

At Ruah Legal Services (RLS), we understand that legal issues don't occur in isolation. People experiencing mental illness need intensive support to navigate the justice system and the everyday challenges they face. To meet this need, we provide **integrated services** to people facing criminal law or care and protection proceedings.¹ This means that our clients work with a **lawyer and a community worker**.

RLS lawyers represent clients from the beginning to the end of their legal matter. This often looks like **multiple appearances** before courts and tribunals, with the ongoing provision of legal advice throughout.

RLS community workers provide psycho-social support to help clients **address the issues that led to their legal situation**, connecting clients to services in mental health, housing, parenting, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, employment, and training.

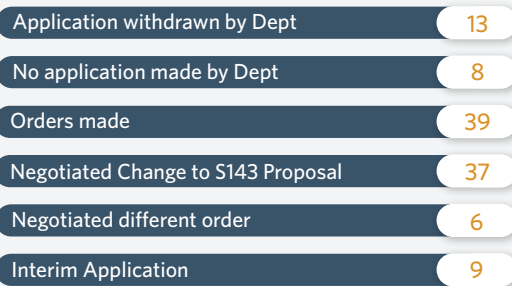
This snapshot includes data from integrated services between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2022.

FAST FACTS



CARE AND PROTECTION LEGAL OUTCOMES

Out of 71 care and protection proceedings finalised during this period, the following outcomes were achieved:²



In 1 in 3 cases, clients had made such significant progress that the Department withdrew their application or, in the case of pre-birth matters, decided not to make an application. In 55% of cases, immediate reunification was found to not be in the best interest of the child. However, RLS representation ensured parents had a voice throughout their proceedings, assisting them with interim applications in relation to placement and contact arrangements, negotiating changes to s143 written proposals and negotiating different orders.

CRIMINAL LAW MATTER OUTCOMES

Out of 34 clients sentenced during the period, the following outcomes were achieved:³

The majority of our clients are facing charges which carry a risk of imprisonment. In prison, their mental health would deteriorate further, leading to greater burden on the public health system and increasing the likelihood of repeat offending when released. Community workers assist clients to access the treatment they need to stabilise and the supports necessary to rehabilitate in the community. With this support in place, a Magistrate is more likely to issue a suspended sentence or a supervision order that allows a client to continue their recovery in the community.



¹ Due to funding constraints, at present only 1 in 5 clients with a criminal law matter receive an integrated service. Clients with the most complex needs are assigned to a community worker, whilst the other 4 out of 5 receive a purely legal representation service. There is a pressing need for funding to extend this integrated service.

² Files often have more than one outcome.

³ Ibid.



OUR CLIENTS

35
MALE

32
ABORIGINAL OR TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER

119
FEMALE

79
HOMELESS OR AT RISK
OF BEING HOMELESS

1
NON BINARY

86
EXPERIENCING OR
AT RISK OF FAMILY
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSIS

33
SCHIZOPHRENIA

46
ANXIETY

43
PTSD

53
DEPRESSION

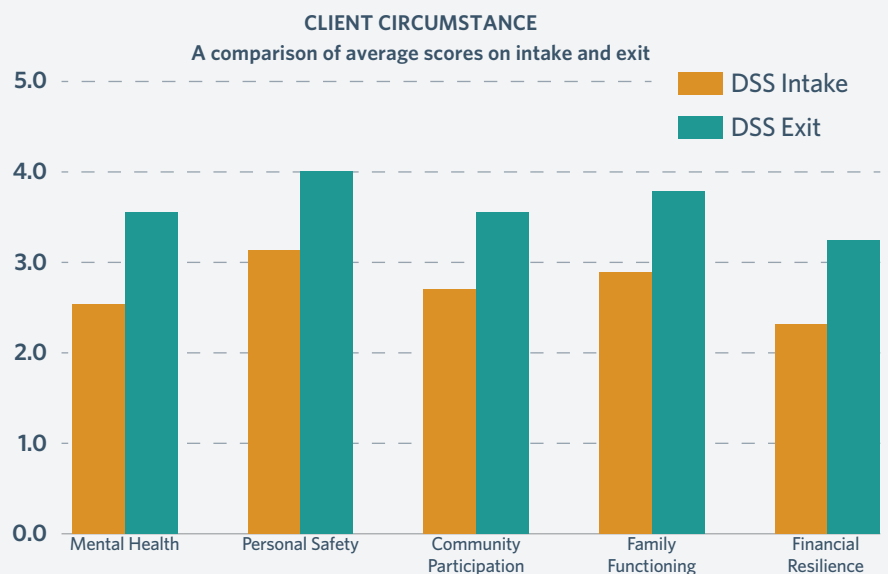
27
BIPOLAR

26
PERSONALITY
DISORDER

Clients often have more than one diagnosis. Other common diagnosis include psychosis and schizoaffective disorder.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (DSS) SCORE SURVEY DATA

The DSS survey helps us measure the impact of our services. Clients complete this survey in the first couple of weeks of meeting their community worker. In the survey, clients rate their circumstances in various areas of their life on a scale from one to five, where one signifies, "Very Poor" and five signifies "Very Good". When their legal matters conclude, clients reassess how things are going now. This bar chart shows average intake scores compared with average exit scores, demonstrating improvement in all domains. These positive non-legal outcomes are inexplicably linked with legal outcomes.



WHAT OUR CLIENTS SAY...

89 % **AGREED** THAT THEY FELT LISTENED TO AND UNDERSTOOD.

81 % **AGREED** THEY FELT BETTER ABLE TO DEAL WITH THE ISSUES THEY SOUGHT HELP WITH.

94 % **AGREED** THEY WERE SATISFIED WITH THE SERVICES THEY RECEIVED.

92 % **AGREED** THEY HAD THEIR VOICE HEARD IN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS.

98 % **AGREED** THAT HAVING ACCESS TO BOTH LEGAL AND SOCIAL SUPPORT FROM ONE SERVICE WAS VALUABLE.

"The lawyer made it easy to understand what was happening at court. Being my first time in this situation it was really helpful. The community worker helped me get connected to services I needed. And helped with housing. This means I have a stable place to stay & changes everything."

"Now I understand my mental health and how to get help. I wouldn't have been able to handle the legal stuff myself and then I would have possibly never got to see my son again."

"The lawyer is very understanding, he listens and tries to understand everything going on for me. He was really straight forward and communicated effectively with me. He would always follow up and he didn't give me false hope. He was honest which was really important to me. It's been so useful to have support in this way."

"Finding out about your service was a moment of hope in a moment that was very dark. I remember the moment I was told about your service that worked with people that have mental health problems and knew about DCP... I had been calling lawyers to find help and then found out about your service. Your service is so needed. Every time I worked with staff I was able to be myself. I was heard and understood. They held the space well and were able to talk with me about my problems."