

Case Study for Victorian CLC Sector-wide Outcomes Measurement Framework: How Women's Legal Service Victoria monitors and reports on the ongoing assistance provided to priority clients

Why WLSV measured whether we were assisting priority clients.

Women's Legal Service Victoria (WLSV) assist women in Victoria who have family law, child protection or family violence related legal issues. In November 2015 we moved away from a means and merits approach to determining which clients we should assist in an ongoing way and changed our 'casework guidelines' to an impact and barriers approach. We wanted to become more strategic about the cases we took on for ongoing legal assistance. Our new guidelines allowed us to make decisions on who to help with reference to broader policy and law reform objectives. The higher a person scores on the barriers and impact axes on the below matrix, the higher priority is given to them. As the axes move away from the origin on the matrix, the barriers and impact move from operating on an 'individual level' towards operating at a broader 'systems level'.

IMPACT	3	HIGH	VERY HIGH	VERY HIGH
	2	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	HIGH
	1	LOW	LOW	MEDIUM
		1	2	3
		BARRIERS		

This is underpinned or motivated by our service-wide Theory of Change which has an impact goal of Australia being a gender equitable society. Below this, one of our desired intermediate outcomes is that *disadvantaged women exercise their rights to live free from violence and make informed choices about their relationships*. Our casework feeds into the pathway towards this outcome. Within our theory of change an intermediate outcome is that disadvantaged clients tell their stories which highlight systemic issues and that these cases are heard by courts, decision makers and others who might influence changes to law and policy [see related outcomes from Sector Framework. Intermediate Outcome 4.2 The community and decision makers have increased information and understanding about systemic injustices; Intermediate Outcome 4.3: Communities are mobilised to act on systemic injustices].

<u>Indicators developed by WLSV to measure outcome of targeting priority (most disadvantaged) clients</u>	<u>Related Intermediate Outcome and indicator from Sector Framework</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of women who are Aboriginal or Torres Straight Islander • % of women who were born in a non-English speaking country • % of women with low or no English • % of women who experienced family violence • % of women who have a disability • % of women at risk of homelessness 	<p>Intermediate Outcome 1.1: People experiencing disadvantage access legal assistance in a timely way</p> <p>Indicator 1.1a Disadvantage profile: Number and % of people accessing legal assistance by type and level of disadvantage</p>

We also tracked the types of cases which were taken on by our service each quarter. The quantitative indicators were the number of cases taken on and the score that was recorded for them against the case intake matrix. In addition, qualitative indicators, such as a description of the legal issues and the barriers facing clients, were recorded.

How WLSV measured the identified indicators

We were able to assess the effectiveness of our changed casework guidelines because we already had a number of systems and practices for assessing the demographic profile/disadvantage indicators for our clients across the service. Our very first efforts at monitoring our outreach services began around late 2014 with tracking clients who accessed our night phone advice line for one month. We entered into excel all the demographic data about these clients to get a picture of the vulnerabilities they may have. Slowly we expanded to quarterly monitoring of each of our services. This included duty lawyer services, our face to face advice clinic, our Skype outreach service, and others.

We relied heavily on excel and CLSIS (the database system at that time). We would export a list of all client IDs for clients for the quarter who had an 'ongoing casework' case opened for them. We would also export a list of IDs for our other outreach services such as our night phones, our duty lawyer services, our family mediation services or our Skype appointments service.

This list of IDs was then connected with the relevant disadvantage indicators for that client, such as whether they had a disability, spoke little or no English, etc. We did this using a master list we generated from CLSIS of all clients for the past 6 months. We connected the client ID lists with the master list using excel formulas. This is unlikely to be necessary in CLASS. We calculated the percentage of clients who registered particular disadvantage indicators using formulas in excel.

One important factor in the success of our approach was that one person within WLSV was in charge of generating reports from CLSIS and working with the excel

sheets. This meant that this work remained a priority. This person was also responsible for encouraging lawyers to enter database information properly and on time to improve data consistency.

To record the qualitative information about cases taken on throughout each quarter, we used volunteers to enter handwritten information into a single spreadsheet. The information was collected on the case intake form and completed by lawyers who saw clients at their initial intake/appointment. The client's details, their legal issue and the policy issues identified for their matter are all indicated on this form. Volunteers transcribed this information into an excel sheet that had columns breaking down the various problem and policy categories. At the end of the quarter, the WLSV staff member who is responsible for monitoring and evaluation work would provide a summary of the number and types of matters taken on. Other information about the frequency that particular policy issues were identified is also part of this report.

What WLSV learned:

As a result of our change in guidelines, and through our associated measuring of disadvantage indicators we saw an increase in the number of ongoing clients who had a disability, had an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background or had experienced family violence. We are constantly assessing whether the people we choose to assist are experiencing more disadvantage than those we turn away, and one aspect of this is looking at the indicators of disadvantage.

As a result of our qualitative analysis of the types of matters taken on and the policy issues seen within them, WLSV were able to determine policy priorities for wider advocacy and law reform work [**see related outcome from Sector Framework. Intermediate Outcome 4.1: Systemic injustices are identified**]. If a particular issue was seen with greater frequency, it could be investigated as the focus of a policy/campaign project in the future.

What WLSV did with the information:

Based on the results we were able to make a case to some of our core funders that our case work intake targets be adjusted. We were showed that whilst we were assisting fewer clients in number, they were on average experiencing greater disadvantage and had more complex issues and needs.

How WLSV Reported on the results:

We report on the above as part of a quarterly monitoring and evaluation report provided to management at WLSV. In addition, we have used some of the statistical information to bolster reports to funders about the effectiveness of our model.

Want to know more about this? You can contact Estelle at Women's Legal Service Victoria on estelle@womenslegal.org.au

