

ala Annual Report

2025/2026

advocacy law alliance

***ALA** provides high quality, independent social and legal advocacy to people in need. We are committed to servicing regional, rural and remote communities as well as metropolitan communities and we focus on empowering clients to navigate the legal and social systems to achieve fair outcomes.*



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters of New South Wales and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' continuing cultural and spiritual connection to Country and acknowledge the significance of their cultures, knowledge and traditions.

what's inside

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1985

A small group of community members established Citizen Advocacy Northwest in Tamworth to advocate for people with intellectual disability. At the same time, Self Advocacy Newcastle commenced, laying the foundations for what would later become Advocacy Law Alliance.

1992

Self-Advocacy Newcastle stops operating and a service called Newcastle Community Access forms an advocacy working group to prepare a tender for federal advocacy funding.

1994

2 STAFF

Disability Advocacy Service Hunter (DASH) is officially established in Newcastle to advocate for all people with a disability.

DASH becomes a separate entity from Newcastle Community Access.

2006

15 STAFF

DASH and Citizen Advocacy Northwest merged to form Disability Advocacy NSW (DA), creating a stronger regional advocacy organisation and expanding services across the Hunter, North West and Mid North Coast regions.

2007

18 STAFF

DA establishes offices in Coffs Harbour and Armidale.

2008

Advocates identified a significant gap in access to free legal assistance on the Mid North Coast and began campaigning for the establishment of a community legal centre in the region.

2010

Commonwealth and NSW governments offer funds to establish a community legal centre in Port Macquarie and DA successfully tenders.

2011

22 STAFF

The organisation adopted the name Advocacy Law Alliance and registered the business names Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre and Disability Advocacy NSW. The Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre opens its doors in Port Macquarie, establishing a dedicated community legal centre for the Mid North Coast.

2013

26 STAFF

NDIS legislation is passed and the Hunter region becomes a NDIS trial site. DA becomes one of the first services in Australia to establish a NDIS Appeals support program.

2016

35 STAFF

ALA expanded its disability advocacy footprint across NSW, welcoming the Disability Information and Advocacy Service in Bathurst as the new Central West region and establishing offices in Parramatta, the Lower Blue Mountains, Dubbo and Broken Hill. As the NDIS rolled out nationally, ALA also expanded its NDIS Appeals program beyond Newcastle into Sydney and other regions.

2018

40 STAFF

DA begins federally funded Decision Support program for all of NSW. DA successfully tenders to extend its National Disability Advocacy Program funding to further establish its work in Western Sydney and Nepean-Blue Mountains.

2019

48 STAFF

Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre receives additional state funding and opens a second office in Coffs Harbour, now covering six LGAs.

DA begins supporting people to tell their story at the Disability Royal Commission.

2020

55 STAFF

Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre established Disability Law NSW, employing a specialist disability lawyer to provide legal assistance to Disability Advocacy clients across NSW. The Centre also secured funding for dedicated programs supporting communities affected by the bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic.

2021

60 STAFF

Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre celebrated its 10th anniversary and rebranded as Mid North Coast Legal Centre (MNCLC). Following the successful #StandByMe campaign and sector reform, ALA secured funding under the new NSW Disability Advocacy Futures Program, expanding its regional footprint and driving significant growth in advocacy services and staffing from 2022.

2022

80 STAFF

ALA continued to grow its disability advocacy services, expanding into Ballina and the Central Coast and increasing capacity across NSW. Planning commenced for the national Disability Advocacy Support Helpline, while a new education advocacy program was launched to improve outcomes for students with disability.

2023

The Helpline secured additional funding to expand its capacity. ALA implemented major internal improvements, including Employment Hero and a new staff intranet, while reviewing its Strategic Plan and launching new organisational values: Courageous, Caring, Connected and Creative.

2024

90 STAFF

ALA transitions to a Company Limited by Guarantee, marking a significant milestone in the organisation's growth and governance.

2025

ALA celebrates 40 years of community advocacy. MNCLC secures 5 year funding under the National Access to Justice Partnership and the Helpline pilot is recognised as a key component of the National Advocacy Support Program.

2026

Mark Grierson retires after 34 years and Amanda Brickwood is appointed as CEO. DA secures 5 year funding under the NSW Disability Advocacy Futures Program.



about ala

Our Vision

All people should have the right to equity and fairness.

Our Mission

To provide high quality social and legal advocacy to people in need. We are committed to servicing regional, rural and remote communities as well as metropolitan communities and we focus on empowering clients to navigate the legal and social systems to achieve fair outcomes.

Our Values

Courageous:
We have the courage to do what's right.

Caring:
We care about our people and the work we do.

Creative:
We use innovation, evidence and curiosity to continually strive to improve.

Connected:
We are better together.



Our Strategic Goals (2023-2026):

1. Deliver high quality, targeted services that meet our clients' needs.
2. Maintain positive workplace culture that is flexible, safe and diverse.
3. Capitalise on funding opportunities to improve access to our services.
4. Continue to enhance our leadership and management support capabilities.
5. Utilise our influence to inform government priorities on disability and law reform.
6. Practice excellent organisational governance.

Funding

Disability Advocacy NSW:

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing – National Disability Advocacy Program, NDIS Appeals, Disability Advocacy Support Helpline.

NSW Department of Communities and Justice – Disability Advocacy Futures Program (DAFP)

Mid North Coast Legal Centre:

Commonwealth Attorney General's Department

Community Legal Centres Program, Legal Aid NSW

NSW Department of Communities and Justice

ALA thanks each of these organisations for their support this year.

ala people

ALA Board

Our volunteer Board of Management oversee the governance of our organisation to ensure Advocacy Law Alliance is financially stable, has a clear strategic direction and has the greatest impact possible for the communities we serve.



NICOLE GRGAS
Chairperson

I hold a Social Science Degree, a Graduate Certificate in Adult Education and a Certificate in Community Services, Advocacy. I am the Manager of a small community organisation and have worked in the field of advocacy for more than 20 years. I have experience on Boards of both large and small community organisations and so have experience on both sides of the fence. I have a commitment to social justice and a particular passion about ensuring all our community members have access to the services they need.

TOBY THOMAS
Treasurer

As someone born with a low vision condition called Achromatopsia, I am acutely aware of the challenges associated with living. This was my primary motivation for joining the ALA Board, and this experience has been profoundly rewarding. I studied a Bachelor of Arts and a Juris Doctor at University and currently work in London with global investment consulting firm WTW. Volunteering for the ALA Board combines two key personal passions of mine, namely, advocating for people with disabilities, and ensuring fairness before the law.

RACHEL SOWDEN
Director

I have four children who are Aboriginal, two who have autism and three who have mental health diagnoses. I am determined that all people in NSW regardless of postcode have access to supports required to live a full life with choice and voice. Having lived the past 23 years in rural and remote locations across NSW, I am familiar with the challenges of obtaining equitable access to services and supports outside of metropolitan locations. I have long held advocacy roles in education and mental health particularly in rural settings, with a focus on young people and people with invisible disabilities.

I believe that people who are disadvantaged before the law deserve excellent representation and access to fearless advocacy. As the mother of a child with an intellectual disability and ASD who is navigating the brave new world of the NDIS, education and health systems, I know firsthand the need for strong disability advocacy services to assist people engaging with these systems. I have served on several boards in disability and health related organisations.

NICOLETTE NAWROT
Director

I am a Chartered Accountant and Partner in Audit and Assurance at KPMG Newcastle, with more than 15 years' experience in governance, financial reporting, risk management and strategic planning. I work closely with not-for-profit, community service and commercial organisations and regularly support Boards and executive teams. As a parent of three children, including two who are neurodiverse, I am passionate about inclusion and ensuring people have access to the support they need to thrive. I joined the ALA Board because I believe everyone deserves a fair voice and access to high-quality advocacy. I am proud to contribute my financial and governance experience to support ALA's important work in the community.

VICTORIA PRYOR
Director

I have built my career across ASX-listed workforce services, national recruitment, and real estate, spanning both the Human Resources and Real Estate industries. I currently lead strategic growth for Stone Real Estate across Australia and New Zealand, focused on expanding the network through new office recruitment and franchise growth. Prior to this, I held senior leadership roles including Group General Manager – Strategic Growth at Ashley Services Group (ASX:ASH) and National Account Director at Programmed, where I worked across Australia, New Zealand and the Asia Pacific region, driving strategic partnerships and growth over more than a decade. I am also a Justice of the Peace in NSW.

As a mother to a child with additional needs, I have a deep personal understanding of the challenges people with disability and their families face, navigating systems that aren't always built with them in mind. This experience drives my passion for advocating for people with disability to have access to fair representation, dignity, and the support they need. I bring this personal commitment together with my strategic mindset, work ethic, and governance experience to my role on the ALA Board.

ROSS CASEY
Director

I worked for Disability Advocacy NSW in Broken Hill between 2017 and 2020, as the organisation's first advocate in the Far West NSW region. I hold Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Justice degrees. I currently work in the public service for the Federal regulator of NDIS supports and services. I am excited to be back involved with ALA and to again contribute to the valuable work of the organisation.





chairperson's report

NICOLE GRGAS

The 2025–26 year was an important period of consolidation, transition and preparation for Advocacy Law Alliance.

Throughout a changing funding and service environment, ALA continued delivering high-quality legal and social advocacy while strengthening its foundations for the future. Longer-term funding arrangements for State disability advocacy and community legal services provided welcome stability. The organisation also prepared carefully for significant reform across the national disability advocacy sector.

The Board was pleased to see continued investment in quality, accessibility and better ways of understanding the impact of our services. Our programs maintained their strong quality and accreditation standing, reflecting the professionalism and care of staff across ALA. This gives the Board confidence that the organisation remains focused on both the people seeking support today and its longer-term sustainability.

A major focus for the Board during the year was leadership succession. After 34 years of dedicated leadership, Mark Grierson retired as Chief Executive Officer. Mark played an extraordinary role in growing ALA from a small regional advocacy service into the respected and capable organisation it is today. On behalf of the Board, I sincerely thank Mark for his vision, commitment and lasting contribution.

Following a thorough recruitment process, the Board appointed Amanda Brickwood as CEO, effective shortly after the end of the financial year. Amanda has served ALA for close to 10 years, most recently as Executive Officer, and brings extensive leadership experience across Disability Advocacy NSW and the broader organisation. Her appointment provides valuable continuity, along with the energy and strategic perspective needed to guide ALA through its next chapter.

ALA finishes the year as a strong, well-governed and purpose-driven organisation, well positioned to respond to future opportunities and challenges.

I sincerely thank our staff, volunteers and leadership team, as well as my fellow directors, for their commitment throughout the year. Most importantly, I acknowledge the people and communities who place their trust in ALA and whose experiences remain central to our work.



treasurer's report

TOBY THOMAS

This is the Treasurer's report, which is in respect to the Advocacy Law Alliance (ALA) financial report for the financial year ended 30 June 2026. The financial report was prepared by Aura Corporate and independently audited by goodCOM Audit & Assurance. The independent auditor issued an unmodified audit opinion. I make the following comments in respect to the financial report:

Key Financial Information

Income & Expenditure Statement

ALA received $12,047,026 in grant income and $197,668 in administration income for the 2026 financial year, resulting in total operating income of $12,244,694. This was an increase of $227,655 from the 2025 financial year. ALA also received some other income of $179,429, primarily in the form of government subsidies and interest income, leading to a total of $12,424,123 of inflows received over FY26. $12,434,349 was incurred in expenses, resulting in an operating deficit of $10,226.

I note that during the financial year several unexpected funding opportunities presented themselves. ALA originally forecasted income of $12,220,449 and expenses of $12,529,863, which would have seen an expected deficit for FY26 of $309,414. However, following some positive funding developments throughout the year, a smaller deficit of $10,226 has been achieved, which is a great result in light of the challenging macroeconomic environment seen across FY26.

Balance Sheet

ALA's balance sheet identifies assets in the sum of $3,156,459. Total assets are primarily comprised of cash and cash equivalents, being money held in bank accounts and term deposits. Other assets include amounts for property, plant and equipment, debtor amounts and rental bonds.

The balance sheet also identifies total liabilities in the amount of $1,378,754. I note that ALA's net asset position has marginally decreased relative to the 2025 financial year, by an amount of $10,226 to $1,777,706. The net asset position indicates that ALA can pay all of its debts as and when they fall due, and despite a small reduction over the past 12 months, it remains very healthy in nature.

Overview

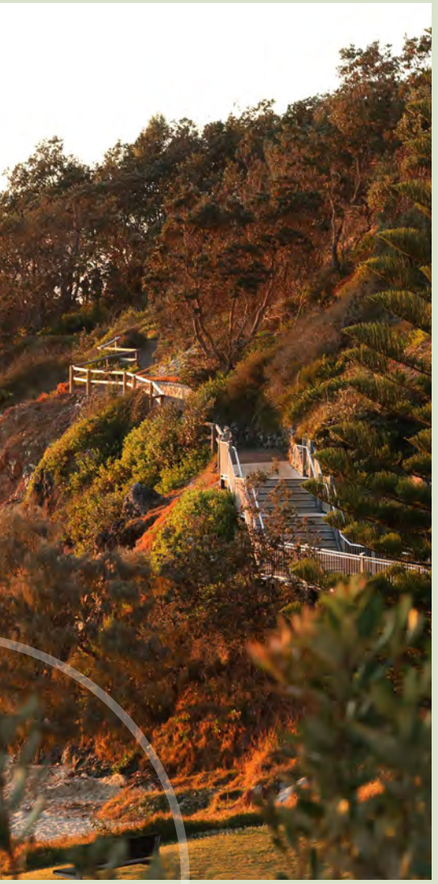
ALA continues to operate in a financially sound manner. As at 30 June 2026, ALA has a current ratio of 2.47, a minor increase from last financial year's current ratio of 2.46. This indicates that ALA continues to maintain a strong level of liquidity.

Based on the financial statements, I am confident that ALA will be able to continue to operate as a going concern.

ALA's staff should be congratulated for their hard work and performance in the 2026 financial year as they have once again delivered an amazing service to all stakeholders and be a leader in their industry.

CEO's report

AMANDA BRICKWOOD



Across 2025–26, ALA's focus was on our people, the experience of those who seek our help and maintaining strong, responsive services across our legal and social advocacy programs.

Achieving ALA's purpose depends on the contribution of people in many different roles, both within our services and in the teams that support them. During the year, each part of the organisation pursued improvement priorities relevant to its role, including strengthening service access and delivery, improving systems and processes, making better use of data and technology, and finding more efficient ways of working. We have seen the benefits of this work both internally, in how our teams are supported to work effectively, and externally, in the experience of people accessing our services.

We also remained focused on using our available resources carefully. Demand does not always align with available funding, so understanding where pressure is growing and where need remains unmet is an important part of our work. During the year, service data and experience helped us make informed decisions about how services were shaped and where resources were directed, while giving us a clearer picture of emerging gaps and helping us adapt as needs and circumstances change.

How our people work together is an important part of what makes ALA effective. Staff have continued to adapt, learn and support one another through both change and the everyday demands of service delivery. The culture we value at ALA does not happen by chance. It is built through the way people share knowledge, help each other, test new ideas, work through challenges together and stay focused on the people we serve. These are the everyday ways I see our values reflected across the organisation.

Supporting our teams to do their best work has remained an important focus. During the year, we strengthened the way we define and support good performance and leadership across ALA, including through the development of an organisation-wide capability framework. This gives our staff greater clarity about what is expected in their roles, how their work contributes to ALA's purpose and goals, and where learning and development can support them to succeed and grow.

All of this has taken place within a changing funding and policy environment. Longer-term funding for our NSW disability advocacy and community legal services has provided greater certainty for the years ahead, while national disability advocacy reform continued throughout the reporting year alongside broader changes affecting the sectors in which we work. Our focus has been on understanding those changes, contributing practical insight from our service experience and preparing our programs carefully as that environment continues to evolve.

Alongside these external changes, the year also brought significant leadership transition. We thank Mark Grierson for his extraordinary 34 years as CEO of ALA and Jane Titterington for her longstanding service as Principal Solicitor of the Mid North Coast Legal Centre. Both made substantial contributions to the growth, development and strength of the organisation and its services. Their leadership, knowledge and commitment have left a lasting mark on ALA and on the services they led.

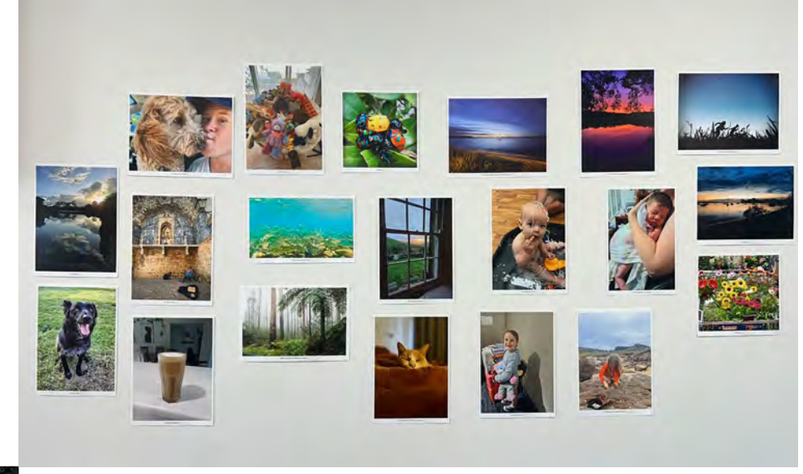
This is my first annual report as CEO of ALA. I commenced in the role shortly after the end of the reporting year, having worked across ALA in a number of roles over the past decade. I am privileged to now lead the organisation into its next phase, building on the work I have been part of over that time and the strong foundations established by those who have contributed before and alongside me. I bring to the role a strong commitment to ALA's purpose, its people and the communities we work in, and a focus on ensuring the organisation remains strong, thoughtful and responsive, with a clear sense of direction for the years ahead.

ALA is also entering an important planning period. Over the coming year, we will develop our next three-year strategic plan, drawing on what we have learned, the changing environment around our services and the needs we continue to see across the communities we support. The focus will be on making deliberate choices about where we direct our effort and resources, while continuing to strengthen the quality, accessibility and sustainability of our services.

Thank you to our staff, volunteers, Board, partners and supporters for the contribution, care and commitment they bring to ALA.



ala conference



The 2025 ALA Conference brought staff from across NSW together in Newcastle to celebrate ALA's 40th anniversary and invest in learning, innovation and connection.

Highlights included a keynote presentation by comedian, author and social commentator Nelly Thomas on creating positive workplace cultures, specialist training from **WiRE** on managing complex client interactions, and an introduction to ALA's approach to artificial intelligence and emerging technologies.

Staff could choose to participate in a photography competition themed "Something that makes you smile", showcasing the creativity and diverse perspectives of our team. The entries were displayed in the conference venue, with winners selected by keynote speaker Nelly Thomas.

The conference wasn't all work, with staff also taking part in the competitive Newcastle Amazing Race-style scavenger hunt and celebrating together at our conference dinner and Christmas celebration.

It was a great opportunity to come together, strengthen relationships across teams, celebrate our achievements and reinforce the collaborative culture that underpins Advocacy Law Alliance.









Disability Advocacy



Report







DA Leaders Report

Charlotte Rider
Manager Advocacy

For the DA team, the 2025 to 2026 financial year was another important year in strengthening the foundations that support effective disability advocacy. We have continued to strengthen advocacy practice, reshape how people first access our service, and build a clearer understanding of the difference advocacy makes for the people we support.

Much of this work has been about moving from design into practice. Our teams have worked to embed new frameworks, strengthen reflective practice, adapt to new team structures and ways of working, and make better use of data to understand demand, people's experience of our service and client outcomes.

These areas of work are closely connected. Quality advocacy depends on people being able to access the service fairly, advocates having the clarity and support to practise well, and us learning from the experiences and outcomes of the people we support. It also depends on teams being willing to reflect, adapt and work through change together.

Our purpose remains the same: standing alongside people with disability when they are not getting a fair go.

Our focus is on continuing to strengthen the service around that purpose, learning from our teams and clients, making thoughtful use of our resources, and ensuring Disability Advocacy remains accessible, consistent and sustainable across the communities we work with.



Key Highlights:

Strengthening advocacy practice

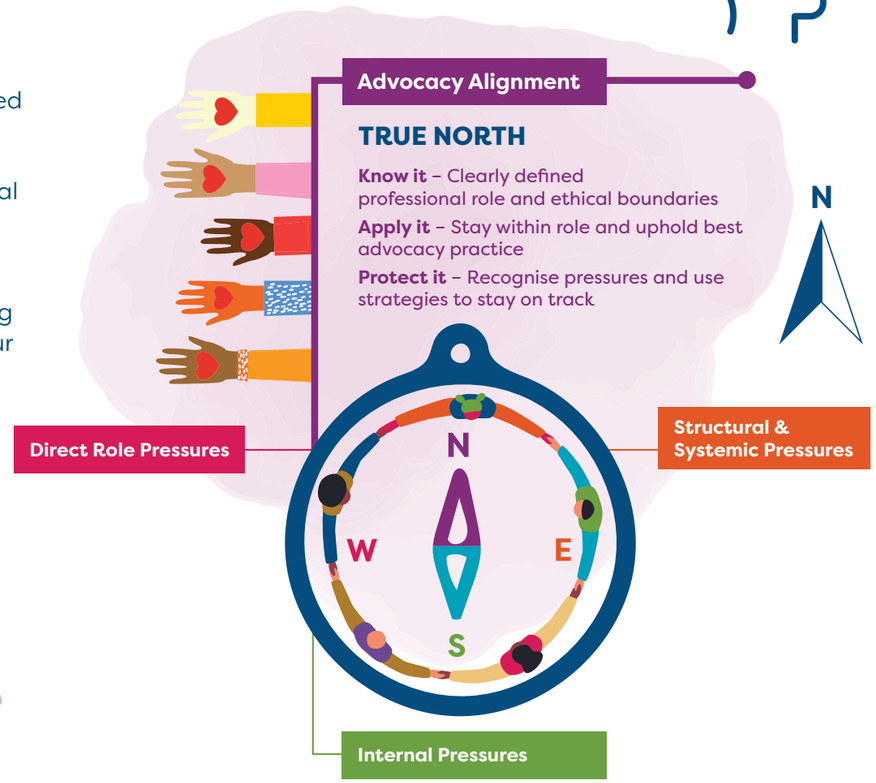
Last year, we developed and launched our True North Framework to strengthen clarity and consistency in advocacy practice. Advocacy often involves complex situations and competing pressures. True North helps advocates recognise when those pressures are pulling them away from the advocacy role and gives them practical ways to respond, keeping the purpose of advocacy and the person's goals at the centre.

This year, our focus shifted from introducing the framework to embedding it in everyday practice. True North is increasingly shaping how advocates learn, reflect and make decisions in their work.

A significant part of this has been shaped directly by our teams. Advocates have worked together to identify the pressures they experience in practice and develop practical strategies for responding to them. These strategies have been tested, discussed and refined across teams, creating resources that reflect both our advocacy principles and the realities of frontline work.

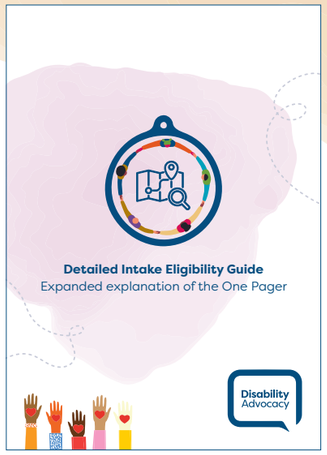
In areas where the advocacy role can be particularly complex, we have also developed more targeted guidance and practical reflection tools. This included specific work in NDIS Appeals, helping advocates navigate the often complex boundary between advocacy and legal work while maintaining strong, rights-based and person-directed support.

We also developed a year-long True North practice reflection program in partnership with WiRE for advocates and managers. The program launched with a focus on vicarious trauma and resilience, with future sessions covering areas such as responding to mental health crises, safeguarding and trauma-informed practice. Themes and common challenges identified through the sessions will help shape the program over time, ensuring it continues to support strong practice, ongoing development and sustainable ways of working.

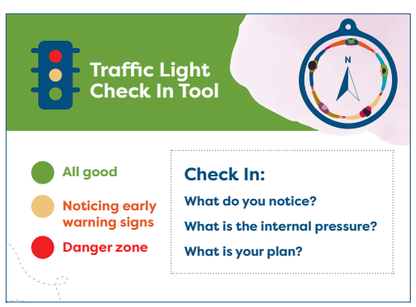


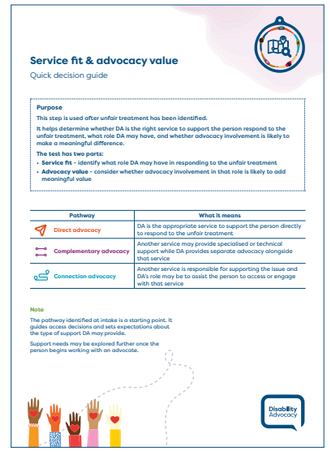
True North in practice

- **Advocate-developed strategies for responding to practice pressures**
- **Guidance and practice tools for navigating advocacy and legal roles**
- **A structured practice reflection program for advocates and managers**
- **Ongoing development of supported decision-making practice and learning**











Reshaping access to advocacy

Over the past year, we have transformed the way people first connect with Disability Advocacy NSW (DA).

The Client Engagement Hub (the Hub) brings our intake advocates together into one coordinated statewide team, supported by dedicated leadership and shared systems. Rather than enquiries being managed separately across regional teams, the Hub allows us to draw on our intake resources collectively, respond more quickly and shift capacity to where it is needed. Our regional advocates remain locally based and connected to their communities; the change is in how people first enter and move through the service.

Technology has played an important role, reducing manual processes and giving the team better visibility across all enquiries and follow-up work. This means more of our time can be spent responding to people, progressing enquiries and making the best use of available capacity across the state.

Throughout this work, the experience of the person contacting us has remained central. We want the Hub to be a responsive, welcoming and accessible place to land, somewhere people are heard and receive clear information about what advocacy can offer. Whether or not DA is the right service for them, we want them to leave with greater clarity about what happens next.

Improving access has also meant strengthening the way we make decisions. Alongside this redesign, we developed our **Fair Access Framework**, a set of principles and detailed practice guidance that supports intake advocates to determine whether DA is the right service for each person. It provides a shared foundation for decisions that are transparent and consistent, while still recognising the individual circumstances, barriers and experiences of the person seeking support.

With the Hub now established and the Fair Access Framework embedded across the service, our focus in the coming year will be on continuing to strengthen the team and refine the experience of people accessing our service. Better data will help us understand demand and resource needs, while we continue to explore new support options, resources and technology that can make advocacy information and support more accessible.

Values in action

The progress made this year has depended on the commitment of our Client Engagement leadership, intake and regional teams. Together, they have adapted to new roles, systems and ways of working while helping to shape the model as it developed. Their patience, trust, practical insight and willingness to keep learning together have been central to bringing the Client Engagement Hub to life and are a strong example of our values in action.

Access at a glance

525
average new enquiry and advocacy cases received each month

87%
average call answer rate, November - June

<2 business days
average time to first contact

5 business days
average time to complete intake assessment

60 seconds
average phone wait time, November - June









Understanding the impact of advocacy

This year we released our first Social Impact Report, marking an important next step in how we understand and improve our work.

For many years, we could describe the number of people we supported and the issues they brought to us. Our Outcomes Measurement Framework now allows us to look beyond service activity and case resolution and ask what changed for the person through advocacy.

The report brings together direct client feedback and advocate observations to understand whether advocacy is helping people build knowledge and confidence, understand their rights and options, make informed decisions, speak up and participate more effectively in the systems affecting their lives. In its first six months, the framework captured insights from 747 clients.

This gives us more than a way to demonstrate impact. It gives us a practical source of learning. As our outcomes data grows, we can look more closely at where advocacy is having the strongest impact, where outcomes are less consistent and what this tells us about people's experiences. Those insights will help shape our practice, learning and service design, so that outcomes measurement becomes part of how we strengthen advocacy over time.

→

Findings are from DA's 2024–25 Social Impact Report, based on the first six months of outcomes measurement. The report represents 747 clients.

Read the full Disability Advocacy NSW 2024–25 Social Impact Report





What we learned from our first Social Impact Report

2024–25 outcomes data

93%

of surveyed clients felt listened to and respected

20% → 70%

client confidence in making decisions about their advocacy issue increased from 20% before support to 70% afterwards

65%

felt they had the opportunity to have their say

3 in 5

clients experienced an improvement in their circumstances during the time DA supported them

Acknowledgments

This year, the Disability Advocacy team has adapted in some significant ways. We have strengthened our focus on reflective practice, introduced new frameworks and ways of working, and made substantial changes to how people first enter and move through our service. None of this becomes embedded simply because a framework is launched or a new structure is put in place. It happens when people are willing to talk openly about practice, share what they are learning, question their own assumptions and make adjustments together.

Change has affected teams in different ways. The establishment of the Client Engagement Hub required patience, trust and a willingness to work through the practical challenges that come with a major service redesign. The Helpline continued to respond to exceptionally high demand, with the team working at pace, sharing the load and maintaining the quality and responsiveness expected of the service. Across DA, there have been many examples of people stepping forward when something needed attention, supporting colleagues through busy periods and finding better ways to get the work done.

These things reflect our values in a very practical way: in the courage to question and improve practice, the care shown to clients and colleagues, the creativity required to respond to pressure, and the way teams stay connected and work through challenges together.

Thank you to everyone across Disability Advocacy for the commitment, openness and care you have brought to the year, and to the broader ALA team and Board for the support they continue to provide.









Our clients

Our reach



All enquiries and advocacy cases during 2025–26

- Western & Far West **612**
- Nepean/Blue Mountains **504**
- Western Sydney **1056**
- Hunter & Central Coast **1410**
- Mid North Coast **476**
- North Coast **657**
- New England **401**

Not shown on the map

1,006 enquiries could not be allocated to a funded region, either because they were from outside DA's service area or there was not enough location information to determine a region.

Our work

6122 Enquiry and advocacy cases across the year

3910 Information, advice and referral cases

2212 Advocacy cases worked on during the year

1755 Advocacy cases closed during the year

Advocacy case timeframes

Average support per case = **13hrs**

Average days open = **70**

Primary Disability

- Physical disability **23%**
- Autism spectrum disorder **22%**
- Psychiatric disability **21%**
- Intellectual disability **11%**
- Multiple or other disabilities **9%**
- Neurological disability **6%**
- Acquired brain injury **5%**
- Sensory & speech **1%**
- Specific learning/ADD **1%**
- Developmental delay **1%**



Cultural background

Culturally and linguistically diverse representation

12%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation

12%

Our impact

76% of closed advocacy cases involved the person reaching or making progress towards their agreed advocacy goal

55% showed an improvement in the person's circumstances during the time we supported them

Top issues

- NDIS Appeals 23%
- NDIS access & supports 16%
- DSP 14%
- Housing 9%
- Education 9%
- Legal 8%

We also provide advocacy support across a diverse range of other issues

- Disability services complaints
- Finances
- Discrimination/rights
- Health/Mental Health
- Abuse/Neglect/Violence
- Access to non NDIS services
- Employment
- Child Protection
- Vulnerable/isolated
- Community Inclusion - Social/Family
- Equipment/aids
- Transport
- Physical access



Feedback

90% It was easy to contact DA when I needed help

92% I felt listened to, understood and respected

90% I was happy with the support I received

90% I knew I had the right to complain if I was unhappy with the service

Coming next

Our 2025–26 Social Impact Report is underway. The report will draw on feedback from people who worked with us about what changed for them through advocacy. It will give us a deeper understanding of the outcomes people experienced and what we can learn from their feedback to continue strengthening our practice and services. The report will be available on our **website** later this year.

Compliments

"My first experience with your service gave me respect, support and advice that enabled me to challenge the decision. My application was successful, proving I was right."

"I was so overwhelmed with it all. After speaking with my advocate, he put my mind at ease and helped me through the initial meeting. I honestly couldn't have done it without him."

"I didn't think anybody cared about my situation until my advocate started advocating for me. If it wasn't for the advocacy service, I would have given up and probably fallen through the cracks."

"The help and support I received from my advocate was truly invaluable. His guidance gave me the courage to stand up for myself and the reassurance that my voice mattered. His dedication and encouragement made a real difference."

"Sometimes what I thought I was okay with turned into something I needed assistance with. It is very hard to know what you need help with when you don't understand the whole process and are worn down."

Case studies

Housing

Nature of case:

A mother with an acquired brain injury, caring for two children with disability, contacted the service for support to raise concerns about unsafe public housing. The client explained that her disability affected her memory and ability to process complex information, making it difficult to communicate her concerns to the housing provider.

Advocacy plan:

- The client and advocate discussed support options and agreed that face-to-face meetings would best meet her needs.
- Together, the client and advocate created a one-page summary using short points and visual prompts to show her housing concerns and the changes she wanted.
- The advocate supported the client in scheduling and preparing for discussions with the local housing provider, focusing on the points she wanted to raise.
- During discussions, the advocate supported the client to understand the provider's responses and communicate her views, with the client deciding how to proceed.

Outcome:

The local housing provider agreed to a repair and relocation plan, and the family later moved to safer housing.

The client reported feeling heard, supported and empowered.





NDIS Appeals



Nature of case:

A person living alone in remote NSW sought advocacy after being declined access to the NDIS and applying to the Administrative Review Tribunal (ART). They had psychosocial and physical disability, limited computer literacy and difficulty understanding the written and digital requirements of the review. Confusion and declining mental health had led them to avoid communication, placing their appeal at risk.

Advocacy plan:

- The person and advocate agreed that most support would be provided by phone, with face to face assistance arranged when the person travelled to the regional centre.
- The advocate worked through documents with the person, explained each stage in accessible language and supported them to respond to requests and make necessary calls.
- With the person's consent, the advocate involved their chosen informal support to help maintain communication and engagement.
- When Legal Aid became involved, the advocate coordinated a phone meeting and supported the person to understand the legal advice and continue participating in the process.
- Legal Aid provided legal expertise, while the advocate provided the practical and disability related support the person needed to remain engaged.

Outcome:

The person continued with the review and ultimately gained access to the NDIS.

Flexible advocacy overcame the geographic, digital and disability related barriers that had placed the appeal at risk. It enabled the person to understand and participate in the process, while ensuring legal advice was accessible and could be acted upon. Without this support, the person was likely to disengage and lose the opportunity to access essential disability supports.

Disability Advocacy Support Helpline (The Helpline)

Disability Advocacy Support Helpline | Disability Gateway

The Helpline is a national service providing short-term advocacy and referral support to people with disability, their families and carers. Delivered remotely and accessed through the Disability Gateway, it enables people across Australia to receive timely support.

During 2025–26, the Helpline continued to demonstrate that advocacy delivered remotely and over a short period can have a substantial impact and contribute to meaningful outcomes. Through a structured and targeted model, advocates worked alongside people on their immediate issue, providing focused information, guidance and practical support. Depending on the person's circumstances, this could include support to raise an issue with a service or government agency, or to build the knowledge, tools and confidence to continue advocating for themselves. In many cases, people achieved tangible improvements in their circumstances within the period of support.

Across the year, the Helpline supported 3,300 people, an increase of 48 per cent from the previous year and an average of around 63 people each week. This brought the total number supported since the Helpline commenced to 7,395. The scale of demand was particularly evident in the final quarter alone, when the team supported 906 people.

People of different ages, cultural backgrounds and disability experiences accessed the Helpline from every state and territory. The NDIS, government payments and housing were the most common issues, reflecting the breadth of systems people were seeking help to navigate.

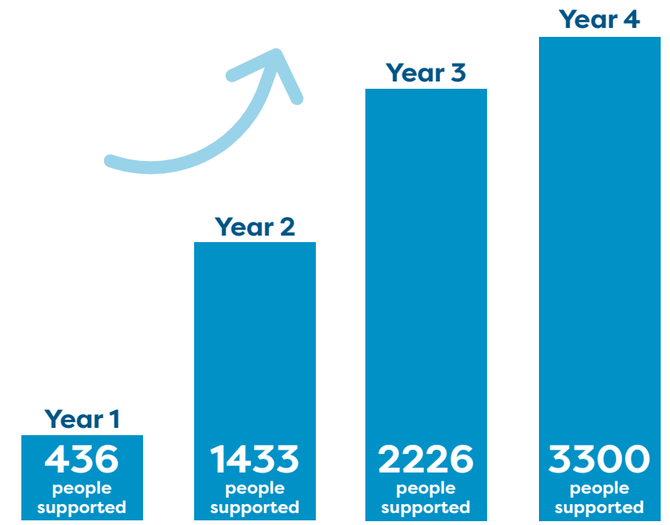
The Helpline also provided an important point of access for people who could not obtain timely assistance locally, reducing the risk that they would be left to navigate complex systems alone. Referral pathways with National Disability Advocacy Program services helped connect people with local or longer term advocacy when needed. In this way, the Helpline complemented the work of local providers and added flexibility and capacity to the national advocacy system.

The skill and commitment of Helpline staff and managers were central to maintaining the quality and consistency of support as demand grew. The first Social Impact Report for the Helpline was also developed during the year, strengthening the evidence about client outcomes and supporting continued improvements to practice.

In June 2026, the Australian Government extended funding for the Helpline until 31 January 2027 while it considered the future direction of disability advocacy supports. Advocacy Law Alliance has since been invited to tender for a further six-year contract, reflecting the Helpline's continued role within the national disability advocacy system.

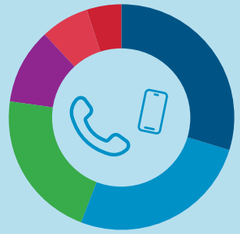


Growing impact, year by year



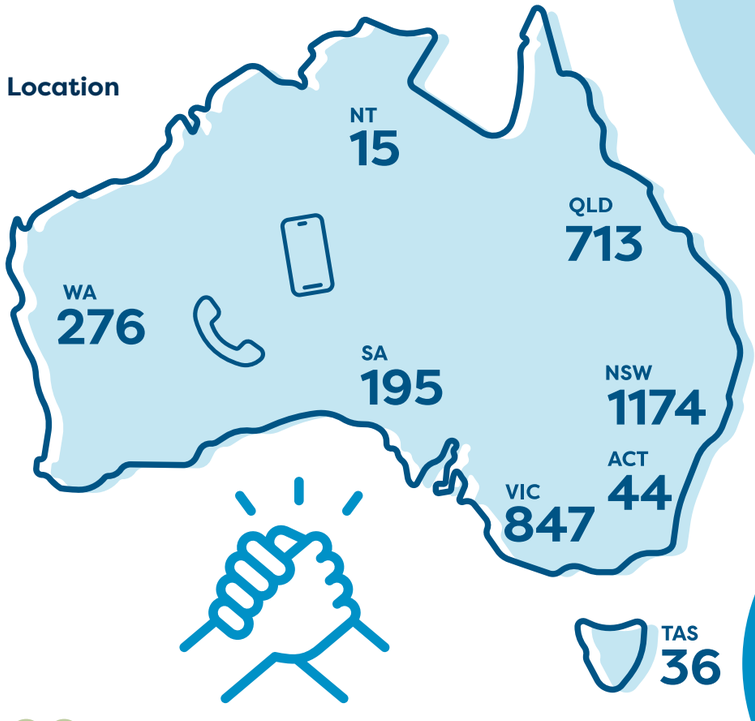
In its first four years, the Helpline supported 7395 people, with more people accessing the service each year.

Primary Disability



- **27%** Physical Disability
- **24%** Psychiatric Disability
- **20%** Autism Spectrum Disorder
- **8%** Intellectual Disability
- **6%** Neurological Disability
- **5%** Acquired Brain Injury

Location



Clients

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representation: 7.42%

Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Representation: 10.55%

Top 5 Issues

1. NDIS
2. Government Payments
3. Housing/ Homelessness
4. Education
5. Legal/Access to Justice

Impact

3300 people supported	**1.66 days** average response time
568 referrals made	**12 days** average time to finalise case
4 hrs average support time per case	



Disability Advocacy Support Helpline

What is the Helpline?

The Helpline is a short term advocacy service that supports people with disability who have experienced unfair treatment. Support is provided remotely to help the person understand and apply their rights.

Who can use the Helpline

- Anyone living in Australia with disability
- Families and carers

The Helpline will

- Listen to what's happening
- Help you understand your rights
- Work with you to explore your options
- Support you to take action



Ask to be referred to the Disability Advocacy Support Helpline

1800 643 787

Scan the QR code to learn more, including access to our Handbook and Easy Read Handbook version, or visit: **advocacylaw.org.au/#helpline**

Compliments

"My advocate was extremely helpful and supportive. I felt I had a say and was understood, even when I couldn't remember something or find the right words."

"Thank you. This is a necessary service that has empowered me by reinforcing that my knowledge is correct and my direction is the right path."



"My advocate was compassionate and caring. She was really thorough in an efficient way. She helped me understand the processes better, and I feel a lot more confident now."

"Thank you for helping me navigate a very stressful situation and get a very fast response. Your guidance was professional, and the outcome was successful."

"Thank you very much. Angels in disguise! You are the epitome of society. Truly amazing!"

Case studies

Education and Reasonable Adjustments

Nature of case: A university student contacted The Helpline after the university required a new, costly assessment before considering reasonable adjustments for their disability. The person wanted support to understand their options and decide how to respond.

Support Block 1: Understanding the issue

- The advocate and the person worked through the university's response and clarified the adjustments being requested.
- Together, they identified the key questions the person wanted the university to address.

Support Block 2: Exploring options

- They discussed asking the university to explain its evidence requirements and consider a supporting letter from the person's psychologist instead of a full assessment.
- They also considered the benefits of raising a formal complaint or seeking legal advice if the issue could not be resolved directly.

Support Block 3: Agreeing on next steps

- The person decided they felt comfortable approaching the university themselves in the first instance.
- The advocate provided a written summary of their discussion, information about the complaints process and details of free legal services.

Outcome: By working through the issue together, the person developed a clear plan for approaching the university and understood the further options available if needed. The focused support helped them take the next step with greater clarity and confidence while leaving the door open for further advocacy.





NDIS access

Nature of case: A person with spina bifida was referred to The Helpline through the Disability Gateway after their application to access the NDIS was declined. The NDIA determined that the evidence did not demonstrate substantially reduced functional capacity. This was despite the person using a wheelchair, requiring a modified vehicle to drive and needing assistance with showering and other daily activities. The person had not previously received formal disability supports.

Support Block 1: Understanding the decision

- The advocate reviewed the decision and supporting evidence with the person.
- The advocate provided general information about substantially reduced functional capacity and helped the person identify functional impacts that did not appear to have been fully considered.

Support Block 2: Strengthening the evidence

- The advocate and the person identified the additional evidence needed, including an updated GP report, an occupational therapy functional capacity assessment and a lived experience statement.
- The advocate supported the person to explain what the reports needed to address and helped them prepare their lived experience statement.

Support Block 3: Challenging the decision

- The advocate supported the person to complete an application for internal review in their own words.
- The person described how their disability affected their day-to-day activities, the support they needed and why they disagreed with the original decision.
- The advocate explained what would happen next and the options available if the internal review was unsuccessful.

Outcome: Within the 20 day support period, the person gained a clearer understanding of the decision, obtained targeted evidence and completed an internal review application that more fully demonstrated the impact of their disability.

As the internal review decision was not expected within the period of support, the person was advised that they could return through the Disability Gateway if they later needed help to consider an external review or connect with an NDIS Appeals advocacy service.



Systemic Advocacy

Disability Advocacy contributes to systemic change in several ways. This includes formal reform work and local initiatives, as well as how we design and deliver individual advocacy across our service. By embedding human rights based approaches, including supported decision making, into everyday practice, advocates bring those principles into their work with schools, housing providers, the NDIS and other services. Over time, these repeated interactions can influence how services understand people's rights, involve them in decisions and respond to their concerns.

During 2025-26, this work included contributing to reviews and inquiries, strengthening how we support people through NDIS Appeals and undertaking targeted projects within local communities. The focus was shaped by issues arising repeatedly through individual advocacy, including complex appeal processes, limited access to legal assistance, inconsistent NDIS access support, housing barriers, safeguarding concerns and reduced choice and control.

A significant area of work related to the experiences of people challenging NDIS decisions. We contributed to national discussions about how NDIS disputes are resolved and to the NSW parliamentary inquiry into supported decision making. We also continued working with government, legal services and advocacy organisations to identify and address barriers to accessing appropriate assistance.

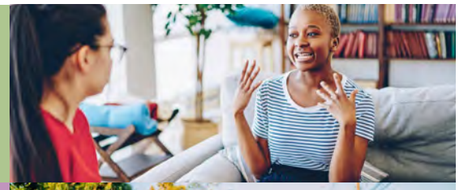
Within Disability Advocacy, we applied this learning by strengthening guidance for advocates supporting people through NDIS Appeals. The work focused on helping people understand their options, communicate their decisions and remain in control of their matter, while ensuring advocates could identify when legal assistance was required.

Regional teams used recurring issues to guide local projects suited to their communities. Their work focused on improving access to independent advocacy, building self advocacy, increasing understanding of rights and improving relationships with local services. Teams also reviewed the effectiveness of their approaches, finding that trusted relationships, targeted events and direct engagement often created stronger connections than broad outreach. Issues that could not be addressed locally were documented and raised for broader consideration.



Key Initiatives

NDIS Appeals reform:
We contributed to a national review of how NDIS disputes are resolved, raising barriers to fair and accessible participation.



Supported decision making:
We contributed to the NSW parliamentary inquiry into how people with disability can be better supported to make their own decisions.



Strengthening advocacy practice:
We developed clearer service wide guidance to help advocates support people through appeals without taking over their matter and recognise when legal assistance was needed.



Access to advocacy:
Regional teams connected directly with people through supported accommodation, day programs, boarding houses, homelessness services and rural and remote communities.



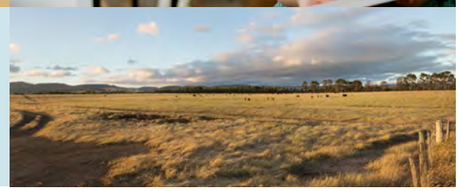
Education:
Teams worked with schools, early childhood services, alternative education providers and TAFE to improve understanding of advocacy and support inclusion.



Housing:
Teams strengthened relationships with tenancy, housing and homelessness services to improve referral pathways and address recurring access and communication problems.



Safeguarding and regional voices:
Teams worked with the NSW Ageing and Disability Commission to raise safeguarding concerns and bring regional experiences into broader discussions.



MID NORTH COAST LEGAL CENTRE

Report



Principal Solicitor

Sarah Dahlenburg & Jane Titterington

The 2025-26 year has been a significant one for Mid North Coast Legal Centre, marked by both continuity and change.

Throughout the year, our team continued to provide free legal assistance to individuals and communities facing disadvantage across the Mid North Coast and beyond. While the legal issues we assist with are diverse, a common thread remains the increasing complexity of our clients' lives. Many people seeking our assistance are navigating multiple challenges simultaneously, including financial hardship, disability, family violence, housing insecurity and mental health concerns. In this environment, access to timely, compassionate and high-quality legal assistance remains as important as ever.

Like many organisations, MNCLC has spent considerable time preparing for the future. This year saw the implementation of a new client management system, AIIM, and the commencement of a new national approach to measuring outcomes across the legal assistance sector. While these changes have required significant effort from staff, they also provide valuable opportunities to better understand community need, measure our impact and ensure our services remain responsive and effective.

We have also continued to invest in the strength of our people. The legal assistance sector is built on the dedication, expertise and commitment of staff who are passionate about improving access to justice. We are fortunate to have a team that consistently demonstrates professionalism, integrity and genuine care for the communities we serve. The willingness of staff to embrace change, adapt to new systems and continue delivering high-quality services throughout a period of transition has been a particular achievement this year.

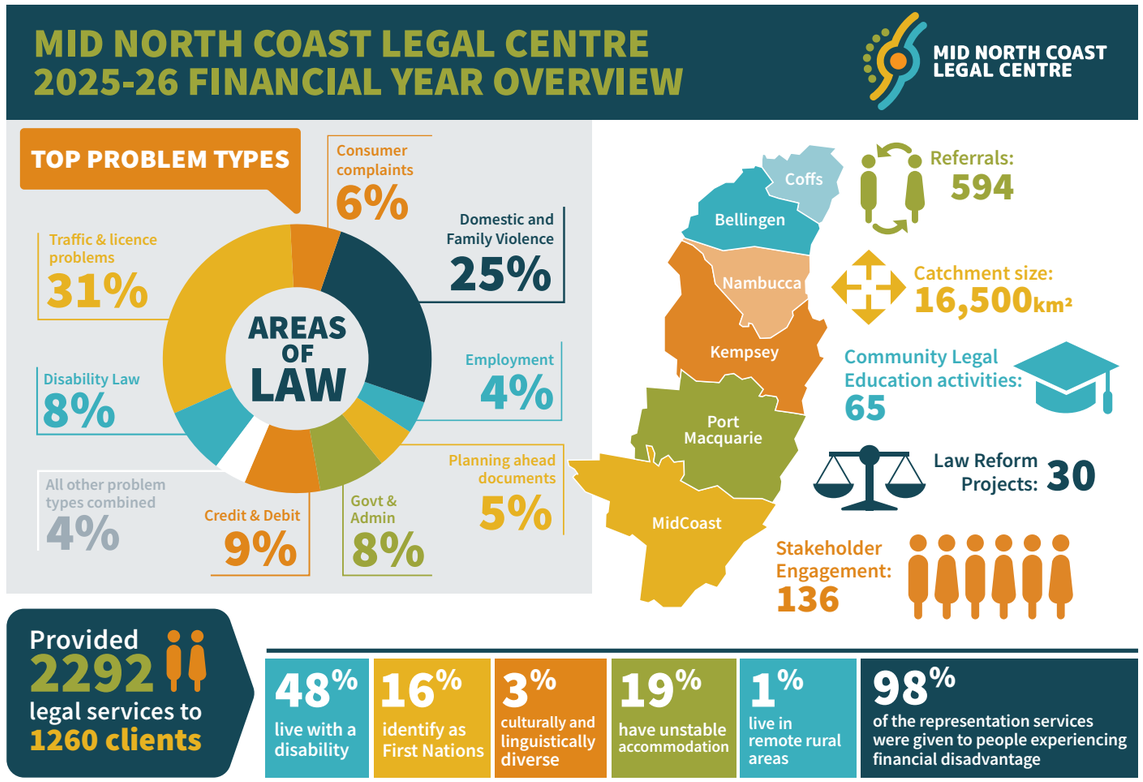
For MNCLC, 2025-26 has also been a year of leadership transition. After more than twelve years as Principal Solicitor, Jane retires with immense pride in what the organisation has achieved and gratitude for the many colleagues, partners and communities who have been part of that journey. Over those years the Centre has grown significantly, expanded its reach, developed specialist programs and strengthened its role within both the local community and the broader legal assistance sector.

For Sarah, stepping into the role of Principal Solicitor is both an honour and a responsibility. Having worked within the organisation for many years, she has witnessed firsthand the dedication of staff, volunteers, Board members and community partners who contribute to the Centre's success. The organisation enters this next chapter from a position of strength, supported by an experienced team, strong community relationships and a clear commitment to improving access to justice.

We would like to thank the Board, Catherine Peek and our colleagues across Advocacy Law Alliance for their leadership and support throughout the year. We also acknowledge our many partner organisations, pro bono supporters and community networks whose collaboration strengthens the assistance we can provide.

Most importantly, we thank our staff. The work of a community legal centre is often challenging, but it is also deeply rewarding. Every day our team helps people understand their rights, navigate complex systems and work towards better outcomes. We are proud of what has been achieved this year and optimistic about the opportunities ahead.

Our impact



Funding

MNCLC's primary funding comes from the Commonwealth and State Governments, administered through the Community Legal Services Program by Legal Aid NSW. This year, we continued our LAMP (Legal and Mental Health Partnership), delivering legal services in collaboration with health and mental health providers across our region. We maintained our work in the disaster recovery space, supported by Federal funding and a grant from the Australian Communities Foundation.



Key events & achievements

Leadership and Succession

2025-26 was a significant year of transition for Mid North Coast Legal Centre. After more than 12 years of dedicated service, Principal Solicitor Jane Titterington retired from the Centre, leaving a lasting legacy of leadership, advocacy and commitment to regional access to justice. The Centre also farewelled Assistant Principal Solicitor Patrick Hourigan after 14 years of service as he moved to a new role within the community legal sector.

These changes marked an important period of succession planning. Zac Keizer was appointed Assistant Principal Solicitor in the Coffs Harbour office and Sarah Dahlenburg was appointed as the Centre's Principal Solicitor, ensuring continuity of leadership and expertise for the organisation's next chapter.

Digital Transformation and Impact Measurement

A major achievement during the year was the successful transition from the long-standing CLASS database to AIIM. The implementation of AIIM represents a substantial investment in the future capability of the Centre.

The new platform will strengthen client management, support improved service coordination and provide enhanced reporting and evaluation functions. It also positions MNCLC to meet emerging outcomes-based reporting requirements under the National Access to Justice Partnership and better demonstrate the impact of our work for clients and communities.







Improving Access to Justice

Improving access to legal services in regional communities remained a key focus throughout the year.

The Centre commenced a project to better understand barriers to legal assistance experienced by residents of the Kempsey region and identify opportunities to increase service accessibility.

This work is exploring a range of innovative service delivery approaches, including expanded outreach locations, drop-in clinics, court-based services and co-located service models. Early results indicate positive progress, with a growing proportion of clients accessing services from the Kempsey Local Government Area.

Strengthening First Nations Relationships

Building respectful and meaningful relationships with First Nations communities continued to be a priority across all areas of our work. Staff participated in Reconciliation Week activities with Birpai Local Aboriginal Land Council, JB Aboriginal Corporation and Dhulawang Aboriginal Corporation, strengthening relationships and fostering opportunities for collaboration. Team members also completed cultural learning through the Connecting to Country program on Birpai Country. The Centre was pleased to host two CLCNSW Indigenous interns during the year, providing practical experience within a community legal centre environment and supporting pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the legal sector.



Compliments

"I was delighted with the outcome. Haley was marvellous and experienced in her handling of the situation."

"Thank you very much, wonderful training, very effective, knowledgeable trainers."

"It was very well presented, informative and easy to follow."



"I just wanted to give a big shout out THANKS to Zac who was fabulous in helping me retain my drivers licence when I went to court last week. Thanks also for the heads up to do the Drivers Intervention course which I think helped. Hope to not see you again, in a nice way!"

"I had a closure phone call with [client] the other day, and he provided some feedback of the service with Disability Law. He was extremely grateful for the level of support and information Lauren provided and for her knowledge and professionalism."

"Your presentation was both engaging and informative. It significantly enriched our program and resonated deeply with our participants Your expertise and willingness to share your time and insights were instrumental in promoting health, wellbeing and positive change in our community… We hope to have the opportunity to collaborate with you again in the future as we continue to grow and enhance our wellbeing initiatives."

"Even though I don't have a course of action again, being given the direction from a qualified solicitor means that I may be able to stop future abuse again."

"I have seen your solicitors working at the Disaster Recovery Centres and someone comes in to talk about insurance and then it ends up being a conversation about so many other things going on. Your solicitors are really good in the DRCs."



Legal assistance – general practice

Mid North Coast Legal Centre provides free legal assistance to people experiencing disadvantage, vulnerability and barriers to accessing justice across the Mid North Coast region.

During 2025-26 the Centre continued to provide information, referral, advice, legal task assistance and ongoing casework in a broad range of legal matters. Our services are designed to support people experiencing financial disadvantage, family and domestic violence, disability, mental ill-health and other forms of vulnerability.

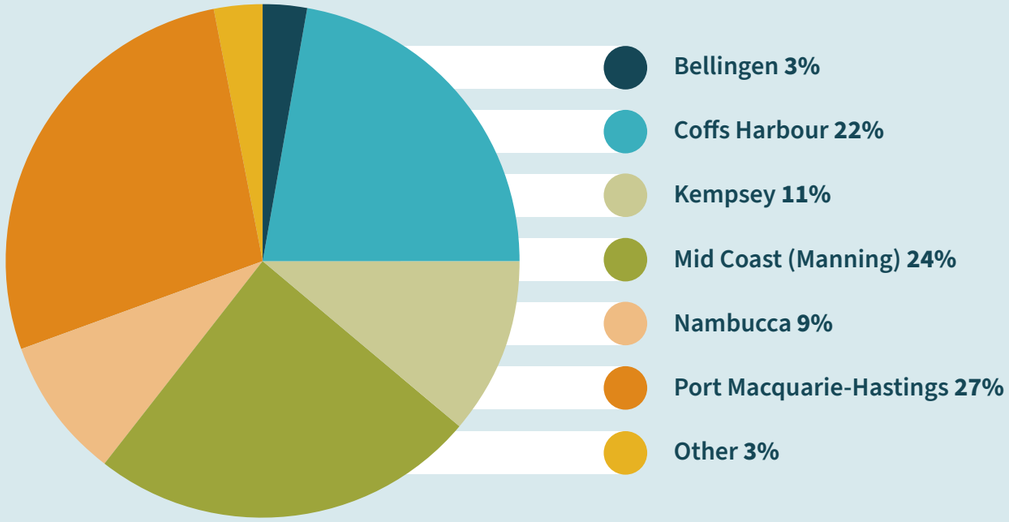
The year also marked an important shift towards outcomes-based reporting. As part of the Commonwealth National Access to Justice Partnership, MNCLC has commenced implementation of an outcomes framework that will enable us to better understand and demonstrate the impact of our services on clients and communities.

In 2025/26, MNCLC assisted 1137 clients across a range of 1287 different "services".

Clients were distributed throughout our catchment area as represented in the figures below. MNCLC offers regular face to face advice sessions in the Kempsey, Bellingen, Nambucca and MidCoast regions, encouraging equal access to legal services for those who may be disadvantaged by distance.



Where do MNCLC clients live?



17%

of clients identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

3.5%

of clients used a language other than English or required an interpreter to access our service

36%

of clients identified as having a disability or mental illness.



Legal advice

A total of 1122 legal advice services were given in the last financial year.

Legal advice is defined in AIIM as "the provision of fact specific legal advice to a person (a client) in response to a request for assistance to resolve specific legal problems."

Problem type

31%
Traffic matters

26%
Family or domestic violence

9%
Credit & debt

9%
PoA & Enduring Guardianship

6%
Consumer law

4%
Employment

2%
Motor vehicle accident

1%
Govt/admin

12%
All other

Legal Task

This financial year MNCLC provided legal task assistance on 277 occasions. Legal task work is often undertaken during outreach and is defined as "where a Centre completes a discrete, one-off piece of legal work, to assist a person in their own efforts attempting to resolve a problem or a particular stage of a problem".

Case studies

Victims Support

We assisted a client who had experienced prolonged domestic and family violence and had previously lodged an application for a recognition payment under the NSW Victims Support Scheme. Following a detailed review of her circumstances, our legal team identified that she may be eligible for additional recognition payments. Working closely with the client and her support workers, we gathered supporting evidence, prepared further applications and sought an internal review.

As a result, the client received a total of five recognition payments. The financial assistance played a critical role in helping her establish a safer and more secure future after many years of violence. Without legal assistance, she would have been unlikely to access the full range of support available to her.

Employment

We represented a young Aboriginal client in proceedings before the Fair Work Commission after his former employer disputed his entitlement to redundancy pay.

Our solicitor assisted the client to prepare his evidence and represented him throughout the Commission process. Through legal representation, the client was provided an opportunity to fully present his circumstances and participate confidently in the proceedings.

The matter resulted in a positive outcome for the client and increased his understanding of his workplace rights and legal options.



Disability Law NSW

Legal assistance

Disability Law Program

Disability Law NSW (DLNSW) is a collaboration between Mid North Coast Legal Centre and Disability Advocacy NSW (DA) and continues to provide specialist legal assistance to people with disability throughout a large geographic area across NSW.

The DLNSW team works closely with advocacy staff to ensure clients receive both legal assistance and practical support. This integrated model recognises that many people with disability benefit from both legal expertise and face-to-face advocacy when navigating complex legal systems.



The Disability Law team: Lauren Jenneke, Billie Shone, Sarah Dahlenburg and Anna Hutchinson

Program Highlights

During 2025-26, DLNSW expanded its capability across several areas of law, including consumer law, credit and debt and strata disputes. While NDIS and disability discrimination matters remain important components of the practice, this broader expertise has enabled the team to respond to a wider range of client needs and legal issues.

A significant achievement during the year was the participation of Sarah Dahlenburg and Amanda Brickwood in the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Supported Decision Making. Drawing on their practical experience working with people with disability, they provided valuable evidence regarding the operation of supported decision-making frameworks and the experiences of clients in NSW.

The team also increased engagement with regional Disability Advocacy offices and commenced development of a series of community legal education sessions focused on disability discrimination and related legal rights.

Legal Services

DLNSW has had fluctuating capacity in the 2025-26 year due to staffing changes. In the second half of the year, we onboarded three new solicitors. We have maintained a focus mostly on providing timely and accessible legal advice to ensure the team can assist as many clients as possible across the DA catchment.

2025-26

11 Referral

145 Legal Advice

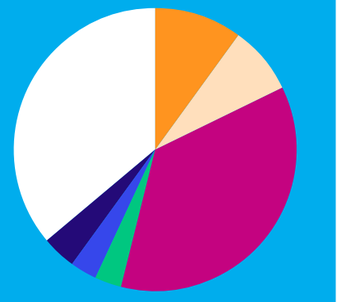
9 Legal Task

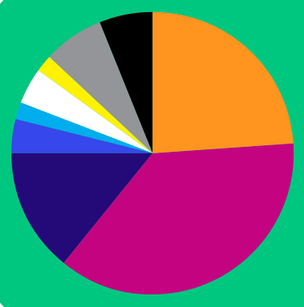
2 Other rep

5 Law & Legal Services Reform

DLNSW assisted 120 clients spread across the DA catchment area, which is approximately two thirds of NSW.

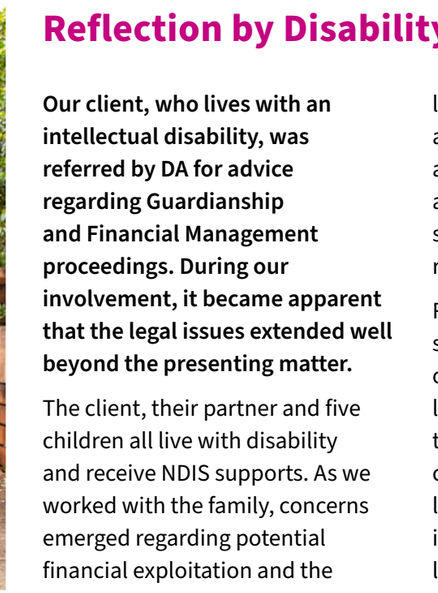
- Mid North Coast 10%
- North Coast 8%
- Hunter & Central Coast 36%
- New England 3%
- Nepean/Blue Mountains 3%
- Western 4%
- Western Sydney 36%





The distribution of legal assistance provided by DLNSW to DA clients is broadly proportional to the volume of work undertaken in each region, with the highest percentages occurring in Hunter & Central Coast and Western Sydney, reflecting their status as the busiest DA service areas.

- Discrimination 24%
- Govt/admin law 37%
- Consumer Law 14%
- Guardianship, PoA & EG 4%
- Employment Law 2%
- Health 4%
- Housing 2%
- Credit & debt 7%
- All other 6%



Reflection by Disability Law Solicitor

Our client, who lives with an intellectual disability, was referred by DA for advice regarding Guardianship and Financial Management proceedings. During our involvement, it became apparent that the legal issues extended well beyond the presenting matter.

The client, their partner and five children all live with disability and receive NDIS supports. As we worked with the family, concerns emerged regarding potential financial exploitation and the management of NDIS funding. At the same time, the family was facing homelessness after receiving an eviction notice from a landlord who was under investigation for the alleged misappropriation of NDIS funds. We also identified a significant property-related issue involving the possible misuse of disability funding.

DLNSW worked with the disability advocate to assist the client to understand and meaningfully participate in the Guardianship and Financial Management proceedings. DLNSW secured pro bono assistance from Clayton Utz in relation to tenancy proceedings before NCAT and from HWL Ebsworth to investigate potential legal and equitable interests in property. We coordinated communication between all legal representatives to ensure a consistent and client-centred approach. This reduced confusion and stress for the family while strengthening the overall legal response to their circumstances.

Reflecting on the matter, the solicitor noted the importance of looking beyond the initial legal issue and taking the time to understand the broader circumstances affecting a client's life. For people living with intellectual disability, complex legal, financial and social issues often intersect, and there is a real risk that critical concerns can be overlooked when services respond to issues in isolation.

By identifying risks early, coordinating legal supports and working collaboratively with pro bono partners, DLNSW worked with DA to stabilise a highly vulnerable family's situation. This approach reduced both immediate and long-term harm while supporting the family's dignity, autonomy and access to justice.

Community legal education

Through our Community Legal Education program, MNCLC helped community members and service providers better understand their legal rights and options. Education sessions focused on key issues including workplace rights, domestic and family violence, victims support and disability discrimination.

MNCLC (including DLNSW) delivered 61 CLE activities and undertook 150 stakeholder engagement activities in the financial year.

Some examples include:

- Education sessions on the legal assistance available to clients of DA through DLNSW including on Guardianship and Debts.
- Supporting the delivery of CLE on Workplace Sexual Harassment for young people at 4 local high schools, in partnership with Kingsford Legal Centre.
- Coordinating an Aboriginal Wills Clinic with Pro Bono Partners Gilbert + Tobin in Coffs Harbour
- Education sessions to people in small communities impacted by natural disasters across our catchment, funded by the Australian Communities Foundation.
- CLE on Victims Services to Community Workers in Coffs Harbour

Community outreach & engagement

MNCLC continues to prioritise accessible, community-based service delivery throughout its catchment area. During the year, staff provided outreach services across multiple locations, including Kempsey, Taree, Nambucca Valley, Macksville and the Mid North Coast Correctional Centre. We maintained specialist partnerships through the Legal Assistance and Mental Health Program (LAMP), domestic violence outreach services and traffic law programs.

The Centre also participated in a wide range of community events and engagement activities, including Youth Homelessness Matters Day, DFV Prevention Month activities, community expos, Reconciliation Week events and local service networking opportunities. These activities strengthen community awareness of legal services and support collaboration across the service sector.



MNCLC solicitors presented Community Legal Education on Victims Services Applications to community workers in Coffs Harbour



Staff member Madison Taylor visited the Mission Australia Community Gardens to chat with residents



Solicitors Emily Small and Morgan Robins attended a Domestic Violence Awareness Morning Tea in Kempsey



Solicitor Josh Martin and CLCNSW Intern Zaiden Theophanous at Taree Court for MNCLC traffic law outreach service

Aboriginal Wills Clinic Coffs Harbour

Impact Story

In February, Mid North Coast Legal Centre partnered with pro bono legal team Gilbert + Tobin to deliver a free Aboriginal Wills Clinic in Coffs Harbour, helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members put important planning-ahead documents in place at no cost.

MNCLC coordinated the clinic and worked closely with participants in the lead-up to the event, ensuring they were well informed and prepared. The result was a highly engaged group of attendees, with Gilbert + Tobin describing it as one of the most successful clinics they had been involved in due to the level of participant preparedness and engagement.

New Stakeholder Relationships

The event strengthened relationships with local Aboriginal organisations, including Galambila Aboriginal Health Service and Coffs Harbour Local Aboriginal Land Council. Interest generated through the clinic has already led to discussions about future clinics in Coffs Harbour and the Nambucca Valley, creating opportunities to expand access to these important services.

Through the event, MNCLC connected with Learning the Macleay, a Kempsey-based organisation developing a Grief and Loss Strategy. Representatives attended the clinic to observe the model in practice and have since been connected with Gilbert + Tobin to explore incorporating an Aboriginal Wills Clinic into future community initiatives. This has the potential to expand access to culturally safe planning-ahead services across the Mid North Coast.

Finally, we have worked with Uncle Richard (Garlambirla Elder) throughout the event planning. Uncle Richard did the Welcome to Country and stayed around for the morning, commenting on how good the event was for community, and that he was seeing people at the event who hadn't been out for a few years.

More than a legal clinic, the event strengthened community connections, built new partnerships and created pathways to expand culturally safe planning-ahead services across the Mid North Coast.

"This is such a great event. I'm seeing people from community who haven't been out for over a couple of years. It's so good to see all these people here"

Uncle Richard, Garlambirla Elder



The team from Gilbert + Tobin with Nathalie Gentle, Madison Taylor and Uncle Richard



Outreach & clinics

Outreach & Clinics	Location	When
Kempsey Neighbourhood Centre	West Kempsey	Wednesday, fortnightly
Manning Uniting Church	Taree	Wednesday, fortnightly
Nambucca Small Hall	Nambucca	Tuesday, fortnightly
Mid North Coast Correctional Centre	Aldavilla	Thursday, fortnightly
Taree Traffic Program	Taree Court House	Tuesday, weekly
Macksville Traffic Program	Macksville Court	Thursday, fortnightly
Liberty Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Service	Port Macquarie	Tuesday, fortnightly
Endeavour Mental Health Recovery Clubhouse (LAMP)	Port Macquarie	Monday, fortnightly
Biripi Aboriginal Medical Corporation	Taree	Wednesday, fortnightly
Samaritians (LAMP)	Taree	Monday, fortnightly

We would like to thank our outreach partners – Kempsey Neighbourhood Centre (Kempsey), Manning Uniting Church in Taree, Biripi ACMC, Nambucca School of Arts, Endeavour Mental Health Recovery Clubhouse and Manning Valley Neighbourhood Centre.



Community Engagement Worker Nathalie Gentle with Kate Darnell of Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services

Law reform

Law reform remains an important part of MNCLC's commitment to addressing systemic barriers and improving access to justice.

The MNCLC Law Reform Committee continued to meet regularly throughout the year to identify emerging issues and contribute to policy and legislative reform processes.

Highlights included:

- Participation in the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Supported Decision Making by Disability Law NSW representatives.
- Contributions to sector-wide work relating to victims support, domestic and family violence and access to justice.
- Ongoing leadership within Community Legal Centres NSW networks and working groups.
- Survey and report on Disasters and Client Experiences following Taree floods of 2025.
- Review of service delivery in Kempsey to understand needs, strengthen partnerships and referral pathways.
- Submission to Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into DFSV and Suicide.
- Commencement of outcomes-based reporting aligned with the National Access to Justice Partnership, strengthening the sector's ability to measure and demonstrate impact.

Nathalie Gentle and Madison Taylor met with the team from Dhulawang Aboriginal Corporation in Kempsey





"As an Aboriginal woman and artist, I am extremely passionate about celebrating and promoting my culture through art and language. I am inspired and driven by the depth of my culture through art and my place within it. This artwork is named 'Djuyalgu Barrayga', meaning 'Conversations on Country' in Gathang, the language of the Birrbay, Warrimay and Guringay people. It represents the MNCLC and the communities they work within across three nations of Birrbay, Daingatti and Gumbaynggirr Countries. It highlights Country from the west in the mountains and hinterlands, the river systems and east to the headlands and sea. It symbolises a gathering on Country, with the line work having a dual meaning of flowing waterways but also communication."

Angela Marr

Reconciliation

MNCLC acknowledges the Biripi, Birpai, Dunghutti and Gumbaynggirr Peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work. We recognise the enduring connection of First Nations Peoples to Country and remain committed to walking together on the path of reconciliation.

Throughout 2025-26, we continued to strengthen relationships with First Nations communities and organisations across our region through engagement, learning and partnership. Staff participated in Reconciliation Week activities with Birpai Local Aboriginal Land Council, JB Aboriginal Corporation and Dhulawang Aboriginal Corporation, providing opportunities to connect, learn and build stronger relationships with community.

This year, staff also undertook cultural learning through the Connecting to Country program on Birpai Country, deepening our understanding of local culture, history and the importance of culturally safe service delivery.

We hosted two Community Legal Centres NSW First Nations interns to support their professional development within the community legal sector. The experience provided valuable insight into community legal practice while strengthening First Nations representation and leadership pathways within the sector.

In partnership with our pro bono partner Gilbert + Tobin, we also supported an Aboriginal Wills Clinic in Coffs Harbour. The clinic provided culturally safe access to wills and planning ahead services and was strongly supported by community members. The event highlighted the importance of accessible legal services that are responsive to the needs and priorities identified by Aboriginal communities.

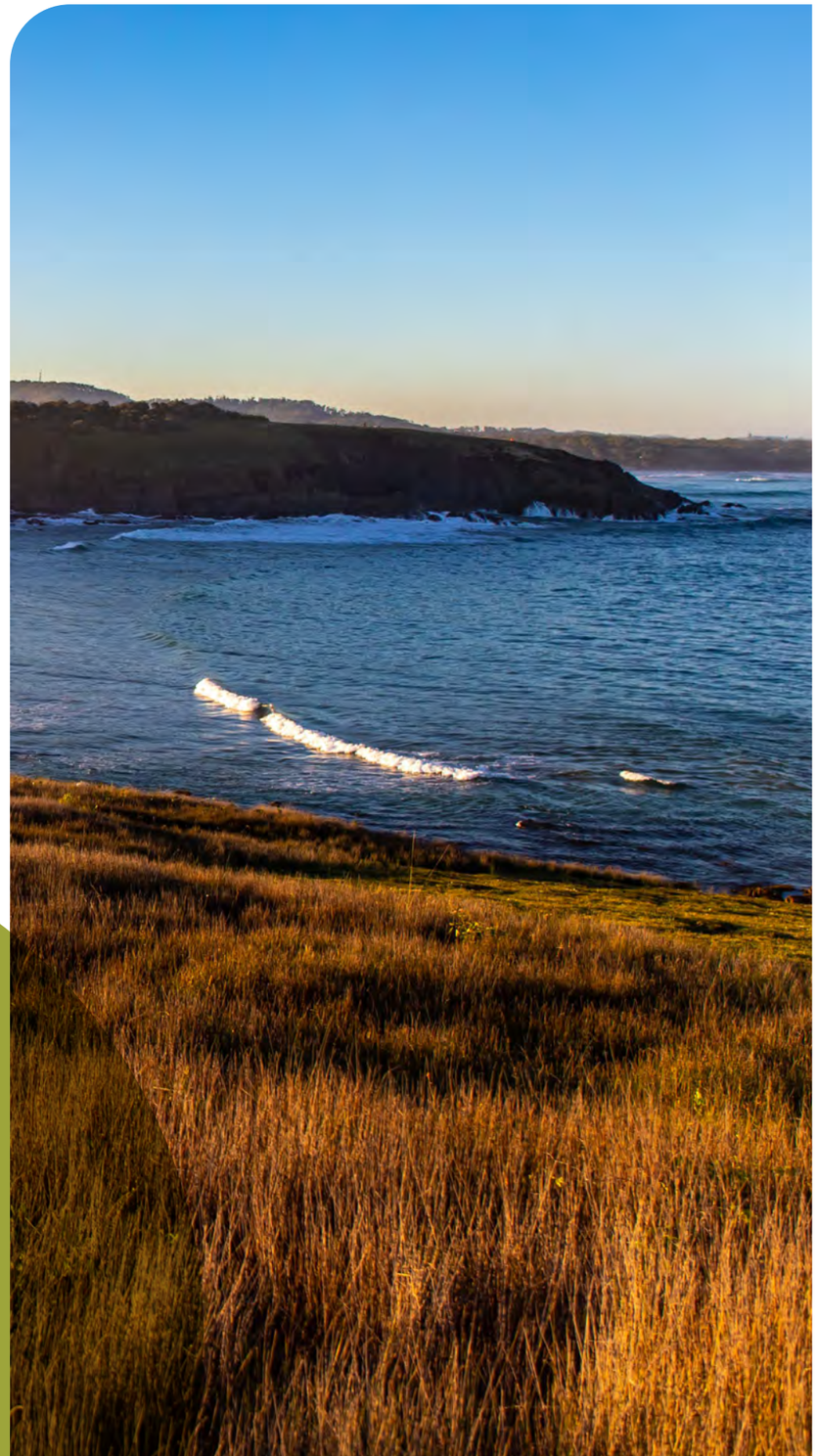
As we move into the final stages of our current Reconciliation Action Plan, we have begun planning for the development of our next RAP, which will commence in 2027. This process will be guided by meaningful consultation with First Nations communities, organisations and stakeholders across our catchment to ensure our future reconciliation commitments reflect local priorities, strengthen partnerships and create tangible outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We remain committed to embedding respect, relationships and opportunities throughout every aspect of our work and to ensuring reconciliation remains an ongoing and active journey for our organisation.

Pro bono partners

We would like to extend our deep appreciation for the ongoing support of our pro bono referral partners:

- Gilbert + Tobin
- HWL Ebsworth
- Hall & Wilcox
- Justice Connect (who assist by linking pro bono requests with firms that may be able to assist)
- DWF



Our volunteers

MNCLC relies on the support of volunteers to deliver an effective and accessible legal service. The volunteers also bring different outlooks and experiences, and we are enriched by their association with our Centre.

We would like to thank our volunteers this year for the valuable contribution they made to the Service:

- Sullivan Izzard
- Matthew Pinkerton
- Will Game
- Dakota Macourt
- Nanette Nowakowski
- Tilak Sinha-Groeger
- Marie Van Gend
- Anthony Harris
- Zaiden Theophanous

Zaiden Theophanous, First Nations Intern and Volunteer

"Through the First Nations Rural, Regional and Remote Internship, I completed a two-week placement at Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre. The experience gave me valuable insight into legal practice and professional life, while strengthening skills that will remain useful throughout my career. ... I took part in legal discussions, shadowed solicitors, attended community outreach activities, assisted with legal drafting and client intake, and observed court proceedings. ... The workplace culture at MNCLC was warm, collaborative and welcoming, and I felt part of the team from the moment I arrived. ... Outreach visits to Taree highlighted the importance of accessible legal services and the meaningful difference free legal assistance can make for people facing complex legal issues. ... Overall, the internship strengthened my understanding of community legal practice, increased my confidence as a future legal professional, and reinforced my commitment to pursuing a career in law."





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