

Refugee Legal: Defending the rights of refugees.



Who We Are



Refugee Legal is an independent, non-profit community legal centre, specialising in refugee and immigration law, policy and procedure. We have been at the forefront of providing legal assistance for over 32 years.

We are Australia's largest provider of free legal assistance to people seeking asylum, refugees and disadvantaged migrants. As lawyers, expert in immigration law, we work directly and strategically to defend the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

What We Do

Refugee Legal's central purpose is to promote and protect the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants through the provision of free legal advice and assistance. Casework and advice remain our central area of skill and expertise. Refugee Legal's other core activities – such as Legal Education and Policy and Advocacy – are informed by its central purpose of casework and advice.

Legal advice and assistance are delivered through core services that include telephone advice,

face-to-face advice, full casework representation and legal clinics.

We conduct law reform and advocacy programs to ensure that Australia's migration and refugee programs operate in a just, fair, ethical and humane manner.

We deliver national training programs, accredited continuing professional development seminars for registered migration agents, as well as community information sessions.

At the heart of this work lie partnerships and collaboration, with a vast network of over 550 volunteers, 15 leading pro bono corporate law firms, Victoria Legal Aid, leading Law Schools, UNHCR and other international agencies, as well as our very generous philanthropic funders and individual donors.

Together we will continue to make the biggest possible impact, knowing the powerful potential of our work to change the course of many people's lives for the better.

From the Chair – Committee of Management

When I reflect on the year, I think of it in two distinct parts. The first part of 2019-2020 was busy as we continued to provide free legal assistance to people seeking asylum, refugees and vulnerable migrants. We focused on defending their rights, and educating the community in order to raise awareness, develop understanding and build action for change. We continued to build partnerships and advocate at local, national and international levels for policies which are fair, just and humane.

As we moved into 2020, we had devastating bushfires. Then we were confronted by the COVID-19 pandemic. There has never been a time of greater need for vulnerable people and we have continued to do all we can to promote and protect the rights and lives of those in urgent need of our help.

This year was tough for everyone and particularly for our clients as the virus has compounded their

vulnerabilities. However, despite the challenges, Refugee Legal has continued to provide free legal assistance to thousands of asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants.

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the world, we moved swiftly to ensure the safety of the Refugee Legal community and adopted new ways of working with staff largely working from home. We focused on the continuity of core services to clients – protection of their rights and wellbeing, and of our community. Despite working from home, staff adapted and rose to the many challenges to continue to deliver our vital services to so many people in need. Differently, but effectively.

At the same time, we significantly improved our digital capacity and capability and we will continue to build on this over the next year.

This was a challenging time for everyone but through our focus on core legal services so many clients have been granted protection, freed from indefinite detention, reunited with family, received advice on the 'Fast Track Assessment' process and cancellation powers and received assistance when facing family violence, or have had their residency restored. This work continues despite the pandemic.

I would like to particularly thank David Manne this year for his leadership in a very difficult time. He has had to pivot Refugee Legal to new ways of working and support his managers and staff as they confront the realities of a very changed environment both for themselves and their clients. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the leadership team for their support both of David and the staff and for the dedication and hard work they have shown over the last year.

I thank the staff and our volunteers for their tremendous work over this year and acknowledge their commitment and skill in assisting asylum seekers, refugees and disadvantaged migrants.

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee of Management Members for their work, their careful consideration of important issues and their wise advice throughout the year.

Clare Morton
Chair Committee of Management



From the Executive Director

This Annual Report presents the opportunity to not only take stock of the year's work, but to also focus on the profound challenges that are immediately before us, and the ones that lie ahead.

For people seeking our help —and for those defending their rights — the challenges are becoming even more grave.



What a year it was! A story in two parts. The first part saw us continue with the work we do - defending peoples' legal rights, educating the community, raising awareness of injustices, building partnerships and taking action for change. This was epitomised by our lead role with Medevac, ensuring that critically ill people in PNG and on Nauru were evacuated to Australia for urgent medical treatment. Well over 200 people were brought to Australia. We fought tirelessly with our partners to save the Medevac Laws from repeal. But ultimately, this was in vain.

Then, in stark contrast, the second part of the year was dominated by the global pandemic. With COVID-19 affecting us all, so many vulnerable people seeking protection were put at even greater risk and were in even more desperate need of our help and protection. This global crisis significantly compounded their vulnerabilities.

The dangers were made more acute for those who were detained. They were trapped in detention centres in capital cities across the country. They were living in cramped

and overcrowded conditions. Standards of social distancing and isolation were impossible, leading them to feel terrified of contracting COVID-19.

Others remained locked up indefinitely in faraway places such as Yongah Hill and Christmas Island. For people consigned to remote detention, the feelings of isolation and despair only deepened. They remained out of sight, out of mind, and out of rights. This only amplified the fundamental importance of our legal work.

During the year, one man we represented was sent to Christmas Island, right in the middle of his case. He told us how our help continued to give him hope, but not false hope. As he choked on his words, he said,

"You can't get emotional on Christmas Island. You've got to remain tough. You can't show any weakness." Then he thanked us for the real hope that we'd given him, with our 'hard advice'.

What is also foremost in our thoughts is the fate of several critically ill men evacuated here from open-air prisons on PNG and Nauru for urgent medical care, only to be indefinitely detained in hotels in suburbs in Melbourne and Brisbane. They are being held under guard and in conditions which take a terrible toll on their physical and psychological health and well-being. This only compounds the severity of their existing medical conditions.

From the Executive Director

Saif, a Somali refugee, separated from his wife and son who are living in the community, spoke from the balcony of his hotel room, "Let me hug my son", he said.

Why is it deemed necessary to keep refugees and asylum seekers locked up for a protracted period, or at all, under what is akin to imprisonment? Many of these men have now been stripped of their freedom for more than eight years.

It underscores the extremity of the deterrence agenda and the cruel indifference being shown to the plight of people who've arrived seeking protection and a safe home. We have a profound problem with liberty in this country. Detention policy continues to be punitive, arbitrary, unnecessary and harmful. It continues to represent one of the great injustices of our times. It also continues to make perpetration of other injustices possible.

But we, in partnership with others, continue to explore ways to challenge the detention of individuals. This year we once again secured the release of people from prolonged detention. We also worked with others to build action for more fundamental change, starting with the Time for a Home campaign seeking the release and resettlement of all people by June 2021. We will continue to do all we can to promote and protect the rights of vulnerable people. We know what injustice looks like and we

know how to fight it. We will continue, with a sense of hope and conviction. We know that our work changes lives.

One of our clients, a man from a Middle Eastern country who arrived in Australia by boat in 2013, had been detained ever since. After three Court remittals - including one from the High Court - four Immigration Assessment Authority (IAA) reviews, substantial psychiatric support by Cabrini Refugee Health, judicial review work by Victorian Legal Aid, and ongoing representation by us at the IAA, he was recently approved on his fourth review. Our client cried with relief and joy at hearing the news. He has since been freed after seven years in detention. Our legal work, our willingness to stay the course, and our remarkable cross sector collaborations make a fundamental difference to the lives of people in the face of extreme injustice.

I want to put our work in perspective. The scale of the numbers worldwide who have been forced from their homes in fear has reached an unprecedented 79.5 million. That's almost 9 million more than last year. This represents **one in every 97 people** on the planet. This is a global crisis which has only deepened due to the pandemic, and intensified the vulnerability of the already vulnerable. **Over 160 countries have closed their borders.** About a third of them have blocked

access to asylum. Many people were trapped in cramped and overcrowded conditions without access to adequate healthcare or sanitation. Many were excluded from mainstream safety measures, including medical treatment. The risk of COVID-19 contraction was acute.

That global challenge comes with a local reality. Across this country, unmet legal need for people seeking asylum, refugees and vulnerable migrants remained endemic and escalated. Many were suffering in the community, on temporary visas, or no visas at all. They were deliberately excluded from access to the most basic supports. They are struggling to survive. For these women, men and children, there was no financial safety. Amidst a public health emergency, there was no universal access to Medicare. Many faced significant barriers to COVID-19 testing and basic medical care.

There was also a slow-motion crisis for 31,000 people still in legal limbo. They were deprived of the ability to rebuild their lives with a sense of safety and security. Thousands of people still await the first decision on their refugee case, despite arriving here eight years ago. Those already granted temporary protection had to re-plead their case for, at best, another three or five-year visa. They faced indefinite, and potentially permanent separation, from their family stuck in danger overseas. Despite all these

challenges, and the additional challenges posed by the pandemic, Refugee Legal did not scale back. Indeed, far from it. Amidst the pandemic we met the acute need, powered by support from thousands of people.

We acted early so we could work differently.

We adapted swiftly to maintain all frontline services remotely. The Refugee Legal Pandemic Response Strategy was three-pronged: continuity of legal services, protection of client rights, safety and wellbeing, and honing our core front-line services and operations

Throughout the year, our critical core services were provided daily. With our legal team working from their homes, in partnership with a growing number of volunteers from across the country, we continued to provide telephone advice, night service, TPV Clinics, full casework representation, and strategic litigation. This year total client assistance reached 10,977.

Many clients were granted protection, freed from detention, evacuated to safety, better protected from family violence, or have had their residency restored. Staff, volunteers and pro bono lawyers did what they do best - provide expert legal help. Their help came with a huge heart. So many clients' lives have been changed for the better.

In partnership with other legal advocates, we continued to challenge unfair Government

decisions and systemic injustice. As the Federal Government sought to erode even more rights under the cover of the pandemic, through the introduction of draconian laws to ban mobile phones in detention and expand powers to cancel visas, we advocated at Senate Inquiries and through the media to oppose these changes.

This is the work we do. Every single day.

We simply could not have risen to these challenges without the ever-expanding partnerships and collaboration of a network of over 550 volunteers, 15 pro bono corporate law firms, Victoria Legal Aid, leading Law Schools, UNHCR and other international agencies, as well as our very generous philanthropic funders and individual donors. In such dire times, our partners have stood with us and have been crucial. An expanding number of volunteer lawyers, based in cities across the country, worked tirelessly, under the supervision of our lawyers working from home, to assist scores of people. This enabled us to expand the reach of our work enormously.

A highlight of the year was speaking at the UNHCR Global Refugee Forum in Geneva in December 2019, where we showcased our special TPV Clinic model as an example of international best practice. Since then, we have continued to collaborate with key global partners to build and mobilise

legal strategies. Ultimately, so much of our work was powered by partnerships and the will of the community for decency and justice.

Our staff and our Committee are the foundation for this work.

I have the privilege of working with a truly remarkable team of people who go about their work tirelessly, and with skill, commitment, courage and humanity. I also want to acknowledge the outstanding collegiality, guidance and support of our Committee of Management and, particularly, the great leadership of our Chair, Clare Morton.

In closing, I want to return to the question of change and the importance of partnerships. History shows that progress and change are not supernatural forces. They are determined by individual and political will. As the world moves to post-pandemic recovery, we will continue to draw on the lessons learned. Where necessary, we will do things differently and we will build back better. We will also continue to work with others, in the hope and conviction that together we can effect change and bend the destiny of so many people, and our country, toward greater justice.

David Manne
Executive Director

We Advise and Assist

"We quickly moved off-site, the staff rallied, and throughout the year we've continued to offer advice and assistance to our clients.

At the start of lockdown we probably asked ourselves: How are we going to do this? But we just kept pushing on. We knew we would not succumb to the pressures imposed by the pandemic because we also knew our clients still desperately needed our help.

Many have very insecure employment and have not been able to access Job Keeper or Job Seeker. They have been thrust into even more extreme poverty. We knew it was essential to continue to deliver our core services because the stress and anxiety for our clients has increased enormously."

Advise & Assist

We **advise** and **assist** people seeking asylum, refugees and vulnerable migrants.

Educate

We **educate** within our community to raise awareness, develop understanding, inspire ideas and collaborations, and build action for change.

Advocate

We **advocate** at local, national and international levels through the media, in public and private forums and with key partners who share our commitment to policies that are fair, just, humane and decent.

Advise and Assist

The casework team continued to work tirelessly in order to meet the unprecedented and ever-increasing levels of need amongst vulnerable clients in the community, in detention, and in offshore detention. Throughout the year, we continued to focus on the delivery of our core services, offering phone advice, night service, casework, full legal representation to clients and legal clinics (refer to separate report on Fast Track Assessment process). Our focus on continuity of services - the underpinning principle - was achieved with great effectiveness and impact.

The logistics of setting up our working from home happened rapidly and efficiently, and we have managed to effectively pivot and adapt in difficult circumstances. Not being able to see clients face to face, and only speaking to them on the phone, has presented real challenges, but we were able to retain our caseload and, in fact, have increased it over the year. Despite the dire circumstances, it was extraordinary to witness the courage and resilience of our clients during these challenging times.

This year, there was an increase in family violence cases, no doubt exacerbated by the pandemic, and we continued our outreach work and community education in this area. We produced a video for women who are experiencing family violence, as well as for

service providers who interact with women caught in this situation, aimed at increasing knowledge of our services.

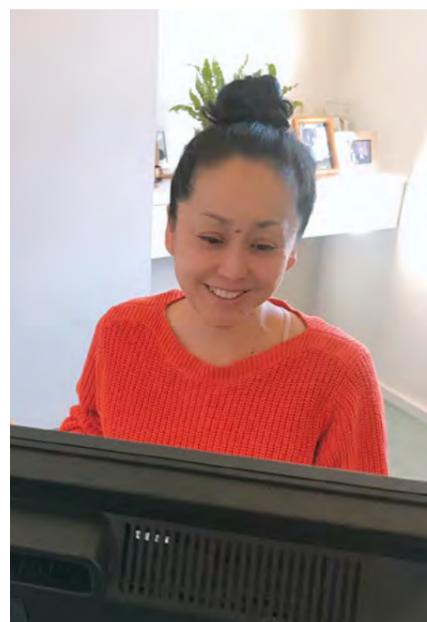
Amidst the work, there was a number of success stories of hope. (Refer to 'Stories of Hope and Resilience')

"Early in the year when we had just gone into the first lockdown, I had a long-term client finally get her Protection Visa. She is a single mother and a victim of prolonged family violence. At the height of the pandemic she was very nervous about having to go to work in her customer service role, which required very close contact with other people. She was also anxious about how she could home school her son. Receiving that visa was life changing. It meant she was able to access some support from Centrelink, take some time out from her job, and be at home with her son."

Much of our core work has remained in the area of Protection Visa applications and appeals to the Immigration Assessment Authority (IAA). We've also assisted clients in detention, including during COVID-19, pursuing their cases to secure freedom, with some clients finally released. To seek to address acute and escalating legal need, we also established a new 'Character Clinic' to provide advice and assistance to those who are facing visa cancellation on character grounds. We continue to assist these clients

through these clinics, staffed by volunteers and supervised by employee lawyers, and to provide legal advice about the cancellation process.

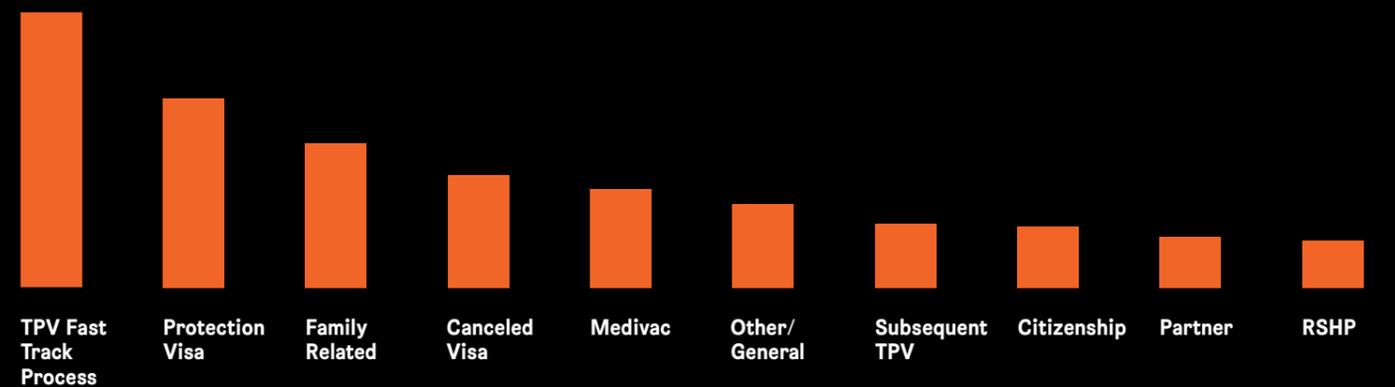
We have also employed a non-legal caseworker who is assisting us with referring clients to support services. While immigration status and visa security - and legal assistance - are fundamental to the people we assist, they face many related challenges and associated support needs. Their safety and wellbeing are so often tied to their psychological and physical health, financial and housing security and access to employment. The new caseworker role has and will continue to increase our capacity to help clients access other non-legal supports and inter-agency collaboration, aimed at holistic support.



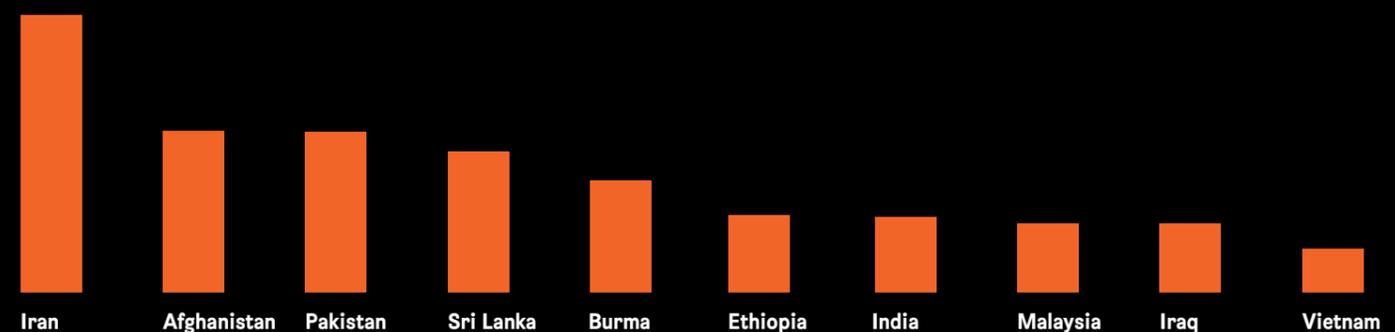
The Numbers for 2019/2020

Total Client Assistance	10,977
Telephone Advice	2,935
Face-to-face Advice	1,329
People Represented	2,995
Legal Clinic Assistance	3,718

No. of Matters



No. of Clients



Responding to COVID-19

"It was remarkable how quickly we were able to adapt as an organization, and how quickly our volunteer lawyers responded to new ways of working.

Our ability to shift into working remotely was incredible. Refugee Legal responded rapidly and had people set up and ready to go in a matter of days."

Refugee Legal Pandemic Response Strategy

At the start of the pandemic we quickly made the decision to work off-site. A small team of people set about packing up everything, from desktop computers, to headsets, to laptops, and to anything else that our lawyers might need to work from home. IT staff quickly ensured servers and software were up to the challenge, and we made sure our volunteer lawyers, located in different cities and towns across the country, had access to all the information they would need.

"Our move to working remotely needed to appear seamless. Consider how stressful the COVID-19 pandemic already was for clients who were very anxious about their visa status and the impact of COVID-19 on their families in their own countries. We knew that if we didn't have that smooth transition it would have exacerbated the stress for our clients."



Communication and careful planning were key. We worked hard to ensure that everybody understood the processes for working off-site. We timetabled regular Zoom check-ins for staff and volunteers. Lawyers contacted clients and information about the move was swiftly posted on our website and at entrance points to the premises. All staff were provided with what they needed to effectively work from home.

"In those first couple of weeks a few of us drove around and delivered anything that a lawyer might have needed to do their work. Yes, it was a stressful time for everybody. But the transition seemed to happen easily. I think that speaks to the sense of camaraderie and commitment that exists here at Refugee Legal. There's an imperative for the work to continue uninterrupted."

The Fast Track Assessment process

"In the midst of COVID-19, Fast Track processing continued. That was very stressful for our clients. We mustn't forget that these people have been waiting since 2012 or 2013 for some kind of response to their applications. Then, in the middle of a pandemic, after waiting for so long, they receive a refusal letter.

Then they have to act so quickly, 21 days, or even less sometimes. We even saw a few clients that didn't seek help because they assumed that everything was closed. Last week I had a client who contacted us two days before the deadline. I dropped everything and did that lodgment myself."

The Impact of Fast Track on People's Lives

In 2017, the Federal Government imposed an arbitrary and final deadline of 1 October for around 31,000 asylum seekers who had arrived in Australia by boat. Under this 'lodge or leave' policy, people were told to lodge a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) application by this deadline, or face deportation without the Government ever hearing their case. Three years on, even though the deadline has well and truly passed, thousands of people have still not had their initial applications processed. Instead, they remain in limbo - seven or eight years after arriving in Australia - waiting for their case to be heard.

Now for many others, there's another looming deadline, the expiry of their original three, or five year TPV. Thousands of vulnerable people who were, and will be, found to be refugees must go through the application process all over again. In the midst of COVID-19, these Fast Track processes continued without respite.

So this year, with staff and volunteers working from home, it was necessary to transition to offering remote Fast Track clinics. They were set up quickly. But it heightened anxiety for our clients. As well as dealing with all the strict timelines and complex processes, they were no longer able to come to our office, drop in documents in person, and talk to someone face to face. Many of our already highly vulnerable clients were left feeling even



more isolated. Despite this, we continued to provide effective assistance remotely to many people, who were deeply relieved and grateful to still be able to access such vitally needed assistance.

"At present our clients are in a very difficult position, in that they are talking to someone they cannot see. When we call, they might ask, 'are you calling from Immigration? Who are you? They cannot see who we are, and so they become anxious. No wonder people's stress around this process is heightened."

Another development this year involved a group of people affected by a Federal Court decision brought down in 2018. This group of 500 are now identified as 'Ashmore Reef Affected' people. The ruling made it clear that they should never have been processed as Fast Track applicants in the first place, effectively meaning their applications lodged in 2016 and 2017 were invalid. While the ruling meant these clients could no longer be processed under

the Fast Track system, it did mean they were being asked to re-apply for protection visas all over again. For some, this was the third time that they'd applied. The compounding issue was that once these clients were notified of this change in their status, they only had seven working days to re-apply.

"That ruling came out in 2018. At first the Minister tried to appeal the decision. Then it took nearly two years to work out what to do with this group. So people have been made to wait for an extra two years, and remember it's been 7 or 8 years since they first arrived. Now, in 2020, they've been told their application is no longer valid. An added pressure lies in the fact that there is absolutely no way of getting an extension on that seven day deadline. So if a client contacts us, and we miss that deadline, that client loses the opportunity to apply for protection ever again. That created huge stress but we met every single one of those deadlines."

Medevac

"What will be the impact of the repeal of the Medevac Laws on these critically ill and highly vulnerable people, brought here for urgent medical treatment? It is difficult to know. But regrettably, the Federal Government remains determined to focus on its policy of deterrence."

Medevac



Since the original passing of the Medevac laws in February 2019, Refugee Legal has taken a lead role in ensuring that well over 200 critically ill people in PNG and on Nauru were evacuated to Australia for urgent medical treatment. Despite the clear and critical necessity for these laws, despite the fact that many people with significant health issues still languish in offshore detention, the Medevac legislation was repealed in late 2019.

In the early part of 2020, those that had already received outcomes in the Medevac process continued to be transferred to Australia. They were placed predominantly into immigration detention centres or, in some cases, into 'community detention'.

This year, Refugee Legal focused on:

- Providing these men with ongoing advice about their legal status, and options for release from detention and resettlement to the US or other countries
- Work, together with legal partners, to challenge their detention

- Collaboration with health professionals to monitor and advocate on health care issues
- Advocacy, together with sector-wide partners, to advocate for release and resettlement of these men
- Work, together with partners, to advocate for the evacuation and resettlement of people still held on Nauru and in PNG

Our work in all of these areas will continue, seeking justice, freedom and a safe home for all.

Despite many of their illnesses being severe or critical, significant information continued to cast serious doubt upon whether they were receiving the required medical treatment. And prolonged, indefinite detention of these men compounded the severity of their medical conditions and their anguish and despair. The pandemic only exacerbated the inadequate access to medical care.

The Volunteers

"Volunteering is about making connections, not just with the people you are assisting, but also with other volunteers.

You soon realise there are many people that also believe in a vision of the future that is positive. I always love it when I hear a volunteer lawyer tell me that they spoke to their Mum or their Aunty about the work they do here.

That act of sharing your commitment changes how people think about refugees and asylum seekers. It's quietly chipping away at changing things and that's what we are trying to do."

From the Volunteers

Every year there are successes that simply could not have been achieved without the ongoing and extraordinary commitment of our volunteer team. This year was no exception. In fact, in 2020, there was a significant increase in the number of volunteer lawyers working with us.

In the early stages of the pandemic, many law firms moved off-site, meaning some of their lawyers had periods of down time, leading to an increase in our volunteer pool. In the face of temporary downturns due to the pandemic, some corporate partners decided to use their extra resources for pro bono assistance. Since our clinics were operating remotely, it didn't matter where the volunteer lawyers were based, so law firms were providing us lawyers from all over the country. Many firms provided graduate lawyers. We had a full time graduate lawyer seconded to our Fast Track team for nearly four months.



The effectiveness and the adaptability of our system to off-site work resulted not only in continuity of services, but in a significant boost in volunteers across the country.

Throughout the year, these volunteers have been working directly with the clients, under supervision from lawyers at Refugee Legal. While they have considerable experience, they are used to working in different sectors, so Refugee Legal provides the training they need. Our lawyers work closely with the volunteers outlining what sections of the law they need to consider and what advice should be provided. This year there have been challenges, particularly in light of having to work remotely with clients, but everyone has risen to those challenges.

"In this year of COVID-19, I've heard some of the volunteers talking about how they wish they could have met with people face to face, particularly at the start of the process. But I think they've all gotten used to it because they had to. They found their own way of working and connecting. We are now in discussions about using video applications, at least

at the beginning of each session with our clients, so they can see our faces."

We continue to deliver training to our volunteers, using video applications such as Zoom and Teams, and our partnerships with law firms have continued to be crucial to what we do. We've built skills within our volunteer team, so that they can work with clients, work with interpreters and understand migration law in Australia. We are committed to maintaining those skills and building on them. We've also continued to build relationships with non-legal organisations who refer clients to us. These many partnerships are crucial to the work we do.

"As a volunteer I understand how much of a difference Refugee Legal makes in people's lives. Volunteering has shown me that the lawyers are listening and working to assure their clients that they are always there to help. Being listened to in itself makes people feel better. I've come to understand that Refugee Legal epitomizes the importance of valuing people and the contributions we can all make to this country."



The interns

"As soon as you step into Refugee Legal you know you are going to be working with people who are there because they believe in the work. They are there for the same reasons you are.

You've just got to turn to your left or your right and there is always someone on hand to talk you through things, and to show you the resources that are available. Everybody just wants what is best for the clients. It's always about wanting the very best for each and every client."

From the interns



Kate

Refugee Legal is one of the foremost refugee support agencies in Australia so it was a privilege to work there. One of the things that stood out for me was the community spirit that lives inside that organisation. There is so much information sharing, professional mentoring and collaboration that goes on. This fosters a sense of connectedness and ensures that when you do come across challenges, you feel comfortable approaching your colleagues and peers and are able to talk through things.

One of the most valuable things about doing so much client centred work was that it pushed and challenged me to be a better advocate, and to hone my skills in working as a trauma informed lawyer. My time at Refugee Legal proved to be such a great experience.



Nadia

My internship presented a number of great opportunities. My work centred on doing legal research, drafting legal documents and working directly with clients, and this allowed me to use a range of skills. Many of the clients are in mandatory detention so a lot of the work was done with interpreters on the phone. Here I learned firsthand about the critical importance of clear communication. I was also given the opportunity to shadow lawyers and witnessed how they were able to gently and expertly tease information out, in order to achieve the best for their client.

It was eye opening to see how many people need access to these services. Even if people came wanting something that perhaps Refugee Legal were not best placed to provide, they were always referred on to different services. It might be referring clients to mental health services or housing support services—that might not necessarily be a lawyers' job to do, but never were they turned away. At all times the lawyers were actively looking out for all their client's needs.



Adil

During my internship I was involved in a range of tasks, from writing draft submissions and preparing statements, to completing country of origin research and working on Freedom of Information applications. I learned about the onerous government processes that surround refugees and asylum seekers and the difficulties they face in working through these processes.

Yet I was always amazed that, despite the difficulties clients had gone through, they were generally positive. So many would talk with great hope about their wishes for a life in Australia. The staff at Refugee Legal were also incredible. They were keen to discover what I was interested in and they wanted to give me work along those lines. I was trusted and given responsibility and the client contact was incredible. I now want to go on and be a volunteer lawyer at Refugee Legal, offering my services in the night clinics. I would wholeheartedly recommend an internship to others.

Educate

"This year education and training have not simply continued to be something that we do, our delivery has increased in priority. There is a real need for it, not only for our own lawyers to stay informed and to build their skills, but also in light of how we are working remotely, and working in collaboration with many others.

We want to make sure that volunteers have the opportunity to upskill, and to consistently be across updates in the law. And we want to ensure that this is happening for all the people working in this sector."

We Educate



Education remains a critical component of the work we do. We engage with the broader legal profession, migration agents, volunteer partners, client groups, and the wider community. Our Education and Training program aims to improve the skills, knowledge and capacity of legal and non-legal service providers about current refugee and immigration law, policy and procedures to better meet the needs of people seeking asylum, refugees and vulnerable migrants. Despite the pandemic, our aim to provide ongoing and rigorous education and training has remained resolute.

While the mode of delivery of our Continual Professional Development (CPD) programs has changed this year, with all of our sessions now being offered remotely, the number of attendees, when compared to previous years, has increased

substantially. Remote delivery has meant that presenters and attendees from across regional Victoria and Australia have been able to take part and make invaluable contributions.

Generally, these CPD sessions have focused on specialist areas of migration law, honing in on protection visa applications, citizenship law and case law updates. We have had presenters from organisations such as Victoria Legal Aid involved, as well as other experienced and highly respected presenters drawn from across the country, who have shared their knowledge and expertise.

We also provided training to non-legal agencies on various topics, including on Family Violence.

Our extensive partnership with Melbourne University, including Melbourne Law

School, continued to develop this year. We ran our Internship programs remotely. We also delivered Practical Legal Training programs for those preparing for legal admission. We remain committed to building these highly successful partnerships.

COVID-19 did create some access issues for our education and training initiatives in the community sector. Usually these sessions involve groups in community locations and facilities. Lockdown restrictions and technology constraints meant that our plans to increase our capacity in this area were limited.

With the lifting of restrictions this is already changing. Next year, we hope to fully implement our plans to expand our community engagement and information activities. We are currently planning sessions with groups based in regional Victoria. These sessions will focus on offering advice and assistance to SHEV (Safe Haven Enterprise Visa) holders, and provide information on how and when they can apply for another protection visa.

Refugee Legal recognises that community education is critical to ensuring that people understand their rights and responsibilities and we will do all we can to ensure people have access to the information they need.

Advocate

"Way back when I was in year seven David Manne came to my school to speak to us about Refugee Legal and to inform us about the work they do and the critical need for it. I remember listening to him and suddenly getting such a strong sense of the world outside my very sheltered private school world.

Many people would be unaware of what the realities of life in detention might be like.

Or what the realities of having to leave your home country might actually mean. Or what it might be like to face ongoing and constant fear of persecution. Listening to David suddenly made that all very clear to me."

We Advocate

A Leading Voice

In December 2019, we were invited to attend the inaugural Global Refugee Forum in Geneva as a keynote presenter. We were asked to showcase our Legal Clinic Model as an example of international best practice. This model was recognised as one that can be taken and used in other settings, to assist with the overwhelming need for legal advice that exists globally. Our model, a unique collaboration with pro bono corporate law partners, was instrumental in enabling us to assist thousands of people to apply for protection under the Fast Track system.

"We were there as a key member of a global network. We were invited to speak about our clinic program, a program that is built on partnerships, and one that harnesses the good will of the pro bono legal community. It was amazing that our work was recognised internationally. We were also part of a joint global initiative, teaming up with other legal providers, to pledge pro bono hours in order to protect and find solutions for refugees and asylum seekers. Being present at that Forum meant that Refugee Legal took part in pushing forward some vital global goals."

As part of the post-Global Refugee Forum process, we also participated in a collaboration with the International Refugee Lawyer Network, working towards the development of

a Concept Note for UNHCR, 'Mobilizing the Global Legal Community to Protect and Find Solutions for Refugees and Others Forcibly Displaced'.

Changing Lives

The lives of thousands of people were changed over the past 12 months by our staff and volunteers doing what they do best—providing expert legal help. Many people have been granted protection, freed from detention, had their residency restored and been reunited with family.

Medevac

Despite the repeal of the Medevac laws, Refugee Legal has continued to work in partnership with the Medical Evacuation Response Group (MERG). We attended MERG stakeholder meetings and press conferences regarding the Medevac repeal. We've also been part of the Offshore



Processing Working Group, and have collaborated with the Independent Doctors Network in relation to the medical care of people evacuated from offshore for urgent medical treatment in Australia.

Innovative Partnerships

In this the year of global pandemic there are now even more volunteer lawyers and corporate law firms partnering with us to provide free emergency legal assistance to thousands of vulnerable people seeking asylum. These collaborations, which connect and harness expertise, have been instrumental in enabling us to scale up and hone frontline services, so that critical legal help can be delivered to many people in need.

Participation with Advisory Groups, Coalitions and Boards

We played a lead role in the re-establishment and then chairing the Refugee and Immigration National Community Law Coalition (RAINCLC) monthly teleconferences, a coalition of key legal agencies in the non-profit legal sector. Here we focused on developing a COVID-19 response and coordinated the drafting of letters to the Department of Home Affairs regarding our ongoing concerns. We participated as a member of the LGBTQIA Asylum Seekers & Refugees Advisory Group and the Refugee Council of Australia Fair

We Advocate

Process Working Group 'Nobody Left Behind' campaign meetings, National Legal Group meetings on COVID-19 and detention and Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Ethics Committee. We also attended Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness Advisory Board meetings.

Meetings with Members of Parliament and Government Officials

We attended high-level meetings with key members of the Department of Home Affairs and consultations with key Federal and State Parliamentarians across the political spectrum. We also met with Governor of Victoria – and Refugee Legal Patron – the Hon. Linda Dessau AC, regarding the impact of COVID-19 on people seeking asylum, and attended a luncheon with senior US State Department officials, focused on the US Resettlement of refugees from PNG and Nauru.

Sector Meetings

We attended high level strategic priority meetings with the Chairperson of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, Vivienne Nguyen, and other key stakeholders. We also contributed to advocacy and policy priorities through our attendance at meetings and teleconferences with other organisations working in this sector, including the Refugee Council of Australia, the Law Institute of Victoria, the National

Asylum Policy and Advocacy Network (Vic) and the Detention Advocacy Network.

Parliamentary and Government Submissions

We made detailed written submissions and were invited to give oral testimony at hearings, to key Federal Parliamentary Inquiries, including:

- Inquiry into Migration Amendment Strengthening the Character Test Bill, a proposed expansion of government powers to cancel visas on 'Character' grounds.
- Inquiry into the Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill regarding the repeal of Medevac laws.
- Senate Select Committee enquiring into the Government's response to COVID-19 (2020).
- Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee on Migration Amendment (Prohibiting Items in Immigration Detention Facilities) Bill 2020, which included measures to ban the use of mobile phones by people detained.
- Senate Select Committee on Temporary Migration.

UNHCR, NGO Consultations and Strategic Litigation

We attended UNHCR-NGO Consultations in Geneva in 2019 and presented at the 7th Annual Strategic Litigation Roundtable. We attended meetings with the

UNHCR in Canberra in relation to the situation of people held in Nauru and PNG, and presented at the 8th UNHCR-NGO Strategic Litigation Roundtable in 2020 held online.

Responding to COVID-19

Consultation and collaboration with the Federation of Community Legal Centres Strategic Advocacy Group and key Community Legal Centres, on COVID-19 response and resourcing. We participated in high level stakeholder consultations, convened by the Victorian Multicultural Commission, to consider specific responses to COVID-19 within multicultural communities.

We also attended the Refugee Council National Bodies' COVID-19 response and planning meeting, as well as meetings of the National Asylum Policy Network. The focus here centred on sector coordination and planning responses to COVID-19. We participated in the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network – International Detention Coalition (APRRN-IDC) Asia Pacific webinar, entitled "The Impact of COVID-19 on Immigration Detention".

Conferences, Presentations and Roundtables

- Presented at the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges (IARMJ) Africa Chapter Regional Conference and at the Roundtable on Litigating Refugee and Migrant Rights, both held in Cape Town, South Africa.

- Keynote presentation at the Global Refugee Forum 'Spotlight Event' in Geneva on building asylum capacity through pro bono partnership legal assistance.

- Participation in and presentation at Family Violence & Migration Law Network roundtable in Canberra.

- Delivered keynote speech at the Peter McMullin Centre for Statelessness Annual Intensive Course Dinner.

- Presentation at the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law and the Transnational Criminal Law Group - Protecting Rights in the Pandemic Seminar Series.

- Presentation at the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law and Progressive Law Network, Beyond Commercial Careers: Public Interest Law Careers Guide Launch

- Delivered keynote address at the Rural Australians For Refugees AGM & Annual Dinner in Queanbeyan, NSW.

- Guest speaker at Victorian Afghan Associations Network Refugee Week Celebration 2019

- Launched book, *Refugee Rights and Policy Wrongs*: Jane McAdam and Fiona Chong in conversation with David Manne

- Delivered guest lectures at Professor Tobin's Melbourne Law School International Human Rights Law class.

- Participated in roundtable on asylum seeker and refugee issues with Dr Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

- Participated in high-level key stakeholder roundtable held by the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

- Panel representation of the Victorian Asylum Seeker Sector Reference Group.

- Presentations at Melbourne Law School to Juris Doctor students.

- Presentation at Queer Displacements: Sexuality, Migration & Exile Conference.

- Facilitated workshop and network meeting with Family Violence support agencies in Shepparton.

- Participated in roundtable on onshore immigration detention hosted by Refugee Council of Australia.

- Hosted roundtable with Dr Jeff Crisp, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, on the plight of refugees globally.

- Guest speaker on panel at the Refugee Advocacy Network Symposium, 'Behind Closed Doors: The Crisis in Australian Immigration Detention', at Melbourne Law School.

- Presented at the 3rd Advancing Community Cohesion Conference on "Citizenship and Social Cohesion", Western Sydney University.

- Guest speaker at Melbourne Law School International Human Rights Masters' program.

- Participated on Melbourne Law Students' Society panel to celebrate International Women's Day.

- Presentation at the Biennial Conference, Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia, in Hobart, on "Exploring Migration and Citizenship".

- Provided a legal information session for counselling staff from Foundation House on current issues affecting people seeking asylum.

- Presented on a panel for Monash Law Students' Society Public Interest Forum.

- Panellist for Melbourne Law School webinar: "Human rights in the time of COVID-19".

- Panellist on a Q&A on Family Violence hosted by the Women's Legal Service.

- Participated in cross-sectoral policy roundtable on temporary migration, hosted by Senator Keneally, Shadow Minister for Home Affairs, Immigration and Citizenship.

- Meeting with Professor Megumi Kato of Meisei, University of Tokyo.

- Attended Victoria's Multicultural Awards for Excellence at Government House.

Stories of hope and resilience

"It has been quite amazing to see how our clients have coped in this year of COVID-19. It's extraordinary when you consider we have retained our client load, and in fact have increased it within the year. Everyone has done an amazing job. And what comes to mind are the specific success stories that have been achieved."

Nalan

A 32 year old Sri Lankan Tamil man, Nalan, arrived in Australia by boat seeking safety over eight years ago. It was five years before he was allowed to apply for protection. In September 2019, two years after applying, and seven years after his arrival, he was finally interviewed by the Government about his fears. Then, in April this year, during lockdown, Nalan received a decision in the mail. His case was refused. He had 21 days to lodge appeal paperwork. He panicked. Then he called us. We immediately booked him into our TPV Clinic.

Nalan told us how empowering it was, despite his ordeal, to be listened to and helped at this time of great need. After a day with a pro bono law firm volunteer working interstate, a Refugee Legal lawyer supervising from their home in Melbourne, an interpreter in another part of the country, and our client at home, the legal paperwork was completed within the deadline.

Sophia

Sophia's story is one of perseverance and strength in the face of extreme hardship. Sophia survived a brutal totalitarian regime in her home country, but at great personal cost, losing members of her immediate family at a young age. As an adult, she suffered discrimination and humiliation due to her political views and faced threats to her, and her children's lives.

Over ten years ago, Sophia fled to Australia with her young sons. Refugee Legal assisted Sophia to lodge a claim for protection but Sophia's journey did not end there. The legal process was long and arduous and involved multiple tribunal hearings, court appeals, and the tireless work of countless lawyers.

Finally, almost a decade after seeking protection in Australia, Sophia and her sons were granted permanent protection visas to stay in Australia. Sophia continues to be a strong advocate for the rights of her people and is finally able to rebuild her life in safety.

Ivan

Ivan arrived in Australia in 2015 after a harrowing escape from his homeland in Central Asia. Ivan's journey is one of extraordinary perseverance in the face of serious corruption. He spent a number of years being pursued by a senior member of the police force in his homeland after he was involved in an accidental car crash with this officer. Ivan was physically assaulted. His house was lit on fire. He was framed for a crime he did not commit and imprisoned. He was eventually forced to flee with his wife to a remote rural area to avoid further retribution. Ivan's attempts to seek the protection of authorities failed numerous times and eventually he escaped to a neighbouring country, before flying to Australia.

Upon arriving in Australia, Ivan sought the assistance of Refugee Legal to file an application for a protection visa. Ivan's case was highly complex, and our lawyers worked tirelessly to ensure that his protection claims were understood. Ivan and his wife lived in limbo for over four years, as he awaited an interview for his protection claims to be heard. At the beginning of 2020, Ivan was granted that interview and was found to be owed protection. Finally, five years after arriving in Australia, Ivan and his wife now have the certainty of knowing that they will be able to live safely and without fear in Australia. They are currently settled in Melbourne and Ivan has recently qualified as a healthcare professional.

Names have been changed to protect confidentiality

More Stories of Hope in the Year of COVID-19

"Thank you very much. You have done a lot for me and if I don't get a visa, I will still be happy knowing I had your full support. I know you did not need to take my case. This has been a huge help to my growth. I can't tell you how much I appreciate this. This is a job for you but for me it's a huge benefit receiving your support. I would have been lost without your help. Thank you again."

An Afghan Hazara woman, a single mother, who suffers from cerebral palsy and an inoperable lymphoma, arrived in Australia by boat in 2011 with her two year old child. She was recently contacted by the Department notifying her of the potential cancellation of her permanent protection visa. But, as a result of our submissions, the Department decided not to cancel her visa.

A Lebanese man who had been in detention since his arrival in Australia in 2013, was finally granted a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) this year. He said to us, "I can't believe I'm out of this place. I've always dreamed about it. I'm still not sure if this is real." We have ensured that he will be well supported upon his release and have made several referrals to other support agencies.

A former client was granted Australian citizenship. Originally from Mauritius, she and her sons were able to attend their citizenship ceremony remotely via video link. She was originally referred to us by the Salvation Army who were assisting her after she managed to escape her extremely violent ex-husband. We assisted her and her sons to apply for Protection Visas. They were finally granted permanent protection by the Department. Our client now owns her own home and works in aged care.

After waiting for an outcome for more than five years, a couple who fled from Eastern Europe after being attacked on the basis of their sexual orientation, were finally granted protection visas. The couple were overjoyed by the result, commenting on how important and how appreciated our legal work was. "You literally save lives," they said to us.



Strength in Partnerships

"Refugee Legal has such rewarding relationships with legal firms and a host of other organisations. As we continue to build those partnerships, people continue to amaze me.

I'm always astonished at people's willingness to give of their time, to do more. You call a lawyer and say, "We've got an urgent case, do you think you could help out again? Straight away, everyone always says, "Of course. I'm happy to help." There is such a willingness to give.

There's also a conviction in the broader community that something is not right and needs to change. People are eager to contribute to making that change."

Thank You To Our Generous Supporters

As a non-profit organisation, Refugee Legal relies on the generous support of the community. We are grateful to all our supporters and acknowledge here the leadership, gifts and support of our major partners who make our work possible.

Refugee Legal Supporters



Refugee Legal Pro Bono Partners



Thanks also to our major supporters: who include Noel & Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation, Harold Mitchell, Leonie Van Raay, Brigitte Smith, Lettisi Foundation, Luna Park, Jack and Hedy Brent Foundation, Krishna Somers Charitable Trust, Nordia Foundation, Leo & Mina Fink Fund, George Biron, Rural Australians for Refugees, Caroline Durré Foundation, Rural Australians for Refugees Affiliated Groups, Manningham Uniting Church, Montmorency Asylum Seekers Support Group, Bangalow Anglican Church, Grandmothers Against Detention of Children and a number of major donors and significant individual donors who prefer to remain anonymous.

"I know firsthand that a refugee's most important need is for good legal help.

This is vital if people are to get a fair chance to secure safety for themselves and their families."

Emeritus Professor Gillian Triggs

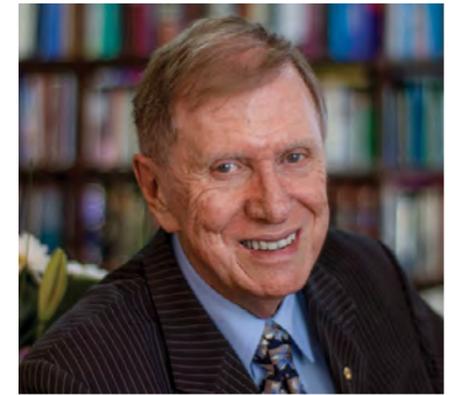
Refugee Legal Patrons



Her Excellency the Honourable
Linda Dessau AM, Governor
of Victoria (Patron in Chief)



Professor
Hilary Charlesworth



The Honourable
Michael Kirby AC CMG

Ambassadors



Special thanks go to three of our Ambassadors Tom Ballard, Associate Professor Munjed Al Muderis and First Dog on the Moon (aka Andrew Marlton) for helping to build our presence, expand our supporter base and raise much-needed funds.

Treasurer's Report

Refugee Legal is pleased to announce an operating surplus of \$330,722 for the financial year ended 30 June 2020. This surplus is \$116,819 higher than the 2019 result. As a consequence, total equity has increased from \$1,464,627 to \$1,795,349.

This result is particularly pleasing given the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of 2020.

Total income from ordinary activities increased from \$2,785,132 to \$3,223,560. Our expenditure on ordinary activities increased from \$2,571,229 to \$2,892,838.

This year our income from ordinary activities included \$959,216 (30%) from Donations and \$2,005,252 (62%) from

Other Grants. Over the course of the 2019–20 financial year, Refugee Legal has benefited from generous grants from numerous philanthropic organisations and individuals as well as generous pro bono support from over 15 corporate law firms.

The increase in expenditure to \$2,892,838 was primarily on account of staffing and associated costs increasing from \$1,857,291 to \$2,116,686, and interpreter costs increasing from \$121,472 to \$136,649.

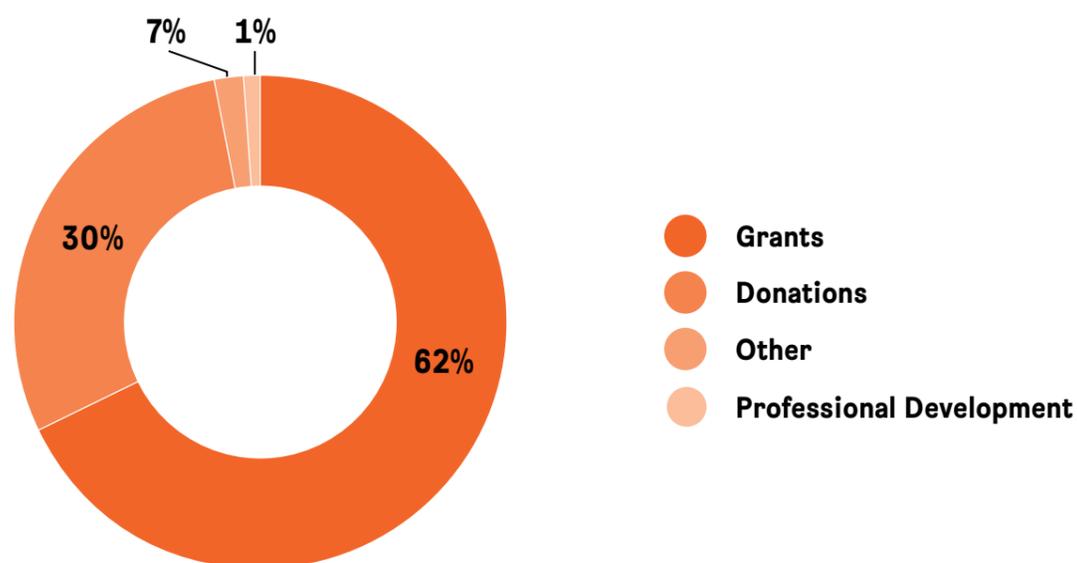
To tackle the ongoing challenges raised by the significant funding cuts that have occurred over the last few years, the unprecedented demand for our services and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Refugee Legal will continue to embark on

a strategy to diversify its funding sources and further harness volunteer and other in-kind cost resources.

As of 30 June 2020, Refugee Legal has total equity of \$1,795,349 and total current assets of \$2,357,681. Refugee Legal remains in a sound financial position to tackle the challenges of funding cuts and in particular, the funding challenges and uncertainty due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We will continue to seek further funding from philanthropic and/or alternate government sources, and continue to maximise new opportunities in the legal education sector.

Funding Sources

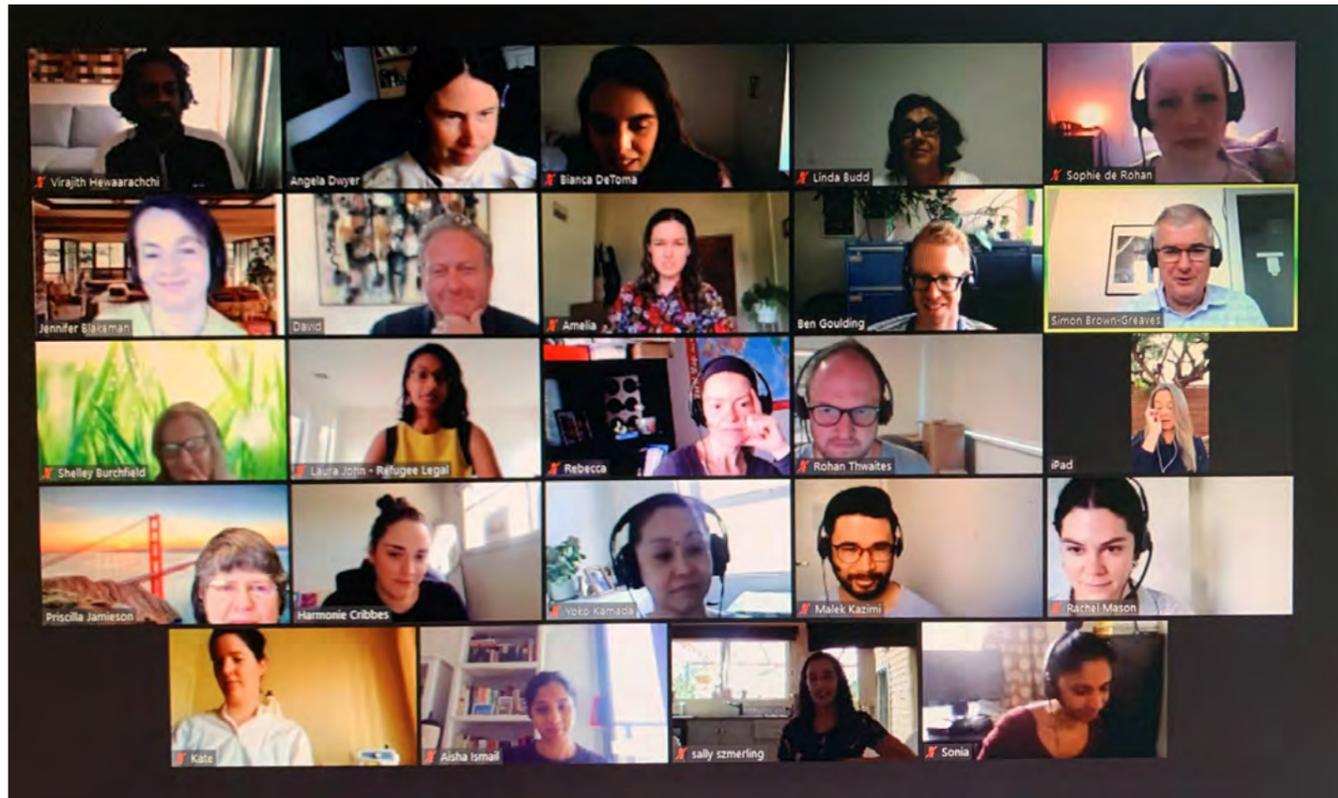


Financial Summary

Income and expenditure in summary

Income 2019-20	2020	2019
Other Grants	\$2,005,252	\$1,901,979
Professional Dev & Training Courses	\$28,575	\$25,393
Donations	\$959,216	\$795,712
Interest Income	\$2,031	\$5,141
Other Income	\$228,486	\$56,907
Total	\$3,223,560	\$2,785,132
Expenditure	2020	2019
Auditor's Remuneration	\$4,000	\$3,700
Bank Charges	\$2,672	\$4,754
Depreciation	\$4,825	\$4,529
General Expenses	\$29,214	\$41,934
Insurance	\$6,344	\$9,479
Interpreters	\$136,649	\$121,472
Postage	\$3,910	\$4,956
Professional Dev & Training Courses	\$30,466	\$33,908
Publications & Subscriptions	\$28,319	\$14,445
Rent	\$176,927	\$175,031
Repairs & Maintenance, Consumables	\$49,706	\$25,710
Salaries (including packaged benefits)	\$2,116,686	\$1,857,291
Stationery, Office Supplies	\$32,208	\$35,465
Staff Training, Seminars & Conferences	\$4,760	\$2,726
Superannuation	\$185,035	\$162,010
Telephone & Fax	\$18,234	\$26,789
Travel & Accommodation	\$55,867	\$41,764
Workcover	\$5,016	\$3,966
Total	\$2,892,838	\$2,571,229
Profit (Loss) after income tax	\$330,722	\$213,903
Net Assets	\$1,795,349	\$1,464,627

This Is The Work We Do. Every Single Day.



Our Staff

Executive Director/ Principal Solicitor

David Manne

Business Manager

Linda Budd

Volunteer Coordinator

Bianca DeToma

Senior Solicitor/Education & Training Manager

Ben Goulding

Solicitors

Cassandra Benjamin (Senior)

Shelley Burchfield

Lachlan Buckley

Josephine Choimes

Lara Conlan

Sophie de Rohan (Senior)

Angela Dwyer

Kate Fitzgerald

Lisa Fowler

Virajith Hewaarachchi

Priscilla Jamieson

Laura John

Yoko Kamada

Malek Kazimi

Rachel Mason

Tessa Maybery

Sanja Nenadic

Amelia Sturton

Sally Szmerling (Senior)

Rohan Thwaites

Rebecca Webb

Executive Assistant

Melissa Green

Administration Support

Jennifer Blakeman

Mikaila Cass

Stephanie Pitt

Abdul Malek Kazimi

James Muirhead

Sonia Soosaithasan

Fundraising

Aisha Ismail

Harmonie Cribbes

Communication

Caroline Zielinski

Committee of Management

President

Clare Morton

Vice-President

Andrew Hamilton

Secretary

Katie Howie

Treasurer

Michael Taylor-Sands

Committee Members

Assoc. Prof. Savitri Taylor

Sasha Findlay

Nima Alexander

Life Members

Priscilla Jamieson

Mary Crock

Walter Lippman

Ron Merkel

Clare Morton

Eve Lester

Carolyn Graydon

Sarah Fisher

Justice Debbie Mortimer

George Lekakis AO

Matthew Beckmann

Katherine Rechtman

Richard Niall QC

Acknowledgements

This annual report was produced collaboratively by

Writer

Tricia Bowen

Editing

David Manne

Priscilla Jamieson

Linda Budd

Design

Studio Round

Photography credits

Cover photo:

© UNHCR/Caroline Gluck

Photos on page 3:

© Steph Tout

Photos on page 13

© UNHCR/Shawkat Alharfosh

Photos on page 15

© UNHCR/Howard J.Davies

Photo on pages 5, 10, 17, 19, 21, 23 and 25

Refugee Legal staff & volunteers

In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, the Chair of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Drafting Committee,

"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. [...] Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world."

That's why you and your support for Refugee Legal, and those we assist, is so vital, so valuable and so powerful.

Thank you,

David Manne
Executive Director
Refugee Legal

Refugees

Asylum seekers

Disadvantaged migrants