

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Promoting safety through specialist legal support and prevention programs



Eastern Community Legal Centre has a longstanding commitment to addressing family violence and helping those that it affects through innovative and coordinated responses.

ECLC also seeks to stop family violence before it occurs by working in partnership to develop and support community prevention and education.

FAMILY VIOLENCE



ECLC provides free and confidential legal advice and assistance to people experiencing or at risk of family violence across the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR).

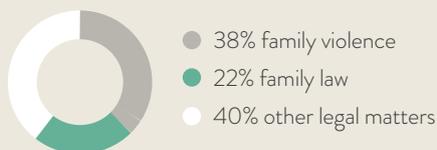
ECLC's Community Lawyers provide help for family violence matters and a range of related legal problems, including:

- Intervention Orders
- Family Law
- Victims of Crime
- Fines and Infringements

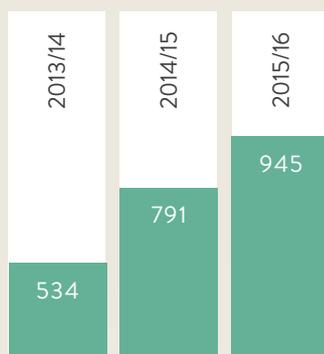
Legal advice is provided at ECLC's offices and at outreach locations across Melbourne's east. More detailed assistance may be offered to people who are experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage.

ECLC also provides referrals to other specialist legal and community agencies, secondary consultations for service workers and arranges interpreter services as needed.

BREAKDOWN OF ECLC CLIENT LEGAL MATTERS IN THE 2015/16 YEAR:



INCREASE IN CLIENTS SEEN THROUGH THE INTERVENTION ORDER SUPPORT SERVICE AT RINGWOOD MAGISTRATES' COURT



INTERVENTION ORDER SUPPORT SERVICE (IOSS)

ECLC's specialist family violence Community Lawyers provide assistance at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court four days a week, supported by trained volunteer paralegals, as part of the Intervention Order Support Service (IOSS). The Community Lawyer:

- Provides legal advice and information to Applicants and Respondents in Family Violence Intervention Order matters
- Liaises and advocates for clients to achieve a negotiated, positive resolution to their matter or support them to have the matter listed for a contested hearing
- Represents clients who require extra support in the Family Violence Intervention Order List
- Arranges referrals to relevant services

ECLC works closely with all other agencies and partners involved in the IOSS, including Victoria Legal Aid, Court staff, Victoria Police, EDVOS, EACH Victims Assistance Program, Court Network, Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service and others.

As part of the IOSS partnership, ECLC produced **Steps2Safety** – an informative video and collection of multilingual resources for people engaging with the Family Violence Intervention Order process.

From 2011-15, ECLC led the **Family Violence Integration Project** (FVIP), which made significant improvements to the coordination and integration of legal and support services for family violence victims/survivors attending Ringwood Magistrates' Court. The Royal Commission into Family Violence endorsed a number of key outcomes of the FVIP as recommendations.



Watch the Steps2Safety video in English and five community languages at eclc.org.au/steps2safety

KEY PROGRAMS



MABELS

MABELS provides an early intervention response to family violence by integrating legal help and specialist support services into universal health settings.

ECLC launched the first MABELS clinics at selected sites in the Maroondah and Yarra Ranges municipalities in 2015.

A specialist family violence Community Lawyer and Specialist Family Violence Advocate work on-site with the health service to provide women with legal advice, safety planning information and referrals in the same appointment.

A successful independent evaluation indicated that the MABELS health justice partnership model has the potential to be replicated across multiple regions, utilising services and connections already in existence, to improve the safety and wellbeing of women and their children.



SAGE: SUPPORT ADVICE GUIDANCE EMPOWERMENT

The SAGE program seeks to overcome barriers that can make it more difficult for some women experiencing family violence to access help, by targeting services to priority groups, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
- women from migrant, refugee or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- women with a disability
- women experiencing mental health issues
- women in rural or remote locations

SAGE utilises an integrated model which sees a specialist family violence Community Lawyer and a Family Violence Advocate work together to provide:

- intensive legal and family violence support
- co-case management and strong referral pathways
- 'wraparound' support through collaboration with other services
- a trauma-informed and strengths-based approach to supporting women to engage with legal processes

Strong partnerships with other specialist services ensure SAGE can provide family violence assistance that is accessible, culturally safe and responsive to the diverse needs of women.

FINANCIAL COUNSELLING

In addition to the trauma of family violence, a number of ECLC's clients endure the stress of debt and bad credit reports, often as the result of a financially abusive partner. Through key partnerships, ECLC hosts family violence financial counsellors on-site as part of an embedded service collaboration.

ELDER ABUSE

Elder abuse is a form of family violence and is a growing issue for Australia. It can take many forms including physical, sexual, financial, psychological, social and/or neglect.

Through its Elder Abuse program, ECLC:

- Advocates for the rights of older people
- Provides secondary consultation to other agencies
- Convenes the Eastern Elder Abuse Network of professionals working with older people
- Contributes to strategic advocacy and law reform

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND LEGAL EDUCATION

ECLC engages in community development activities across the EMR, including providing community legal education workshops, professional development and legal needs research.

These activities are tailored to meet the needs of people experiencing or at risk of family violence and the agencies that provide a service to them.

ECLC also addresses family violence across the prevention, early intervention and response continuum as an active member of the Regional Family Violence Partnership and a wide range of other projects.





SARAH'S STORY

Sarah attended ECLC's Healesville office to seek assistance with an outstanding phone bill. During the appointment, it was discovered that although Sarah had purchased the phone, it was being used exclusively by her ex-partner, Tom, in the context of a family violence relationship.

ECLC's Community Lawyer assisted Sarah to obtain an interim Intervention Order at Ringwood Magistrates' Court. The Magistrate noted on the order that Tom was to return the phone to Sarah, which he failed to do. Sarah reported the breach to police on ECLC's advice.

In the meantime, the telecommunications company issued Sarah with a contract cancellation invoice in excess of \$3,500, which she had no capacity to pay.

The Community Lawyer worked closely with ECLC's hosted Financial Counsellor to advocate for Sarah and seek that the company waive the debt. ECLC provided evidence of the current Intervention Order and referred the company to recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Family Violence in relation to telecommunication services.

Following months of advocacy, the company agreed to waive the entire debt, remove all traces of the debt from Sarah's credit record and allow Sarah to keep the phone free of charge. ECLC also assisted Sarah to finalise her matter at Court, resulting in a full 12-month Intervention Order.

IMPROVING LAWS, IMPROVING LIVES

ECLC advocates on family violence issues by calling for significant and urgent law reform. ECLC has contributed to the numerous government inquiries into family violence, including:

- Parliamentary Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia (2014)
- Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (2015)
- New South Wales Inquiry into Elder Abuse (2015)
- Australian Law Reform Commission, Elder Abuse Inquiry (2016)
- Parliamentary Inquiry into 'a better family law system to support and protect those affected by family violence' (2017)

PARTNERSHIPS

ECLC delivers its family violence projects and services in partnership and with the support of other community agencies, volunteers, law firms and government bodies. ECLC particularly acknowledges the financial support of:

Australian Government – Attorney-General's Department
Victorian Government
Victoria Legal Aid
Victorian Legal Services Board
Victoria Law Foundation
Phyllis Connor Memorial Trust

RESOURCES

To access videos, resources and information about ECLC's family violence projects and services, visit eclc.org.au/familyviolence or call **03 9285 4822**

ECLC offers free legal assistance from its offices in Box Hill, Boronia and Healesville and at outreach locations across Melbourne's east. ECLC also engages in law reform and undertakes community development to educate and empower the community.

ECLC acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land across ECLC's region. We pay our deep respects to the Elders, both past and present.