



Impact Report

2025–26





Southside Justice acknowledges the Boon Wurrung People of the Eastern Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we work.

We recognise their enduring connection to Country, culture, lore and community spanning more than 65,000 years, and acknowledge that Aboriginal sovereignty was never ceded.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and honour the resilience, wisdom and leadership of First Nations Peoples.

Southside Justice supports Treaty in Victoria as essential to justice, recognition and healing, and to building a better future for all Victorians.

← Boonwurrung Wiradjuri artist Ngarra Kulin with his mural celebrating the vast waters of Nairm (Port Phillip Bay), located behind St Kilda Library.

Strengthening Foundations, Growing Impact

FY26 was a year of significant growth for Southside Justice.

As demand for our services continued to increase, so too did our capacity to respond. More people than ever accessed legal assistance through Southside Justice, supported by an expanding network of community partners who recognise that legal problems rarely exist in isolation. Today, more than three-quarters of our clients come to us through **trusted referral pathways**, reflecting the strength of the relationships we have built across Melbourne's inner south and state-wide for sex workers.

This year's results reinforce something we have long believed: **place matters**. Effective access to justice is built on trust, local knowledge, and collaboration.

Our impact is strongest when legal assistance is embedded alongside the health, housing, family violence and community services that people already know and rely on.

We are proud to be part of a local ecosystem committed to improving outcomes for our community.

FY26 was also a year of organisational growth. Income increased by 58.1%, enabling us to expand services, strengthen specialist expertise, and reach more people facing complex legal challenges.

This growth included significant investment in family violence, family law, housing and economic justice initiatives, as well as continued development of the Sex Worker Legal Program.

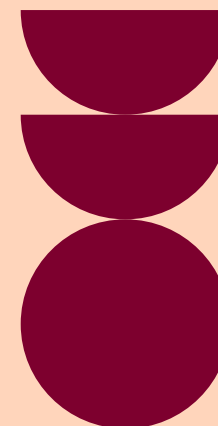
Growth, however, brings responsibility. As community need increases, so does the importance of building a sustainable organisation capable of delivering high-quality services over the long term. This year, we took deliberate steps to strengthen our financial position, increasing accumulated funds and establishing a Future Fund with Australian Communities Foundation to support long-term financial resilience.

These decisions reflect our commitment to the principle that impact and sustainability must go hand in hand. Strong outcomes for communities depend on strong organisations, supported by skilled staff, effective systems, meaningful partnerships and funding that reflects the true cost of delivery.

Throughout this report, you will see the difference that accessible legal assistance makes in people's lives. Behind every outcome is the contribution of our staff, board members, partners, funders and supporters.

To our staff, thank you for your dedication and unwavering commitment to social justice. Every day, you support clients facing some of the most challenging circumstances of their lives. Your compassion, smarts and determination make Southside Justice what it is.

To our board members, thank you for your leadership, stewardship and belief in our vision. We extend our sincere thanks to Denis Nelthorpe, Elliot Anderson and Sonia Clarke, who concluded their board service this year after a combined 17 years of dedication to Southside Justice. Their guidance and commitment have helped shape the organisation we are today. We also welcomed five new board members, Oliva Clark-Moffatt, Emily Millane, Jeevi Mather, Alex Batsis and Miriam Raphael, whose diverse skills, experience and enthusiasm will help guide our next chapter.



To our funders, thank you for your confidence in our work and your shared commitment to access to justice. In particular, we acknowledge the Victorian Government, the Department of Justice and Community Safety, and the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner, whose support accounted for almost three-quarters of Southside Justice's funding this year.

To our supporters, including our pro bono partners, referral agencies, community organisations, donors and advocates, thank you for standing alongside us. Your partnership, generosity and trust extend our reach and enhance our impact, helping ensure that more people can access the legal assistance they need when they need it most.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to building a stronger, more sustainable organisation that can meet growing legal need while staying connected to the communities and partnerships that define our work. Thank you for being part of Southside Justice's journey.

**With gratitude,
Brendan Lacota and Mel Dye**



How We Measure Impact

This report explores impact through our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework.

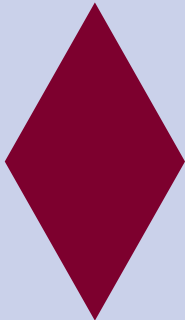
Our MEL helps us understand not only what we do, but whether our work is making a meaningful difference to the people and communities we work together with. Through the report, we explore four key questions:

- Our work**
What did we deliver for our community?
- The experience of working with us**
What was it like to access our services and partner with us?
- The difference it made**
What changed because of our work?
- Insights shaping what comes next**
What are we learning and where are we going?

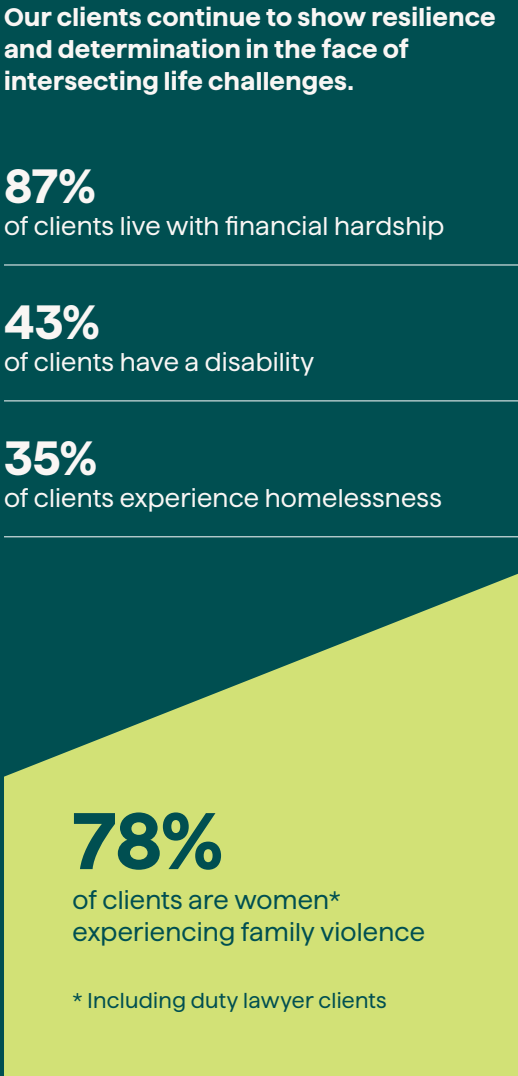
These questions are explored through the lens of our Strategic Plan 2023 – 2028, which identifies three strategic impact areas:



- Our Principles — Guiding Our Work**
 - Community lawyering.**
We practice with self awareness, compassion and a commitment to working in solidarity.
 - People and communities are the experts in their own lives.**
We recognise, listen to and amplify their voices.
 - Together is better.**
We know that the community and legal sector are more effective together. We always collaborate for greater and deeper impact.



Our Clients, By The Numbers



Safe Justice

Family violence continues to have a profound impact on our community and is a key driver of legal need. More people experiencing family violence were able to access specialist legal support this year as we expanded our capacity and strengthened our family law expertise.

Types of legal issues

Family law, family violence, personal safety, criminalisation, discrimination

71%

Of clients received support for Safe Justice issues

359

People accessed our Duty Lawyer at Moorabbin Specialist Family Violence Court

Specialist programs & partnerships

[Alexis - Family Violence Response Model](#)

[VincentCare Family Violence Refuge](#)

[Maternal & Child Health Partnerships](#)

[REACHher](#)

The experience of working with us and the difference it made

Feedback from clients accessing our specialist Safe Justice programs highlights the importance of trauma-informed legal support. Clients overwhelmingly reported feeling safe and supported when working with their lawyer, which is critical to helping people engage with legal processes, understand their options and make informed decisions that support safer outcomes.

The importance of this trusted support was reinforced by our partner organisations. In a survey of **Maternal and Child Health** staff, all staff agreed that clients felt supported and safe engaging with Southside Justice, and all staff reported improved outcomes for clients who received legal assistance. Our partnerships also strengthened the capability of frontline workers. **VincentCare Refuge** staff reported significant increases in both referral confidence and understanding of family violence and legal issues over the past 12 months.

Insights and what's next

This year marked the first full year of **REACHher**, our program that supports women affected by family violence to build long-term financial independence by helping them secure fairer property settlements. Beyond its direct impact for clients, **REACHher** has been transformative for our Safe Justice practice. The addition of specialist expertise in property settlement matters has significantly strengthened our family law capability. In March, this was recognised through our acceptance onto the Victoria Legal Aid Family Law Panel, expanding our ability to represent clients in more complex family law matters.

This year also saw the commencement of a formal evaluation of our integrated legal support within The Salvation Army's **Alexis - Family Violence Response Model**. Led by Monash University's Family and Gender-Based Violence Prevention Hub, the evaluation draws on in-depth interviews with clients and Alexis staff to explore the impact of legal support within this specialist model. Findings due in 2027 will help strengthen the model and contribute to the evidence base for integrated responses to family violence.

Cleo's Story

After years of family violence and legal proceedings, Southside Justice helped Cleo secure the freedom to return to her home country with her young child and begin rebuilding their lives.

Cleo was referred to Southside Justice through our partnership with a local Maternal and Child Health service. She was caring for her young child and dealing with the ongoing impacts of family violence. Cleo reflects, "I became engaged with Southside Justice during one of the most difficult periods of my life. I felt overwhelmed, isolated, and unsure how to move forward within a legal system that was unfamiliar to me."

Speaking English as a second language and raising a child without friends or family had become incredibly challenging. She also continued to live in fear for her safety due to ex-partner's history of family violence. Cleo's end goal was clear; she wanted the freedom to move back to her home country with her child.

Southside Justice advised Cleo that returning home with her child was not a simple process. Without the consent of both parents, relocating a child overseas can involve complex family and international law issues.

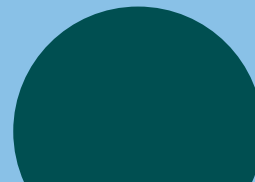
Working closely with Cleo, we helped her navigate these challenges and advocated for an arrangement that prioritised her child's best interests while providing certainty for the future.

Following months of negotiation, an agreement was reached giving Cleo sole decision-making authority for her child and the freedom to relocate overseas. The Family Court then formalised the arrangement, allowing Cleo and her child to move forward with security and peace of mind.

Today, Cleo and her child are building a new chapter together. Her story is a testament to the resilience of survivors of family violence and the importance of having trusted, no-cost support when navigating complex legal challenges. With the right assistance at the right time, people can move beyond crisis, reclaim their independence and create brighter futures for themselves and their children.

"My experience has shown me how important it is for vulnerable people, especially women experiencing family violence, to have access to compassionate and competent legal support. I am grateful to Southside Justice for treating me with dignity and helping me feel that my voice matters"

—Cleo



Housing Justice

Access to safe and secure housing provides the foundation for people to participate in work, education and community life. This year, our Housing Justice work focused on helping people understand and exercise their rights in an increasingly complex housing environment.

Types of legal issues

Tenancy rights across public, community and private housing; homelessness support

22%

Of clients received support for Housing Justice issues

Specialist programs & partnerships

[City of Port Phillip – Private Renters](#)

[Madden House](#)

[The Salvation Army Upton Rd Youth Services](#)

[Sacred Heart Mission – Central](#)

[Launch Housing – Southbank](#)

[The Salvation Army – Access Health](#)

The experience of working with us and the difference it made

This year, many residents affected by public housing redevelopment and community housing relocations told us they felt uncertain about their rights and under pressure to make decisions that would have lasting consequences for their future. Through independent legal advice and community education, residents were better equipped to understand their options, make informed decisions and advocate for their interests during significant periods of change.

For people experiencing housing instability, early legal support can prevent relatively small issues from becoming major barriers to maintaining housing. Through our integrated partnerships with **Madden House** and **The Salvation Army's Upton Road Youth Services**, residents were able to access legal assistance before problems escalated, helping to strengthen housing stability and address issues that may otherwise have gone unresolved.

The impact of our intervention was particularly evident in the **City of Port Phillip**, where six Notices to Vacate were resolved before reaching VCAT, preventing eviction and supporting residents to remain in their homes.

Insights and what's next

The legal issues people bring to us rarely exist in isolation. Increasingly, they are the consequence of a worsening housing crisis that is placing enormous pressure on individuals and families. Whether facing eviction, forced relocation, barriers to maintaining a tenancy or uncertainty about their rights, our clients are navigating complex systems while struggling to secure the stability and safety that housing should provide.

Our casework gives us unique insight into the systemic issues driving housing insecurity. We used this evidence to advocate for stronger laws, better regulation and greater accountability, ensuring individual experiences inform reforms that create lasting change. With increased capacity in our Housing Justice team in the coming year, we will strengthen this work and continue to advance the rights of residents across our communities.



Scott's Story

After several years of sleeping rough in his car, Scott* had recently secured supportive housing and was beginning to rebuild his life. However, an ongoing parking issue threatened the stability he had worked so hard to achieve.

Without access to onsite parking or a residential permit, Scott was constantly moving his vehicle to avoid fines, causing significant stress and disruption.

When Scott was referred to Southside Justice, we recognised that resolving the issue was about more than a parking fine. For Scott to successfully sustain his housing, he needed practical barriers to stability removed. We worked with his housing support team and made submissions to the local council outlining his circumstances and the importance of supporting people transitioning out of homelessness.

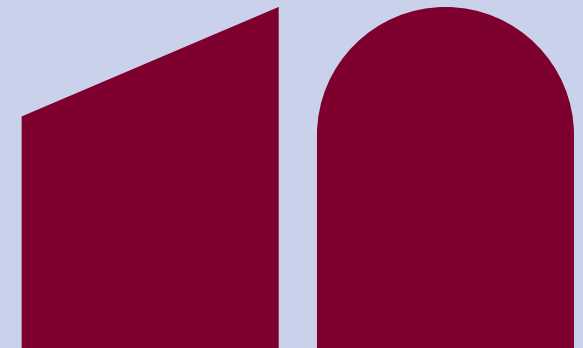
As a result of our advocacy, council granted an exemption allowing Scott to obtain a street parking permit. We were also successful in having his parking fine withdrawn.

Reflecting on the outcome, Scott said:

“It has made my life so much easier. I have stopped worrying about getting fines every hour of the day and was able to turn off my hourly alarms to move my car. It’s unbelievable how much of a difference it’s made.”

Scott's story highlights how seemingly small legal issues can create significant barriers to housing stability. By addressing these obstacles early, we can help people maintain their housing, reduce stress and focus on rebuilding their lives after homelessness.

*Name changed with permission



Economic Justice

Fines, debt, economic abuse and income insecurity continue to drive inequality in our community. This year, we supported people to improve their financial security by addressing legal issues that often intersect with family violence, homelessness and other forms of disadvantage.

Types of legal issues

Fines, debt, property settlements, employment rights, compensation

34%

Of clients received support for Economic Justice issues

\$1.2 million

Secured in financial outcomes for clients

Specialist programs & partnerships

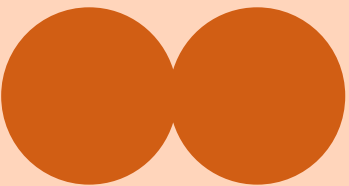
[REACHher](#)

[Sex Worker Legal Program](#)

The experience of working with us and the difference it made

For many clients, infringement debt represented a significant source of financial stress. Through legal advocacy, we supported clients to challenge unjust debt, resulting in more than **\$140,000** in fines being waived or withdrawn and reducing financial pressure at times of significant vulnerability.

Our **REACHher** program delivered the most significant financial outcomes of the year. By combining legal representation with financial counselling from South East Community Links, women affected by family violence secured more than **\$1 million** in property settlements. For many, these outcomes created a pathway to long-term financial security and greater freedom to make decisions about their future.



Insights and what's next

Financial hardship doesn't just increase legal need. It can also reduce people's capacity to respond when problems arise, making early support and stronger referral pathways more important than ever.

Strengthening our partnership through networks such as the **Infringements Working Group** and **Economic Abuse Reference Group** will remain a key focus, helping us respond to emerging issues and advocate for systemic change.



Emily's Story

When Emily's* long-term relationship ended following family violence, she became a single parent overnight, responsible for caring for young children while trying to rebuild her life. Through our REACHher program, she received the legal support she needed to retain the foundation of her family's stability: the family home.

Emily was referred to Southside Justice through the REACHher program via her local community legal centre. At the time, she felt overwhelmed by the legal, financial and emotional challenges ahead.

"Although there were significant assets, I had very little access to cash, was working part-time, and couldn't access legal aid through other avenues," Emily recalls.

One of Emily's greatest concerns was keeping a stable home for her children. Throughout the relationship, finances had been used as a form of coercive control, and she feared losing both her home and the stability it provided.

"I was terrified that my children and I would lose our home and face homelessness," she says. "The thought of having to relocate and further disrupt my children's lives at a time of enormous upheaval was overwhelming."

From her first conversation with Southside Justice, Emily felt a sense of relief.

"From my very first phone call, I felt reassured that I had someone in my corner. I felt heard, safe and believed."

Over the following months, Southside Justice guided Emily through property settlement negotiations and helped her understand her rights and options. A settlement was reached that enabled her to refinance the mortgage, purchase her former partner's interest in the property and remain in the family home with her children.

Today, Emily says the impact extends well beyond the financial outcome.

"Having access to free, compassionate legal support didn't just help me achieve a fair financial outcome. It gave me hope, stability and the confidence to create a safe future for my children."

Emily's story demonstrates that family law assistance is about more than resolving property disputes. For many victim-survivors, it can be the difference between uncertainty and stability, helping families rebuild their lives with safety, dignity and hope.

*Name changed with permission



Sex Worker Legal Program

This year, we strengthened the foundations for the next phase of the Sex Worker Legal Program (SWLP). A new strategic plan developed alongside sex workers guides our expanded advocacy on workplace rights and safety, targeted engagement with Police, and new tools to improve access to legal information.

Types of legal issues

Discrimination, sexual assault, engaging with police, non-payment, worker rights

73

Sex workers received free legal support

\$23,800

Recovered in payments to sex workers

Key partnerships

[Vixen](#)

[RhED – Better Health Network](#)

[St Kilda Gatehouse](#)

The experience of working with us and the difference it made

For many sex workers, seeking legal help requires navigating systems that have historically been associated with stigma and exclusion. Feedback from clients reinforces the importance of specialist legal support that is grounded in respect, confidentiality and an understanding of the unique experiences of sex workers. All surveyed clients this year said they felt welcome and safe, understood their legal problem more clearly, and would recommend the service to other sex workers.

This trusted support helps people engage with legal systems and pursue outcomes that may otherwise feel out of reach. This year, the SWLP supported victim-survivors in what is believed to be Victoria's first successful prosecution involving deceptive non-payment following consent reforms that reclassified this conduct from fraud to a serious sexual offence. We provided sustained legal advocacy and support to help overcome barriers to police reporting and engagement, demonstrating the importance of specialist legal advocacy in achieving access to justice for sex workers.

Insights and what's next

This year reinforced that legal reform alone does not guarantee access to justice. Our work supporting victim-survivors of sexual offending demonstrates that significant barriers to police reporting and engagement remain, and that our advocacy is often required to help clients navigate systems that should be accessible without specialist support.

In response, we strengthened relationships with specialist sexual offence investigation teams and delivered training to **Victoria Police** on working effectively with sex workers who report sexual offences. We also deepened our engagement with **WorkSafe Victoria**, securing a commitment to ongoing collaboration on workplace health and safety issues affecting sex workers in managed venues.

Looking ahead, we will continue investing in initiatives that improve sex workers' ability to understand and exercise their rights. This includes spearheading a national collaboration to develop a digital legal information hub for Australian sex workers. The forthcoming review of the Sex Work Decriminalisation Act 2022 (Vic) also presents an important opportunity to reflect on the impacts of the legislation and opportunities to strengthen its practical realisation.

Launching The Next Chapter

In November 2025, more than 60 supporters, partners and stakeholders gathered to launch the Sex Worker Legal Program's three-year Impact Report and new Strategy for 2026-2028.

The event provided an opportunity to reflect on the achievements, lessons and opportunities that have emerged since the program's establishment. Key findings from the Impact Report include:

- The importance of funded, peer-informed services that centre the lived experience of sex workers.
- The need for greater accountability from public institutions in responding to sex workers' health, safety and workplace rights.
- The value of strategic legal representation that tests legislation, establishes precedent and drives higher standards across the industry.

Our new Strategy for 2026-2028 builds on these findings and commits to driving systemic change by strengthening our peer-led partnerships, expanding legal advocacy and pursuing strategic litigation. Our deep thanks to the **Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner** for hosting this event and for being our key funding partner over the past three years.



Better Together

Better Together is one of our core values. It recognises that lasting change happens when we work alongside clients, communities, partners and advocates to address the systems that create legal problems in the first place.

This year, we increased our ability to translate client experiences into systemic advocacy, ensuring community voices are more consistently reflected in public debate and policy discussions. Dedicated investment in policy and advocacy has increased our capacity to pursue systemic change on issues affecting our communities.

During the year, we advocated against proposed local law changes in the City of Port Phillip that disproportionately impacted people experiencing homelessness and contributed to broader advocacy around the criminalisation of poverty in community spaces. We continued to raise awareness of the legal and human rights impacts of public housing redevelopment across Melbourne's inner south, drawing on our frontline experience supporting affected residents.

We also created opportunities to bring people together around a shared commitment to local access to justice. In May, we hosted *People, Place & Possibility*, bringing together 50 supporters, partners, community members and sector leaders to reflect on the impact and opportunities around place-based justice. The evening was anchored by Southside Justice client Catherine, who generously shared her experience of receiving free, non-judgemental legal support from Southside Justice.

The event was made possible through the generous support of our pro bono partners - Barry Nilsson, Ashurst, Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer and MinterEllison.

“People don’t come to us in isolation. They come through places they already trust - an ecosystem of local services who know their story. That’s why where we sit, and who we sit alongside, matters so much.”

—Mel Dye, CEO



Financial Overview

Southside Justice continues to grow and diversify its income streams while we continue to advocate for increased recurrent government funding.

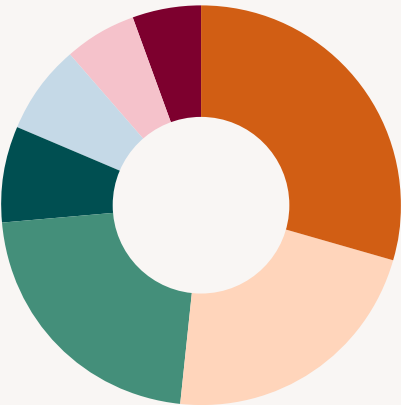
Income increased by **58.1%** during the year, rising from \$1,512,244 in FY25 to **\$2,391,211 in FY26**. This growth was driven primarily by additional project funding, enabling us to expand our services, increase our impact, and support more people in our community.

Total expenditure for the year was \$2,259,455, resulting in a **net surplus of \$131,756**. This outcome reflects a deliberate and prudent approach to financial management, with the surplus increasing **accumulated funds to \$386,490** and strengthening the organisation's financial position.

To further support long-term sustainability, Southside Justice established a Future Fund with Australian Communities Foundation. The Future Fund provides a vehicle for investing accumulated reserves in a responsibly managed investment portfolio, building financial resilience and creating a stronger foundation to support future service delivery and organisational growth.

Income

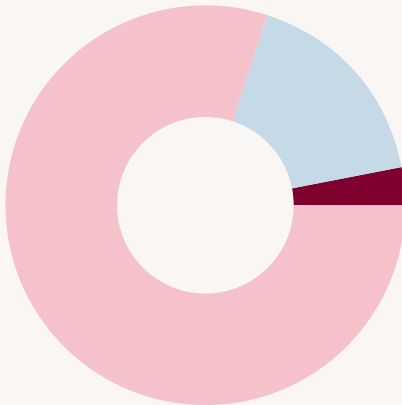
Southside Justice continues to diversify its income streams. Increasing recurrent baseline funding remains a key priority to support financial stability, sustainable growth, and ongoing service delivery.



- 29.6% State Government - Fixed Term
- 22% State Government - Baseline
- 22.2% VLSB+C
- 7.7% Commonwealth Government - Baseline
- 7.2% Philanthropy
- 6% Donations and other income
- 5.3% Other grant funding

Expenses

Our expenditure reflects the true cost of delivering services. Consistent with the *Pay What It Takes* framework, high-impact outcomes require investment in both our talented and committed staff and the organisational capacity that supports them.



- 80% Direct costs
- 17% Direct overheads
- 3% Indirect overheads

Thank You

Barristers

Gautam Mukherji
Nicholas Petrie
James Plunkett
Tom Smyth

Community legal centres

Community Legal
Centres Australia
Federation of
Community Legal
Centres
First Step Legal
Gippsland Community
Legal Centre
Human Rights Law
Centre
Job Watch
Justice Connect
Peninsula Community
Legal Centre
South East Monash
Legal Service
Victorian Aboriginal
Legal Service

Government & Statutory Authorities

City of Bayside
City of Port Phillip
City of Stonnington
Commonwealth
Government of
Australia
Victorian Department
of Justice and
Community Safety
Victoria Legal Aid
Victorian Government

Law firms

Ashurst Perkins Coie
Barry Nilsson
Clayton Utz
Herbert Smith Freehills
Kramer
HWLE Lawyers
Lander & Rogers
Maddocks
MinterEllison
Nicholes Family
Lawyers
Norton Rose Fulbright

Organisations

Assembly Four
Better Health Network
+ RhED
Family Life
Homeless Persons
Union Victoria
Launch Housing
Ngwala Willumbong
Port Phillip Community
Group
Sacred Heart Mission
Scarlet Alliance
South East Community
Links
South Yarra Public
Tenants Association
St Kilda Gatehouse
The Salvation Army
Uniting
Windana
Victorian Public
Tenants Association
VincentCare
Vixen

Trusts and Foundations

Equity Trustees -
The W.C.F Thomas
Charitable Trust and
The Arthur A Thomas
Charitable Trust
Just World Investments
Matana Foundation for
Young People
Victorian Law
Foundation
Victorian Legal
Services Board Grants
Program
Victorian Women's
Benevolent Trust -
The Fay Marles Equal
Opportunity Sub-Fund





03 7037 3200

info@southsidejustice.org.au

Boonwurrung Country
118A Carlisle St
St Kilda VIC 3182

southsidejustice.org.au

