to improving the circumstances of clients, by being person centred, realistic and innovative in addressing issues that matter and affect the person.” – Staff quote*

## our services

The NSCLC provides several programs, predominantly for people living in Perth's north metropolitan corridor, with the exception of OPRS which is metropolitan wide.

There is no wrong door entry, with individual legal need recognised as being in the context of complex life issues that often require health, social and financial support.

The NSCLC provides an integrated approach to supporting clients. This is based on principles of accessibility, collaboration, capacity building and innovation.

We continue to be a diverse and multidisciplinary group of professionals, with employed solicitors, tenancy/housing advocates, health advocates, social work staff, financial counsellors and client service officers – together with a valuable contingent of dedicated volunteers.

The new *NSCLC Strategic Plan 2019-2023* was developed this year and highlights our focus on client-centered practice, quality services and partnerships.

As a team of professionals, we were proud to work on and create a plan that has meaning and provides a strong foundation to serve our community.

### NSCLC Consumer Advisory Group

The introduction and aim of the group is to provide support and advice to NSCLC to improve our approach to the community, our service mix and the overall consumer experience. This is moving along and we extend a thank you to group members for their participation so far.

### Immigration Outreach Clinic – LAWА

In November, LAWА began an outreach clinic at the Mirrabooka office for clients experiencing migration issues. This has been a great success.

The community, especially in our catchment area, has responded well and we thank LAWА for the service.

## our core services include:

- General legal service – family law, civil and minor criminal (Mirrabooka and Joondalup offices) and a legal service for family and domestic violence.
- Older People's Rights Service (OPRS) for people over 65 years at risk of or experiencing elder abuse (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people over 50 years), including volunteer program
- Restraining Orders and Respondents Program (ROAR)- Joondalup Magistrates Court.
- Women's Resource and Engagement Network (WREN) for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence
- Tenant Advocacy and Education Program, including a weekly duty service to Joondalup Court.
- Community education and training for professionals



*"Strong Leadership."* – Staff quote

## general legal services

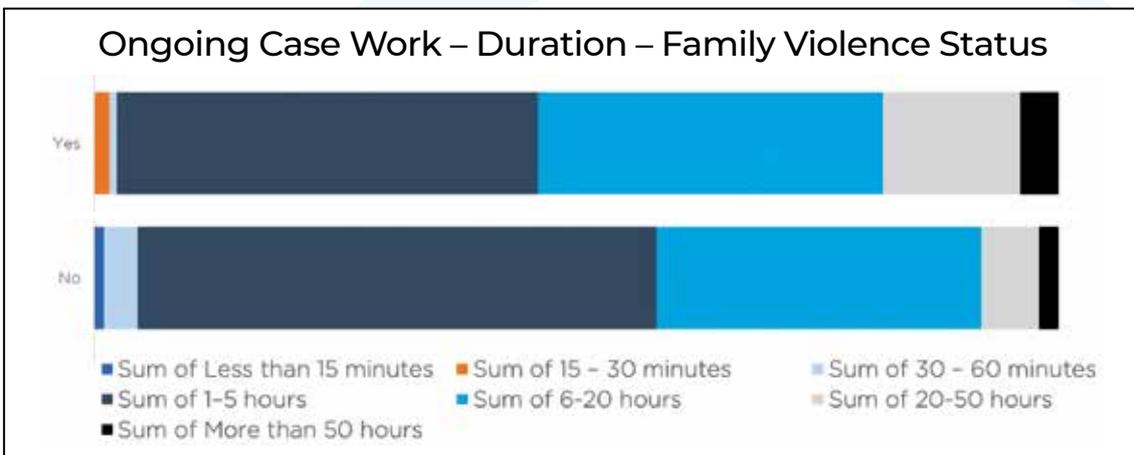
General legal advice appointments continued to be offered at both the Joondalup and Mirrabooka offices five days per week. Solicitors provided limited representation at the Family Court of WA and in the Magistrates Court in Midland, Joondalup and Perth. Our Mirrabooka-based solicitors provided legal advice in family law, family violence, and civil law including debt, criminal injuries compensation and motor vehicle accidents. The Joondalup office provided telephone advice in family law, family violence, civil including debt, criminal injuries compensation and motor vehicle accidents as well as legal advice on traffic and minor criminal matters. Our partnership continued with Edith Cowan University and our Joondalup office again hosted the Community Law and Practice Unit for the School of Law.

Both offices recorded a high proportion of clients attending with family and domestic violence concerns and an increasing number of clients presenting with multiple complex issues.



Students in the program attended our Joondalup office one day per week and gained practical legal experience under supervision of the Centre's senior solicitor.

Due to COVID-19, the number of students completing the unit was limited this year. Eight students were enrolled in the undergraduate practicum unit, and an additional three completed the practical training module of the Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice.

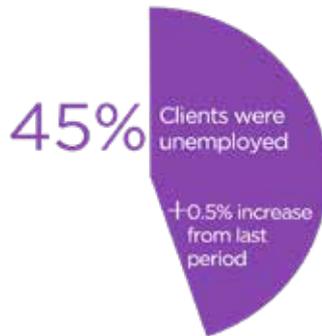
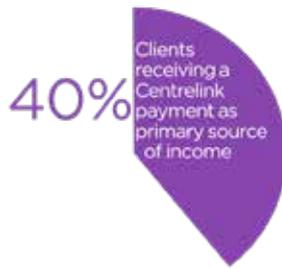


Over the last financial year, of all NSCLC services provided to clients, family and domestic violence was identified as a risk factor in 47.3%. The table outlines the complex nature and investment of time on these cases. There was increased proportion of time spent in the 20-50 hour time allocation compared to no family and domestic violence risk factor cases.

Clients who speak a language other than English at home represented almost 10% of the total NSCLC client group in 2019/2020 but represented 27% of all recorded time spent on representative cases.

34% Male      65% Female      1% Non-Binary

Total number of clients assisted **2682**



28.5% of all clients disclosed a history of family violence      +0.5% increase from last period

## the five most common problem types

<b>1482</b>	<b>1342</b>	<b>1171</b>	<b>909</b>	<b>847</b>
Family and/or Domestic Violence	Child Contact Orders	Family Law Property Settlement	Child Residency	Family Violence Restraining Orders

## streams of law

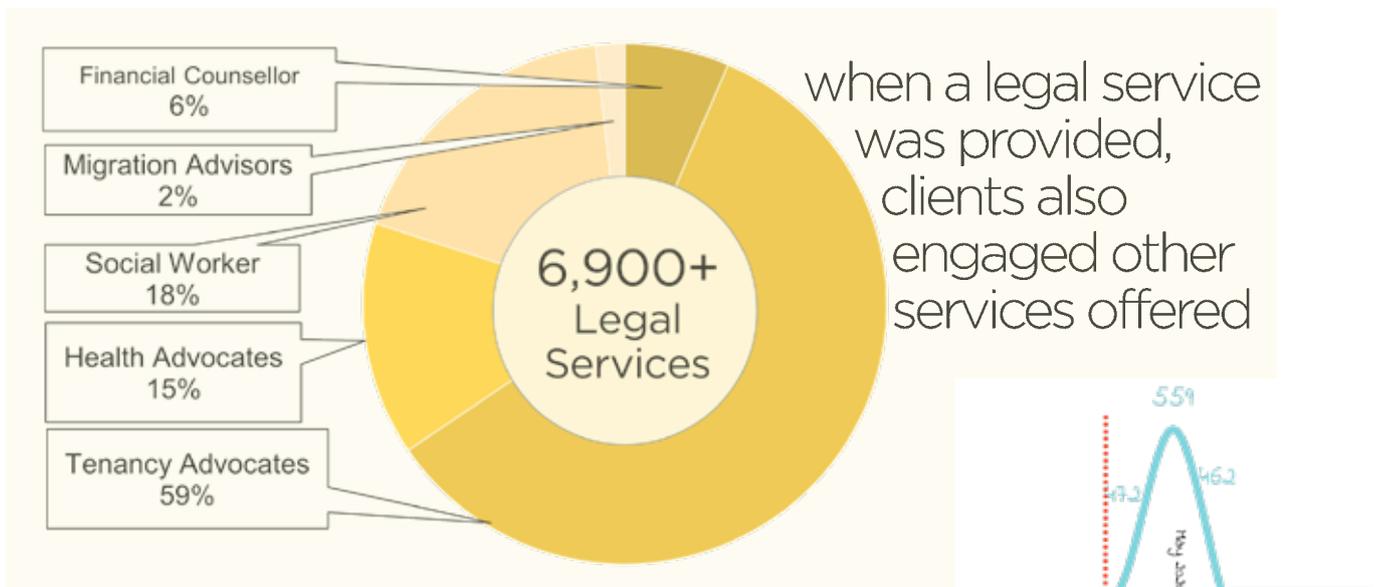
<b>48%</b> Family Law	<b>40%</b> Civil Law
	<b>12%</b> Criminal Law

## training program

<b>36</b> Community Legal Education Activities	<b>25</b> Legal Training Activities	<b>42</b> Stakeholder Engagement Activities
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# 8,000 occasions of service across our 5 program areas

providing a **wrap-around service**



our **pro-bono partners advised 982 appointments** to 605 clients.

**Volunteer Solicitors and Law Graduates** provided a total of **432** legal services

and **speciality research students spent over 300** hours on project work

COVID-19 saw our **modes of delivery** quickly adapting

## restraining orders and respondents – ROAR

The Restraining Order and Respondents Service (ROAR) provided advice and support to 92 clients through the Joondalup Court this year. A large proportion were respondents seeking assistance with Family Violence Restraining Orders and Violence Restraining Orders.

It is a valuable service that is an integral part of the broader court system. Our solicitors provided a range of information and with many clients, attempted to resolve matters before resulting to a trial.

- 92 clients were assisted by the duty lawyer service throughout the period, with 58% having previously accessed a service from NSCLC and 42% being new clients.
- ROAR was able to assist 87.6% of people who requested assistance and 69.6% of these people had their matters resolved by negotiation.
- 58% of people with a presenting issue received advice and information on family and domestic violence and relevant protection orders.

- 64% of clients were male
- 27.1% self-reported a disability
- 92% of clients were financially disadvantaged
- Respondents attending the Court were primarily from the three surrounding local governments areas
  - 42.2% within the City of Wanneroo;
  - 14.1% within the City of Joondalup;
  - 12.7% within the City of Stirling.
- 64% of matters concerned family and/or domestic violence.

NSCLC staff were invited to appear at the Parliamentary *Inquiry into Magistrates Court of WA management matters involving Family and Domestic Violence*. This followed a submission based on the ROAR program and the work of the duty lawyer service for respondents. The State Government will report on the *Inquiry* recommendations over the coming months and we look forward to positive changes.



*“Through our networks, we spread the message of social justice.” – Staff quote*

# tenancy advice and education program

Our tenant advocates provide advocacy, advice and community legal education events for both private and public tenants falling within our catchment.

They are skilled negotiators advocating for the rights of both public and private tenants whilst also working with tenants to provide them with the necessary tools to improve their situation and to accept responsibility for the decisions they make.

The Tenancy Advice and Education Program is one of the organisations busiest programs, often dealing with clients presenting with multiple, complex issues. The service supported 254 clients over the year, with 69% of them being women. Over the course of the year, our tenant advocates predominately assisted with rental terminations, general rights and bonds.

The program is offered at the Mirrabooka and Joondalup office. As skilled negotiators, our advocates have built strong relationships with public housing staff and property managers and have achieved many positive outcomes through their cooperative working practices.



In addition, our tenant advocates appear in the Joondalup Court each week, providing a duty advocate service.

This last year, our tenant advocates provided in excess of 1055 advices as well as representing clients in court on several occasions. They participated in the broader tenancy network and maintained strong working relations with many local services as well as with other tenant advocate professionals across the sector.



*“Through empowering our clients, we empower our communities.” – Staff quote*

WREN is in its third year of operation and was established under the Commonwealth Government, Women's Safety Package. It is a partnership with Legal Aid WA and the Ramsey Health/Joondalup Health Campus. The service continues to work closely with other agencies including the Spiers Centre, the Pat Giles Centre and Edith Cowan University, School of Psychology.

During 2019-2020, client referrals were received from Joondalup Health Campus, Magistrates Court, domestic violence support services, the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, NSCLC Mirrabooka and Joondalup offices, WA Police, multicultural services and other support services.



## the health-justice partnerships

In September 2019 we established a health-justice partnership with Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Service. This has proven to be a great success with accessibility to support and advice for clients from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds proving invaluable. Our senior solicitors visit the service on a fortnightly rotation and provide both case work and education sessions to clients and staff.

Our work continues with the Joondalup Health Campus where the WREN staff attend weekly to provide legal advice and assistance to women experiencing family and domestic violence. We introduced new flexible contact methods, including phone consultations which allowed continuity of the service throughout the COVID-19 lock-down period. Referrals increased by 47.6% in comparison to the same time last year. We found a 216% increase in the up-take of appointments and a 383% increase in legal advice provided.

As of 1 July 2019 the financial support service was established as part of the WREN holistic model. Clients were assisted with:

- Budgeting and prioritising debts;
- Information on the WA No Interest Loan scheme;
- Emergency relief information including food vouchers;
- Negotiating with debt collectors, banks, the Fines Enforcement Registry and approval of financial hardship variation requests.



# the older people's rights services

The OPRS team, funded through the Department of Communities, continued to provide legal advice, information and support to older adults who are at risk of, or are experiencing elder abuse and live in the Perth Metropolitan area or Mandurah.

The last twelve months have been extremely busy for the team with local and national acknowledgment of the scale of elder abuse in our communities. We contributed and were part of the Department of Communities 'Strategy to respond to the Abuse of Older People' (Elder Abuse), launch and continued our involvement with the Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (APEA).

This past few months were particularly challenging for our older people with the onset of COVID-19. We heard many stories of loneliness, and significant isolation. We also heard many stories of communities and families coming together to support each other during unprecedented times. For older people, many clients expressed that their lives had not changed significantly as they already live in a small world.



Congratulations to Fran Ottolini (right), our OPRS Senior Solicitor, who was nominated for the Women's Lawyer of the Year Award, pictured with Carol Boogaard.



Minister for Seniors the Hon Mick Murray MLA at WA Elder Abuse Strategy Launch 2019 with NSCLC staff.

To this end, we were invited to be part of a working group for older people in the state government's *Covid-19 Seniors Taskforce* to address the pandemic. This led to a strong connection and cohesiveness between services, with a commitment to work together as we navigate the landscape.

During the latter part of the year, OPRS began working in partnership with the University of Western Australia's Social Care and Social Ageing Living Lab and the University of Southampton UK in trialling 'GENIE'. This is a tool to reduce social isolation, through a client centred approach of mapping social connections and encouraging client social interaction to reduce isolation. The objective is to improve the quality of life and reduce likelihood of abuse of older adults. This trial is scheduled to take place over the next 12 months and we look forward to its evolution in Western Australia.

We also partnered with Legal Aid WA this year to establish the Elder Law – Community of Practice. The aim is to provide a forum for practitioners in the legal sector working with older people at risk or of experiencing harm/abuse to discuss and share expertise, knowledge and information. Several of our colleagues in the community legal sector have joined the group and we anticipate that this is the beginning of building capacity and knowledge across professionals.

## the oprs volunteer program ...

Our volunteers proudly advocate for the protection of older people's rights by providing information to their peers about elder abuse, as well as promoting positive ageing strategies. The program was first introduced to assist in alerting older people to the risk of elder abuse, it provided them with the tools that will help to identify, prevent and protect them against such abuse including information on where to get help if required.'

During the year we said farewell to our original coordinator, Marissa Martin, and welcomed our new volunteer coordinator, Camille Grubba. We take this opportunity to extend a huge thanks to Marissa who worked tirelessly for the program and was firmly committed to the advancement of older people's safety.

Whilst many events were ultimately cancelled due to COVID-19, our wonderful contingent of volunteers still managed to attend some occasions throughout the year.

This helped older people participate in conversations about concerns they have about elder abuse or not being allowed to age positively, in a safe way with peers who can point them towards much needed assistance. Some of the events included:

- Heathridge Seniors Network Meeting
- Public Trustee exhibit



*Over 2000 people were recorded as linking into our social media awareness campaign for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.*



*Our volunteers and the Purple Road had made over 3000 contacts with people who were seeking information about elder abuse, their rights, information regarding resources and positive ageing strategies.*

- Council of the Ageing: Downsizing for over 55s
- World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEEAD) events
- Heathcote Park with Mayor of Melville for WEEAD
- City of Bayswater Ambassadors Program
- Genie Trial Training in partnership with UWA

The Minister for Seniors Interests, the Hon Mick Murray MLA has been a tremendous support for the program. We thank him for his continued work towards raising older people's rights in our community. Of course the program would not be as successful without our dedicated and brilliant volunteers - they are treasures and we are privileged to work with them each day.



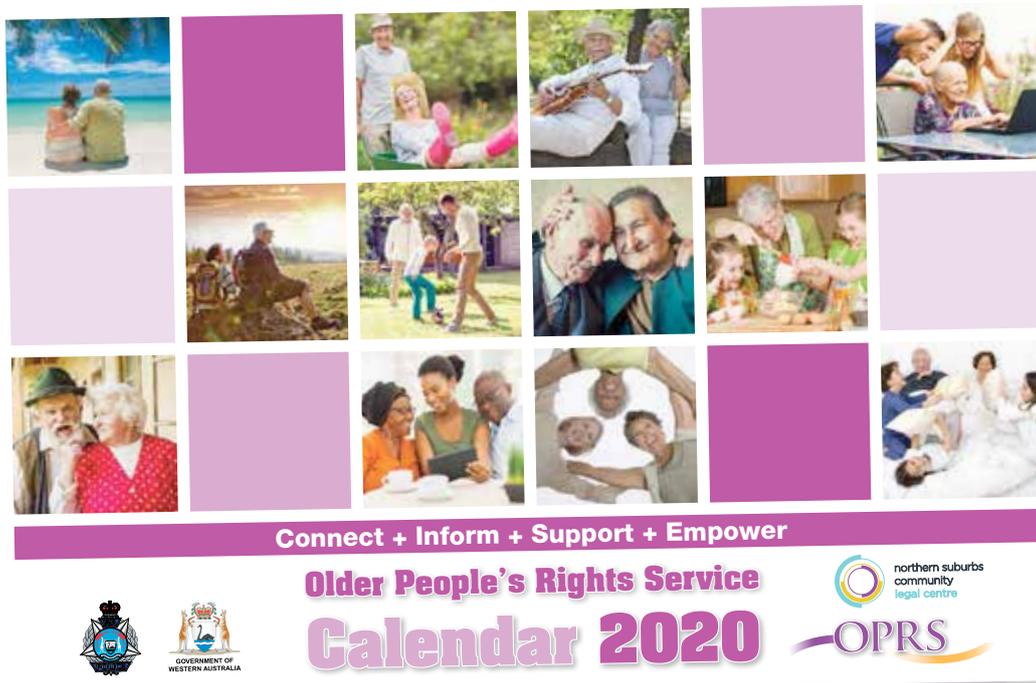
# ... and the purple road



**goal: connect + inform + support + empower**

The Purple Road continued on its journey this year with visiting many sites across Perth and interstate. It reached 18 meters in length, displaying thousands of handmade flowers (and still growing). The Purple Road was displayed in 12 libraries across cities of Stirling, Joondalup and Wanneroo and will continue its road trip to other locations over the coming 12 months.

*Purple is the colour of age and wisdom. Every flower represents someone's story, a conversation or reflection relation to the very important, yet sensitive subject of Elder Abuse.*

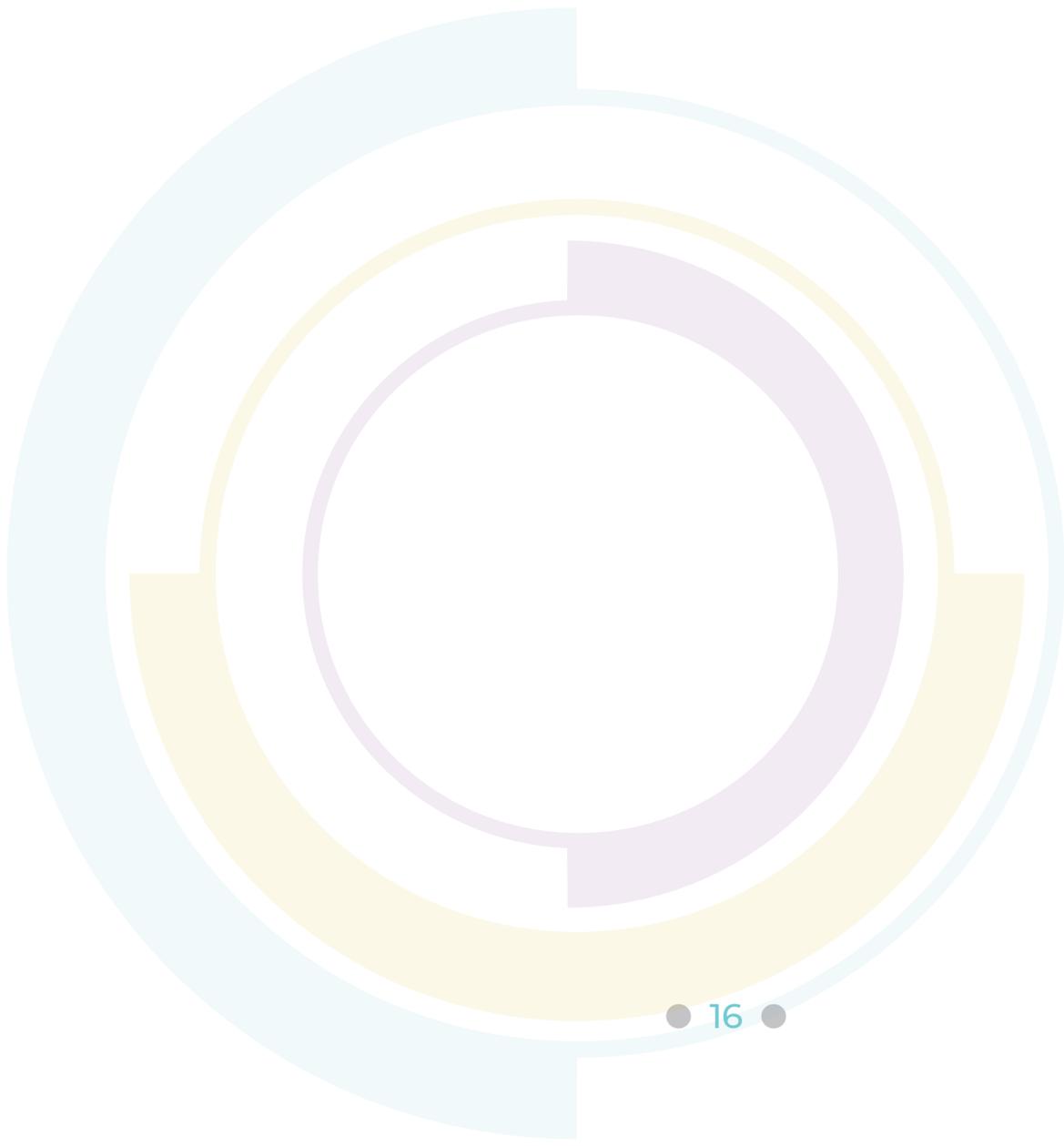


## The oprs calendar



The OPRS 2020 calendar was once again immensely popular, and this year contained beautiful, age focused images, relevant legal information and resources. The calendars promoted positive actions that can be taken to remain informed, empowered, connected and supported. Purple is the colour of age and wisdom. Every flower represents someone's story, a conversation or reflection relation to the very important, yet sensitive subject of Elder Abuse.

*"Terrific values, being creative and serving our community." – Staff quote*



# the year that was . . .



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