



the Humanitarian group

Community focused legal services for people new to Australia

ANNUAL REPORT
2014-2015



Report from the Chair

Mike Best

Welcome to our 2015 Annual Report. Now more than ever our clients desperately need The Humanitarian Group to help them navigate the Australian legal system and achieve access to justice. Ongoing funding cuts mean our ability to help has been constrained and our Board and staff are faced with the constant challenge of finding new income streams. My heartfelt thanks go out to everyone who supported us through 2014-2015, including our pro bono partners and our financial supporters. To our staff, volunteers and departing and incoming Board Members, thank you for your efforts in helping get our organisation to where it is today.

This year saw many long and heartfelt debates by the Board culminating in the decision to change our operating name

from “CASE for Refugees” to “The Humanitarian Group.” We recognised that whilst the original name has served us well for many years and holds a dear place in the hearts of many of our supporters, if we are going to continue to build and grow our organisation, we need to better engage with a broader audience to build meaningful partnerships into the future.

In conclusion I would like to thank everyone who has helped The Humanitarian Group over the last 12 months. I look forward to another challenging and exciting year as we move towards our vision of an inclusive community where people new to Australia from disadvantaged and culturally diverse backgrounds understand their rights and are treated with equality and dignity.



Report from the CEO

Helen Pearce

This year saw 2,338 people approach The Humanitarian Group seeking assistance with a wide variety of matters across all our service areas. They came from 71 different countries and the majority have suffered torture and trauma.

The statistics show that this is a substantial increase from last year. Unfortunately, despite the streamlining of processes to ensure efficient and effective delivery of services, a lack of resources meant that we were still unable to assist 30% of these highly vulnerable people. Even those that we did help were in many cases provided with only limited assistance as we drew more heavily than ever on our referral networks to provide additional pro bono services. The number of volunteer hours directly contributed to our organisation rose from 4,200 hours in the previous year to over

6,200 hours this financial year. All this has happened at a time of increasing complexity in the law and a reduction in funding for our client group.

Our work has never been more important. The support from our volunteers, pro bono partners, service providers and supporters has made it possible for us to rise to the challenge of continuing to provide professional and accessible migration assistance, legal advice and education to people new to Western Australia from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Our clients include humanitarian visa holders, asylum seekers, refugees and people who are otherwise disadvantaged in their access to legal services.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our work over the past year. We could not do it without you.

CASE STUDY 1: Zahra* is from Eritrea. When she spoke out against women being sexually assaulted while they serve compulsory military service, Zahra was put in prison and tortured. She managed to escape from prison in Eritrea and travelled by foot to Saudi Arabia, before coming to Australia. We helped Zahra to successfully apply for protection in Australia.

CASE STUDY 2: Guang* is from China. A victim of human trafficking and serious human rights abuses, Guang was referred to The Humanitarian Group for help across an array of complex matters. With our help, Guang has been granted a visa while she assists the Australian Federal Police with their trafficking investigation. We have also helped Guang to maintain custody of her child.

Our Work in 2014-2015

In a year where global forced displacement reached unprecedented levels, the Australian response resulted in a high degree of legislative activity, culminating in December with the passage of the Migration Amendment (Resolving the Legacy Caseload) Act 2014.

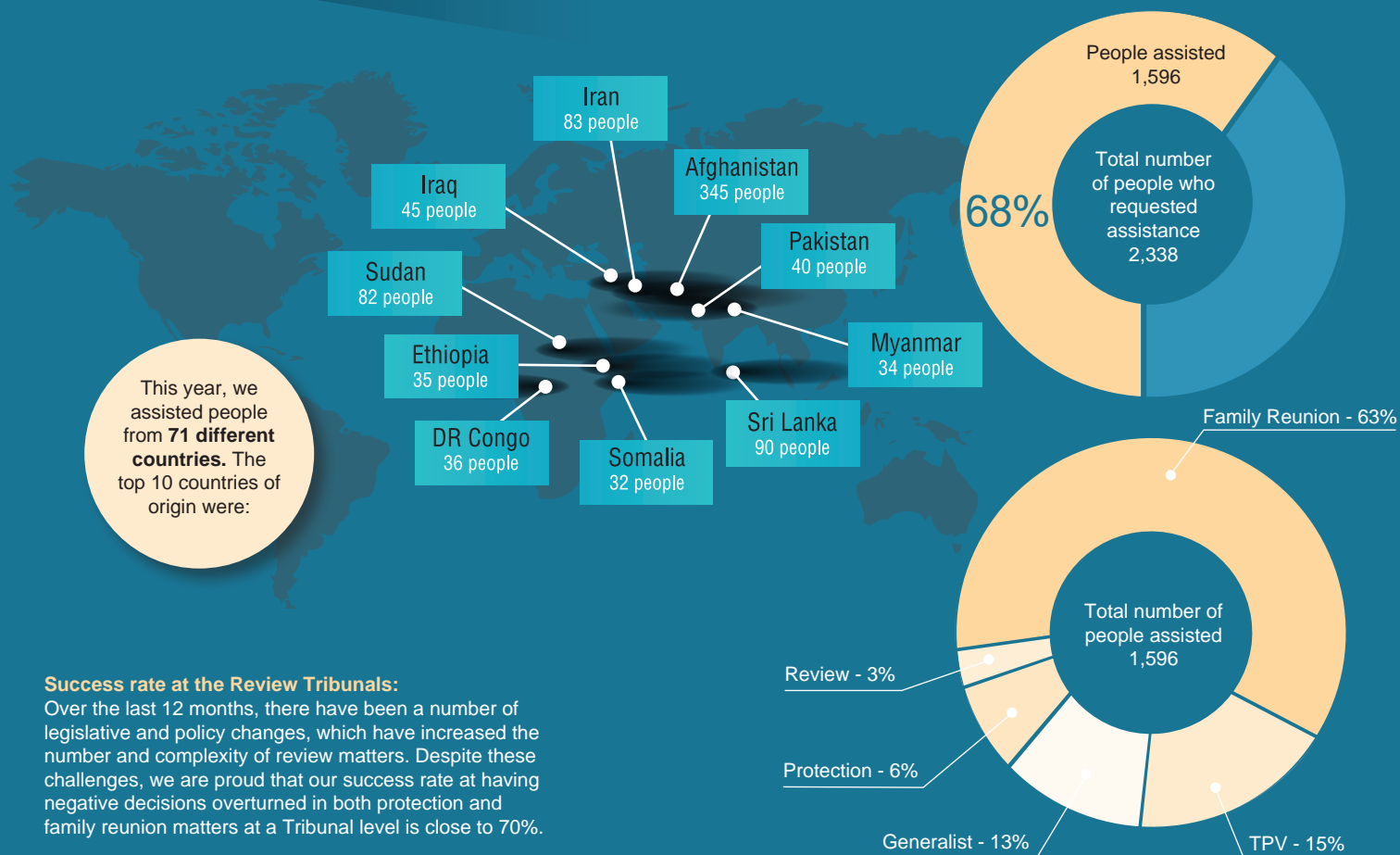
This Act represented the most significant overhaul of Australia's protection obligations since protection visas were introduced. It empowered the Government to detain and return asylum seekers without assessing their protection claims, introduced temporary protection visas for unauthorised air and maritime arrivals, established a separate assessment system for maritime

arrivals, redefined who Australia considers to be a 'refugee' and reintroduced the Minister's power to cap protection visas. This year also saw significant amendments to the character test and general visa cancellation powers and we started to see the impact of slower protection visa processing and the removal of family reunion access, which was legislated the previous year.

As a result, at an organisational level, we have seen a significant shift in the balance of family reunion and protection work with family reunion visa grants continuing to reduce, the establishment of the Temporary Protection Visa Project (TPV Project) and increased demand for

general legal assistance which calls on our specialist knowledge of migration law.

It is in this context that we have seen the demand for our services increase substantially over the past year and saw 2,338 people, the majority of whom have experienced torture and trauma, approach us for assistance. These people came from 71 different countries around the world. Unfortunately, due to limited resources, we were unable to meet the need for services for approximately 30% of the people who approached us and had to make difficult decisions as to the level of assistance we could provide to those that we were able to help.



Breakdown of General Legal Service

Approximately 25%

of clients approached requiring advice with specialist immigration / generalist matters, including a significant increase in clients requiring advice with character issues.

Over 50%

of clients who received advice from the General Legal Service approached with family law related problems, often related to family violence.

Approximately 15%

of clients sought advice on civil law related matters and a small minority required advice with criminal law matters.

Migration and Legal Services

Our core work is still to provide advice and assistance with protection visa applications for people outside of their home country who cannot return home because they are at risk of persecution or serious human rights violations, as well as to help reunite families. However, this year has also seen an increased demand for assistance with applications for temporary protection visas and specialist complex legal advice relating to the visa status of people at risk of cancellation of visas.

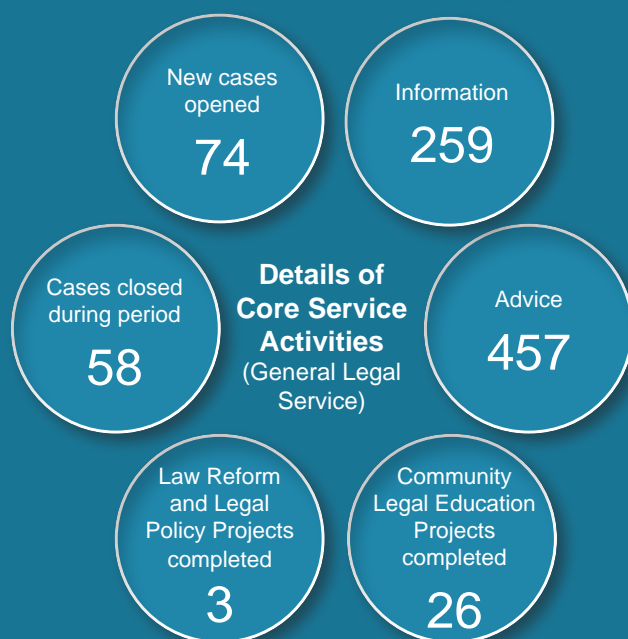
There are approximately 2,000 asylum seekers currently living in Western Australia who arrived by boat between August 2012 and December 2013. These asylum seekers are subjected to the new fast track assessment process to determine their eligibility for the grant of a temporary protection visa.

In 2015, we established the TPV Project to provide specialised legal assistance to these highly vulnerable asylum seekers. Without this assistance, these asylum seekers would be left without the means or the knowledge to put together their claim for asylum and navigate the complex legal process. Since we started in May 2015, we have held 18 information sessions across 10 different language groups, with a total of 408 attendees. Over the next year we expect over 1,000 people will attend similar information sessions and approximately 10 people per week will receive assistance through our clinics to lodge visa applications.

The General Legal Service offers legal assistance across a broad range of issues. This year, our Service assisted a large number of victims of domestic violence

with their associated legal issues, including family violence orders, divorce and child contact issues. We have also seen a significant increase in clients wanting assistance with specialist legal matters that cross over general and migration law, particularly with issues involving character considerations and requests to change governmental records.

In addition, we commenced the provision of generalist outreach services. Outreach services are provided at the Domestic Violence Advisory Service (DVAS) / Multicultural Women's Advocacy Service (MWAS) and the Ethnic Disability and Advocacy Centre (EDAC). Just under 20 clients have been seen at outreach locations since the service commenced in mid-March 2015.



CASE STUDY 3: Aloysius* is from West Papua.

He supported the West Papuan independence movement and had to flee to avoid being put in prison for his political opinion. After Aloysius' original application for protection was refused, we helped him successfully apply for a review of that decision. Aloysius has now been granted protection in Australia.

Number of people attending TPV information sessions: **408**

Number of TPV applications already lodged: **21**

CASE STUDY 4: Djo* is from the Democratic Republic of Congo. He came to The Humanitarian Group because a private landlord had unfairly withheld the bond on his rental property. When Djo tried to negotiate with the landlord, the landlord made threats and told Djo to never contact him again. We were able to negotiate a settlement for Djo so that he not only received just under the full amount of the bond back, but also an apology from the landlord.

Education and Professional Development Services

Through the course of our work, it is clear to us that community legal education aimed at prevention and early intervention is the best strategy to protect clients and reduce the need for more intensive assistance at later stages. This year we provided 26 community legal education sessions across a variety of topics. These initiatives help to raise awareness about where to access services and to ensure people can avail themselves of the protections offered by our legal system. They also help to increase knowledge about the implications and longer term serious consequences of what may initially appear to be minor infractions.

In 2014-2015 we also provided both legal and non-legal work experience opportunities to students from Curtin University, Murdoch University, the University of Notre Dame and the University of Western Australia. These include placements to 3 law students undertaking final year legal units to complete the practical training components of their units and placements to 14 students in various stages of

their degrees to complete practical components across a diverse range of units, including human rights, behavioural science, and extra-curricular leadership programs.

We also continued to provide extensive training and volunteering opportunities to over 100 volunteers, running 9 volunteer training workshops with over 120 people in attendance. In 2014-2015, these volunteers provided 6,239 volunteer hours to assist us in providing our services.

A number of law firms have expressed interest in participating in a program where their employee lawyers (ranging from graduates to partners) will attend our offices to assist clients with the preparation of statements as a supplement to the TPV clinics we are hosting. In the first part of 2015, we developed a training program for participating law firms, with the first training session being held in August 2015. We look forward to expanding this model to a number of additional law firms in the new financial year.

Volunteer hours:

6,239
hours

Number of
volunteers:

Over
100

Number of CLE
sessions:

26

Number of
student internships/
placements:

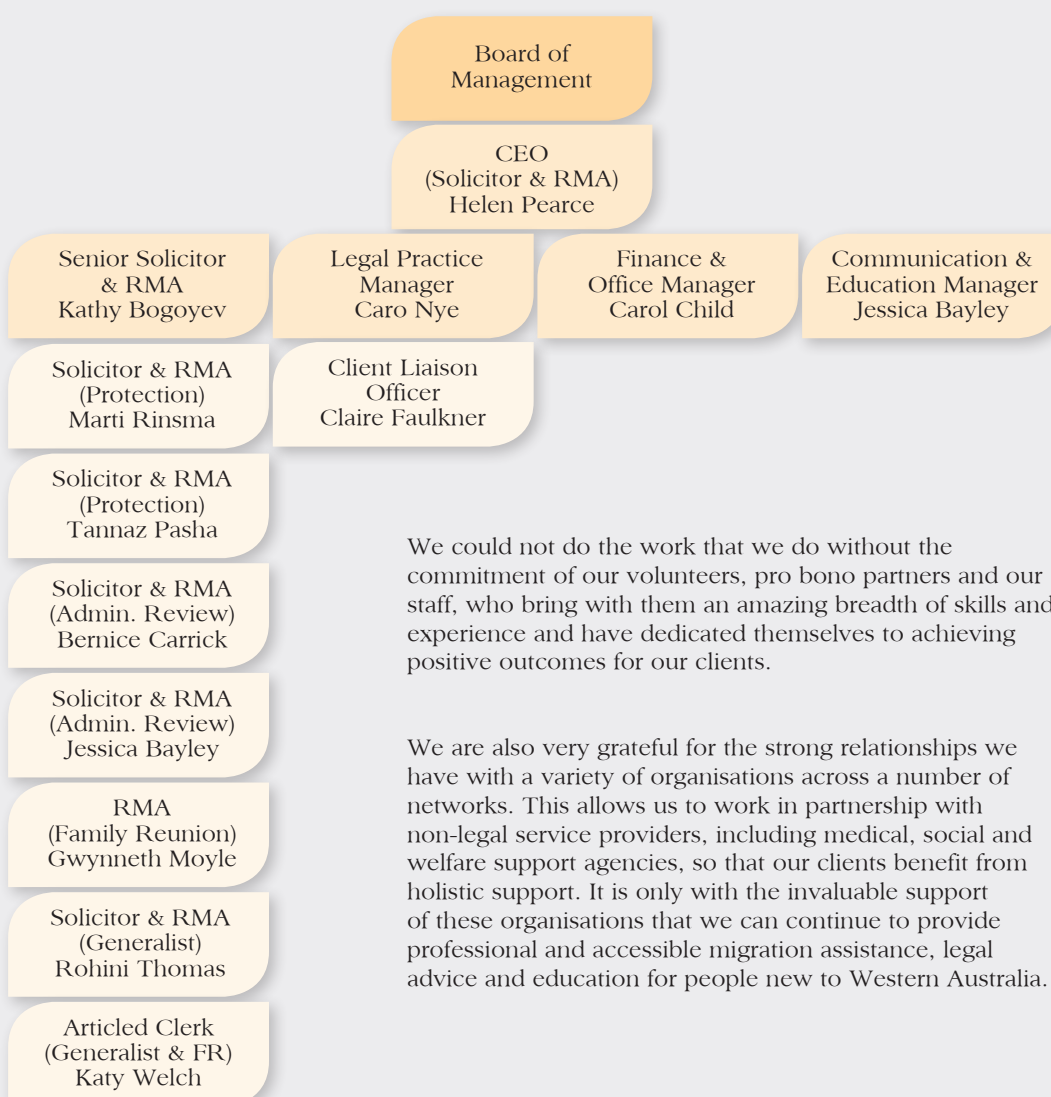
17 in total

CASE STUDY 5: Hassan* is a 15 year old Hazara from Afghanistan. He fled persecution from the Taliban. As he came to Australia by boat, Hassan cannot apply for a permanent protection visa. However, we have helped Hassan apply for protection in Australia by way of a temporary visa. He is still awaiting an outcome. Although he feels relief now that he has applied for protection, he is also anxious because it will only be temporary. Even if he is successful, he will have to repeat the process once his visa expires. In the meantime, he has limited options to work and study in Australia and will not be able to be reunited with his family.



Acknowledgements

Our organisation, supported by our first patron, Rosemary Hudson Miller, benefits from a very experienced Board of Management with diverse skills and from a cross-section of society. This year, we bade a fond farewell to Cathy McComish and Brendan Lobo, both of whom we sincerely thank for their efforts in getting our organisation where it is today. We also welcomed new Board Members, Han Nguyen, Lisa Cluett and Akram Sabbagh, who have brought new skills and experience to the Board.



We could not do the work that we do without the commitment of our volunteers, pro bono partners and our staff, who bring with them an amazing breadth of skills and experience and have dedicated themselves to achieving positive outcomes for our clients.

We are also very grateful for the strong relationships we have with a variety of organisations across a number of networks. This allows us to work in partnership with non-legal service providers, including medical, social and welfare support agencies, so that our clients benefit from holistic support. It is only with the invaluable support of these organisations that we can continue to provide professional and accessible migration assistance, legal advice and education for people new to Western Australia.

CASE STUDY 6: Tsage* is from Ethiopia. After she came to Australia to be with her husband, both her parents passed away, leaving her four siblings orphaned. At the time the eldest was 13 years old and they had no other family to look after them. In 2012, we helped Tsage apply to bring her orphaned siblings to Australia. After a long and complex process, including DNA tests to prove that the children were Tsage's siblings, the orphan relative visas were finally granted and the children arrived in Perth earlier this year.

Finance and Governance

The Humanitarian Group is committed to attaining a high standard of governance, legal practice, risk management and accountability. The organisation's overall direction is set by the Board of Management and currently defined in the 2014-2016 Strategic Plan.

Financial accountability is provided through the preparation of an annual budget, monthly financial reporting to the Board, the acquittal of funding agreements and the undertaking of an annual independent financial audit.

The Humanitarian Group is an accredited community legal centre under the quality assurance scheme operated by the National Association of Community Legal Centres

(NACLC). We also participate in the NACLC Professional Indemnity Scheme.

The sourcing of funds to maintain and expand services remains an important activity of the staff and the Board, with financial sustainability identified as a key focus area under the risk management plan. During 2014-2015 there was a 186% increase in the level of fundraising and donations. In particular, the Fair Go for Asylum Seekers Appeal was launched in order to raise funds for the TPV Project.

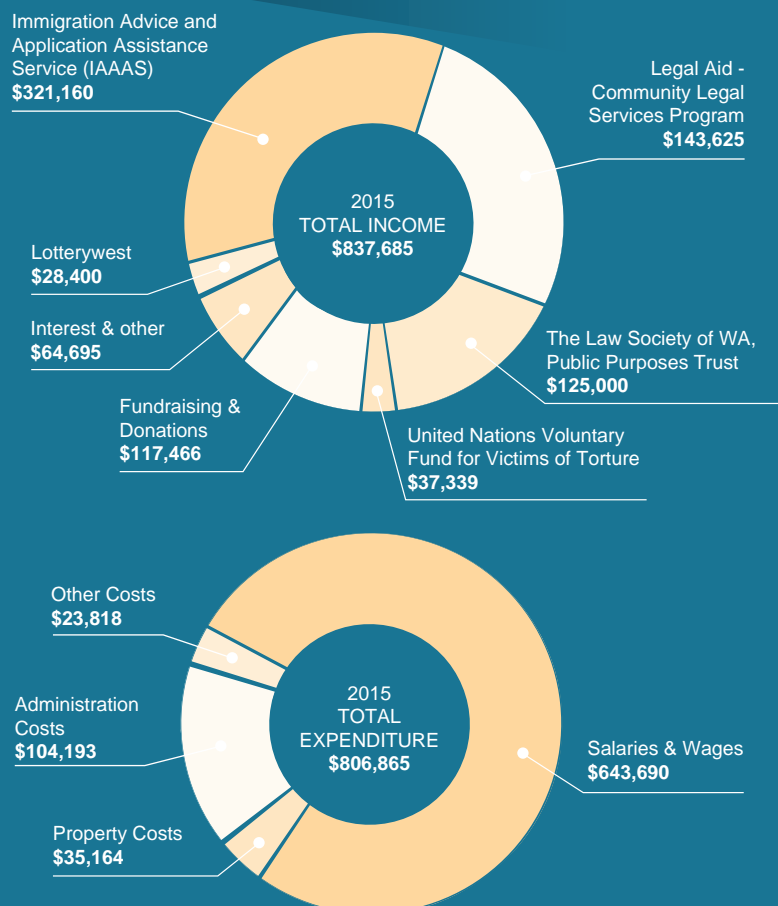
A number of successful events were held, for both this and our General Appeal, and we would like to acknowledge all of the organisers of and participants in these events, as well as the many individuals and

organisations who directly donated to us.

We would also like to acknowledge both Lotterywest and The Hub Marketing Communications. Lotterywest granted us \$28,400 for our rebranding project, which was successfully delivered by The Hub.

In 2014-2015, 80% of our costs were expended on salaries and wages ensuring the optimisation of our service delivery. We acknowledge the support of UnitingCare West, our partnership with them enabling us to keep our rent and other property costs at a relatively low level.

Summaries of our finances are shown below. Full copies of our audited accounts are available and can be requested by emailing finance@thehumanitariangroup.org.au.



Profit and Loss	2015 \$	2014 \$
Grants & Fees	655,524	701,874
Fundraising & Donations	117,466	41,115
Interest & Other	64,695	73,013
Total Income	837,685	816,002

Salaries & Wages	643,690	642,777
Other Expenses	163,175	171,199
Total Expense	806,865	813,976

Surplus for the Year	30,820	2,026
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Balance Sheet	2015 \$	2014 \$
Fixed Assets	46,228	51,780
Current Assets	448,916	443,907
Current Liabilities	130,829	162,046
Non Current Liabilities	6,219	6,365
Net Assets	358,096	327,276

Retained Earnings	108,096	77,276
Reserves	250,000	250,000
Total Equity	358,096	327,276



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Opening Hours
Monday to Friday 9am to 12noon, 1pm to 3pm

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