arc justice

We exist so rights are known and acted upon, and communities are fairer.

Welcome to the 2024 ARC Justice Impact Report.



A new approach

"ARC Justice's inaugural Impact Report embodies our commitment to transparent, measurable reporting of impact for our communities. It builds on our legacy of sustained community advocacy and service."

"This report, with a new impact framework at its foundation, represents the first step in our journey to better define, measure and share the meaningful change we deliver across rural and regional Victoria. It drives accountability and directs our energies where they are needed most."

Damian Stock, CEO, ARC Justice

About ARC Justice | Download our Strategy 2024-2029



Our impact

ARC Justice provides people-centred services, education, engagement and advocacy. We work at an individual, community and policy level to create fairer access to justice.

Our strategy informs each of our **four impact domains**, ensuring our strategic efforts and actions are aligned with **nine key outcomes** that we measure and report against. A summary of the program logic underpinning our impact framework is available here.

Our impact framework is available here.

We are focused on breaking the spiral of injustice.



How to use this report

The report is structured by our four impact domains. The buttons are coloured by domain and, wherever you are in the report, pressing them will take you back to that domain area.

In each section, also look out for buttons that reveal case studies and other useful content.

Fairer communities

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We understand our communities and work together to increase access to justice.

People-centred, rights-based support

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We empower our communities with knowledge and well-designed services to prevent legal issues and enhance access to justice.

Positive, systemic change

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By amplifying regional insights and community voices, we drive meaningful change for more just outcomes.

Strong & sustainable ARC Justice

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We foster an engaged, expert team and strong organisational practices to sustain impactful support for our communities.



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Read more





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Read more



Outcome 1

Prioritise local solutions specific to community needs

We establish relationships with key stakeholders in government, health and community services across our regions. We are working collaboratively across our 13 local government areas to deliver initiatives for targeted priority groups.

In 2023, we introduced community engagement expertise, which has led to considerable gains in connecting with community members. We have increased the awareness of ARC Justice's services and represented ARC in forums with other key stakeholders.

To achieve this outcome, we will track:

- Quantity and quality of engagement with key community groups, ensuring representations of diverse stakeholders.
- Quantity and quality of collaborations with priority group representatives addressing identified areas of legal need.

Since our collaboration with the Centre for Non-Violence (CNV) in Echuca launched in 2018, demand for ARC's services has grown from ad-hoc court appearances to a heavily booked schedule, underscoring the critical need for accessible legal support in Echuca. Read more about our Family Violence Justice Partnership with CNV.

13
local government areas

8
strategic partnerships

50
community legal education sessions

191
stakeholder activities

Case study | Next outcome

Co-location model proves powerful in Echuca

The Family Violence Justice Partnership – which includes an ARC Justice lawyer spending a day a week at the Centre for Non-Violence (CNV) in Echuca – has enhanced support for victim-survivors in the past year.

The project has enabled ARC Justice lawyer Roweena Ilsley, as well as other ARC lawyers, to provide legal help to 103 clients across the Campaspe region, primarily women experiencing family violence who would otherwise face significant barriers to justice.

ARC lawyers take referrals from not only CNV staff in Echuca, but also two other co-located organisations – The Orange Door and Anglicare Victoria. **This co-location model has created an efficient referral system, allowing clients to access multiple forms of support in one place.**

In the past 12 months, Roweena and other lawyers have helped clients with family violence intervention orders and other related legal issues, including family law and child protection. ARC frequently represents clients in court, guiding them through the legal process and helping them obtain protective orders.

In addition to scheduled appointments and court appearances, the lawyers work directly with CNV staff so they can help them identify when a client has a legal issue, make timely referrals and understand legal processes so they can best support their clients.



ARC Justice lawyer Roweena Ilsley.

Outcome 2

Increased inclusiveness and geographical reach of our services

We are committed to engaging with communities to improve knowledge of and access to our services, using targeted communications to strengthen these connections.

Our service design, community engagement and strategic communications are leading to increased services to communities including those further away from our main offices in Bendigo and Shepparton.

To achieve this outcome, we will track:

- Changes in service provision in response to strategic communications and engagement activities.
- Geographic reach of services and the alignment to area population data and need.

We value opportunities to engage with communities in the places they find accessible and recognise the importance of partnering with trusted local organisations. Read more about our work supporting community members in Seymour who were impacted by the 2022 floods.

Case study



Heat map showing service locations by local government area.

Face-to-face support delivered in Seymour

After the devastating floods of late 2022, ARC Justice was invited to be part of Mitchell Shire Council's Seymour Recovery Hub to support flood-hit residents. Many were struggling with insurance issues.

Setting up a fortnightly presence at the hub, ARC Justice worked alongside Emergency Recovery Victoria, Goulburn Flood Recovery Service, Nexus Primary Health, Mind Australia and other services to help flood-hit locals navigate the world of insurance.

ARC Justice's Community Engagement Leads offered hands-on support to households facing issues like repair delays, poor communication from insurers, work quality concerns and confusion over pre-existing damage, as well as the complaints process.

Many residents arrived at the hub worried and overwhelmed, sometimes with piles of correspondence with their insurance company.

ARC Justice also delivered three community legal education sessions on insurance, helping locals understand the claim process and their rights, as well as the complaints process. Two sessions were held online, with another taking place in-person at the hub.

Through this support, ARC Justice aimed to help residents gain clarity, offering practical steps to move forward. This initiative highlights ARC Justice's commitment to standing by rural Victorians during challenging times, despite geography, ensuring they know where to turn and how to tackle post-disaster recovery hurdles.



ARC Justice Community Engagement Lead Peter Coles presents a "Storms, Floods, Insurance and You" information session.

Outcome 3

Community members demonstrate increased legal understanding and capability to address or prevent legal problems

We work with community members and clients to build legal capability - so they have the capacity to take steps to address and prevent legal needs arising.

The most common legal problems involved:

- family violence
- tenancy
- family law

To achieve this outcome, we will track:

- Quantity and quality of educational activities and resources that are accessible to our community.
- Client capability to know their rights and take action.

When we build our communities' legal capability, it means people experiencing new legal problems can take steps to prevent and address them, just like Hannah did. Read Hannah's story.

Case study | Next outcome

In 2023/24 ARC Justice helped **5503** people, with:

1018 legal advice services

1748 information services

1689 duty lawyer services

1538 hours of renter support

Hannah's story

In mid-2023, regional Victorian woman Hannah* faced homelessness after her then-partner trashed her rental, causing extensive damage, and prompting an eviction notice from her landlord.

The man broke into Hannah's home – a private rental property where she'd been living alone for several years – while she wasn't there. He turned the house "upside down", smashing cabinets and mirrors and punching holes in the wall. Police were called and the man was arrested and issued with a Family Violence Safety Notice.

Shortly after, Hannah's interstate landlord issued a Notice to Vacate, saying the damage was done by a tenant or their visitor. Hannah knew finding another rental in a town with a vacancy rate of just above 1% would be near-impossible.

After calling ARC Justice's Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre, Hannah met with a lawyer. The lawyer went on to represent Hannah in the Magistrates' Court and successfully argued that the landlord shouldn't evict her because of the damage caused by the family violence perpetrator, saving her tenancy.

A little over three months later, the landlord again tried to evict Hannah, this time claiming they needed to live in the property. **Hannah knew ARC could help so reached out again.**

ARC Justice's lawyer appeared once more in the Magistrates' Court and was again successful, with the magistrate finding it would not be "reasonable and proportionate" to allow the eviction. This meant Hannah was able to stay in the property and rebuild her life.



ARC Justice was able to save Hannah's tenancy several times.*

Outcome 4

Services are accessible

We target our services to address the greater barriers to justice our community members experience.

In 2023/24 we provided **996** intensive casework services to clients we identified with the greatest barriers to justice. Of these clients:

- **76%** women
- **10%** First Nations
- **7%** migrant or refugee
- **5%** older people

To achieve this outcome, we will track:

- Accessibility of our casework services to priority groups.
- Quantity and quality of casework services.

By partnering with community health and service organisations, like our health justice partnerships with Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative in the Greater Shepparton region, Bendigo Community Health Services and Maryborough District Health Service, we expect to improve the accessibility of our services to priority groups. Read Clare's story to learn more about the impact of our partnership with Rumbalara.

Case study Next outcome

We provided **996** intensive casework services to clients:

25% experiencing financial disadvantage

17% experiencing family violence

8% remote and rural location

4% living with mental health challenges

Clare's story

In mid-2023, Clare*, a First Nations mother from regional Victoria, was pregnant with her second child and desperate for protection from her ex-partner, Ross*.

She'd already faced months of his escalating violence and had recently separated from him but still feared for her safety and and that of her children.

Clare had applied online for a Family Violence Intervention Order to keep Ross away from them. But without a temporary order, she and her children were still unprotected. Clare reached out to ARC Justice's Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre in Shepparton looking for help.

A lawyer from the community legal centre met with Clare, giving her advice before her first court date and then appeared on her behalf. They secured an interim order to keep Ross away while the case continued. Clare was also connected to a family violence support service, which helped her report breaches of the order to police.

When Ross didn't show up for the final hearing, ARC's lawyer argued for a full order with clear conditions. The magistrate approved, giving Clare the peace of mind that Ross could only contact her about childcare arrangements.

This left Clare feeling "empowered and protected". ARC's help "was a lifeline", she said, helping her feel informed and prepared to keep her children safe.



ARC Justice helped Clare keep her children safe from her abusive ex.*

Outcome 5

Increasing access to holistic services

We recognise that clients from priority groups often face legal issues across multiple areas, such as family law, family violence, and tenancy. By providing a holistic service, we support them in addressing both their legal and non-legal needs.

At the new Bendigo Specialist Family Violence Court, ARC Justice's Information and Referral Officer helped over **750 people** to better understand their legal problems and connect to support services, including our programs.

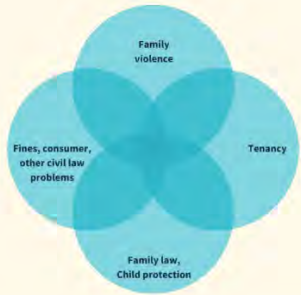
To achieve this outcome, we will track:

- Quantity and quality of services provided to clients addressing multiple legal and non-legal problems.
- Early intervention initiatives aimed to prevent and reduce legal problems.

Jason was experiencing multiple legal and non-legal problems when he reached out to our team in Shepparton, read more about Jason's story.

Case study

In 2023/24 **46%** of our clients were assisted with multiple legal problems.



Jason's story

In 2022, Jason*, a carer for his elderly father, found himself in a financial crisis after causing a car crash when he was uninsured. The incident left him with a $25,000 demand from the insurer of the other car and a hefty traffic fine.

Living on carers' benefits, Jason was already struggling to afford basics and relying on food vouchers to survive. Adding to his distress, Jason had difficulty with reading and filling out all the required insurance documents.

Desperate, he reached out to ARC Justice's Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre in Shepparton. The team worked with Jason to prepare an application for a debt waiver based on his financial hardship. He was able to secure an extension and negotiate a manageable payment arrangement for the fine, preventing further penalties.

While helping him address these issues, ARC's lawyers also supported Jason after he received a Notice to Vacate his rental due to rent arrears.

Ultimately, the insurer waived the debt. **Jason's fine is now being paid in instalments, and he is no longer at risk of eviction.** Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre also referred Jason to a financial counsellor, ensuring he can better manage any future challenges.



ARC Justice helped Jason regain control of his life.*

Outcome 6

Trusted and authoritative voice on regional social issues, influencing better justice outcomes

We are recognised as a trusted source for evidence-based advice, with our reports and insights being regularly referenced by policymakers, media and advocacy organisations in the region. We lead and collaborate with regional partners on key advocacy campaigns and policy submissions that are priority issues for our communities.

During the first half of 2024, highlights include **more than a dozen major media engagements** featuring ARC's CEO and directors, including:

- Live-to-air and pre-recorded appearances on national, state and regional ABC News radio programs and bulletins.
- Reporting on ABC News website.
- Coverage on local commercial radio and television.
- Print coverage in *Bendigo Advertiser, Maryborough District Advertiser, Shepparton News* etc.

To achieve this outcome, we will track:

- Impact of media coverage.
- Advocacy and law reform activities, prioritising a regional focus.

A key example of how this media presence has extended our influence, reinforced our role in advocating for rural communities and ensuring their needs are represented at the highest levels was the following national ABC story.


Nervous wait for Campbells Creek campers facing eviction from their own land as council promises to listen

By Emma D'Agostino | ABC Central Victoria | Housing Policy

Thu 16 May

*ARC Justice's advocacy for Campbells Creek campers facing eviction from their land was the **#1 ranked story Australia-wide** on **May 16-17** on the ABC News website.*

Case study | Next outcome

Shining a light on flood insurance failures

In September 2024, ARC Justice was featured in an impactful ABC News story by Adele Ferguson, one of Australia's most respected investigative journalists.

Known for exposing wrongdoing in sectors like financial services and healthcare, the journalist reached out to ARC Justice for expert commentary on low cash settlement offers from insurers that often leave flood victims with less than they deserve.

The coverage shone a national spotlight on the challenges facing rural and regional communities in the wake of climate disasters.

The story, which aired across multiple ABC platforms, highlighted ARC Justice as a leading voice on the issue, underscoring the organisation's deep understanding of the hardships faced by flood-affected residents in rural Victoria.

ARC's involvement in this high-profile story reflects its growth as a trusted and authoritative voice on social justice issues in regional Australia.

By strategically investing in skilled staff, ARC Justice has strengthened its public profile, making it a go-to resource for national media on issues of fairness and accountability in the insurance industry.



Flood Water Receded, Echuca Village. Image: Nicholas Masters, via Shire of Campaspe photography competition.

Outcome 7

Amplifying client and community voice

We will amplify client and community voices in our advocacy and communication work and focus on elevating diverse voices.

ARC Justice has consistently invested in research and advocacy that informs decision-makers of our community and client experiences of injustice and the benefits of systemic improvement.

In 2023/24 we were able to speak directly to the Premier of Victora Jacinta Allan, Attorney-Generals of the Federal and Victorian Governments Mark Dreyfus KC and Jaclyn Symes, the Speaker of the Victorian Parliament Maree Edwards and several other federal and state MPs.

We also welcomed the outgoing Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass to our Bendigo office and worked with her team to extend their service's outreach to the regions.

To achieve this outcome, we will track:

- The role of community voices shared in our advocacy work.

After the 2022 floods, ARC Justice supported impacted communities to access information and legal assistance to resolve disputed insurance claims. We shared community stories with a Federal Government committee. Read more about our advocacy.

Case study



Mark Dreyfus and Federal Member for Bendigo Lisa Chesters during a visit to ARC's Bendigo office.

Input shapes proposed flood insurance reform

In late 2023, ARC Justice made a written submission to the Federal Government's inquiry into insurers' responses to claims after the catastrophic 2022 floods, and in early 2024, appeared before the inquiry committee to give oral evidence.

Drawing on the experiences of community members, ARC Justice highlighted widespread issues, such as delays, inadequate communication and disputes over coverage that left many flood-affected people without clear recourse or adequate support.

ARC Justice's submission helped shape the inquiry's final report, Flood Failure to Future Fairness, released in late October 2024, with 14 of the report's 86 recommendations informed, at least in part, by ARC's insights.

Key recommendations included requiring insurers to provide clear advice on the rights and risks involved in cash settlements, introducing a cooling-off period for these settlements and mandating referrals to free legal services to ensure people understand the terms they're offered.

ARC also pushed for insurers to assign a single point of contact and to establish an independent panel of technical experts to provide objective building reports. These were reflected in the committee's recommendations. If implemented by government and industry, these changes pave the way for fairer, more transparent outcomes for disaster-affected communities.

Through its advocacy, ARC Justice amplified the voices of rural Victorians, ensuring their needs are central to policy reform and that insurers are held accountable in future disasters.



ARC Justice Community Projects Lead Dr Prue Bagley spoke to the inquiry.

Outcome 8

Expert and engaged team making a real-world difference

We support and grow our team to be engaged in work they find rewarding – where we are proud to say we work for ARC Justice.

ARC's team has **grown significantly** from July 2023 to July 2024. All staff are in permanent and ongoing positions. The latest staff survey reported above industry standard for **staff alignment and engagement**, with significantly high results in the areas of autonomy, well-being and "pride" in working for the organisation.

We've **established practice-based teams** where new-career and experienced lawyers are supported by paralegals and accomplished managing lawyers and invested in a multi-disciplinary team, improving our capacity to support clients.

We've **invested in systems and functions** that better measure and communicate our impact and **enhanced our climate justice capability** in recognition that the climate crisis is already significantly impacting access to justice for rural and regional communities.

To achieve this outcome, we will track:

- Employee engagement and retention.

We are committed to providing excellent services to our communities and this demands team members who are supported to develop expertise as well as a drive for increasing justice. Read Nicole's story to see how ARC supports employees throughout their careers



ARC Justice Climate Lead Jack Piper.

Case study | Next outcome

From student to accredited specialist

Nicole Day has built her legal career from the ground up at ARC Justice, transforming her passion for community legal work into leadership and advocacy.

Born and raised in Bendigo, Nicole – now ARC Justice's Managing Lawyer (Families) – connected with ARC in 2011 through volunteering and then placement while studying law at La Trobe.

Then taught by Dr Rebecca Edwards, now ARC Justice's Director of Legal Practice, Nicole spent 12 weeks providing family violence court support. **"I fell in love with the work and the community legal sector more broadly when I saw the real-world difference I could make," she recalls.**

Determined to stay involved, Nicole volunteered at both ARC Justice's night service and daytime programs during her studies, worked short contracts in the sector and joined ARC part-time in 2015, just a few months after being admitted, then full-time in 2016.

As well as lawyering, Nicole has held a variety of roles at ARC, which deepened her understanding of the sector.

In 2018, Nicole began practicing in child protection law, a field where she discovered her passion. Progressing to Senior Lawyer in 2020, Nicole recently became Managing Lawyer (Families) as part of ARC's organisational realignment.

In 2024, Nicole achieved specialist accreditation as a Law Institute of Victoria Accredited Specialist in Children's Law and now leads a team of 12. Nicole says her career trajectory reflects a culture of professional excellence and personal enrichment that makes ARC special.

"I've always felt supported to stretch myself and as we continue to grow our Families practice, I'm keen to get more involved in the policy advocacy side … because ultimately, we're all here to get better outcomes for our clients."



ARC Justice's Managing Lawyer (Families) Nicole Day

Outcome 9

Sustainable, reliable, effective and responsible organisation

We value a healthy risk culture and a commitment to transparency and accountability to communities as well as to our funders.

Our funding has grown steadily in recent years, from **$3.8m in FY22**, $4.7m in FY23, $7.4m in FY24 to **$8.3m in FY25**.

Download our 2023/24 financial statements.

We've strengthened the organisation at every level – from an updated constitution, new funding streams, renovated office spaces, new hybrid fleet vehicles and new IT hardware and software.

The implementation of our strategy has included a new risk management framework and our impact framework – overseen by a refreshed and committed board with diverse skills and experience – is setting ARC Justice up for strong and sustainable performance.

To achieve this outcome, we will track:

- Performance in annual external audits.
- Progress towards our Reconciliation commitments.
- Our environmental impact.

Our board and leadership are proud of the ambitious and intentional work done over



From left, People and Culture Director Jenny Cobby, new board member Rebecca Hearn, Director of Legal Practice Dr Rebecca Edwards, returning board member Erin Turner, departing board member Kate Scarce, returning board members Melinda Charlesworth, Ed Butler and Clare Fountain, CEO Damian Stock, returning board members Sarah Gee and Melissa Ralph, Strategy and Impact Director Kate Clohesy, returning board member Narlinga Morgan and new board member Ian Heycox.

the past year, establishing the groundwork for increased impact.

Hear from ARC Justice CEO Damian Stock

Watch video

About ARC Justice

ARC Justice is a rights-based, for-purpose organisation that incorporates the Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre and Housing Justice, a specialist renter support program based in Bendigo, and the Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre, based in Shepparton.

ARC provides legal and tenancy support services across 13 local government areas in central and northern Victoria, with a team of more than 60 staff working to advocate for and uphold the rights of rural and regional Victorians.



Our purpose

We exist so rights are known and acted upon, and communities are fairer.

Our role

- We promote individual rights and access to justice
- We prevent or reduce socio-legal problems by building awareness
- We create and support solutions that give the greatest opportunity for change

Our principles

- *Holistic self-determination* - We focus on the whole person and the whole of a problem as a way of finding more healthy and sustainable solutions to legal issues, and work with them to see a just outcome.
- *Safe and rights-based* - We recognise human rights and freedoms as legally enforceable and give priority to people in the most marginalised or vulnerable situations who face the biggest barriers to realising their rights.
- *Systemic* - We aim to create wider positive effects on a group or system, arising from our work with individuals and communities.

Our programs

loddon campaspe community legal centre

Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre is based in Bendigo and provides free legal information, advice and representation to people living in central Victoria.

Learn more

goulburn valley community legal centre

Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre is based in Shepparton and provides free legal information, advice and representation to people living in northern and north-east Victoria.

Learn more

housing justice

Housing Justice stands up for the rights of tenants, helping them to solve their tenancy problems and stay in their rental homes.

Learn more

Our board

ARC Justice's board drives ARC Justice's strategic direction and ensures a strong system of governance and oversight to maximise the



organisation's impact. Guided by the Strategic Plan, the board works closely with the CEO to enable the organisation to obtain and effectively allocate resources to implement the organisation's strategic priorities.

- Erin Turner – Chair
- Melissa Ralph – Deputy chair
- Ed Butler
- Melinda Charlesworth
- Clare Fountain
- Sarah Gee
- Rebecca Hearn
- Ian Heycox
- Narlinga Morgan



The ARC Justice board, from left, Rebecca Hearn, chair Erin Turner, Ed Butler, Clare Fountain, Sarah Gee, deputy chair Melissa Ralph, Narlinga Morgan and Ian Heycox. Absent: Melinda Charlesworth.



Our communities and clients

We work with people in regional and rural Victoria who experience disadvantage relating to their housing, family, relationship, consumer, economic, social and civil rights. We walk with First Nations people and communities.

Accreditations

Law Institute of Victoria Accredited Specialist

Registered Charity – acnc.gov.au/charityregister

This Centre is accredited by Community Legal Centres Australia

Memberships

VCOSS Victorian Council of Social Service

Community Legal Centres Australia

Federation of Community Legal Centres Vic

Funders

Australian Government

VICTORIA State Government

Victorian Legal Services BOARD + COMMISSIONER
Funded through the Legal Services Board Grants Program

THE FRANCES & HAROLD ABBOTT FOUNDATION
managed by Equity Trustees

Partners

- Bendigo Community Health Service – Bendigo Health Justice Partnership
- Centre for Non-Violence – Bendigo Family Violence Justice Project
- Eastern Community Legal Centre, Federation of Community Legal Centres and Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places – Climate Partnership
- Maryborough District Health Service – Maryborough Therapeutic Justice Partnership
- Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative – Rumbalara Health Justice Partnership and Putting Families First
- Tenants Victoria, WEstjustice, Peninsula Community Legal Centre, Barwon Community Legal Service – Rental Stress Hub
- WEstjustice – Tenancy Stress Victoria

Resources

- 2024-2029 Strategic Plan
- Program Logic
- Insurers' responses to 2022 major floods claims
- Financials