



the Humanitarian group

Community focused legal services for people new to Australia

ANNUAL REPORT
2015-2016

Report from the Chair

Mike Best



Welcome to our 2015-2016 Annual Report. The last 12 months have been very challenging but also very rewarding for The Humanitarian Group and I hope you enjoy reading about some of our successes in the following pages.

In my report last year I talked about our change of name from 'CASE for Refugees' to 'The Humanitarian Group'. I'm pleased to report that 12 months later the name change has gained real traction amongst our supporters and the wider community.

Whilst refugees and asylum seekers will always remain our core client group, I believe our new name more accurately reflects our current service offering, which can be neatly summarised as 'community

focused legal services for people new to Australia.'

Sadly my three year term on the Board of The Humanitarian Group will come to an end at our 2016 Annual General Meeting. It has been a privilege and a real learning experience for me to work with this organisation and I wish the Board and staff every success into the future.

I would also like to thank all our volunteers, pro bono partners and financial supporters for helping us get to where we are today. I wish you all the best as we work 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 2,885 people from 79 different countries from around the world approach The Humanitarian Group seeking assistance with a wide variety of matters across all our service areas. The majority of these people have sadly suffered torture and trauma. This is an increase over the past two years of people seeking our help of almost 300% and has put great pressure on our organisation to respond.

The Chief Justice of Western Australia, in his speech at the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) Conference in August 2016, spoke of the need for targeted intervention, utilisation of volunteers and innovation by community legal centres to ensure access to justice for those seeking their assistance.

The Humanitarian Group has risen to this challenge and found new ways of adapting to meet this unprecedented demand whilst maintaining its values of human rights, compassion, community and professionalism. This year has seen the introduction of new and more efficient targeted ways of providing advice and assistance culminating in the presentation

of the award of the prize for Brief Talks, Big Ideas at the NACLC conference for use of innovative technology in the delivery of information in our Temporary Protection Visa Project. It has also seen new collaborations within the legal and community sector with volunteer and pro bono hours contributed directly to our organisation rising to 9,590 hours, an increase of over 200% over a two year period.

We received many expressions of thanks throughout the year but one this year in particular made us laugh and shows how together we can empower people by providing access to justice.

"The Humanitarian Group made me feel very welcomed and important. It means a lot to me that they took some time out to help with my application. They gave me wings like red bull!"

As we reflect on the challenges ahead, we acknowledge that it is only through the collaboration of staff, volunteers and our pro bono and community partners and supporters that we can do the work we do. This thank you is for you all.

CASE STUDY 1: Shohreh* is from Iran. She came to Australia on a partner visa to be with her husband. After she arrived in Australia her husband became violent towards her, including subjecting her to significant physical and psychological abuse. Shohreh sought safety at a women's refuge, which referred her to The Humanitarian Group. We helped Shohreh to successfully apply for a permanent partner visa on the grounds of family violence.

Our Work in 2015-2016

This year, global forced displacement reached unprecedented levels. Whilst there were no significant legal changes that affected our work in 2015-2016, looking forward, it can be expected that some High Court and Federal Court decisions handed down this year will impact on the landscape in which we work.

At an operational level, the commencement of the fast track assessment process for maritime arrivals, and the anticipated increase in the number of mandatory and discretionary visa cancellations, has seen a significant shift in the

balance of our work with almost 47% of people approaching for assistance receiving help through the Temporary Protection Visa Project (TPV Project) and a 10% increase in our specialist generalist services. Whilst the overall number of people assisted with family reunion has remained steady, this year our family reunion work equated to only 17% of people approaching as against 63% in 2014-2015.

It is in this context that we saw 2,885 people, the majority of whom have experienced torture and trauma, approach us for assistance in 2015-2016. These people came from 79 different countries around the world. This is an increase of over 500 people from last financial year and an almost 300% increase from the 2013-2014 financial year.

Despite this massive increase in demand on our services over the

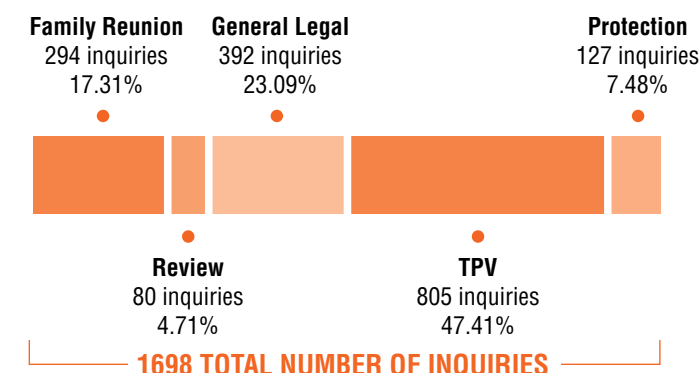
past two years, we have been able to adapt and through organisational efficiencies and innovation and by drawing on a substantially increased pool of volunteer and pro bono services, were able to provide advice and assistance to 87% of those who approached us this year. This is an improvement on last year in which only 68% of those approaching were provided with assistance.

It must be noted that this improvement in total number assisted has come with a reduction in many cases of the level of assistance we have been able to provide. As we look towards 2016-2017 and the continuing funding crisis in our sector, we will again have to make further difficult decisions as to the level of assistance we will be able to provide to the vulnerable people that seek our help over the coming months.

Our year at a glance



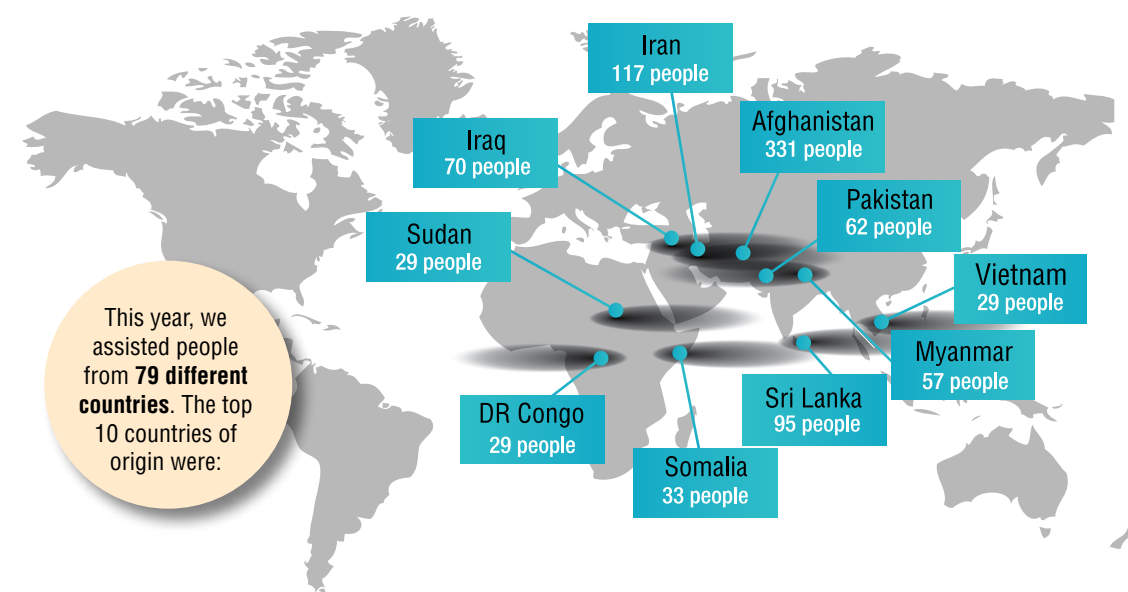
BREAKDOWN OF WORK BY MATTER TYPE



We are proud that our success rate at having negative decisions overturned in both protection and family reunion matters at a Tribunal level is approximately



CASE STUDY 2: Aysha* is from Malaysia. She was persecuted because she is transgender and could not express her true identity without facing abuse and harassment on a regular basis. After she came to Australia, we helped Aysha to successfully apply for permanent protection in Australia.



Migration and Legal Services

This year has seen us continue to provide migration assistance at both primary and review levels to people who cannot return to their home countries because they fear persecution, as well as to help reunite families, while also finding innovative solutions to meet the increased demand for our services.

Our Temporary Protection Visa Project (TPV Project) has expanded to meet the need to assist people who arrived by boat and are subject to a separate fast track assessment process to determine their eligibility to seek protection in Australia by way of a temporary

visa. We provide information via mp3 recordings in a number of languages, provide ongoing advice via weekly Drop In Advice days and assisted 205 people to lodge applications through our clinics.

Further post-lodgement assistance for these vulnerable applicants and referral pathways for administrative and judicial review are provided through valuable collaborations with our community and legal partners.

In 2015-2016, our General Legal Service has continued to provide family law, civil law and criminal law assistance, while also meeting a significant increase in demand for assistance in the priority areas of family violence and specialist immigration.

We also continued to provide an outreach service at the Domestic Violence Advisory Service /

Multicultural Women's Advocacy Service.

This year, we provided community legal education across a variety of topics, with a focus on temporary protection and family violence, as well as broader sessions about legal issues and how to access our services. We also presented to a large number of support worker groups, to help ensure they can facilitate referrals for assistance at an early stage of a client's legal issues.

Next year, we plan to increase our provision of holistic legal education and advice services to victims of family violence from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds through our new Family Violence Legal Outreach and Education Program, the Voice Project, which is funded through a grant from the Criminal Property Confiscation Grants Program.

9,590
VOLUNTEER
HOURS

Legal and
Administrative
Volunteers
143



Bilingual
Volunteers
131



Pro Bono
Lawyers
120



Internships and
Placements
18



The Importance of Pro Bono

'Pro bono' is from the Latin phrase bro bono publico, which means 'for the public good'. In the legal context, it generally means the provision of legal services on a free basis, with no expectation of a commercial return.

In The Humanitarian Group context, we receive pro bono contributions from volunteers across all service areas, from being the welcoming face of the organisation when clients first walk in the door, to playing a role in providing migration and legal assistance, to helping us deliver community legal education and raising funds so that we can continue to do what we do.

Each year, we are overwhelmed by the incredible contribution given so generously by our volunteers. This year, our volunteers recorded 9,590 hours, equating to approximately \$1,440,000.

In 2015-2016, we benefited from providing a number of internships and placements. We provided internships to nine university students in various stages of their degrees to complete practical components across a diverse range of units, including law, human rights and extra-curricular leadership programs. We provided practical legal training placements to three law graduates. We were also proud to partner with the Piddington Justice Project (PJP) in its first year and provide work experience placements to six PJP law graduates.

We provided training and volunteering opportunities to 143

legal and administrative volunteers, who have exponentially increased our capacity to deliver services to more people.

Faced with interpreter funding reductions, but with the majority of our clients not speaking English as their first language, this year we developed our bilingual volunteer training program. We now have 131 bilingual volunteers who provide us with pro bono interpreting services.

This year also saw us develop pro bono partnerships with a number of law firms to help us deliver the TPV Project clinics.

After delivering training to interested people in each firm, we have had 120 lawyers, ranging from graduates to partners, attend our office to assist clients to prepare their visa applications.

GENERAL LEGAL SERVICE BREAKDOWN BY MATTER TYPE

Approximately **49%** of clients approached with family law related problems, often related to family violence.

Approximately **41%** of clients who received advice required assistance with matters with a domestic violence indicator.

Approximately **33%** of clients approached requiring advice with specialist immigration matters.

Approximately **15%** of clients sought advice on civil law related matters. A small minority required advice with criminal law matters.

New cases opened
63

Information
269

Cases closed during period
33

CORE GENERAL LEGAL SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Total Advice
464

Law Reform and Legal Policy Projects completed
5

Community Legal Education Projects completed
22

Number of people who received one off TPV advice and information:

805

Number of TPV applications lodged:

205

Number of TPV referrals:

155

CASE STUDY 3: Faytinga* is from Eritrea. She fled persecution and came to Australia in 2010 as a humanitarian entrant. As she could not read and write in her spoken language, she did not realise at the time that her name was spelt incorrectly on her application documents. Faytinga realised the mistake after she learnt to read and write in Australia. In 2016 we helped Faytinga to correct the government records. She can now apply for Australian Citizenship with her correct name.



CASE STUDY 4: Marie* is from the Democratic Republic of Congo. She publicly criticised the government's failure to address human rights abuses, particularly sexual violence. After one of her statements was broadcast on television, she was visited at home in the middle of the night by armed men. Marie fled and hid before coming to Australia. We helped her apply for protection in 2012, but her application was refused. We then helped Marie to successfully apply to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for a review of the decision. In 2016, Marie was finally granted protection in Australia.

Acknowledgements

Our organisation benefits from an experienced Board of Management with diverse skills and from a cross-section of society.

This year, we bade farewell to Tom Tolchard and Richard Valton, both of whom we sincerely thank for their contributions. We also welcomed Megan O'Rourke, who has brought new skills and experience to the Board.

Chairperson: Mike Best

Vice-Chairperson: Akram Sabbagh

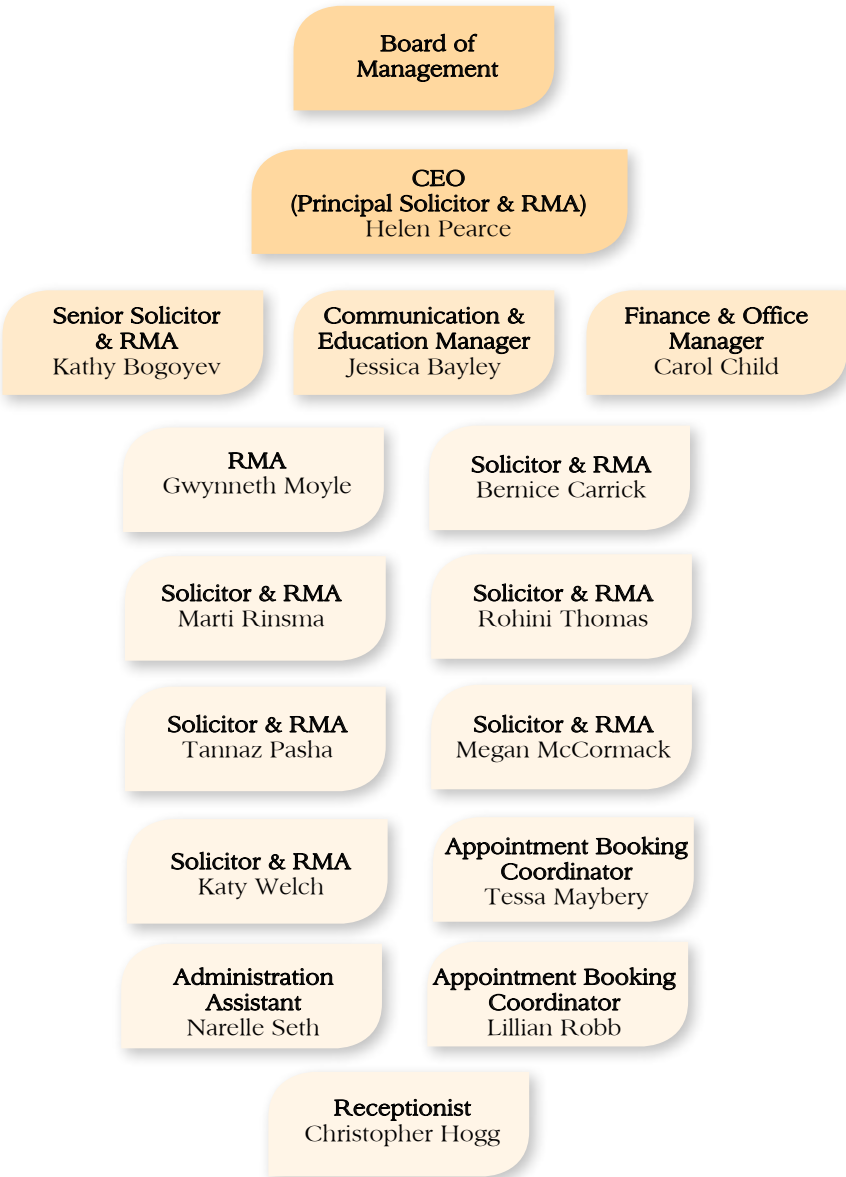
Treasurer: Han Nguyen

Secretary: Anne Durack

Members: Dr Anne Mathews, Dr Lisa Cluett, Megan O'Rourke

We could not do the work that we do without the commitment of our staff, who bring with them an amazing breadth of skills and experience and have dedicated themselves to achieving positive outcomes for our clients. This year we said sad goodbyes to Caro Nye, Claire Faulkner, Sunili Govinnage, Imelda Williamson and Anita Will. We wish them all the best in the next chapters of their careers.

We also welcomed Tessa Maybery, Christopher Hogg, Lillian Robb and Narelle Seth. We are so glad to have them as part of our team.



RMA – Registered Migration Agent

We greatly appreciate the generous commitment from our volunteers and pro bono partners. By supporting us across all areas of our work, they play a vital role in providing professional and accessible migration assistance, legal advice and education for people new to Western Australia who are disadvantaged in their access to legal services.

We are also grateful for the strong relationships we have with organisations across a number of networks. This allows us to work in partnership with non-legal service providers, so our clients benefit from holistic support. It is only with the invaluable support of these organisations that we can continue to provide access to justice to vulnerable people and ensure they are treated with equality and dignity.

CASE STUDY 5: Bader* is a Sunni Bedoon from Iraq. He worked as a driver to support his wife and five children, who still live in Iraq. He fled after he was detained due to his ethnicity and religion and threatened with torture. As he came to Australia by boat, Bader cannot apply for a permanent protection visa. We helped Bader apply for protection in Australia by way of a temporary visa. He is still awaiting an outcome. Even if he is successful, he will have to repeat the process once his temporary 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.

CASE STUDY 6: Amla* is from Nepal. We originally helped Amla with her protection visa. She later tried to apply for a partner visa for her husband to come to Australia, but was unsuccessful. We assisted Amla to make a new application. Amla was pregnant at the time of the application and we helped her bring her husband to Australia in time for him to be present for the birth of his child.

Finance and Governance

We are committed to maintaining a high standard of governance, legal practice, risk management and accountability. The organisation's overall direction is set by the Board of Management as defined in its 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.

We are 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.

In 2015-2016, we made a surplus of \$7,700. Costs were strictly controlled and we relied heavily on the use of legal, administrative and bilingual volunteers. The organisation remains in a healthy financial position with reserves of \$326,000 and cash of \$284,000 at June 2016.

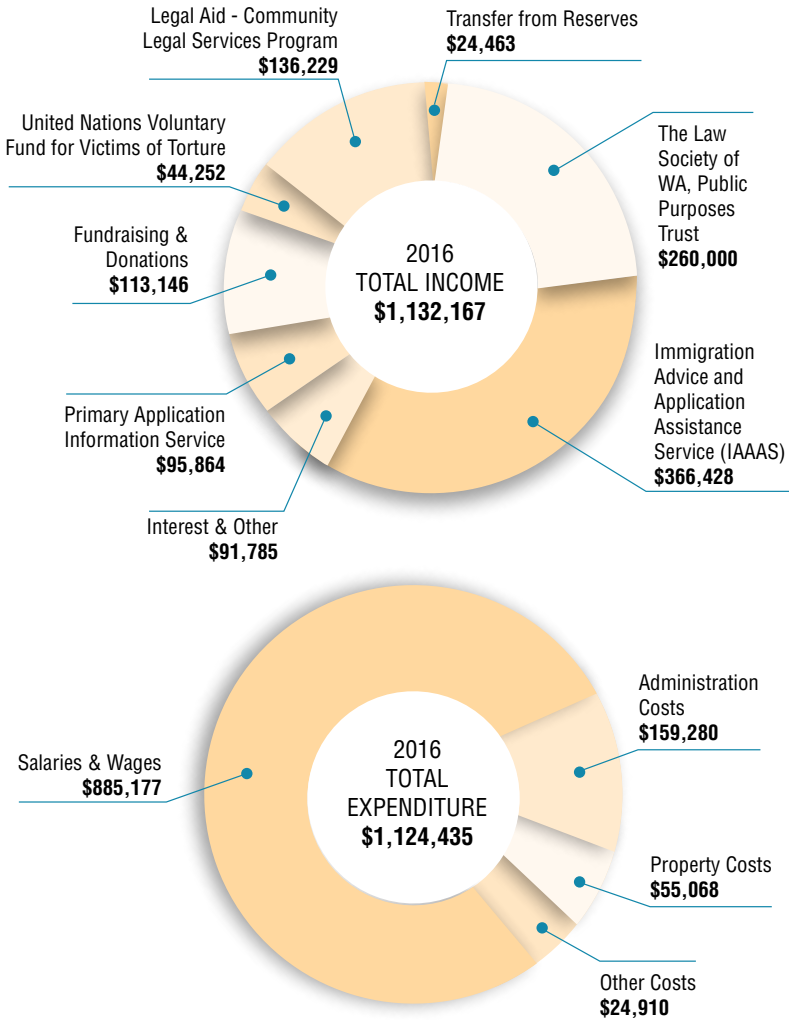
The sourcing of funds to maintain and expand services remains integral. This year our total revenue increased by 35% from \$837,000 to \$1,132,000. The Public Purposes Trust of The Law Society of WA gave a grant of \$160,000 towards the Administrative Review Project and the TPV Project. We also billed \$96,000

as part of the Primary Application Information Service (PAIS) contract.

Fundraising and donations remained consistent at \$113,000. A number of successful fundraising events were held and we would like to acknowledge all the event organisers and participants, as well as the many individuals and organisations who directly donated to us.

Increased service levels led to employment costs increasing by 37% from \$643,000 to \$885,000. However, salaries and wages as a percentage of costs remains at 79%, thereby ensuring service delivery optimisation.

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



Profit and Loss	2016 \$	2015 \$
Grants & Fees	916,393	655,524
Fundraising & Donations	113,146	117,466
Interest & Other	78,165	64,695
Transfer from Reserves	24,463	-
Total Income	1,132,167	837,685

Salaries & Wages	885,177	643,690
Other Expenses	239,258	163,175
Total Expense	1,124,435	806,865
Surplus for the Year	7,732	30,820

Balance Sheet	2016 \$	2015 \$
Fixed Assets	23,840	46,228
Current Assets	545,639	448,916
Current Liabilities	215,082	130,829
Non Current Liabilities	28,019	6,219
Net Assets	326,378	358,096
Retained Earnings	100,841	108,096
Reserves	225,537	250,000
Total Equity	326,378	358,096

* Clients' real names have not been used in case studies. We have withheld our clients' identifying details to respect their confidentiality.



the Humanitarian
group

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