Reaching in by joining-up

Evaluation of the legal assistance partnership between Legal Aid NSW and Settlement Services International

LAW AND JUSTICE FOUNDATION OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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Shortened forms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
CASES	Legal Aid NSW's administrative data system
CLE	community legal education
CLEMS	Legal Aid NSW's Community Legal Education Management database
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
EIU	Family Law Early Intervention Unit, Legal Aid NSW
FLC	Family Law Council of Australia
Foundation	Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales
FRC	Family Relationship Centre
LAW Survey	Legal Australia-Wide Survey
Legal Aid NSW	Legal Aid Commission of New South Wales
LGA	Local Government Area
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding between the Legal Aid Commission of New South Wales and Settlement Services International
MRC	migrant resource centre
n/a	not applicable
NESB	non-English speaking background
NPA	National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services
Parties	Legal Aid NSW and SSI
SSI	Settlement Services International Inc.
SSI Partnership	Collaboration between the Legal Aid Commission of New South Wales and Settlement Services International Inc.
TIS	Translating and Interpreting Service
WDVCAS	Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service

Migrant resource centres

Auburn Diversity Services	Auburn Diversity Services Inc.
Fairfield MRC (Cabramatta)	Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre at Cabramatta Community Centre
Fairfield MRC (Fairfield)	Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre (Fairfield)
IMS	Illawarra Multicultural Services
Liverpool MRC	Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre
Metro MRC (Campsie)	Metro Migrant Resource Centre (Campsie)
Metro MRC (Marrickville)	Metro MRC (Marrickville)
Northern SS (Bateau Bay)	Northern Settlement Services (Bateau Bay)
Sydney MCS (Daceyville)	Sydney Multicultural Community Services (Daceyville)
SydWest MS (Blacktown)	SydWest Multicultural Services Inc. (Blacktown)

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Executive summary

The Legal Aid NSW and Settlement Services International Partnership

In March 2013, Legal Aid NSW and Settlement Services International Inc. (SSI) formalised a partnership (SSI Partnership) to provide accessible legal services to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community members experiencing disadvantage and limited access to legal assistance. Under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Parties, outreach family law and civil law (including specialist immigration) clinics are operated by Legal Aid NSW at eight SSI member organisations, in 10 locations (Auburn Diversity Services; Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, Fairfield and Cabramatta; Illawarra Multicultural Services; Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre; Metro Migrant Resource Centre, Campsie and Marrickville; Northern Settlement Services, Bateau Bay; Sydney Multicultural Community Services, Daceyville; SydWest Multicultural Services, Blacktown). Clinic locations were chosen according to the greatest need and perceived beneficial impact upon CALD communities. Legal Aid NSW provide regular community legal education (CLE) workshops to Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) staff, clients and communities.

Legal Aid NSW uses funding received under the *National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services* (NPA) to support this program. The NPA prioritises legal assistance services for disadvantaged Australians in accordance with access to justice principles of accessibility, appropriateness, equity, efficiency and effectiveness.

Evaluation

The Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales (Foundation) was asked by Legal Aid NSW to evaluate the first year of the partnership's operation. The results are summarised below.

Services provided and clients assisted under the SSI Partnership

Assistance provided

- During the first year following the launch of the SSI Partnership in March 2013, Legal Aid NSW outreach clinics operated at 10 separate MRC locations and three suburban Legal Aid offices. In all, there were eight family law clinics, six immigration law clinics and two generalist civil law clinics.
- Administrative data (CASES) indicates that, in total, 2182 assistances were provided to clients in the first formal year of the SSI Partnership. These assistances comprise 2.5 per cent of all advice and minor assistances provided by Legal Aid NSW during this period.
- Around half (51%) of these assistances were for immigration matters, 21 per cent for family law matters and 28 per cent for other civil law matters. Variation in service demand by legal practice area was observed.
- Nearly 70 per cent of all assistances provided through the SSI Partnership were advice and just over 30 per cent were minor assistance. Interestingly, the proportion of assistance provided as minor assistance was lower under the SSI Partnership than in Legal Aid offices and particularly compared to other outreach services. This may in part reflect the areas of law dealt with (51% immigration) and the options available (or not) to address clients' legal problems.
- In around one-third (32%) of SSI Partnership matters, clients received *more* than one advice or minor assistance, significantly more than the 26 per cent of other outreach matters and slightly more than the 29 per cent of Legal Aid office matters.

- Snapshot data (collected by solicitors for a one-month period) gives more detail about the types of legal assistance provided. It illustrates that all clients (in that period) received verbal or written information and/or procedural advice. Minor assistance included solicitors undertaking further research or enquiries for clients, drafting letters, assisting clients to complete applications for legal aid and assistance with other (non-legal aid) forms. More than half the clients received at least one onward referral.
- CASES data indicate that clinic solicitors referred clients to other government departments (in 20% of assistances), other Legal Aid NSW services (11%), and other lawyers (6%) or courts (5%). However in nearly half of all assistances (48%), an onward referral was not considered necessary.

Clients assisted

- CASES data provide compelling evidence of the SSI Partnership as an effective pathway to clients from diverse cultural backgrounds, including those newly and recently arrived in Australia.
- The vast majority (88%) of assistances provided through the SSI Partnership were to clients born in non-English speaking countries, compared to 17 per cent of other outreach assistances and 24 per cent of assistances provided in Legal Aid offices. SSI Partnership assistances accounted for one in 10 (10%) of all Legal Aid NSW assistances during the first year of the SSI Partnership, to people born in non-English speaking countries.
- SSI Partnership assistances were only 2.5 per cent of all Legal Aid NSW assistances in the project year, but they comprised more than one in five (21%) of all assistances provided to people who had been in Australia for one or two years.
- The average (median) number of years that clients had been in Australia was significantly less for SSI Partnership assistances (seven years) than for other outreach (18 years) or Legal Aid offices (17 years).
- Twenty per cent of SSI Partnership assistances were to clients born in Iraq, 12 per cent to Vietnamese-born clients, 5 per cent to clients born in Lebanon and nearly 4 per cent to Iranian-born clients. With clients from over 100 countries, only 10 per cent of assistances were to people born in Australia.

Community legal education

- CLE is a key element of the outreach program, not only to impart legal information but as a means of building the awareness and trust needed among MRC workers and clients to support effective outreach.
- Of 49 separate formal CLE events recorded at SSI Partnership organisations during the first formal year of the SSI Partnership, 30 covered family law issues and 19 covered civil law issues (including immigration).
- Around half of the CLE was directed to caseworkers or other professionals and half to community members (with a small number identified as targeting both). This is in addition to 'informal' CLE that occurred through the ongoing relationships between outreach lawyers and MRC client services staff.

Referrals to the clinics

- CASES data indicate that assistances provided through the SSI Partnership successfully reached new client groups. For instance, in 73 per cent of matters dealt with at Legal Aid offices, clients 'already knew about Legal Aid NSW' and therefore self-referred. By comparison, in significantly fewer matters (38%) dealt with at SSI partnership outreach clinics (and 36% of matters in other outreach clinics) the clients already knew about Legal Aid.
- The proportion of SSI Partnership matters in which the client was referred by a community organisation (31%) or by family and friends (7%), was significantly higher than matters dealt with in other outreach services or in Legal Aid offices.
- In the one-month snapshot period, solicitors recorded that in 65 consultations (42%), clients 'found out about the clinic' through an MRC worker or program; while a further 38 consultations (25%) were with repeat clients. In another 33 consultations (21%), clients were referred by

another agency/professional or a family member or friend. Only three people (2%) already knew about Legal Aid NSW. The high rate of referral from MRC workers, other agencies and family and friends, together with the feedback from solicitors and MRC staff, suggests that the clinics are becoming embedded in networks which support the target client group.

Impact of extending immigration services

- Legal Aid NSW's specialist immigration solicitors were previously based only at Legal Aid NSW's head office in the Sydney Central Business District. Under the SSI Partnership, immigration advice services were also provided at the Fairfield, Bankstown and Liverpool Legal Aid offices and at Liverpool MRC, SydWest MS and Auburn Diversity Services. The aim was to improve access to immigration law services among CALD communities, many of whom live in South West and Western Sydney.
- The roll-out of immigration outreach clinics represented an increase in the overall number of immigration assistances, rather than the replacement of immigration assistance in the city with assistance in the outreach locations. Overall there was a 65 per cent increase in immigration assistances from the six months prior to the immigration clinics commencing to the same period a year later.
- During this same period, there was a modest increase in the number and proportion of immigration assistances to clients born outside Australia and in non-English speaking background NESB countries. While there was an increase in the *number* of assistances of clients who were newly arrived (within the last two years), the proportion of all immigration assistances to this client group dropped from 40 per cent to 36 per cent. Factors which may have contributed to this (some beyond the program) are discussed in the results section.
- Most noticeably there were very considerable increases in assistances to clients residing in Liverpool, Bankstown, Rockdale, Holroyd, Canterbury, Penrith and Fairfield. This both reflects the locations of the SSI Partnership outreach services and suggests the appropriate targeting of services to CALD clients residing in South West and Western Sydney. Also noted was a significant increase in assistances to women, when comparing the period before the clinics commenced to the last six months of the reporting period.

The Legal Aid NSW and SSI 'partnership model'

Key features of the SSI Partnership

- Assessed against the six elements of the Partnership Assessment Tool, the SSI Partnership was found to have established a solid foundation for effective partnering and collaborative working.
- Interviews with Legal Aid NSW and SSI senior managers, as well as MRC and Legal Aid NSW program managers, revealed a mutual commitment to the SSI Partnership and recognition of the value and benefits of partnering and collaborating for legal service provision to the target client group.
- The interview and survey material demonstrated a shared view that Legal Aid NSW and SSI were the 'right' partners, and that Legal Aid NSW's outreach legal services were a good fit for the MRCs. The different, yet complementary, expertise and services of the agencies, and their similar values, scale and ethos, supported a shared 'holistic' approach to client services.
- Shared understanding of the scope and purpose of the SSI Partnership was articulated in a MOU between the Parties. The way in which the SSI Partnership was formed, and the composition of the Steering Committee with representatives from Legal Aid NSW, SSI and MRCs, fostered commitment and ownership of the legal outreach services, as well as trust between the Parties and the MRCs. At the frontline, relationships and trust between solicitors and MRC staff were principally forged through the provision of legal outreach and CLE services.
- The strength and depth of the relationship between Legal Aid NSW and MRCs appeared to be better at some locations than others. Explanation of this variation was attributed to two factors. First, a 'virtuous circle' wherein stronger relationships result in higher client referral and service provision, and higher service provision supports stronger relationships and referral. Second, there appear to be additional service challenges in trying to reach clients about issues that are more culturally sensitive, particularly family law matters.

- Features of the SSI Partnership that supported the clarity of purpose, effective partnering and collaborative working included: the baseline needs analysis provided by the consultant report, the circumscribed nature of the NPA funding, the agreed MOU terms and conditions, the peak organisational relationship between SSI and the MRCs, the work of the Steering Committee, and relationships between Legal Aid NSW and MRC staff.
- The MOU, the Steering Committee and a shared commitment to evaluation evidenced the Parties' commitment to monitoring, measuring and learning from the experience of providing outreach legal services under the SSI Partnership.

Benefits of the SSI Partnership

- There was a strong consensus among informants that the benefits of the SSI Partnership for clients, MRCs and Legal Aid NSW, outweighed the costs.
- MRC client services staff informants identified positive differences that partnering in the legal outreach services had made to their work. These included: improved understanding of client legal issues and needs; help to provide clients with appropriate services, advice and referrals to Legal Aid; improved relationships with clients; and the opportunity to follow up with the client and legal advisers.
- MRC CEOs identified benefits that the legal outreach services provided under the SSI Partnership had for funders and government, as well as wider benefits including: improved access and equity for a very disadvantaged group; enhanced knowledge and understanding of the legal system; and increased client ability to contribute productively to the community. MRC CEOs also pointed to what they saw as the cost effectiveness and efficiency of the SSI Partnership arrangements.

Legal assistance service model

- This evaluation indicates that outreach provided under the SSI Partnership conformed with Legal Aid NSW's own *Best Practice Principles for Legal Aid NSW Outreach Services*. These principles suggest: targeted services; reach and engagement with target clients; appropriate services; effective collaboration and 'joined-up' services; effective referral pathways; coordinated legal assistance services; early and timely legal assistance; and suitable administrative arrangements.
- SSI Partnership outreach services addressed four access to justice 'roadblocks': lack of knowledge about the Australian legal system, remedies and services, across all areas of law; fear and misunderstanding of courts, the justice system and legal services; shame and fear associated with having a legal problem, particularly family problems; and lack of financial resources for private legal services.
- A key feature of the legal assistance model was the capacity to reach clients through the location of the outreach services and collaboration with MRCs. Embedding outreach legal assistance with other assistance services targeted to the CALD community and recently arrived migrants, including the suite of settlement services provided to recent humanitarian arrivals, was a defining feature of the model of service. MRCs were an 'ideal' location to reach the target client group, as a well-known and well-frequented 'first port of call' for assistance. MRCs were also a more accessible and comfortable location for seeking and obtaining assistance, and had the necessary infrastructure and resources to be a suitable host location for legal outreach.
- Analyses indicated that MRC staff contributed to the accessibility and cultural appropriateness of the legal assistance service model. They often played a key role in supporting vulnerable clients before, during and after legal appointments which contributed to the accessibility and cultural appropriateness of the legal outreach services. The range of human services available at MRCs also helps to shortcut identification and referral of legal outreach clients to appropriate non-legal services.
- Consistency of service was identified as an important way to maintain legal outreach 'front of mind' among MRC client services staff who have a pivotal role in spotting and referring clients. Inconsistent client demand and service was a particular challenge experienced by Legal Aid NSW's family practice area.

- Legal outreach under the SSI Partnership was identified as being accessible, and culturally appropriate and appropriate to the legal problems and capability of the client group. Services were tailored to match clients' legal need and capability through the options of information or advice provision, minor assistance and follow-up assistance, as well as referral to non-legal and other more appropriate legal assistance services.
- Collaboration between the Parties facilitated what informants viewed as a culturally appropriate pathway among previously isolated clients with legal need, through MRC client services staff to the legal clinics. The legal clinics then provided a gateway to other Legal Aid NSW services, and other public and private legal services.
- The legal assistance model was also identified as a key early intervention strategy, legal outreach being an earlier and more preventative form of legal service, particularly when MRC staff identify clients who have a legal problem and refer them to the legal outreach service.
- Although there was some variation in administrative arrangements from location to location, arrangements for the legal outreach generally worked well. The biggest frustration experienced by solicitors concerned the use of telephone interpreter services.

Lessons learned from both the SSI Partnership and experience of service delivery concern:

- effective partnering for legal assistance services
- sustaining strong services
- valuing service delivery to hard-to-reach clients.

Underpinning these lessons is the need for ongoing commitment and resourcing. Resources are required not only to provide legal clinics, but to support the collaboration required to sustain relationships and services at outreach locations.

1. Introduction

1.1 Legal assistance partnership between Legal Aid NSW and Settlement Services International Inc.

On 5 March 2013, Legal Aid NSW and Settlement Services International Inc. (SSI) formalised a partnership to provide accessible legal services to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community members experiencing disadvantage and limited access to legal assistance. Under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreed between the Parties, outreach family law and civil law (including specialist immigration) clinics are operated by Legal Aid NSW at eight SSI member organisations, and 10 locations, according to the greatest need and perceived impact upon CALD communities. Legal Aid NSW also provides regular community legal education (CLE) workshops to migrant resource centre (MRC) staff, clients and communities.

Legal Aid NSW is a statewide independent statutory body, which helps people to understand and protect their legal rights, through advice, advocacy, representation and education. Services are prioritised to disadvantaged people and communities.

SSI is a statewide independent not-for-profit organisation supporting refugees, humanitarian entrants and other migrants to fulfil their potential as members of the Australian community. SSI has 11 member organisations that agreed to be represented by SSI for the purposes of the SSI Partnership.[1] The 11 SSI members comprise a number of migrant resource centres and multicultural services (also known as diversity centres or migrant or settlement services). SSI members are independent not-for-profit organisations providing assistance and advice to newly arrived migrants and refugees. For the purposes of this report they are referred to collectively as 'MRCs'.

Legal Aid NSW used funding received under the *National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services* (NPA) (COAG 2010) to establish this project. The NPA was established to support a holistic approach to the reform of legal assistance services, including improving the targeting of services for disadvantaged Australians and the wider community (COAG 2010).

Under the SSI Partnership, Legal Aid NSW provides legal assistance (information, advice, minor assistance), referral and community legal education (CLE). These services are targeted and tailored to the needs of MRC clients, including recently arrived migrants, who are frequent users of MRC or settlement services. The SSI Partnership terms and conditions were formally agreed between the Parties in the form of an MOU, after seed money was used to conduct a baseline needs analysis. The SSI Partnership takes family, immigration and other civil law outreach services to target communities across the greater Sydney area, Illawarra and Newcastle through the MRC network.

The MOU was agreed to formalise financial, administrative and procedural arrangements, promote more effective cooperation and coordination, and facilitate improved client service delivery. The MOU sets out the agreed responsibilities of each Party concerning:

- the provision of legal assistance services
- responsibility for booking appointments and interpreters
- the rate of payment to cover family and civil law clinic expenses
- insurance and occupational health and safety issues
- other terms and conditions.

1 The 11 member organisations of SSI are Auburn Diversity Services, Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, Hills Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre, Illawarra Multicultural Services, Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre, Macarthur Diversity Services Initiative, Metro Migrant Resource Centre, Northern Settlement Services, St George Migrant Resource Centre, Sydney Multicultural Community Services, and SydWest Multicultural Services Inc.

In sum, the MOU formalises the Parties' common interest in providing accessible legal assistance services to members of the community from CALD backgrounds. The Parties agreed to evaluate and review the SSI Partnership arrangements at the end of June 2014.

1.2 Evaluation of the project

In October 2013, the Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales (the Foundation) was asked to evaluate the SSI Partnership and the legal assistance services provided.[2] That evaluation is the subject of this report.

The scope of the evaluation, determined in consultation with Legal Aid NSW, has been framed by several considerations:

- a focus on examining the operation of the SSI Partnership and the model of legal assistance, and drawing lessons from the collaboration between Legal Aid NSW, SSI and the MRCs in light of the following:
  - the NPA priority of achieving increased collaboration and cooperation between legal assistance providers and other service providers to ensure clients receive 'joined-up' service provision to address legal and other problems (COAG 2010, Clause 16c).
  - recommendations of the Family Law Council (2012) that highlight the need to enhance cultural competence across the family law system and to improve the access of clients from CALD backgrounds to family law by improved collaboration between migrant service providers and legal assistance services
  - Legal Aid NSW's intent to provide disadvantaged new arrivals, including refugee and humanitarian entrants, improved access to legal assistance services by establishing immigration outreach services in South West and West Sydney.
- a preference to examine the first full year of legal assistance services provided by Legal Aid NSW under the SSI Partnership (i.e. the period 1 March 2013–28 February 2014).
  It was beyond the scope of the current project to collect information from clients and measure the impact of Legal Aid NSW outreach and community legal education (CLE) services on client outcomes. Rather, the report is based on Legal Aid NSW administrative data (extracted by Legal Aid NSW from their CASES and CLEMS databases), interviews with Legal Aid NSW managers and solicitors, and surveys of the CEOs of MRCs (or their nominated delegate) and MRC client services staff (see Section 2, Methodology).

The evaluation is framed around the following key questions:

1. What are the key features of the 'partnership model' of legal assistance services?
2. What advice, minor assistance, referral and CLE services have been provided under the SSI Partnership?
3. What difference does locating immigration outreach clinics at MRCs make to the type of clients assisted and the matters dealt with?
4. What are the benefits and challenges of the SSI Partnership for clients, Legal Aid NSW and MRCs?
5. What has been learned from the experience of providing outreach clinics to MRCs in terms of:
   - the administration and practical implementation of this type of collaboration
   - the particular legal needs and the provision of legal assistance to these communities
   - the difference providing outreach clinics for MRCs' clients makes to their access to legal assistance services
   - the role of CLE in facilitating access to legal assistance and building capacity among MRC client services staff.

2 The Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales is an independent statutory body established to improve access to justice in NSW, particularly for socially and economically disadvantaged people. Since 2012, the Foundation and Legal Aid NSW have had a research alliance. To date, the Foundation has completed a number of evaluations and reviews of Legal Aid NSW services under this alliance (Forell & Cain 2012; Forell, Ramsey, McDonald & Williams 2013; Forell, McDonald, Ramsey & Williams 2013).

This evaluation report is structured as follows:

Section 1: Introduction—looks at the background of the legal assistance partnership between Legal Aid NSW and Settlement Services International Inc.

Section 2: Methodology—looks at the qualitative and quantitative data used in the evaluation.

Section 3: Literature and context—looks at the literature relating to justice and legal needs.

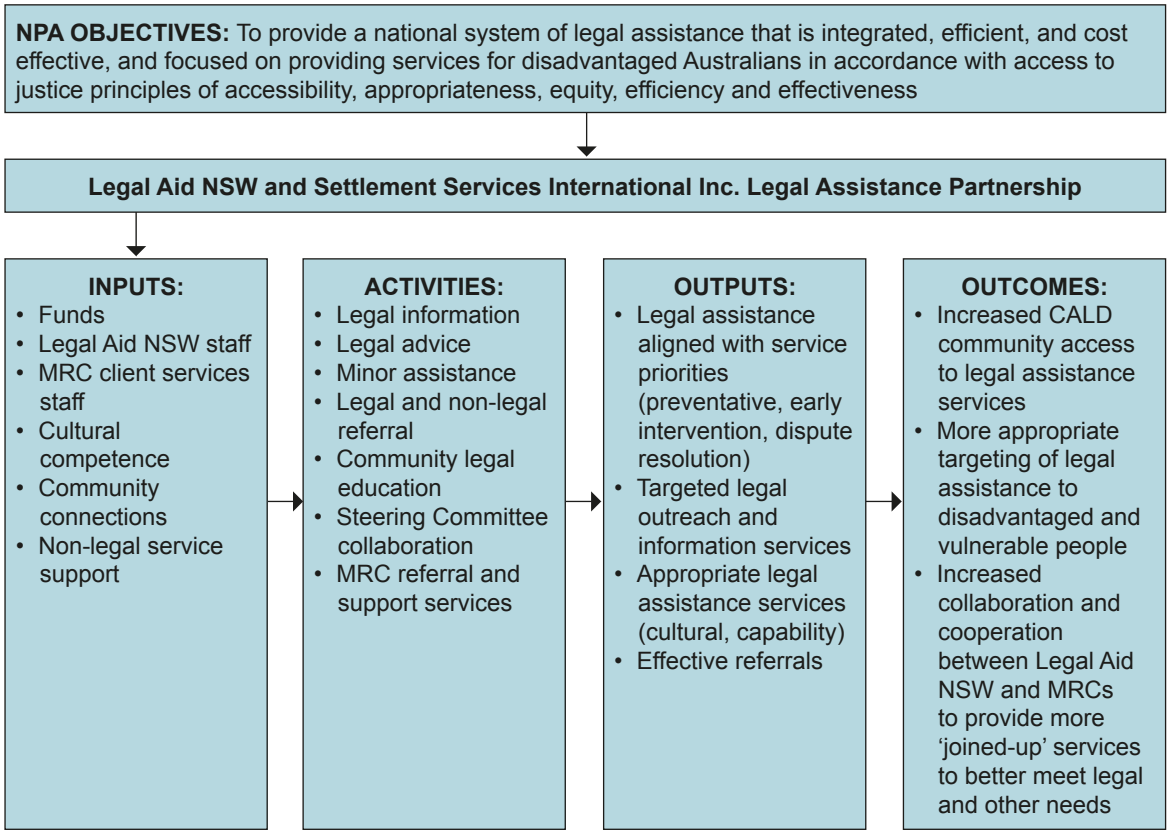
Section 4: Results—looks at the services provided and clients assisted under the SSI Partnership, the key features of the SSI Partnership, and the key features of the legal assistance service model.

Section 5: Discussion and conclusion—looks at project outcomes and service delivery.

1.3 SSI Partnership program logic

Figure 1 depicts the inputs, activities, outputs and desired outcomes of the SSI Partnership, and indicates how they link to the broader policy objectives of the NPA. The program logic has shaped the evaluation of this project. If the SSI Partnership has produced outputs and outcomes identified in Figure 1, then the activities undertaken by Legal Aid NSW, SSI and the MRCs can be described as having contributed to achievement of NPA objectives.

Figure 1: Program logic



2. Methodology

2.1 Data sources and analyses

This evaluation is based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative data obtained from Legal Aid NSW, SSI and MRC executive management, and Legal Aid NSW and MRC frontline service providers, together with administrative data and other documentary material supplied by Legal Aid NSW.

An overview of the quantitative and qualitative data sources follows.

Legal Aid NSW administrative data: CASES

Legal Aid NSW provided the Foundation with de-identified unit record data from its administrative data system (CASES) for all advice and minor assistance provided by the civil and family practice areas in the period 1 January 2012–28 February 2014. These data represent the year prior to and the first 12 months following the formal launch of the SSI Partnership. Of note, several of the outreach clinics commenced operation in late 2012 and prior to the formal commencement of the SSI Partnership.

Fields extracted from CASES included:

- month and year of matter
- unique matter ID
- unique person ID (de-identified)
- assistance type (advice or minor assistance)
- demographic information (e.g. gender, age, country of birth, year of arrival in Australia, Indigenous status, employment and benefit status, residential postcode)
- matter description, group and type and service location (geographical and location type)
- service provider and business unit
- referral information (to and from Legal Aid NSW).

CASES data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 19 and Excel.

Measuring service delivery—what is counted in CASES?

The unit of measure used by Legal Aid NSW in its official reporting, and counted in this report, is '*an assistance*'. For each matter (or legal problem) that a client presents to Legal Aid NSW with, they may be provided with one or more assistances.

Two broad categories of assistance are included:

- advice (advice specific to the client's legal issue)
- minor assistance (such as the solicitor drafting a letter, negotiating with other parties or providing a warm referral).

Thus, for any one matter a client may, for instance, be provided with an advice, have a letter drafted and receive a warm referral to another service. This would be counted as three assistances—one advice and two minor assistances—for that matter. An exception is that referrals to and from Legal Aid NSW are recorded per matter, and not per assistance.

Further, each separate assistance is not necessarily a discrete client appointment or consultation. A client may be provided with more than one assistance during a single appointment, and may be provided with multiple assistances for the same matter in consecutive appointments.

Legal Aid NSW administrative data: CLEMS

Data were extracted from the Community Legal Education Management (CLEMs) database, for CLE conducted from 1 March 2013–28 February 2014. While there were changes to the fields available during the trial period, information provided included: date of CLE, venue location (geographical and type), law type, estimated or actual audience size, and audience type. Legal Aid NSW also provided information on requests for CLE. Data were cleaned and analysed using Excel.

The way CLE data are reported in this report differs from the way in which Legal Aid NSW may report these data. Due to differing reporting requirements for different funders, Legal Aid NSW separately identifies CLE for different types of law and funding streams (state and Commonwealth). In this report we count one session at one location only once, even if the CLE covers several types of law and/or state or Commonwealth issues.

Snapshot data (additional data collection)

To collect further information about the clients attending the outreach services and the assistance and referral services provided, a data collection sheet (Appendix A1) was developed in consultation with Legal Aid NSW managers and solicitors providing outreach to MRCs. The additional 'snapshot' information supplements the CASES data.

During the four-week period, Monday 24 February–Friday 21 March 2014, Legal Aid NSW outreach solicitors completed one snapshot data sheet for each SSI outreach client assisted. However, no data was collected at two clinics: the family law clinic at Illawarra MRC, which was not active in the snapshot month; and the civil law clinic at Cabramatta Community Centre (Fairfield MRC). The Cabramatta civil law clinic has been run by a solicitor at Fairfield Legal Aid office for 20 years and was not formally part of the SSI project. As such, it was not included in the snapshot data collection. CASES data from this clinic *is* reported, as it is a service provided at a relevant MRC.

During the snapshot period, 154 data collection sheets were completed. This information was entered into SurveyMonkey[3] and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 19 and Excel. To ensure accuracy of data entry, half of the data collection sheets were crosschecked by Foundation researchers with the SurveyMonkey records.

MRC CEO and client services surveys

Foundation researchers conducted two online surveys hosted by SurveyMonkey to obtain information from MRCs about the operation and experience of Legal Aid NSW's outreach clinics and CLE. Online surveys have the benefit of allowing respondents to complete the questionnaire at a convenient time and streamlines data entry and analyses. Two separate questionnaires were developed to survey MRCs. Each questionnaire was first piloted with the assistance of staff from Metro Migrant Resource Centre (Metro MRC) before being distributed.

One questionnaire was developed for the Chief Executive Officer/Executive Officer/Director, or a nominated delegate, of the eight MRCs receiving legal assistance services under the SSI Partnership (CEO Survey; see Appendix A2). In total, the CEO Survey was completed by seven MRCs (a response rate of 87.5%). The relatively high response rate and broad cross-section of respondents from all but one of the MRCs indicates that the information obtained is broadly representative of the views of MRC CEOs.

A second questionnaire was developed for MRC caseworkers and other client services staff as nominated by the MRC CEO or a contact staff member to receive an invitation to participate (MRC Client Services Survey; see Appendix A3). The MRC Client Services Survey was distributed to 40 MRC staff members across seven MRCs. In total, the survey was completed by 13 staff members from four MRCs (a response rate of 32.5%). It should be noted that over 80 per cent of respondents were from only two MRCs. As such, the information obtained from the MRC Client Services Survey should be treated with some caution as it is neither representative of the views of all client services staff, nor all staff across all MRCs. The information obtained does, however, provide valuable qualitative insight concerning the experiences and views of some client services

3 SurveyMonkey is a web-based company that provides tools to administer online surveys (see www.surveymonkey.com).

staff who were invited and interested enough to contribute. Given these limitations, the MRC Client Services Survey is used primarily to describe a selection of staff views and experiences.

Both MRC surveys were analysed using SurveyMonkey and Excel.

Key stakeholder interviews

Stakeholder interviews were undertaken by Foundation researchers with Legal Aid NSW and SSI managers, SSI Partnership Steering Committee members, Legal Aid NSW managers, all immigration outreach solicitors, and a selection of civil and family law outreach solicitors involved in the SSI Partnership. Of note, because outreach solicitors typically provide services at more than location, they have a vantage point from which to observe how various factors may affect the operation of different clinics.

A total of 15 interviews were conducted with 33 separate people. Key themes in the interviews were analysed qualitatively using Nvivo.

Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data

The collected information and data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. In data analyses we use the word 'significant' to indicate findings that are statistically significant. While the interviews are not used to quantify SSI Partnership outcomes, they provide rich context and qualitative meaning to the quantitative analyses of the CASES, CLEMS and snapshot data. Together, the collected information and data provides insight into the work and impact of legal assistance services provided under the SSI Partnership, and a vital base from which to establish an ongoing monitoring framework.

3. Literature and context

The role of Legal Aid NSW is to help people to understand and protect their legal rights, through advice, advocacy, representation and education, with services prioritised to disadvantaged people and communities (Legal Aid NSW 2013). The Australian Government, largely through settlement services, supports the 'smooth and effective settlement' and social integration of newly arrived migrants to Australia (Pakulski 2014, p. 25). Pakulski and Markowski (2014, p. 8) argued that the most recent wave of migrants face a more difficult settlement process and pose new challenges arising from:

> ... a mass inflow of immigrants and refugees coming not only from crisis-ravaged parts of Europe, but also—and increasingly—from East and South East Asia (including Afghanistan), from the war-ravaged Middle East, and from the destabilised parts of Africa. Like many recent non-European migrants to Europe, these new 'New Australians' face a much more difficult adaptation, partly because of their relatively low social resources (skills, knowledge, networks), partly because of wider religious differences and 'cultural distance' from the host society, partly because of rising competition for jobs, and partly because of mounting security concerns and the negative stereotyping of 'illegal' immigrants.

Thus, settlement services and public legal assistance services share a common client group. Further, legal services can support the effective settlement of disadvantaged migrants by facilitating understanding of and access to justice institutions.

The challenges of settlement identified by Pakulski and Markowski (2014) are striking in their similarity to many of the policy and service challenges associated with affording access to justice to disadvantaged groups in Australia (Coumarelos, Marcourt, People, McDonald, Wei, Iriana & Ramsey 2012a; Pleasence, Coumarelos, Forell & McDonald 2014). 'Cultural distance' and the limited personal resources and capability of many recently arrived humanitarian and other migrant arrivals are among those challenges. Making services accessible to such clients is key.

Table 1 reports an extraction of data indicating the 10 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in New South Wales where the highest number of humanitarian settlers reside. LGAs which also host a

Table 1: Humanitarian settlers (NSW) by top 10 Local Government Authorities, 2009–14

LGA	*Humanitarian settlers*	*% of all humanitarian settlers in NSW*
Fairfield	5131	23.1%
Liverpool	2895	13.0%
Blacktown	2029	9.1%
Auburn	2016	9.1%
Parramatta	1578	7.1%
Holroyd	1115	5.0%
Canterbury	1019	4.6%
Wollongong	871	3.9%
Bankstown	636	2.9%
Coffs Harbour	611	2.7%
Rest of NSW	4345	20%
Total	**22246**	**100%**

Source: Extracted from *Settlers by LGA of residence (Name) by Migration Stream* 1 Jan. 2009–1 Jan. 2014 Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014.

Note: Bold text indicates LGAs in which Legal Aid NSW provides outreach legal services under the SSI Partnership.

Legal Aid NSW outreach service provided under the SSI Partnership are shown in bold. Table 1 indicates SSI outreach services which are located close to high proportions of recent humanitarian settlers in New South Wales. In total, seven of the 10 MRC locations and all of the Legal Aid NSW offices where SSI Partnership outreach services are located, are provided in these LGAs.

3.1 Access to justice and legal needs

Ignorance about legal rights and resolution among migrant and non-English speaking groups has long been recognised as exacerbating legal problems and needs (Australian Law Reform Commission 1992; Cass & Sackville 1975). Strategies to increase the accessibility of legal information and assistance services among groups that may not be reached by more general or mainstream services, such as through outreach services, were recommended by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department Access to Justice Taskforce (2009).

Findings from the recent Law Australia-Wide (LAW) Survey demonstrate considerable diversity, according to demographic status, in the experience, handling and resolution of legal problems (Coumarelos et al. 2012a). As a consequence, the value of tailoring legal services to the legal needs and capability of different demographic groups has been highlighted (Coumarelos et al. 2012a; Pleasence et al. 2014). Coumarelos et al. (2012a, p. 229) concluded that 'disadvantaged groups may often require more intensive, integrated assistance and support to achieve legal resolution.'

One disadvantaged group identified from LAW Survey findings as potentially benefiting from legal assistance targeted and tailored to their needs was people with a non-English main language (Coumarelos et al. 2012a; People 2013). In most Australian jurisdictions, including New South Wales, the LAW Survey demonstrated that people with a non-English main language had significantly higher levels of inaction for their legal problems than other people (Coumarelos et al. 2012b). In New South Wales, people with a non-English main language were also found to have significantly lower levels of finalisation for their legal problems.[4] LAW Survey respondents who speak only non-English languages have also been found to have lower awareness of public legal services such as Legal Aid and community legal centres than those who speak English, while those with a non-English main language have been shown to be more likely to take no action for legal problems because they thought it would be too stressful to try and resolve the problem compared to people with an English main language (McDonald & People 2014; People 2013).

Coumarelos et al. (2012b) also pointed to the potential benefits of initiatives to increase legal capability among non-English speaking people in NSW and of empowering them to obtain legal assistance when they need it.

Other studies in NSW have variously identified access to justice barriers experience by people from CALD backgrounds, non-English speaking backgrounds, and migrant and refugee women (Pe-Pua & Echevarria 1998; Schetzer & Henderson 2003; Women's Legal Service NSW 2007). Although different ethnic groups are likely to have different needs according to the country they have come from, common access to justice barriers identified in these studies include:

- lack of English language skills and literacy
- lack of knowledge of the legal system, legal rights and how to access legal help
- fear and mistrust of authority and the Australian legal system
- stigma attached to seeking 'outside' help
- the perceived cost of legal services and a lack of personal financial resources
- lack of effective referral between migrant and legal services
- problems with a lack of documentation
- the absence of a coordinated approach in access strategies (Pe-Pua & Echevarria 1998; Schetzer & Henderson 2003; Women's Legal Service NSW 2007).

In February 2012, the Family Law Council of Australia (FLC) published a report (FLC 2012) in which they found that the family law system was not systematically meeting the needs of people

4 The LAW Survey findings were consistent with past studies in NSW, Canada and England and Wales that have also found low levels of taking action or seeking advice amongst ethnic minority groups (Coumarelos et al. 2012b; Currie 2007; Fishwick 1992; Pleasence 2006; Pleasence et al. 2004).

from CALD communities. A range of personal and systemic factors impeding the ability of people from CALD backgrounds to access the family law system were identified, including:

- lack of knowledge about the law and a lack of awareness of available services
- language and literacy barriers
- cultural and religious barriers that inhibit help-seeking outside the community
- negative perceptions of the courts and family relationships services
- social isolation
- lack of collaboration between migrant services and the family law system
- fear of government agencies
- visa dependency
- lack of culturally responsive services and bicultural personnel
- legislative factors
- cost and resource issues.

These barriers present particular challenges to legal service providers seeking to support these client groups. The FLC (2012) identified a need for legal information programs tailored to specific communities as well as greater integration, information sharing and collaboration between service providers in the family law and migrant settlement services sectors. Partnerships between legal and migrant services were further identified as a beneficial strategy for

- facilitating access to local communities
- building trust between service providers and the CALD community
- overcoming cultural barriers that inhibit legal help-seeking.

FLC consultations with MRCs revealed a strong desire for greater collaboration with legal service providers.

Recent evaluation of another agency's migrant outreach legal service found that settlement services caseworkers played an important role in assisting clients to resolve their legal problems, with most clients (74%) having been referred to the outreach service by caseworkers, and caseworkers helping legal services to overcome barriers to working with newly arrived migrants (Justice Connect 2014).

Outreach legal services

Outreach is a service model for 'bridging' the access to justice gap for disadvantaged groups who have high levels of unmet legal needs and poor capability for addressing those needs by accessing mainstream legal assistance (Forell, Ramsey et al. 2013; Forell, McDonald et al. 2013). It is a tool of providing targeted, timely, integrated and appropriate legal services to efficiently meet the needs of socially or economically isolated and/or disadvantaged communities (Pleasence et al. 2014).

Legal outreach services targeting the particular needs of a specific demographic group, such as migrant communities likely to be experiencing certain legal problems, call for the design of culturally sensitive and appropriate services. The Commonwealth Attorney-General's Access to Justice Taskforce (2009) noted that outreach targeted to CALD communities can help them to learn about Australian law, their rights and the legal pathways that are available to them. Targeted outreach allows information to be provided in appropriate languages and ways that are sensitive and responsive to the particular needs of people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Commonwealth Attorney-General's Access to Justice Taskforce 2009; FLC 2012).

Effective legal outreach services are planned and targeted to meet the legal need and capability of priority clients. Needs analyses and pre-planning is vital to appropriately inform and establish new legal outreach initiatives (Long & Beveridge, 2004, p. 69; Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014).

Pleasence et al. (2014, pp. 64–65) suggested the first step in planning a new legal outreach service is to identify the:

> particular legal needs of the client group, their level and type of disadvantage and social exclusion, their legal capability and other competencies, their cultural influences and the existing barriers they face to accessing legal assistance will ideally influence the legal outreach model that is established and its location.

Other steps identified by Pleasence et al. (2014, p. 66) for planning effective legal outreach services are summarised in Figure 2.

The particular legal needs and capabilities of the target client group may affect the appropriateness and effectiveness of the service location, mode and form (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014).

Building trust and rapport is central for legal outreach services that successfully engage hard-to-reach socially disadvantaged and isolated client groups (Forell & Gray 2009; Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014; Porteous 2012). One way to shortcut the effort required to build awareness, trust and rapport with target clients is for legal services to partner with organisations that are already linked with, trusted and used by the target client group (Pleasence et al. 2014).

The right partner or host agency can not only facilitate promotion, accessibility and client trust, but can also help to establish an appropriate cultural fit and effective referral pathways (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013). For example, Forell and Gray (2009, p. 10) found that the 'best sources of referrals are sources who are already trusted by the client group, such as case workers, community members or friends.' While non-legal human services can play a vital role in connecting people with legal assistance services, they are not necessarily well equipped to act as gateways and may require training and support to effectively fulfil this role (Clarke & Forell 2007; Coumarelos et al. 2012a).

In-person outreach, involving face-to-face service provision, has been the main and traditional model for delivering legal outreach (Pleasence et al. 2014). Other modes of service, such as telephone or information technology-based outreach may not be accessible or culturally appropriate for some client groups (Forell & Gray 2009; Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014). Direct engagement with clients may not only be preferred, but will sometimes be necessary to adequately address the access barriers experienced by some communities (Access to Justice Taskforce 2009).

The legal needs and capability of the target client group also affects the appropriateness of the form of legal assistance. For instance, many disadvantaged clients with limited capability may lack the personal skills and resources to successfully action legal information and advice to resolve their legal problems (Pleasence et al. 2014). More intensive forms of service, such as multiple advice appointments, provision of minor assistance and follow-up assistance may be required (Coumarelos et al. 2012a; Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al 2014). Legal resolution may also depend upon clients having access to non-legal support services to help meet concomitant non-legal needs (Coumarelos et al. 2012a; Pleasence 2006; Pleasence et al. 2014).

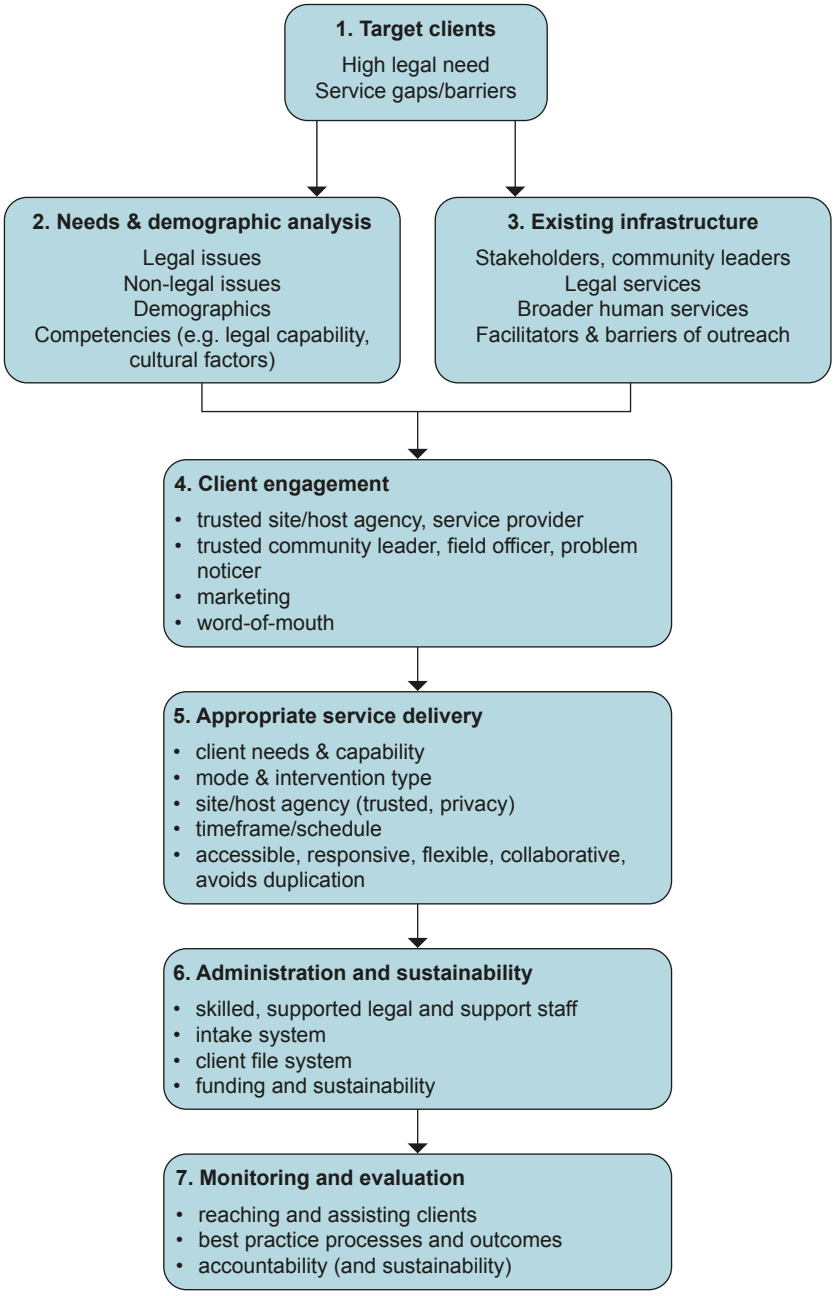
While legal outreach is a key strategy for public legal services targeted to socially disadvantaged and excluded groups, the key service challenge is how to implement them in an effective and affordable way (Long & Beveridge 2004; Pleasence et al. 2014). For instance, legal outreach should be sufficiently staffed and resourced to maintain effective collaboration with host agencies and other services that comprise key client referral pathways (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014).

Targeted and appropriate legal services

Disadvantaged groups often have legal and other needs that exacerbate barriers to justice, as well as personal circumstances that compromise their ability to deal effectively with legal and other problems as they arise (Coumarelos et al. 2012a; Pleasence et al. 2014). Having a range of service options available (information, advice, minor assistance and referral) enables solicitors to triage and tailor services in response to the needs and capability of different clients (Pleasence et al. 2014).

Pleasence et al. (2014) found that carefully designed and implemented legal outreach services can have considerable benefits and provide positive outcomes for disadvantaged clients who might otherwise have only limited or no access to justice.

Figure 2: Planning a legal outreach service



Source: Pleasence et al. (2014), Figure 3.1, p. 66.

Outreach as early intervention and timely assistance

Clients with limited legal capability tend not to seek legal assistance at an early stage because they are either unaware that they have a problem that may have a potential legal solution or are unaware of options to obtain legal assistance (Coumarelos et al. 2013; Genn & Paterson 2001). Consequently, they may only seek legal assistance when problems have escalated (Coumarelos et al. 2012a; Pleasence 2006). Outreach services are one early intervention and prevention strategy employed by legal service providers to target services to groups with heightened legal need (Pleasence et al. 2014).

Because the vulnerability to legal problems varies over time, key points of transition in people's lives provide markers for early intervention and prevention strategies. Migration to and settlement

in Australia, is one key point of transition where people may have heightened vulnerability to legal needs (FLC 2012).

Research also points to the utility of different legal assistance strategies that 'dovetail' to better meet clients' needs in a timely fashion (Pleasence et al. 2014). For instance, the impact of legal outreach and CLE may be greater than the sum of their individual parts. CLE is identified as a vital strategy to support legal outreach, particularly when targeted to partners, host agencies and other human services. CLE may help to build legal problem identification and referral pathways and raise awareness of how outreach services can benefit recipients (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014).

Critically, by reaching clients who may otherwise have left problems unaddressed or only have sought assistance once issues escalated to crisis point, legal outreach potentially provides earlier and more timely intervention (Forell & Gray 2009; Pleasence et al. 2014).

Sustainable outreach services

Outreach sustainability is compromised by failure to successfully engage the target client group, and manage relationships with partners, host agencies and stakeholders (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013). Client-intake and appointment arrangements appropriate for the target client group provide a foundation for effective outreach (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014). Host agency staff play a pivotal role in the operation of outreach services, and often need recurrent training and support (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013). Consequently, staff turnover can erode service consistency, engagement and trust. Pleasence et al. (2014) noted that:

> If you're building … community relationships, it's with a person, it's not with a service. If you have constant turnover of staff, you lose relationships and you have to rebuild them up all over again … (Public service lawyer)

Establishing and maintaining good engagement with the client group, host agency and other stakeholders is therefore an ongoing challenge to effective legal outreach (Forell & Gray 2009; Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014).

Forming partnerships

Good collaboration between legal and non-legal services is often central to effective legal outreach (Dewson, Davis & Casebourne 2006; Forell & Gray 2009; Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014; Porteous 2012). Pleasence et al. (2014, p. 63) point to the following benefits of collaboration for legal service providers, host agencies and clients:

> the legal outreach provider can benefit from the use of the host agencies facilities, local community knowledge and networks; the host agency can benefit from an increased capacity to offer clients a wider range of services; and clients can benefit from the provision of legal assistance in an accessible, familiar and trusted site, and from more holistic service delivery and referral.

Because most legal outreach involves some form of collaborating or 'joining-up' with service partners or host agencies, outreach services face particular challenges associated with effective collaboration (Pleasence et al. 2014). In fact, effective partnerships and collaborative working is far from straightforward. Collaboration can be such a resource-consuming activity that it should only 'be considered where the stakes are really worth pursuing' (Huxham & Vangen 2003, p. 13).

A recent report prepared for the NSW Public Service Commission similarly noted that collaboration can be costly and difficult. It indicated that collaboration should only occur if it will achieve different and better results—such as, increased service effectiveness, cost effectiveness, community trust and engagement, and reduced risk etc.—than could be achieved without collaborating (Nous Group 2013).

Services can be 'joined-up' in a variety of forms, with varying partners and to a range of degrees (Nous Group 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014). One basis upon which to collaborate is where organisations have an interest in providing beneficial services to a shared client group (Pleasence et al. 2014).

Features found to support and enable good collaboration and service integration include CEO support; appropriate governance; skilled convenors; partner selection; shared vision; mutual trust, honesty and reliability; mutual interdependence; appropriate power distribution; effective leadership and communication; stakeholder inclusion; sufficient investment; and mechanisms that support learning (Huxham & Vangen 2005; Noone & Digney 2010; Nous Group 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014).

It is important that agencies collaborate with the right partner and that there is a good fit between the resources the parties contribute, the model of integration adopted and the intended outcomes to be achieved (Nous Group 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014). For example, Pleasence et al. (2014) noted that it may be more effective and more efficient for legal services to seek to partner and collaborate with organisations that accept the benefits of collaboration and are already joined-up or integrated in terms of service provision.

Conversely, factors that contribute to poor collaboration include:

- geographical distance
- personal agendas and egos
- cultural differences
- politicking and poor managerial relationships
- power asymmetry
- inadequate accountability and responsibility arrangements
- insufficient investment and commitment (Nous Group 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014).

Collaboration between legal and other human services could face particular challenges stemming from conflict arising from competing interests, responsibilities, ethics and cultures, work practices and administrative arrangements, and lack of resourcing to build and sustain relationships (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014).

A common approach to evaluating partnerships is to ascertain whether or not key 'building blocks' that form the basis for effective collaborative practice or successful partnerships are in place (Hardy et al. 2003; Nous Group 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014). For example, in the United Kingdom the Partnership Assessment Tool examines partners' recognition of:

- the need for the partnership
- clarity and realism of purpose
- commitment and ownership
- development and maintenance of trust
- clarity and robustness of partnership arrangements
- monitoring, measurement and learning (Hardy et al. 2003).

4. Results

The quantitative and qualitative material collected for this evaluation is analysed and reported in this Results section. To facilitative the analyses, key features of the SSI Partnership and the model of legal assistance service that it enabled are drawn out separately. The results are presented in the following sections:

4.1 Services provided and clients assisted under the SSI Partnership

4.2 Key features of the SSI Partnership

4.3 Key features of the legal service assistance model.

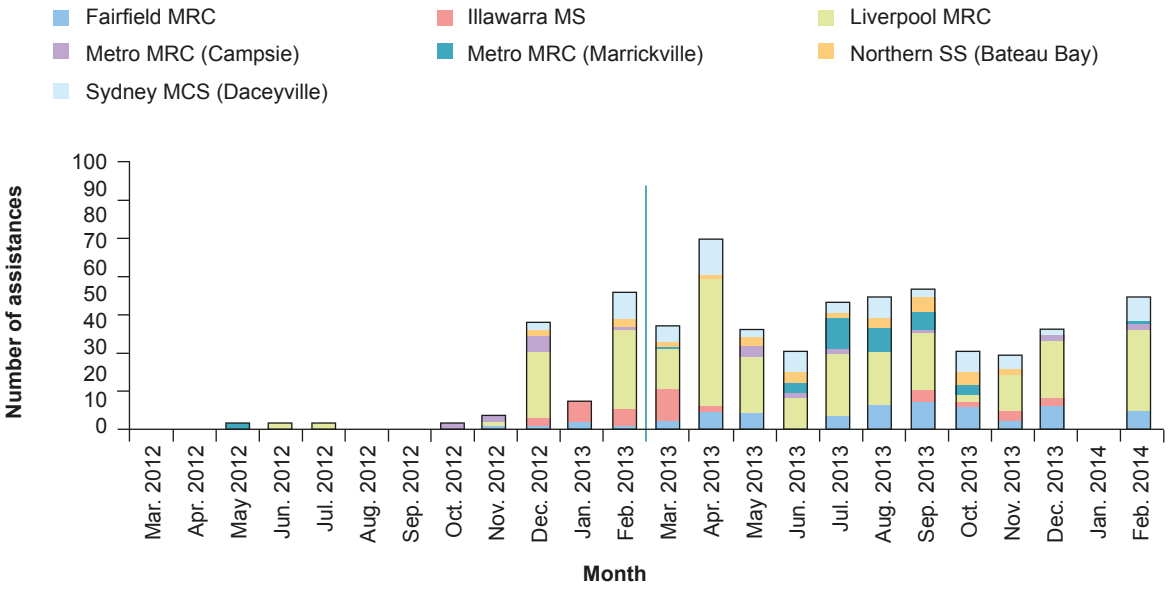
4.1 Services provided and clients assisted under the SSI Partnership

Legal assistance provided under the SSI Partnership

The formal partnership between SSI and Legal Aid NSW was signed in March 2013. However, clinics had commenced at a number of MRCs at various points before this time. Figures 3–5, indicate the monthly number of family law, immigration and other civil law assistances at the partner agencies in the period March 2012–February 2014. These figures indicate when each of the clinics started and the number of assistances provided per month thereafter.

There were a small number of family law assistances provided at MRC locations in mid-2012. Figure 3 indicates family law assistances commencing in numbers from December 2012. An average of 19.0 and 5.4 assistances per month were provided at Liverpool and Sydney (Daceyville) MRCs, respectively in the period 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.

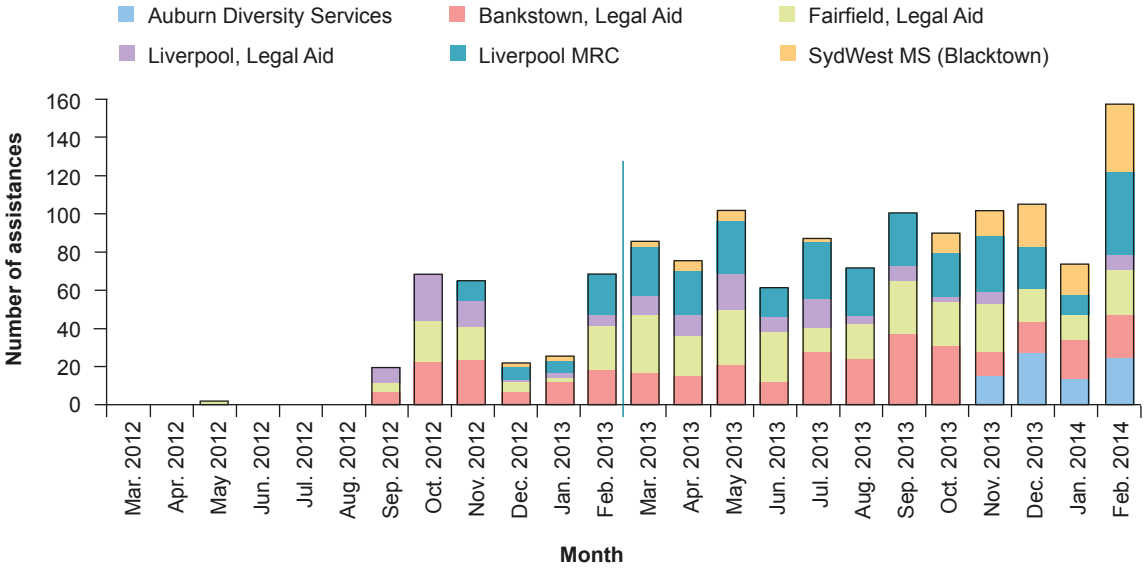
Figure 3: SSI Partnership family law assistances by month and location, Mar. 2012–Feb. 2014



Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI family law assistances only, 1 March 2012–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 575 assistances. One family law assistance, recorded on CASES as being provided at Fairfield MRC's Cabramatta office, is included in the Fairfield MRC assistances. Some family law assistances at Fairfield MRC (Cabramatta) may have been mistakenly recorded as Fairfield MRC (Fairfield).

The immigration clinics commenced in September 2012, before the formal agreement of the SSI Partnership, and, seasonal variation aside, numbers of assistances have remained strong. Figure 4 indicates assistances commencing at SydWest Multicultural Services (Blacktown) and Auburn Diversity Services in late 2013. Liverpool MRC was the busiest immigration law clinic with an average of 25.8 assistances per month, followed by Fairfield, and Bankstown Legal Aid offices with averages of 22.1 and 21.3 assistances per month for the period 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.

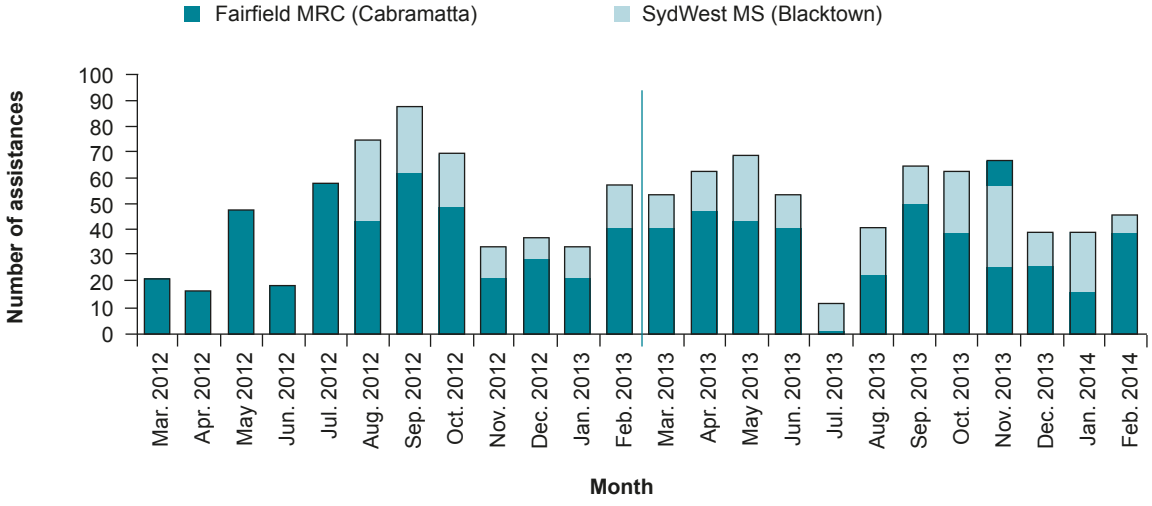
Figure 4: SSI Partnership immigration law assistances by month and location, Mar. 2012–Feb. 2014



Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI family law assistances only, 1 March 2012–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 1367 assistances. 20 assistances provided by the civil law outreach at Cabramatta over the two year period are not included.

Figure 5 indicates other (non-immigration) civil law assistances being provided at Fairfield MRC (Cabramatta) throughout the reporting periods. This clinic has been operated by Fairfield Legal Aid office for around 20 years and, on average, provided 32.8 assistances per month between 1 March 2013 and 28 February 2014. The civil law clinic at SydWest Multicultural Services (Blacktown) commenced in August 2012 and provided an average number of 16.5 assistances per month between 1 March 2013 and 28 February 2014.

Figure 5: SSI Partnership other civil law assistances by month and location, Mar. 2012–Feb. 2014



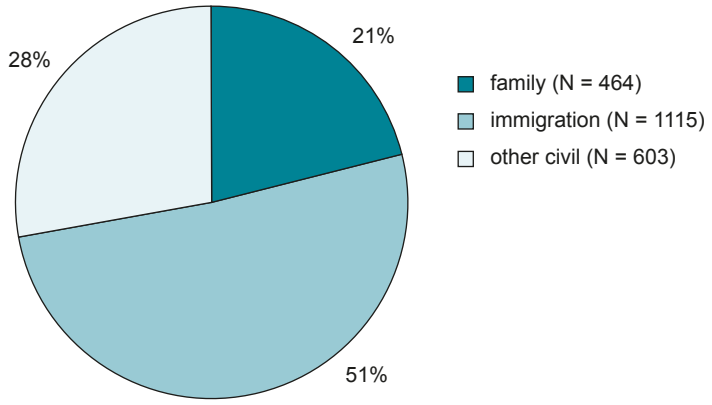
Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI project only, 1 March 2012–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 1142 assistances. A small number of assistances provided at Liverpool MRC (5), Metro MRC (Campsie)(3), and Metro MRC (Marrickville)(4) were not included.

Assistance provided in the first year of the SSI Partnership

Unless otherwise stated, the data below reports activity in the year following the formal commencement of the SSI Partnership (March 2013), when all but two of the clinics were up and running (immigration clinics commenced at SydWest in October 2013 and at Auburn Diversity Services in November 2013). This allows a common period of time to be observed. Other Legal Aid outreach services and Legal Aid 'in office' services provide a point of comparison. For some questions, additional snapshot data (collected by solicitors in February–March 2014) is used to provide more detail. The complete analysis of the snapshot data is provided in Appendix B.

In total 2182 assistances[5] were provided to clients in the first year after the formal launch of the SSI Partnership. These assistances comprise 2.5 per cent of all advice and minor assistances provided by Legal Aid NSW during this period.

Figure 6: Proportion of SSI Partnership assistances, by area of law, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014



Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI Partnership assistances only, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 2182 assistances.

Around half (51.1%) of all SSI Partnership outreach assistances in this period were provided for immigration matters, 21.3 per cent for family law matters and 27.6 per cent for other civil law matters (see Figure 6). Of the 603 'other civil' law assistances, more frequently occurring legal matter types were:

- Consumer (19.6%)
- 'Other' state civil law matters (16.3%)
- Personal injury or accidents (14.8%)
- Employment (12.1%)
- Non-consumer debt (7.0%)
- Housing (5.9%)
- Social security (5.8%).

Assistance by outreach clinic and area of law

Legal Aid clinics were operating at 10 MRC locations (some MRCs operate in two locations) and three suburban Legal Aid offices during the first year following the launch of the SSI Partnership.

The Family Law EIU provided family law clinics at six MRCs in eight locations. Immigration law clinics were set up at three MRCs as well as the Legal Aid offices in Fairfield and Bankstown, along with efforts to build strong referral links with local MRCs. In Liverpool, the clinic was initially held at the Legal Aid office while the clinic at Liverpool MRC was being established. Since November 2012, outreach services have been mainly provided at Liverpool MRC, although some direct referrals to the Liverpool Legal Aid office are also made by Liverpool MRC. A civil law clinic which had been operating at Cabramatta Community Centre (Fairfield MRC, Cabramatta) for 20 years

5 An '*assistance*' is a discrete advice or a minor assistance undertaken by a solicitor on a single legal matter for a client. A client may receive more than one assistance for each legal matter.

continued to operate, and an additional civil law clinic was established at SydWest Multicultural Services in Bankstown.

The areas of law described in Table 2 reflect these arrangements. In reading these figures, be aware that different clinics commenced at different times.

Table 2 indicates that nearly half (49.1 %) of all family law assistance provided as part of the SSI Partnership during the year following the launch of the project was provided at Liverpool MRC, with a further 15 per cent provided at Fairfield MRC (Cabramatta), 14 per cent at Sydney Multicultural Community Service in Daceyville and nine per cent at Metro MRC (Marrickville). A further five per cent of assistances were provided at each of Northern SS (Bateau Bay) and Illawarra Multicultural Services, and three per cent at Metro MRC (Campsie).

Table 2: Number and proportion of SSI Partnership assistances, by location and area of law, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

MRCs/offices	*Family* *N (%)*	*Immigration* *N (%)*	*Other civil* *N (%)*
Auburn Diversity Services*	n/a	82 (7.4%)	n/a
Bankstown, Legal Aid	n/a	255 (22.9%)	n/a
Fairfield MRC (Cabramatta)	1 (0.2%)	12 (1.1%)	394 (65.3%)
Fairfield MRC (Fairfield)	68 (14.7%)	n/a	n/a
Fairfield, Legal Aid	n/a	265 (23.8%)	n/a
Illawarra MS	23 (5%)	n/a	n/a
Liverpool, Legal Aid	n/a	90 (8.1%)	n/a
Liverpool MRC	228 (49.1%)	309 (27.7%)	4 (0.7%)
Metro MRC (Campsie)	15 (3.2%)	n/a	3 (0.5%)
Metro MRC (Marrickville)	40 (8.6%)	n/a	4 (0.7%)
Northern SS (Bateau Bay)	24 (5.2%)	n/a	n/a
Sydney MCS (Daceyville)	65 (14%)	n/a	n/a
SydWest MS (Blacktown)*	n/a	102 (9.1%)	198 (32.8%)
Total	**464 (100%)**	**1115 (100%)**	**603 (100%)**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, partnership assistances only, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: Civil law outreach to Fairfield MRC (Cabramatta) is largely provided by Fairfield LA Office. Immigration outreach for Fairfield MRC is provided at Fairfield and Bankstown Legal Aid offices. Some family law assistances at Fairfield MRC (Cabramatta) may have been mistakenly recorded as Fairfield MRC (Fairfield).
*The immigration law clinics at SydWest MS and Auburn Diversity Services commenced in November 2013.
n/a: not applicable.

Immigration assistances were more evenly distributed across Liverpool MRC (27.7% of immigration assistances), Fairfield Legal Aid office (23.8%), Bankstown Legal Aid office (22.9%), and (noting the later commencement of the other immigration outreach clinics), SydWest Multicultural Services in Blacktown (9.1%) and Auburn Diversity Services (7.4%).

Two-thirds (65.3%) of the other civil law assistances were provided at Fairfield MRC (at Cabramatta Community Centre), the long running outreach clinic provided by Fairfield Legal Aid office. The remaining civil law assistances (32.8%) were provided at SydWest Multicultural Services in Blacktown.

Who was assisted through the SSI Partnership?

The partnership with SSI was established to reach and assist clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly, people newly arrived or recently arrived in Australia. Here we describe the characteristics of clients assisted by Legal Aid NSW through the SSI Partnership.

Age and gender of clients

Overall, a significantly higher proportion of assistances were provided to women through the SSI Partnership (59.2%) than through other outreach (56.3%) or Legal Aid offices (55.5%). Broadly speaking, the pattern of assistances to clients of different ages was similar for SSI Partnership and other outreach and in-office assistances.

However, Table 3 indicates there was variation within the SSI project, with nearly three-quarters (73.7%) of all family law assistances and 60 per cent of immigration assistances provided to women. By contrast, a slightly higher proportion of other civil law assistances were provided to men (53.2%).

The age range of clients also showed some interesting differences. As might be expected, family law assistances were most commonly provided to clients between the ages of 25 and 44 years (59.8%).[6] Immigration assistances showed a similar pattern, but with slightly more assistances to older age groups. Civil law assistances showed a different pattern, with more than 60 per cent (61.4%) of assistances to clients over the age of 45. This may in part reflect the long-term nature of the outreach service to Fairfield MRC (Cabramatta).

Table 3: Proportion of SSI Partnership assistances by age, gender and area of law, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

	Family	*Immigration*	*Other civil*
Gender	***N = 464***	***N = 1089***	***N = 602***
Female	73.7%	59.8%	46.8%
Male	26.3%	40.2%	53.2%
Age group (years)	***N = 462***	***N = 1084***	***N = 600***
17 and under	0.4%	0.8%	0.0%
18–24	6.5%	5.8%	4.7%
25–34	27.5%	23.0%	14.3%
35–44	32.3%	28.9%	19.5%
45–54	19.5%	21.7%	26.8%
55–64	11.0%	11.9%	20.3%
65 and over	2.8%	7.9%	14.3%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI Partnership assistances only, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: Gender information was missing for 27 assistances and age missing for 36 assistances.

Country of birth

The vast majority (88.3%) of assistances provided through the SSI Partnership were to clients born in non-English speaking countries (Table 4). By way of contrast, only 16.6 per cent of other outreach assistances and less than one-quarter (24.1%) of in-office assistances were provided to people born in non-English speaking countries.

Further, while only 2.5 per cent of all Legal Aid NSW assistances were provided under the SSI Partnership during this year, SSI Partnership assistances accounted for nearly one in 10 (9.5%) of all Legal Aid NSW assistances during this period to people born in non-English speaking countries. These figures provide compelling evidence of the SSI Partnership as an effective pathway to reach clients from diverse cultural backgrounds.

6 This is consistent with the findings of the LAW survey regarding the age at which people experience particular types of legal problems (Coumarelos et al. 2012a).

Table 4: Legal Aid NSW assistances by location of birth, comparing SSI Partnership to other outreach and in-office matters, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

Location of birth	*SSI partnership* *N = 2119*	*Other outreach* *N = 20606*	*Legal Aid offices* *N = 59998*
Born in Australia	10.2%	78.8%	71.8%
Born in other main English speaking countries	1.5%	4.5%	4.1%
Born in non-English speaking countries	88.3%	16.6%	24.1%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI Partnership assistances only, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 82,723 assistances. Information on country of birth was missing (not stated) for 4738 assistances: 63 (3.0%) in SSI partnership, 1366 (6.6%) in Other outreach and 3309 (5.5%) in Legal Aid offices. In addition to Australia, other main English speaking countries include United Kingdom, Ireland, United States of America, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2008).

There were some differences between assistances for different areas of law provided under the SSI Partnership. More than 95 per cent of immigration assistances were provided to clients born in non-English speaking countries, while around four out of five family and civil law assistances (82.1% and 80% respectively) were provided to clients born in non-English speaking countries (Table 5).

Table 5: Proportion of SSI Partnership assistances, by location of birth and area of law, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

Location of birth	*Family* *N = 458*	*Immigration* *N = 1076*	*Other civil* *N = 585*
Born in Australia	14.8%	3.5%	18.8%
Born in other main English speaking countries	3.1%	0.9%	1.2%
Born in non-English speaking countries	82.1%	95.5%	80.0%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI Partnership assistances only, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 2119 assistances. Country of birth information was missing for 63 assistances. In addition to Australia, other main English speaking countries include United Kingdom, Ireland, United States of America, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa (ABS 2008).

Overall, legal advices and minor assistances were provided through the SSI Partnership to clients born in over 100 different countries. Table 6 indicates the proportion of assistances provided through the SSI Partnership to clients born in the 20 most common countries of birth.

Table 6 indicates that nearly 20 per cent of all SSI Partnership assistances were to clients born in Iraq, more than 11 per cent to Vietnamese-born clients, nearly 5 per cent to clients born in Lebanon and 3.5 per cent to Iranian-born clients. Ten per cent of assistances were to people born in Australia. Contributing to the relatively high proportion of assistances to SSI clients from Vietnam is the long-term civil law clinic in Cabramatta. These figures are in marked contrast to the profile of assistances provided in other outreach locations and in Legal Aid offices.

Table 6: Proportion of assistances, by country of birth and area of law, comparing SSI Partnership to other outreach and in-office matters, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

Country of birth	SSI Partnership N = 2119	Other outreach N = 20606	Legal Aid offices N = 59998
Iraq	19.7%	0.5%	1.4%
Vietnam	11.7%	0.5%	1.2%
Australia	**10.2%**	**78.8%**	**71.8%**
Lebanon	4.8%	1.2%	1.5%
Iran	3.6%	0.4%	0.9%
China	3.5%	1.5%	2.2%
Sudan	3.4%	0.2%	0.4%
Cambodia	3.2%	0.0%	0.2%
Afghanistan	2.7%	0.2%	0.4%
Philippines	2.6%	0.9%	1.1%
Sierra Leone	2.6%	0.0%	0.1%
Fiji	2.3%	0.5%	0.9%
Syria	2.1%	0.1%	0.2%
India	1.6%	1.0%	1.2%
Pakistan	1.6%	0.2%	0.5%
Myanmar (Burma)	1.5%	0.3%	0.3%
Bangladesh	1.2%	0.1%	0.1%
Croatia	1.2%	0.3%	0.4%
Egypt	1.2%	0.4%	0.6%
Tonga	0.9%	0.3%	0.3%
All other countries	18.5%	12.4%	14.4%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI Partnership assistances only, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: Information on country of birth was missing (not stated/unknown) for 4738 assistances, and this was not included: 63 (3.0%) in SSI Partnership, 1366 (6.6%) in other outreach and 3309 (5.5%) in Legal Aid offices.

Years in Australia

One group that Legal Aid NSW has identified as in particular need of legal assistance are recently arrived migrants. CASES records the year of arrival for clients not born in Australia.[7] Table 7 indicates that one in five assistances (20.6 %) provided through the SSI Partnership, were to overseas-born clients who had been in Australia for one or two years. This compares to four per cent of assistances provided through other outreach and seven per cent of assistances provided through Legal Aid offices. Further, 43 per cent of all assistances provided through the SSI Partnership were to people who had been in Australia for five years or less, compared to 15 per cent of assistances provided in Legal Aid offices. One caution in reading these figures is that the year of arrival was not recorded for nearly 30 per cent of other outreach assistances and more than 20 per cent of assistances provided in Legal Aid offices. We do not know when these clients arrived in Australia and whether these figures may have changed the results reported. If we assume the missing data is evenly distributed across the years of arrival, the figures suggest the successful targeting of SSI Partnership assistance to clients newly arrived and recently arrived from other countries.

While assistances under the SSI Partnership only comprise 2.5 per cent of all Legal Aid NSW assistances in the project year, they comprise one in five (20.6%) of all assistances to people who have been in Australia for one or two years.

7 As month of arrival is not recorded, these figures must be treated as indicative rather than specific.

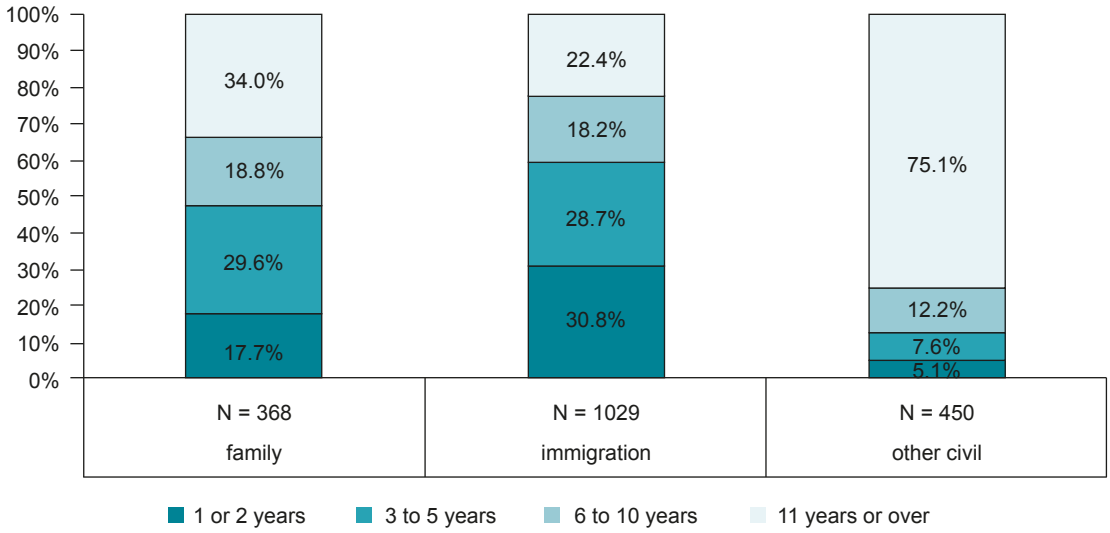
Table 7: Number and proportion of Legal Aid NSW assistances provided, by number of years in Australia, comparing SSI Partnership to other outreach and in-office matters, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

	SSI Partnership		*Other outreach*		*Legal Aid offices*	
Years in Australia^	***N***	***%***	***N***	***%***	***N***	***%***
1 or 2 years	405	20.6%	213	3.7%	1384	6.8%
3–5 years	438	22.3%	388	6.8%	1641	8.1%
6–10 years	311	15.8%	592	10.3%	2219	11.0%
11 years or over	693	35.2%	2911	50.8%	10723	53.0%
Not stated	119	6.1%	1621	28.3%	4253	21.0%
Total	**1966**	**100.0%**	**5725**	**100.0%**	**20220**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, assistances to clients born *outside* Australia only, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 21918 assistances. ^As CASES only records year of arrival (not month), these figures are only indicative.

Notably, within the SSI Partnership, there are differences between the areas of law in the assistances to newly arrived clients. Figure 7 indicates that, overall, more family and immigration law assistances than other civil law assistances were provided to clients who had been in Australia for shorter periods of time.

Figure 7: Proportion of SSI Partnership assistances, by years in Australia and area of law, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014



Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI Partnership assistances only, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 1847 assistances. Assistances were to clients born outside Australia only. Year-of-arrival information (for those born outside Australia) was missing for 119 assistances—28 in family, 48 in immigration and 43 in other civil.

Table 8 indicates the average (median) number of years that clients assisted had been in Australia, by the location of the outreach service. This table indicates the variation, showing the long-term outreach at Cabramatta reaching a more established CALD community.

The median number of years that clients had been in Australia was examined, comparing SSI Partnership assistances to those provided by other Legal Aid NSW advice services. The average number of years that clients had been in Australia was significantly less for SSI Partnership assistances (7 years overall, and 5 years if Fairfield MRC at Cabramatta Community Centre is excluded) than for other outreach (18 years) or Legal Aid offices (17 years), again strongly supporting the hypothesis that outreach assistance provided in partnership with MRCs will reach more newly arrived and recently arrived clients (Table 9).

Table 8: SSI Partnership assistances, average (median) number of years in Australia by MRC, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

MRCs/offices	*Median years in Australia*
Auburn Diversity Services	5.0
Bankstown, Legal Aid	5.0
Fairfield MRC (Cabramatta)	23.0
Fairfield MRC (Fairfield)	12.0
Fairfield, Legal Aid	5.0
Illawarra MS	4.0
Liverpool, Legal Aid	5.0
Liverpool MRC	4.0
Metro MRC (Campsie)	10.0
Metro MRC (Marrickville)	9.0
Northern SS (Bateau Bay)	9.0
Sydney MCS (Daceyville)	5.5
SydWest MS (Blacktown)	8.0
All SSI Partnership outreach locations	**7.0**
SSI Partnership outreach locations (excluding Fairfield MRC, Cabramatta)	**5.0**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 1847 assistances for all SSI Partnership outreach locations. Assistances were to clients born outside Australia only. Year of arrival information was missing for 119 assistances. N = 1531 assistances for SSI Partnership outreach locations (excluding Cabramatta CC).

Table 9: Average (median) number of years in Australia, comparing SSI Partnership to other outreach and in-office assistances, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

	SSI partnership	*Other outreach*	*Legal Aid offices*
Family	7	15	15
Immigration	5	9	4
Other civil	22	25	24
Total	**7**	**18^**	**17^**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 21918 assistances. Assistances were to clients born outside Australia only. N = 1847 assistances for SSI Partnership, N = 4104 assistances for other outreach, and N = 15967 assistances for other Legal Aid offices.
^ For those born outside Australia, information on arrival time was missing for 119 (6.4%) assistance in SSI partnership, 1621 (39.5) assistances in other outreach, and 4253 (26.6%) in Legal Aid offices.

Family law assistances in particular appear to be bridging a gap to more newly and recently arrived clients, while immigration law assistances were already reaching relatively more recently arrived clients. Civil law assistances appear to be reaching clients who have been born overseas, but living in Australia for longer periods.

Residential location of clients

One way that outreach legal services improve access to disadvantaged clients is by being located in places that are geographically accessible to target client groups. Table 10 indicates 10 LGAs with the highest number of assistances through the SSI Partnership. It shows that 60 per cent of all assistances provided under the partnership were to clients residing in the Fairfield (26.6%) and Liverpool (23.8%) and Blacktown (9.8%) LGAs. A further 18 per cent were provided to clients residing Bankstown, Canterbury and Parramatta LGAs.

Table 10: Proportion of assistances in top 10 Local Government Authorities of client residence, comparing SSI Partnership to other outreach and in-office matters, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

LGA	*SSI partnership*	*Other outreach*	*Legal Aid offices*
Client residential LGA	*N = 2115*	*N = 20201*	*N = 58539*
Fairfield	26.6%	1.8%	4.1%
Liverpool	23.8%	2.0%	4.1%
Blacktown	9.8%	4.7%	4.9%
Bankstown	7.3%	1.6%	2.7%
Canterbury	5.6%	1.6%	2.2%
Parramatta	5.2%	2.4%	2.5%
Holroyd	2.8%	1.4%	1.8%
Auburn	2.7%	1.3%	1.3%
Campbelltown	1.7%	5.0%	4.1%
Penrith	1.7%	1.8%	3.8%
Rest of NSW	12.7%	76.4%	68.7%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, assistances, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 80855. 62 (2.9%) SSI Partnership assistances, 1470 (6.7%) other outreach and 4802 (5.5%) of in office assistances missing NSW postcode (invalid, post office box). In addition, a total of 1804 or 2.1% interstate postcodes (only five SSI assistances).

The geographical distribution of assistances under the partnership (by client residential location) strongly reflects the locations where most humanitarian entrants to NSW in the last five years reside, namely:

- Fairfield (23.1% of all NSW settlers with Humanitarian visa)
- Liverpool (13%)
- Blacktown (9.1%)
- Auburn (9.1%) and
- Parramatta (7.1%)
- Bankstown (2.8%) (see Table 1 for more detail).

This again suggests the effective targeting of services to disadvantaged clients within the CALD communities.

Employment and benefit status

Overall, seven out of 10 assistances provided under the SSI Partnership were to clients who were 'not employed' (Table 11). The proportion of assistances to clients who were not employed *appears to be* significantly higher in the SSI project, compared to assistances provided both in other outreach and Legal Aid offices. Note, however, that with around one-quarter of employment data missing for Other outreach and Legal Aid office assistances, the comparison must be viewed with caution.

Table 11: Proportion of assistances by employment status, comparing SSI Partnership to other outreach and in-office matters, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

	SSI Partnership	*Other outreach*	*Legal Aid offices*
Employment status	*N = 2182*	*N = 21972*	*N = 63307*
Employed	17.2%	20.0%	22.0%
Not employed	70.3%	54.8%	54.7%
Not stated	12.4%	25.2%	23.3%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, all assistances, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 87461 assistances. Employed includes full-time, casual, part-time or not specified employment.

Looking within the SSI Partnership, Table 12 indicates that more than three-quarters (76.9%) of family law assistances and over 70 per cent (71.7%) of immigration assistances were to clients who were not employed. More than 60 per cent (62.7%) of other civil law assistances were to clients who not employed. The higher number of family law and immigration law assistances to people who are not employed may in part reflect the higher number of assistances to women in these areas of law. Again, however, with a high proportion of missing data (between 10 and 17%), the differences must be viewed with caution.

Table 12: Proportion of SSI Partnership assistances, by employment status and area of law, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

Employment status	Family N = 464	Immigration N = 1115	Other civil N = 603
Employed	11.2%	18.1%	20.2%
Not employed	76.9%	71.7%	62.7%
Not stated	11.9%	10.1%	17.1%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI Partnership assistances only, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 2182 assistances. Employed includes full-time, casual, part-time or not specified employment.

While 7 out of 10 assistances were provided to SSI clients who were not employed, 56 per cent (55.7%) of SSI Partnership assistances were provided to clients who were in receipt of Centrelink benefits.

Interestingly, while a significantly lower proportion of assistances provided under the SSI Partnership were to clients who were employed, there was *no difference* in the proportion of assistances to SSI clients, compared to other Legal Aid clients (in office or other outreach) receiving benefits. Relevant here are the limitations placed on people with certain types of visas in accessing benefits.

Overall, 56 per cent (55.7%) of SSI Partnership assistances were provided to clients who were in receipt of Centrelink benefits. Benefit status was consistent across law types (i.e. there was no statistically significant difference).

Other characteristics of clients assisted

Feedback from MRC CEOs and clients services staff suggests that the client group assisted through the SSI Partnership includes people, predominately from CALD backgrounds, facing forms of disadvantage about which administrative data is not collected. In particular, when asked what considerations should inform services for clients, CEOs described the prevalence of clients facing mental and physical health issues arising from trauma relating to refugee histories:

> Many clients coming through the MRC have poor mental health and experiences of torture and trauma. This may impact on their concentration and memory, and ... which may be more difficult to identify in a mainstream context. **(MRC CEO Survey respondent)**

More descriptive information about the clients assisted is provided in Section 4.3 (Targeted outreach services).

Snapshot data: clients assisted

The snapshot data collected by lawyers in a four-week period in early 2014 also provided more detail about clients assisted. This data, reported in full in Appendix B, provides:

- more granulated information about time in Australia (by month and year, not just year) broadly reflecting the pattern of data already reported from CASES
- details of consultations—nearly half (48.0%) of the consultations were with clients who solicitors' noted spoke English 'well', one-quarter (25.7%) were with clients who were rated as not speaking English well, and just over a quarter (26.4%) were recorded as not speaking English at all
- solicitor assessments of English proficiency, which were noted to be higher for those who had been in Australia for longer periods
- the visa status of those assisted:
  - more than one-third (34.4%) of consultations were to Australian citizens
  - nearly one-quarter (23.4%) were to people with a permanent visa
  - 13 per cent were to those holding a bridging visa.

Types of assistance provided

Assistance may be provided in the form of 'advice' or 'minor assistance'.[8] Nearly 70 per cent of all assistances provided through the SSI Partnership were advice and just over 30 per cent were minor assistance (Table 13). Interestingly the proportion of assistance provided as minor assistance was lower under the SSI Partnership than in Legal Aid offices and particularly compared to other outreach services. This may in part reflect the areas of law dealt with, the options available (or not) to address issues, and in particular, the high number of immigration assistances involving advice (Table 14).

Table 13: Proportion of assistances by type of assistance, comparing SSI Partnership to other outreach and in-office matters, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

Type of assistance	*SSI partnership* *N = 2182*	*Other outreach* *N = 21972*	*Legal Aid offices* *N = 63307*
Advice	69.4%	51.6%	63.4%
Minor assistance	30.6%	48.4%	36.6%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, all assistances, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 87461 assistances.

Table 14 examines SSI Partnership assistances by area of law. It indicates that over 70 per cent of immigration assistances were in the form of advice and nearly 30 per cent were minor assistances. Forty per cent of family law assistances were in the form of minor assistance, while nearly three-quarters of all civil law help was in the form of advice.

Table 14: Proportion of SSI Partnership assistances, by type of assistance and area of law, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

Type of assistance	*Family* *N = 464*	*Immigration* *N = 1115*	*Other civil* *N = 603*
Advice	60.6%	70.8%	73.8%
Minor assistance	39.4%	29.2%	26.2%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI Partnership assistances only, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 2182 assistances.

8 Advice is legal advice provided by a Legal Aid solicitor. Minor assistance involves activities such as drafting a document or correspondence, making telephone calls and gathering additional information relevant to the matter. A matter is the legal issue for which the solicitor provides assistance.

Assistances per matter

In two-thirds (67.1%) of SSI Partnership matters, clients only received one advice or minor assistance. In 22 per cent of matters, clients received two advice or minor assistances and in 11 per cent of matters clients received three or more assistances. Table 15 also indicates that, SSI Partnership clients received 1.61 assistances per matter.

Table 15: Percentage of assistance per matter, comparing SSI Partnership matters to other outreach and in-office matters, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

Assistance per matter	*SSI partnership N = 1357 matters (2182 assistance)*	*Other outreach N = 14868 matters (21972 assistance)*	*Legal Aid offices N = 40870 matters (63307 assistance)*
1 advice or minor assistance	67.1%	76.0%	71.3%
2 advice or minor assistances	21.9%	14.6%	19.9%
3 or more advice or minor assistances	11.0%	9.4%	8.9%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
Average assistances per matter	1.61	1.48	1.55

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 57095 primary matters, and 87461 assistances.

Of note, clients assisted through the SSI project received significantly more assistances per matter than clients assisted in other outreach and slightly more than those assisted in Legal Aid offices. The number of assistances provided per matter may reflect a number of factors, including: the types of legal problems being addressed; the capability of different clients; and the legal options available to address matters.

Snapshot data: specific types of assistance provided

In the one-month snapshot data collection, solicitors recorded the specific types of assistance that they provided to clients in each consultation. Specific types of assistance include verbal or written information, different types of advice, various forms of minor assistance and referrals. These categories provide more detail than the broader CASES classifications of 'advice' or 'minor assistance' reported above.

In all, nearly 95 per cent of the 154 consultations, clients were provided with more than one *specific type of assistance*. The most common specific forms of assistance were:

- verbal information (83.8%)
- procedural advice (79.9%)
- written information (19.5%)
- minor assistance in the form of research or undertaking further enquiries (19.5%)
- referrals to non-legal aid services (26.0%)
- referrals to other Legal Aid NSW services (13.0%)
- advice (11.7%) and/or assistance (5.2%) to complete an application for Legal Aid
- assistance to complete forms (apart from Legal Aid forms) (10.4%).

In more than half (52.6%) of all consultations, an onward referral was not considered necessary, and in 15 per cent of consultations, solicitors indicated there was nowhere to refer clients. More detail of the assistance provided, by area of law, is reported in Appendix B.

Onward referrals

Solicitors may refer clients onto other services if the assistance required is beyond the remit of, or not best dealt with by, the outreach service. In nearly half (47.8%) of all matters dealt with in SSI Partnership outreach services, solicitors indicated that 'no referral was necessary'. This compares to 46 per cent of matters dealt with by other outreach services and 37 per cent of matters dealt with in Legal Aid offices (Table 16).

Interestingly, a lower proportion (11.1%) of SSI Partnership matters compared to other outreach or in-office services involved a referral to another Legal Aid office (17.6% other outreach and 20.1% Legal Aid offices) or to a private practitioner (5.4% SSI compared to 17.7% other outreach and 15.3% Legal Aid offices).

Balancing this was a higher proportion of referrals to government departments from SSI Partnership outreach services (19.8% of matters) compared to other outreach (5.4% of matters) and Legal Aid offices (4.1%). However, an examination of the SSI referrals by area of law suggests that these differences may more closely reflect the areas of law dealt with than the office or location from which the service was delivered.

Table 16: Onward referrals for SSI Partnership matters, compared to other outreach and in-office matters, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

Referral to	*SSI Partnership N = 1357*	*Other outreach N = 14868*	*Legal Aid offices N = 40870*
No referral necessary	47.8%	45.5%	37.0%
Legal Aid NSW	11.1%	17.6%	20.1%
Law Society/private practitioner	5.4%	17.7%	15.3%
Court/tribunal	4.6%	5.4%	7.4%
Government department	19.8%	3.6%	4.1%
Community organisation	3.4%	1.6%	3.7%
Dispute resolution/mediation	0.1%	1.2%	2.7%
Family Relationship Centre	0.5%	2.3%	2.2%
Nowhere to refer client to	2.7%	1.1%	2.2%
Community Legal Centre	0.9%	1.1%	1.5%
Other	3.8%	2.9%	3.9%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, all assistances, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: Only one referral source can be recorded per matter. 'Other' includes: Ombudsman, Financial Counsellor, Police, Doctor/health professional, LawAccess NSW, Pro bono legal services, Aboriginal Legal Services WDVCAS, Library.

Looking within the SSI partnership, Table 17 indicates that more than 80 per cent (82.4%) of family law assistances and 60 per cent (61.4%) of civil law assistances did not require any further referral. By contrast more than three-quarters of immigration assistances involved a referral elsewhere. Nearly 40 per cent of immigration assistances involved a referral to a government department (39.5 %) and a further 12.9 per cent involved a referral to another Legal Aid NSW service.

Table 17: Onward referrals for SSI Partnership matters by area of law, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

Referral to	Family N = 284	Immigration N = 643	Other civil N = 430
No referral necessary	82.4%	23.3%	61.4%
Government department	0.4%	39.5%	3.3%
Legal Aid NSW	8.8%	12.9%	10.0%
Law Society/private practitioner	3.9%	7.0%	4.0%
Court/tribunal	0	1.7%	11.9%
Community organisation	0.7%	6.7%	0.2%
Nowhere to refer client to	0	4.7%	1.4%
Doctor/health professional	0	2.0%	0.7%
Community Legal Centre	0.4%	1.4%	0.5%
Ombudsman	0	0	2.1%
Other	3.6%	0.8%	4.6%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI Partnership assistances only, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: Only one referral source can be recorded per matter. 'Other' includes LawAccess NSW, FRCs, financial counsellors, Police, WDVCAS, library and dispute resolution/mediation, all of which received less than 0.6 per cent of referrals

Expanding immigration law services to Western Sydney: what difference does it make?

Legal Aid advice services for immigration matters were previously based only at Legal Aid NSW head office in the Sydney Central Business District. Under the SSI Partnership, immigration advice services were also provided at Legal Aid offices in Fairfield and Bankstown (and initially at Liverpool, while the Liverpool MRC clinic was being established) and at Liverpool and SydWest MRCs, and Auburn Diversity Services. The aim was to improve access to immigration law services to CALD communities, many of whom live in South West and Western Sydney.

With immigration assistances also being provided in Western Sydney from September 2012, we examined *all* assistances for immigration law over four time periods:

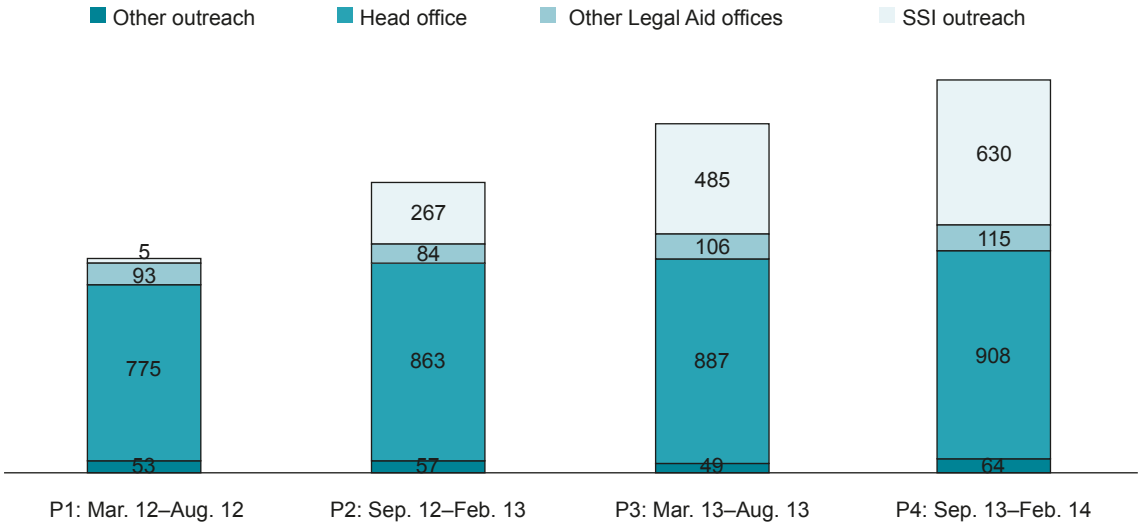
- Period 1: March 2012–August 2012 (*before* SSI immigration outreach clinics commenced)
- Period 2: September 2012–February 2013 (clinics commenced September 2012)
- Period 3: March 2013–August 2013 (clinics continue)
- Period 4: September 2013–February 2014 (clinics continue, with SydWest and Auburn Diversity Services commencing in October and November 2013).

Figure 8 indicates how the number of immigration assistances provided through the SSI Partnership grew from September 2012. It also indicates that these assistances were *in addition to* rather than a replacement of immigration assistances provided through head office.

Comparing Period 1, before the immigration outreach services commenced, to the same six month period a year later (Period 3), reveals a 65 per cent increase in the overall number of assistances for immigration matters. A comparison of Period 1 to Period 4 (noting this is a different time of year), indicates an 85 per cent increase in the overall number of assistances for immigration law provided by Legal Aid NSW. As Table 18 below indicates, the increases are overwhelmingly due to the additional SSI Partnership assistances.

Table 18 provides more detail about how the provision of immigration assistances has changed since the SSI Partnership commenced. Before the SSI Partnership outreach clinics commenced, more than four out of five (83.7%) immigration assistances were provided at the Sydney head office of Legal Aid NSW. By Period 4 (September 2013–February 2014), just over half of all immigration assistances were provided in Sydney head office (52.9%), with well over one-third (36.7%) provided through the SSI Partnership outreach services.

Figure 8: Numbers of Legal Aid NSW immigration assistances, comparing SSI Partnership to other Legal Aid NSW locations, Mar. 2012–Feb. 2014



Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, immigration assistances only, 1 March 2012–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 5441 assistances.

Table 18: Proportion of immigration assistances, comparing SSI Partnership to other Legal Aid NSW locations, Mar. 2012–Feb. 2014

Immigration law	*Period 1: Mar. 2012–Aug. 2012 N = 926*	*Period 2: Sep. 2012–Feb. 2013 N = 1271*	*Period 3: Mar. 2013–Aug. 2013 N = 1527*	*Period 4: Sep. 2013–Feb. 2014 N = 1717*	*% change P1 to P3*
SSI outreach^	0.5%	21.0%	31.8%	36.7%	9600%
Other outreach	5.7%	4.5%	3.2%	3.7%	–8%
Legal Aid head office	83.7%	67.9%	58.1%	52.9%	14%
Other Legal Aid office	10.0%	6.6%	6.9%	6.7%	14%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**65%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, all assistances, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 5441 assistances. ^ Including the Legal Aid offices at Fairfield, Liverpool and Bankstown, which were part of this project.

To assess whether the provision of immigration assistance in outreach locations makes a difference to the overall profile of clients assisted with immigration matters, we compared the profile of those receiving immigration law assistance before the immigration clinics commenced (Period 1) to those receiving assistance in the same six month period a year later (Period 3), after the project commenced.

When reading the following data, bear in mind that:

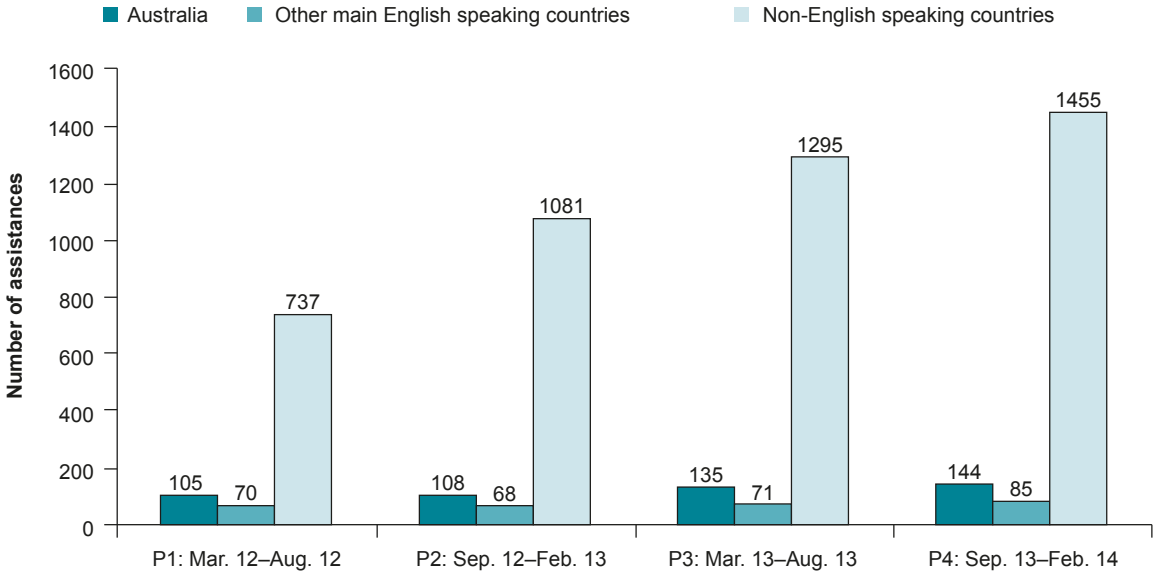
- the figures below refer to *all* immigration assistances, not just immigration assistances provided through the SSI Partnership
- more than half of all immigration assistance continued to be provided at Legal Aid NSW head office at the same time that the SSI Partnership outreach services were being rolled out. By Period 4, 37 per cent of all immigration assistances were provided at outreach locations through the SSI project. There is a limit to the impact that one-third of all immigration assistances can make on the overall figures.

Figure 9 suggests that as a proportion of immigration assistances provided at the outreach locations increased, so too did the overall number (and proportion) of immigration assistances provided to clients:

- born outside Australia, from 821 or 88.7 % assistances to clients born outside Australia in Period 1 (before the outreach services commenced) to 1573 or 91.2% assistances in Period 3 (the same six month period a year later)
- born in non-English speaking countries, from 737 or 80.8% of assistances in Period 1 to clients born in NESB countries to 1455, or 86.3 % in Period 3.

We also explored whether the movement of immigration services affected the number of assistances provided to more recently arrived clients. The total *number of* assistances to newly arrived clients (in Australia for 2 years or less actually increased) increased from 317 in Period 1 to 484 in Period 3 and 540 in Period 4. With overall increases in the number of immigration assistances provided during this period, the *proportion of* assistances to newly arrived clients actually decreased. However, in all time periods, newer arrivals to Australia comprise the highest proportion of all clients that received assistance for immigration matters.

Figure 9: Numbers of immigration assistances, by country of birth, four time periods, Mar. 2012–Feb. 2014



Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, immigration assistances only, 1 March 2012–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 5354 assistances. Information on country of birth was missing for 87 assistances.

Table 19 indicates a statistically significant decrease in the proportion of assistances to clients who have been in Australia for one or two years, and to clients who have been in Australia three to five years, when comparing the period before the SSI Partnership commenced to Periods 3 and 4.

Table 19: Proportion of immigration assistances by year of arrival and project period, Mar. 2012–Feb. 2014

Years in Australia	Period 1: Mar. 2012–Aug. 2012 N = 793	Period 2: Sep. 2012–Feb. 2013 N = 1129	Period 3: Mar. 2013–Aug. 2013 N = 1352	Period 4: Sep. 2013–Feb. 2014 N = 1509
1 or 2 years	40.0%	36.3%	35.8%	35.8%
3–5 years	27.4%	30.4%	24.3%	22.9%
6–10 years	13.9%	14.2%	15.9%	19.7%
11 years or more	18.8%	19.1%	24.0%	21.6%
	100.0%	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, immigration assistances only, 1 March 2012–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 4783 assistances. Assistances were to clients born outside Australia only. Information on arrival time was missing for 166 assistances (11%).

It should be noted that change in immigration policy will be mirrored in variation over time in the number of recently arrived migrants.

An examination of immigration assistances over the four time periods also indicates:

- a significant increase in the number of assistances to clients who are in receipt of government benefits after the SSI Partnership outreach clinics commenced (comparing the first quarter in which 20 per cent of assistances were to clients on benefits to the remainder where around 30% of assistances were to clients on benefits) (19.9% in Period 1 compared to 31.6% in Period 3)
- across each of the four periods, around 70 per cent of all immigration assistances were to unemployed clients. With only small differences and a high proportion of missing data, no meaningful differences can be detected between the four time periods
- a significant increase in proportion of all immigration assistances being provided to women, from 37 per cent in the period before the immigration outreach services commenced to 45 per cent in final period from September 2013–February 2014.

The residential location of clients assisted

The shift in the provision of immigration assistances from Sydney head office to various locations in West and South West Sydney has seen a corresponding shift in the residential postcode of those receiving assistances (Table 20).

Table 20: Top 20 client resident LGAs by number of assistances for immigration matters, indicating the percentage difference in assistances provided between Period 1 (pre SSI outreach services) to Period 3

LGA	Period 1 Mar. 2012–Aug. 2012 N	Period 2 Sep. 2012–Feb. 2013 N	Period 3 Mar. 2013–Aug. 2013 N	Period 4 Sep. 2013–Feb. 2014 N	P1 to P3 % difference
Fairfield	97	203	215	223	**122%**
Canterbury	69	112	161	146	**133%**
Auburn	119	111	98	138	–18%
Liverpool	23	84	145	183	**530%**
Sydney	93	74	73	84	–22%
Blacktown	49	64	95	99	**94%**
Parramatta	44	61	87	114	**98%**
Bankstown	31	53	98	102	**216%**
Holroyd	28	55	70	80	**150%**
Randwick	19	24	33	33	**74%**
Penrith	10	17	23	51	**130%**
Marrickville	27	29	20	19	–26%
Campbelltown	13	18	22	36	**69%**
Strathfield	24	21	22	17	–8%
Rockdale	9	25	23	19	**156%**
The Hills Shire	18	10	19	21	6%
Hurstville	7	19	15	23	**114%**
Ryde	10	13	17	15	**70%**
Wollongong	9	12	7	16	–22%
Newcastle	16	5	8	9	–50%

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, immigration assistances only, 1 March 2012–28 February 2014.
Note: N = 5441 assistances.

In particular, comparing Period 1 (before the outreach services commenced) to Period 3 (the same six-month period a year later), we see the largest increases (well over the overall 65 per cent increase in the total number of immigration assistances seen over the same period) in assistances to clients living in Liverpool, Bankstown, Rockdale, Holroyd, Canterbury, Penrith and Fairfield. This reflects the locations of the SSI Partnership outreach services (see maps 1 and 2, below) and suggests the appropriate targeting of services to CALD clients residing in South West and Western Sydney.

Maps 1 and 2 illustrate these geographical shifts in the residential postcode of clients, comparing Period 1 (before the immigration outreach services commenced) to the same period a year later, after the outreach services were established. The maps also demonstrate an increase in immigration assistances to clients living in areas with the highest number of humanitarian settlers, namely the Bankstown, Blacktown, Holroyd, Liverpool and Parramatta LGAs.

Community legal education delivered through the SSI Partnership

The role of CLE in the SSI Partnership

Legal Aid NSW and SSI partners, interviewed/surveyed for this report, both described community legal education (CLE) for staff working at the MRCs and for their client communities, as a critical element of the outreach program. CLE was not only used to impart important information (in a context where there is an opportunity to use that information in a timely way) but also as a way to build bridges of trust and rapport between the solicitors, the MRC workers and the communities and clients they serve. Trust and rapport are key elements of effective outreach, providing a pathway between disadvantaged clients and legal help (Forell, McDonald, Ramsey & Williams, 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014).

CLE for caseworkers and other professionals

A solicitor explained the aim of providing CLE to MRC staff and other professionals, noting the vital role that MRC staff play in linking client groups who are often isolated from legal assistance to the legal aid clinics:

> It's meant that we've been doing an enormous amount of CLE and it has been very much focussed on … the case worker as like the problem solver, the problem spotter. They're sort of the broker between us and the client so that is where a lot of our energy has gone in the promotion of the services, … So going to the staff meetings that the MRCs are a really important aspect of what our outreach legal staff do. **(Legal Aid manager)**

The role that MRC workers play as 'problem spotters' and thereby as a link between clients and the legal aid clinics was confirmed in survey responses by MRC workers[9] and CEOs (see Section 5.3, discussion *Effective collaboration and 'joined-up' services)*.

Solicitors described the intended outcomes of CLE to caseworkers. For instance:

> I wanted them to be our client spotters, I wanted them to know when to refer, when not to refer, how to make appropriate referrals. **(Family solicitor)**

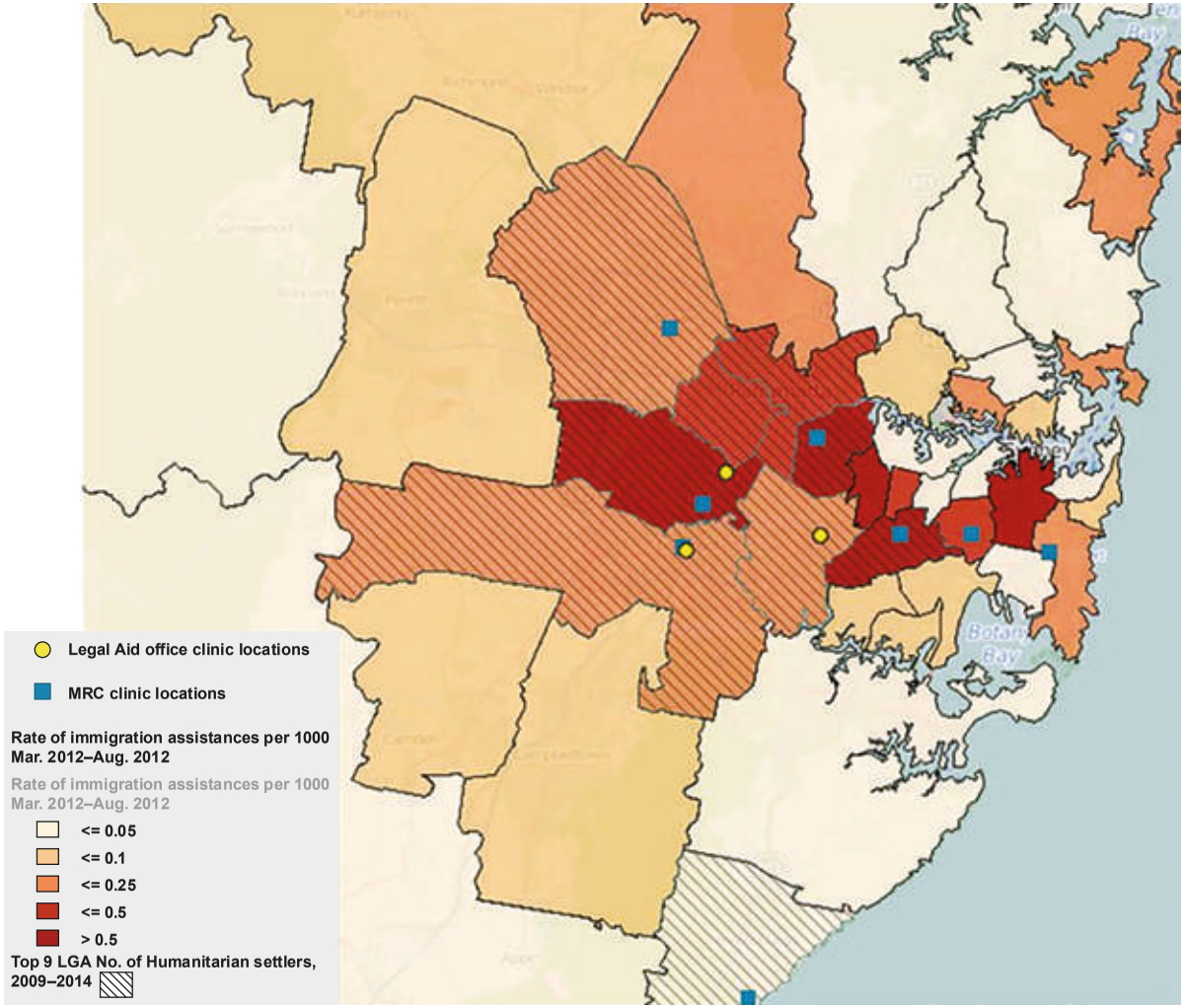
MRC CEOs and staff also valued the information provided by and contact made with the solicitors through the CLE sessions:

> It means that staff are empowered to know where they can go for what and what the latest information is. It keeps them informed and up to date. Law is but one of the areas they work across, so keeping it simple and current is vital. **(MRC CEO Survey respondent)**

> … having training across some of those areas is very empowering for [workers] because you don't know what you don't know but once you actually attend that training you think, 'Okay, I understand how the clinics work, I understand the different areas of law. I understand the components around referrals for my clients.' And so there's a sense of confidence in that–in that referral process, that they understand. **(SSI manager)**

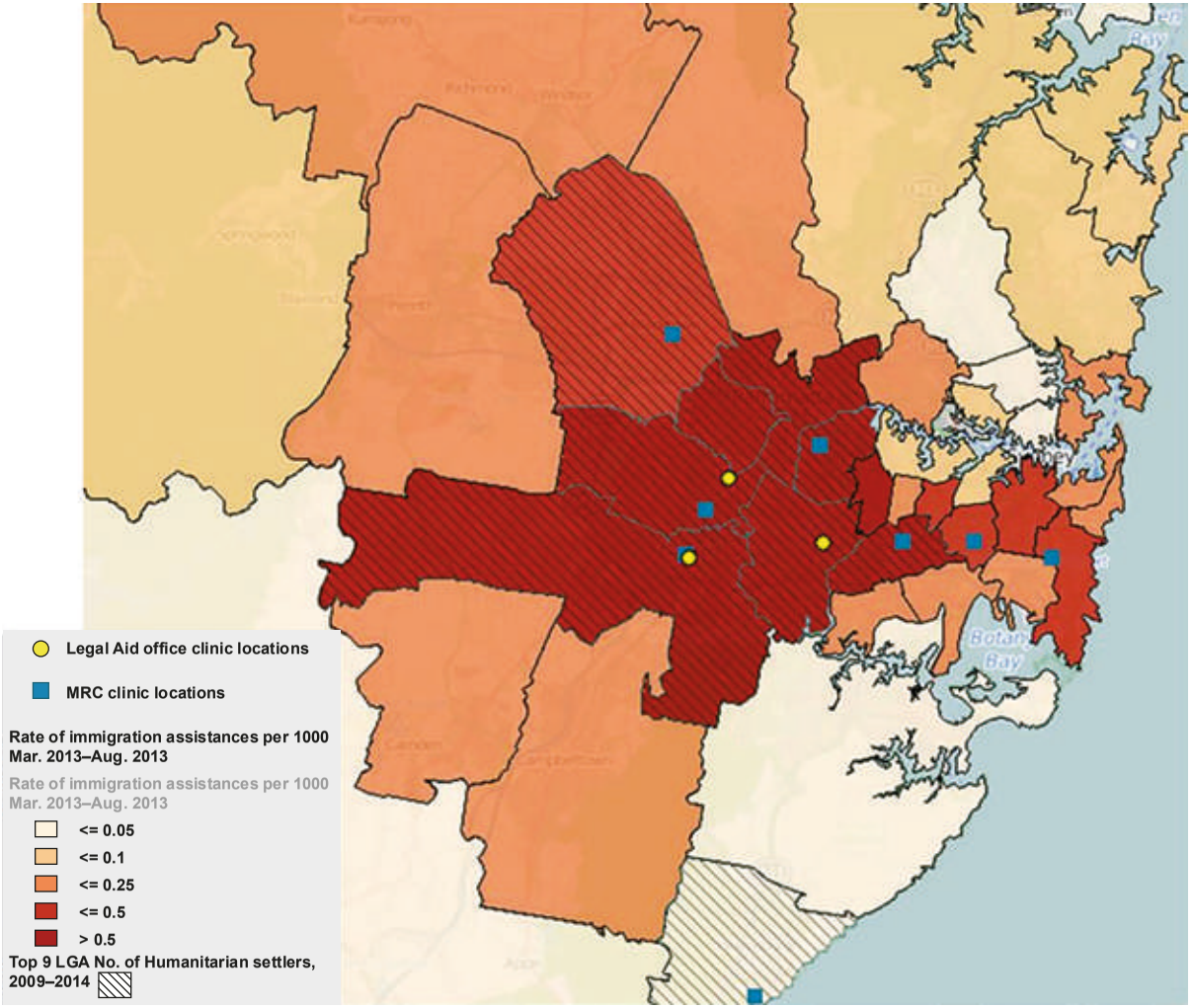
9 See Section 2: Methodology for a description of these surveys. With a limited response rate to the caseworker survey, responses only represent the experiences of the 13 workers who participated, and do not necessarily represent the views of all caseworkers.

Map 1: Rate of assistances for immigration matters per 1000 Period 1 (Mar. 2012–Aug. 2012) by Local Government Area



Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, immigration assistances only, 1 March 2013–31 August 2012; Department of Immigration & Border Protection 2014.
Note: Rate of assistances for immigration matters per 1000 pre Period 1 (March 2012–August 2012) by LGA, and the top 9 LGAs with the highest number of Humanitarian settlers in New South Wales from 2009–14. The LGA with the tenth highest number of humanitarian settlers in this period, Coffs Harbour (2.7%), is not shown on the map (see Table 1). The SSI outreach clinic at Northern SS (Bateau Bay) is not shown on the map.

Map 2: Rate of assistances for immigration matters per 1000 Period 3 (Mar. 2013–Aug. 2013) by Local Government Area



Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, immigration assistances only, 1 March 2013–31 August 2012; Department of Immigration & Border Protection 2014.
Note: Rate of assistances for immigration matters per 1000 pre Period 3 (March 2013–August 2013) by LGA, and the top 9 LGAs with the highest number of Humanitarian settlers in New South Wales from 2009–14. The LGA with the tenth highest number of humanitarian settlers in this period, Coffs Harbour (2.7%), is not shown on the map (see Table 1). The SSI outreach clinic at Northern SS (Bateau Bay) is not shown on this map.

Increased referrals to the clinics are then a valuable indicator of the value of the CLE as part of the broader program. Data on referrals to the Legal Aid clinics are reported in Section 4.1 (Referrals to SS Partnership legal clinics).

Legal Aid partners also described the importance of *ongoing* CLE, to build and *maintain* awareness of potential legal problems and the clinics as a source of assistance, particularly when there is high staff turnover and the use of volunteers:

> Because staff change, programs change, it's just not a situation where you can do one staff meeting at the beginning of the year. **(Legal Aid manager)**

> ... if you are doing clinics in any of the centres whether they are associated with SSI or otherwise I believe there should be at least one CLE every three months for case workers, communities, financial counsellors and whoever is involved, because I would say nine out of 10 even the people that work at the MRCs, they are not really aware of the difference between civil law, criminal law and family law. **(General civil solicitor)**

CLE for community members

In addition to the CLE run for caseworkers and other professionals, Legal Aid also ran CLE sessions for community members. This was considered vital to address the very low level of understanding of the Australian legal system, particularly among those more recently arrived in Australia. Equally important, CLE to community members provided an opportunity to introduce, build trust in and link clients to the outreach assistance services, so that acquired knowledge could be used.

A family lawyer described how she often gave an overview of the Australian legal system in CLE sessions before speaking specifically about family law issues and domestic violence:

> The reason for that was, again, to essentially empower them and for them to have a better understanding of how the Australia legal system works. Basic concepts like the rule of law, everyone is equal under the law, just because you are charged by police doesn't mean that you are guilty; that you have the ability to make complaints against government and government departments. All these basic things that I feel like they just simply do not understand and do not know. **(Family solicitor)**

Another family lawyer noted:

> I think one of the main reasons why we have a huge focus on CLE for our migrant, refugee, CALD communities, is because the family law system in Australia is so different ... to back home. There's lots of misunderstanding, lots of misconception, lots of concerns, lots of fears about the family law system in Australia. **(Family solicitor)**

She went on to describe the difference that information (followed by assistance) could make to clients:

> I see the reactions on their faces when I tell them, for example, if you want to apply for a divorce you do not need to provide a reason for why you want to do that, it is a no-fault system. Or you do not need to get the consent of the other party. It's like a new revelation for some of our clients because they feel they are stuck in this relationship until they literally have to die. **(Family solicitor)**

This was a view shared by some MRC staff:

> It has given them the opportunity to ask questions and have responses that make sense, it has assisted clients in building their confidence and knowledge about the Australian legal system which may be a new concept considering the backgrounds these clients come from. It has given clients information about referrals and how the issues can be addressed in a timely manner. **(MRC Client Services Survey respondent)**

Particularly in the context of dealing with very sensitive issues such as family violence, solicitors noted the additional role of CLE in providing a 'face' to the service, building confidence and trust in the legal provider and providing a link to the outreach legal clinics:

> Then actually doing CLE with community members I think just increases the trust that the service has and, you know, gets your face out there so you're recognisable and people are just more open to—it's less of an issue I think, to be honest, with the immigration clinics because there's such high demand. But it's still incredibly important to, you know, have that trust and have the people recognise you and sort of know who you are. **(Immigration solicitor)**

Solicitors noted, however, it is not just the formal CLE that builds trust and rapport with clients; it is the integration of CLE with the ongoing relationships formed with caseworkers and with clients through the consistent provision of regular outreach services:

> And the thing is, clients in trauma, they often have issues with building trust and you need to establish that trust very quickly to get instructions, to get proper instructions. And they often have that trust with their caseworker and you're not just a lawyer, you then become the friend of the caseworker. **(General civil solicitor)**

> It's not only that client we are taking to. We are talking to the whole community. That client goes out and that client says, this is what I found, and it's a word of mouth thing. If we are telling them certain things and definitely they are receptive, if they are taking it and they go to their community, their family, and they say, '... I tried, it really helped'. The message gets across. That's what we want. **(General civil solicitor)**

CLE sessions delivered through the SSI Partnership

In the first formal year of the SSI Partnership, a total of 49 CLE 'events' were recorded on administrative database for CLE (CLEMS) as taking place at SSI or at MRCs hosting a clinic. Any CLE undertaken at alternative locations by the SSI outreach solicitors, even if provided for this client group or relevant caseworkers, is not included in this figure. For this reason, this figure may undercount all CLE undertaken as part of the project.

> A 'CLE event' is a presentation or session of community legal education occurring at a single location on a single day. One CLE event may cover one or more broad areas of law (e.g. family and civil law) and include one of more audience types (e.g. general public and caseworkers). CLE can also take place in a range of different forums, from formal education sessions, to information sessions at staff meetings or to community groups already meeting for another purpose: 'whether it's a sewing group, whether it's a cooking class, whether it's a mothers' support group or whatever that may be, an English class'. **(Family solicitor)**

These 49 CLE events represent 2.9 per cent of the 1686 unique CLE events recorded on CLEMs, as being undertaken by Legal Aid NSW at all locations around NSW during this one-year period. A further 55 events (3.3% of all CLE events) were to audiences of participants from CALD backgrounds or in other CALD specific locations (e.g. an MRC location outside the SSI Partnership, other community organisation or a language school). Thus, nearly half (47%) of all Legal Aid NSW CLE targeting audiences from CALD backgrounds during this period were undertaken at a SSI Partnership location.

As indicated on Table 20, more than one-quarter (13) of all CLE sessions at SSI Partnership locations were provided at Auburn Diversity Services and a further 10 sessions were provided at SydWest MS in Blacktown and Mt Druitt.

In addition to the formal CLE events counted above, some of the outreach lawyers conducted ongoing 'unofficial CLE' by making time to talk with staff during their visits:

> If I have an outreach clinic ... I make sure I go round to the different staff members, let them know who I am, remind them that we are here, because of the high turnaround and because it's administrated a lot of the time by volunteers. So I would go there and say 'we come here once a fortnight ... we are a free service, these are the sorts of things we can do for your clients, so there's no harm in referring them'. I would also do that so in a way it was like an unofficial CLE. **(Family solicitor)**

> Legal Aid Team are more interactive when they come in. They have conversations with my team and they often follow up queries and this is reflective on the professional service that they offer. **(MRC CEO Survey respondent)**

Areas of law covered

Table 21 indicates that 31 CLE events held at partnership MRCs/SSI during the project period covered family (63.2%) and 19 covered immigration and/or other civil law issues (39%), including two which covered both family and immigration and/or civil law issues. Two CLE events included criminal law issues. Within the broad area of law, CLE events often cover a range of issues.

The greatest concentration of CLE activity was at Auburn Diversity Services, with 13 CLE events, 10 of which concerned family law (one including family and crime) and three of which focused on immigration and/or other civil law issues. Interestingly the Family Law EIU does not provide an outreach service at Auburn Diversity Services. Metro MRC at Campsie and Liverpool MRC had CLE events on family and immigration and/or other civil law issues.

Table 21: Community legal education topics and events, at SSIs or MRCs under the SSI Partnership, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

MRCs/offices	*Family*	*Civil/ immigration^*	*Other civil^*	*Crime*	*Total topics*	*Total events*
Auburn Diversity Services	10	2	1	1	14	**13**
Fairfield MRC (Cabramatta)	2	2	1	0	5	**4**
Fairfield MRC (Fairfield)	0	1	0	0	1	**1**
Illawarra Multicultural Services	3	0	0	0	3	**3**
Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre	2	2	0	0	4	**4**
Metro MRC—Campsie	4	3	3	0	10	**6**
Metro MRC—Marrickville	3	0	0	0	3	**3**
Northern SS (Bateau Bay)	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Settlement Services International	5	0	0	0	5	**5**
SydWest MS (Blacktown & Mt Druitt)	2	6	1	1	10	**10**
Sydney MCS (Daceyville)	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Total	**31**	**16**	**6**	**2**	**55**	**49**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CLEMS data March 1 2012–February 28 2013.
Notes: ^ In consultation with Legal Aid NSW managers about CLE undertaken, events on 'Commonwealth' civil law are described here as 'civil/immigration', though these may also include some social security and other Commonwealth issues. Events concerning state civil law are defined as 'other civil'. Counted together, there were 19 'civil law topics', including three which involving state and Commonwealth civil law topics. CLE on family law or criminal law may include state and/or Commonwealth issues.

The audiences

Twenty-six of the 49 CLE events at SSI Partnership locations during the first year of the project involved community workers and/or other professionals, while 24 events included community members (Table 22). Three events involved CLE to both community workers and community members. The average estimated (or actual, if that was available) audience size was 30 people for family law CLE events at SSI Project MRCs, and 22 people for civil law CLE events. For the two criminal law CLE events, there was one audience of 15 people and one of 35.

Table 22: Community legal education audience types, at SSIs or MRCs under the SSI Partnership, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

MRCs/offices	Community workers	Other professionals	General public/ community members	Total audience types	Total events
Auburn Diversity Services	4	0	9	13	13
Fairfield MRC (Cabramatta)	2	0	2	4	5
Fairfield MRC (Fairfield)	1	0	0	1	1
Illawarra Multicultural Services	2	0	2	4	3
Liverpool MRC	1	0	3	4	4
Metro MRC—Campsie Office	3	1	2	6	5
Metro MRC—Marrickville	3	2	0	5	3
Northern SS (Bateau Bay)	0	0	0	0	0
Settlement Services International	3	5	0	8	5
SydWest Multicultural Services (Blacktown & Mt Druitt)	5	0	6	12	10
Sydney MCS (Daceyville)	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**24**	**8**	**24**	**56**	**49**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CLEMS data March 2013–February 2014.
Notes: A group noted as 'students' has been included in 'community members' at SydWest MS. Health professionals and teachers have been included as 'other professionals'. Audience type was not specified for one session at Auburn Diversity Services.

Benefits of CLE

Six MRC CEOs indicated in a survey that CLE had been conducted at their centres. They identified a number of benefits of the CLE provided by Legal Aid NSW, which may be summarised as:

- increased understanding about legal services, the clinics and the legal issues clients may face and how the clinics may help clients
- the provision of information on how to tackle the legal problems clients may experience
- encouraging referral relationships between MRC caseworkers, counsellors and other client staff to Legal Aid NSW's clinics
- the opportunity for MRC staff to ask questions and develop their understanding of the clinics
- through all of the above, MRC staff being empowered to support clients with accurate information and referral
- reduced need for background and basic information to be provided to the client during clinic appointments.

Eight of the 13 MRC client services staff who responded to the survey indicated that they had attended Legal Aid NSW CLE sessions. The overwhelming majority of respondents (7 of the 8) who had attended CLE indicated that it had changed the way that they were able to help clients. Respondents variously indicated that from the CLE they had learned about:

- particular areas of law (e.g. family, immigration, tenancy, consumer laws)
- different types of legal matters
- identifying clients in need of legal assistance
- why it is important to seek legal assistance
- where and how to refer clients to the right legal assistance service
- who can provide assistance for certain types of legal issues
- the availability of legal aid and limitations for court representation
- adjusting client expectations of legal assistance
- various pieces of legislation.

Referrals to SSI Partnership legal clinics

A central rationale for providing CLE to MRC staff is to encourage appropriate referrals to the clinics. Legal Aid NSW records how clients found out about or who referred clients to their services for assistance. A single 'referral' is recorded for each *matter*[10] dealt with by solicitors.

Table 23 indicates that, overall, the pattern of referral sources for SSI Partnership matters differed both from other outreach and matters dealt with in Legal Aid offices. To begin with, in significantly fewer matters, clients reached through outreach (37.9% SSI Partnership and 36.2% other outreach) 'already knew about Legal Aid NSW' and therefore self-referred, compared to the nearly three in four clients (73.3%) who sought assistance directly at Legal Aid offices. This suggests that outreach services (SSI and otherwise) may be reaching more clients who are new to Legal Aid NSW services.

Table 23: Proportion of Legal Aid matters by referral source, comparing SSI Partnership matters to matters dealt with in other outreach and Legal Aid offices, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

Referral source	*SSI Partnership* *N = 1357*	*Other outreach* *N = 14868*	*Legal Aid offices* *N = 40870*
Already knew about Legal Aid NSW	37.9%	36.2%	73.3%
Community organisation	30.5%	9.4%	3.8%
Family/friend	7.1%	1.8%	2.2%
Another Legal Aid office	4.1%	2.5%	2.2%
Community Legal Centre/ALS	2.3%	4.2%	1.6%
Other agency	2.1%	4.8%	2.8%
Internet/publication/phone book	0.5%	1.0%	1.1%
LawAccess NSW	0.2%	0.9%	0.9%
Court/tribunal	0.1%	19.4%	2.1%
Not stated or not applicable	15.2%	19.8%	9.9%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI Partnership matters only, 1 March 2013–28 February 2014.
Notes: N = 57095 matters. Figures count matters, not assistances, as only one referral source can be recorded per matter.
Other agency includes: doctor/health professional, dispute resolution/mediation, FRCs, private practitioner, prison, government department, Union, WDVCAS, Library and Police.

The proportion of SSI Partnership matters in which the client was referred by a community organisation (30.5%) or by family and friends (7.1%) is significantly higher than matters dealt with in other outreach services or Legal Aid offices. This, together with the feedback from solicitors and MRC staff, may suggest the impact of the relationship building (including CLE) between the solicitors providing the outreach services under the SSI Partnership and the host agencies in which they are based. Overall, the 13 staff survey respondents indicated that they referred just over one in five clients per month to Legal Aid NSW's clinics.

We repeated this analysis *including only clients from CALD backgrounds* in each location. The pattern was similar to Table 23. For instance, in significantly fewer matters, CALD clients reached through the SSI Partnership (37.4%) or other outreach (27.5%) 'already knew about Legal Aid' compared to those reached by Legal Aid offices (70.1%).

Within the SSI Partnership matters, we see differences between the areas of law (Table 24). More than half of all family law matters were as a result of a referral from a community organisation (most likely the host MRC), with less than 20 per cent (19.7%) indicating they already knew about Legal Aid NSW and therefore self-referred. This may suggest that the connections necessary to 'bridge the divide' and provide legal assistance for issues which sensitive in the target communities, are taking effect.

In just over a third (36.2%) of immigration matters, clients indicated that they already knew about Legal Aid NSW and self-referred while another third (35.9%) were referred by a community

10 Each matter may involve one or more assistances.

Table 24: Proportion of SSI Partnership matters, by referral source and area of law, Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014

Referral source	*Family* *N = 284*	*Immigration* *N = 643*	*Other civil* *N = 430*
Already knew about Legal Aid NSW	19.7%	36.2%	52.3%
Community organisation	51.4%	35.9%	8.6%
Family/friend	4.6%	5.9%	10.5%
Another Legal Aid office	2.5%	6.7%	1.4%
Community Legal Centre	6.0%	1.6%	0.9%
Other agency /court	3.2%	3.1%	0.2%
Internet/publication	1.4%	0.5%	0.0%
LawAccess NSW	0.4%	0.0%	0.5%
Not stated	10.9%	10.1%	25.6%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, CASES data, SSI Partnership matters only, 1 March 2013-28 February 2014.
Note: Figures count matters not assistances, as only one referral source can be recorded per matter. Other agency includes doctor/health professional, FRC, Police, government department, WDVCAS and courts/tribunals.

organisation. The pattern was different for other civil matters in which more than half already knew about Legal Aid—again perhaps reflecting the long-term civil law outreach clinic in Cabramatta.

Snapshot data: how clients found out about the clinics

In the snapshot period, solicitors recorded how clients found out about the clinics. In 65 consultations (42.2%), clients indicated that they found out about the clinic through an MRC worker or program, while a further 38 consultations (24.7%) were with clients who had received assistance from the clinic on a prior occasion. In another 19 consultations (12.3%), clients were referred by another agency or professional and in 14 (9.1%) clients were informed about the clinic by a family member or friend. Only three people (1.9%) already knew about Legal Aid NSW (see Table A1 in Appendix B). The high rate of referral from MRC workers, other agencies and family and friends would suggest that the clinics are well embedded in networks which support the target client group.

The data reported above describes the assistance provided and the clients assisted through the SSI partnership, and how these differ from the services provided and clients reached through other outreach and in-office services. The service provision above has been enabled through a partnership between Legal Aid NSW, SSI and its member MRCs. The features, benefits and challenges in that partnership are described below.

4.2 Key features of the SSI Partnership

The *Partnership Assessment Tool* provides a framework for assessing the strength and effectiveness of a partnership between organisations (Hardy et al. 2003). It examines six partnership principles shown by research to be building blocks for successful partnership:

- partners' recognition of the need for the partnership
- clarity and realism of purpose
- commitment and ownership
- development and maintenance of trust
- clarity and robustness of partnership arrangements
- monitoring, measurement and learning.

Below, the SSI Partnership is assessed against these principles.

Need to partner

The interviews with Legal Aid NSW and SSI senior managers, as well as MRC and Legal Aid NSW program managers revealed a strong, mature relationship between Legal Aid NSW and SSI, with a mutual commitment to the SSI Partnership and recognition of its value to each organisation. Recognition of the needs and value of partnering was strongly evidenced at both senior management and frontline service delivery levels. For example, the SSI Partnership was described by a SSI manager as having been:

> great for SSI, it's great for MRCs—it's about engaging in a model that's tailored to the needs of its constituency … it's not an expensive program. It's really honing and targeting of resources to meet—culturally [and] appropriately—the needs of a community in a way that's quite sustainable. It was researched and was applied dynamically. **(SSI manager)**

Legal Aid NSW initially identified SSI as a potential partner due to its connection to MRCs and the CALD community, a client group identified as being under-represented amongst of Legal Aid NSW services:

> … we were aware from just looking at our own demographics that the CALD client group wasn't necessarily a group who we were attracting into our services … we had been doing a little bit of thinking ourselves around maybe we should be being a bit more proactive and … see whether there was some sort of partnership that could take place on the ground. **(Legal Aid manager)**

At the same time, the FLC (2012) released their report on access to the family law system highlighting barriers experienced by the CALD community:

> … it sort of all came to a point of us saying we've got to do better, there's a lot that we can learn from the Family Law Council report and we might need to take a different approach. **(Legal Aid manager)**

Partnering provided Legal Aid NSW the opportunity to target and tailor its services more effectively for this particular disadvantaged client group and respond to their identified needs (Legal Aid Manager).

When Legal Aid NSW approached SSI about forming a partnership to provide legal assistance services in family and civil law, the proposal was immediately attractive to SSI because 'it was such a wonderful idea', the 'possibilities were good' and 'the goals of what Legal Aid wanted to achieve resonated with SSI' and its constituency:

> When we were approached, this fit really well because it was about trying to provide legal services in the areas most needed that was actually driven by an evidence base … the benefit of it is that it allows for an integration of service delivery … all those access roadblocks that are normally in the way, are removed and that was really what drove SSI and the MRCs to say, 'Yeah, we really do like the idea of having these clinics based in a geographical area and in an actual service centre that people who are traditionally very hard access are comfortable and familiar with. **(SSI manager)**

Importantly, the timing of the SSI Partnership was seen as having been 'reasonably good for both agencies', with Legal Aid NSW seeking an appropriate partner and SSI and members MRCs interested in extending the range of assistance services available to its core client grant (Legal Aid manager; SSI manager). Each respondent to the MRC CEO Survey indicated that Legal Aid NSW's legal outreach was a 'good fit' for their centre. Reasons included:

- the clinics complemented the other services at the MRC
- the clinics are highly suited to client needs, and the assistance provided has been culturally appropriate and sensitive to complicating factors such as poor mental health and English language skills.

Legal Aid NSW solicitors and MRC client services staff similarly articulated the need to partner, in order to deliver improved services and outcomes to clients. The SSI Partnership was variously described as being a 'mutual' and 'collaborative relationship' based on their shared interest in assisting the same client group.

Informants described the need for the SSI Partnership in terms of the services enabled by the partnering and the positive impact for clients. As observed in the MRC CEO and client services surveys:

> The service has impacted positively on many of our client's lives, it has improved communication, access and most importantly understanding … [and] has also benefited the workers in the MRCs where their knowledge about Legal Aid services has improved immensely. **(MRC CEO Survey respondent)**

> it has been of assistance to many clients in different situations. [The] assisting lawyers were capable professionals and sensitive of client issues and culture. There is need for the service. **(MRC Client Services Survey respondent)**

> [The services] not only take the pressure off caseworkers when clients are facing a multitude of problems, but that legal advice/help is accessible and attainable for our clients. **(MRC Client Services Survey respondent)**

Solicitors interviewed similarly indicated that they thought the legal outreach clinics were achieving their purpose and had been a 'huge success'. Immigration solicitors reported that had experienced very high demand and positive responses from MRC clients and staff. Their clinics were consistently booked, and had a waiting list at some locations. The general civil outreach clinics similarly faced strong client demand. Consistent with the CASES data reported previously, family solicitors and managers reported that they had experienced more sporadic client demand, in part related to the sensitivity of the issues being dealt with, but had made a positive difference for many clients.

There was a broad consensus amongst solicitors interviewed that Legal Aid NSW was 'definitely providing an outreach service to clients that need it', although the volume of services appeared to depend on the 'relationship with the MRCs' (General civil solicitor; Family solicitor). It also appeared to depend on the legal problem circumstances. For example, family solicitors identified particular challenges associated with the area of law and clients' cultural backgrounds:

> … with hard work and commitment from both ends, we are seeing a lot more clients wanting to see a solicitor … there are things we can improve on, but I think that the number of people that we've assisted over this short period of time has been incredible … it's not until you do that sort of grass roots work that you understand how it can impact families and members of the community … What is more important to people than family? **(Family solicitor)**

It was these challenges, identified in the FLC (2012) report, that were, in part, the impetus for the SSI Partnership and the model of service. However, there was a broad consensus amongst the family solicitors interviewed that through partnering and collaborating with the MRCs they had successfully connected with and provided legal information, advice, assistance and referral to many clients who otherwise may not have had access to legal assistance (Family solicitor).

In the interviews there was a strong sense that both Parties had found the 'right partner'. For example, Legal Aid NSW was characterised as being a 'good partner' to work with because it has 'an excellent reputation … it delivers' and achieves 'good outcomes' for clients (SSI manager). Legal Aid NSW was also described as having a similar philosophical approach and values, and that it sought out and listened to the advice of service partners to provide more accessible and culturally appropriate services (SSI manager). It was:

> not your typical bureaucracy … their people are actually in the community, they're experts … They're not in a big building that you never see … I think that it's a good culture, it's a wonderful approach that they have. **(SSI manager)**

SSI was described as being the 'right partner' for Legal Aid NSW because of the connection to migrant and CALD communities through the MRCs, and the similar nature, scale and ethos of the organisations:

> They're actually really similar, organisationally they've got a similar sort of vision [and] mission to us, and a similar sort of independence from government … **(Legal Aid manager)**

There were benefits for Legal Aid NSW in partnering and collaborating with organisations that had 'sufficient size', resources and infrastructure that they were willing to contribute to the SSI Partnership (Legal Aid manager).

Interviewees highlighted how the different, yet complementary, nature of their respective expertise and services combined to provide a shared 'holistic' approach to client services (Legal Aid manager; SSI manager). Namely, Legal Aid NSW was identified by SSI and MRC informants as being 'expert' legal service providers to disadvantaged clients and the types of problems they have, while SSI and MRCs were identified as having expertise about the human and settlement services needs and the cultural factors affecting migrant communities in particular locations. In addition, each of the Parties brought complementary staff skills, status and reputation, and their wider relationships and networks to the SSI Partnership. For instance, MRC client services staff were described as having valuable expertise that improved the nature of the legal assistance services that Legal Aid NSW was able to provide:

> … they have a real understanding of what impacts our clients [and] how to give them assistance from a holistic perspective … they really are incredible in terms of providing case work and support to individuals … **(Family solicitor)**

The nature of the 'peak agency' organisational structure of SSI and its member MRCs was also cited by the Parties as another feature that made them a suitable partner for the model of legal assistance services. SSI's peak role is explored further below in the context of the robustness of the SSI Partnership arrangements.

Clear and realistic purpose

Shared understanding of the purpose of partnering underpins effective collaborative working, and provides a basis for better service design and implementation (Nous Group 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014). In the interviews for this project, managers at both Legal Aid NSW and SSI clearly articulated the same scope and purpose of the partnership. Informants pointed to the MOU as formally stating the purpose of the SSI Partnership and the Parties' shared interest in providing accessible legal services to CALD community members (Legal Aid manager; SSI manager).

Legal Aid NSW was described as having been 'really clear' about what funding and resources it had available to commit to the SSI Partnership, and importantly, as being clear about what it could and could not do in terms of legal service provision:

> Legal Aid have been very transparent and open to us at all levels. They never promised the moon … They were really clear on resources, on timeframe, on approach. **(SSI manager)**

In particular, NPA funding requirements defined a framework for the legal assistance services to be provided (Legal Aid manager; SSI manager). Within that framework, the Parties collaborated on the design, implementation and operation of those services.

Clarity in the resources available and client needs to be addressed, established a foundation for the Parties to negotiate partnership terms and conditions, subsequently manifesting in the MOU terms formally agreed, solidifying the purpose in partnering, and responsibilities of each Party in doing so.

Commitment and ownership

The MOU formally established the commitment of each Party to the SSI Partnership, and the interview and survey material indicated a common view that the Parties had fulfilled their respective commitments.

The way in which the SSI Partnership was formed, and the way in which it had been implemented, and how the Steering Committee comprised of Legal Aid NSW, SSI and MRC representatives had operated, was described as fostering commitment and ownership between the Parties and MRCs:

> So it's been a very mutually satisfying development of a model that we've—that we feel we've all had a say in it ... [and] because it wasn't imposed, it was quite organic, people feel that they own it. **(SSI manager)**

One of the common interests shared by the Parties was the desire to use scarce resources as effectively as possible, and seeking to locate them so as to maximise their beneficial impact for MRC clients (SSI manager; Legal Aid manager).

Seed money was used to engage a consultant, Cultural Perspectives, to undertake a needs analysis to firstly, determine the access to legal services at each SSI member MRC and the perceived level of demand for family and immigration legal assistance services, and secondly, to recommend where to locate the limited number of family and immigration clinics amongst SSI's 11 member MRCs. This report not only provided baseline evidence of needs, but established the Parties' shared intention to use the limited available funding to provide those services where they were most likely to have the greatest benefit for MRC clients and had demonstrated Legal Aid NSW's openness to collaborative working to do so (Legal Aid manager; SSI manager).

Develop and maintain trust

The way in which the SSI Partnership was negotiated and agreed, the collaborative manner in which the outreach legal services were planned, and the ongoing interaction between stakeholders though the Steering Committee were the primary means through which trust was developed and maintained at the agency manager level. For instance, informants characterised Legal Aid NSW as being 'very open, very respectful' approach to partnering (SSI manager). Responses to the MRC CEO Survey indicated that 'Legal Aid NSW had an open mind about client needs and worked effectively to build a partnership with the MRC', and 'received feedback well and worked hard to improve the accessibility of the clinics'.

At the frontline service provider level, relationships and trust between Legal Aid NSW solicitors and MRC client services staff was principally forged though the provision of the legal outreach and CLE services. For example, the interviews and surveys indicated that at some MRCs, Legal Aid NSW and MRC staff have good relationships, 'they talk to each other to improve their understanding and clarify what each other do and how clients can be assisted' (MRC CEO Survey). Solicitor interviews suggested a number of important dimensions to their relationship with MRCs:

- It can be hard to build relationships in a short time.
- Relationships can deteriorate with staff change and turnover.
- The relationship needs to be continually worked on.
- Helping clients improves the relationship with the MRC.
- Spending time between client appointments getting to know workers helps.
- Regular clinics develop better relationships.
- Solicitors sometimes work closely with caseworkers to meet client needs.
- Being available for contact out of office hours builds the trust of MRC staff.

It appears that the strength and depth of the relationship between Legal Aid NSW and the MRCs is better at some locations that others. For example, one MRC CEO Survey respondent indicated that their centre had not been attending Steering Committee meetings because there had been confusion about whether or not the MRC was part of the arrangements to host clinics in the wake of management change and staff turnover. Some Legal Aid NSW informants similarly reported a need to try and 'restart' some clinics where client demand had dropped-off (Family solicitor).

Explanations for the variable relationship between Legal Aid NSW and the MRCs are explored further below, although two aspects appear to be telling. First, it appears that at MRCs where there has been stronger demand and service provision, there is also a stronger relationship between Legal Aid NSW and the MRC. There appears to be a virtuous circle between stronger Legal Aid NSW and MRC relationships and client demand: better relationships contribute to higher client referral and service provision, and higher levels of service provision contribute to stronger

relationships and referral. For instance, one family solicitor explained that where there was a good relationship and trust, there was better scope to have more requests for appointments, see more clients, provide better assistance and develop better awareness on reputation of services (Family solicitor). Second, there appear to be additional service challenges trying to reach clients about issues that are more culturally sensitive (such as family law issues) and that additional time may be needed to build trust and relationships with the MRC and local community to successfully bridge the 'cultural distance'.

Clear and robust partnership arrangements

The SSI Partnership is the first time that Legal Aid NSW has formally partnered with a peak organisation constituted by independent member organisations (Legal Aid manager). The partnership arrangements were described as being 'nimble' and a 'really efficient approach' because they facilitated quick decision-making and streamlined service implementation (SSI manager).

The SSI Partnership has a number of structural and other features that demonstrate the clarity and robustness of the partnering arrangement, and together support effective partnering and collaborative working. In particular, the baseline needs analysis provided by the consultant report, the circumscribed nature of the funding, the MOU terms and conditions, the relationship between SSI and the MRCs, the collaborative work of the Steering Committee, and the relationships between Legal Aid NSW and MRC staff, all provided for and supported robust partnering.

Informants indicated that the baseline needs analysis provided by the consultant report was 'money well spent' because it 'shortcut the process' of rolling-out and establishing individual outreaches (Legal Aid manager). It also focused the Parties on the purpose of the SSI Partnership, and provided a clear and transparent framework for making decisions about locating family and immigration outreach clinics to fill access gaps and avoid duplicating existing services (SSI manager; Legal Aid manager).

Informants indicated the circumscribed nature of the NPA funding had had some advantages in terms of clarifying the scope and nature of the SSI Partnership (SSI manager; Legal Aid manager). The finite resources were also described as being the 'biggest challenge' for the Parties because it forced them to work hard to make the most of them (SSI manager)

The independent consultant's report was also identified as helping to frame the scope of the terms and conditions agreed in the MOU. The MOU established standard terms and conditions for outreach clinics across MRCs, framed expectations, and also set out some administrative and service model details, such as they type and nature of the legal assistance services that Legal Aid NSW would provide. The MOU formally stated the responsibilities of the Parties. SSI had responsibility for providing a private, appropriate space for each clinic, managing appointment booking and recording client details, as well as arranging interpreter services. In turn, Legal Aid NSW agreed to pay SSI sessional costs at a fixed rate to cover the following:

- appointment arrangements
- interpreter bookings
- reception on the day of the clinic
- rent of a private space for the clinic
- internet access
- landline telephone access
- photocopying
- printing
- access to general MRC facilities.

Informants reported that those arrangements had 'worked reasonably well', because it clearly defined 'what they do, and what we do' (Legal Aid manager; SSI manager).

Having the Steering Committee co-convened by Legal Aid NSW and SSI, with SSI providing secretariat support, was described as providing appropriate arrangements for managing the SSI Partnership and the operation of the clinics (Legal Aid manager; SSI manager). SSI contributed resources to that enabled the meetings to be organised, have minutes recorded and distributed, and liaise with MRCs unable to travel to attend meetings. Respondents to the

MRC CEO Survey also indicated that the role SSI played had enabled MRCs to participate and had supported better partnering across the MRCs (MRC CEO Survey Respondent).

Informants also recognised that the relationship between SSI and member MRCs provided the advantages of a peak organisational structure. Not only did SSI have expertise stemming from running settlement services programs across NSW, but had extensive experience in working with MRCs to do so. Given that it was neither feasible nor sustainable within available resources to separately partner with local ethnic and migrant organisations, SSI provided an effective and efficient route to for Legal Aid NSW to partner with key migrant and settlement service providers (Legal Aid manager). SSI provided a central point of contact for partnership arrangements, while its member MRCs provide decentralised points of service delivery with reach into areas of high migrant concentration across metropolitan and regional areas (SSI manager).

A number of informants cited examples of how the relationship between Legal Aid NSW and MRC staff facilitated troubleshooting of operational matters as they arose. For example, two MRC CEO Survey respondents reported that issues were raised directly with Legal Aid NSW solicitors and quickly resolved. Another MRC CEO reported that they had worked with Legal Aid NSW staff improve communication concerning appointment bookings. Legal Aid NSW solicitors similarly cited examples of working with MRCs to improve the operation of the clinics.

Monitor, measure and learning

The MOU and ongoing Steering Committee meetings also evidence the Parties' commitment to monitoring, measuring and learning from the experience of providing legal assistance services under the SSI Partnership. Not only is the SSI Partnership the subject of this evaluation report, but the Steering Committee provided a 'problem solving' forum for monitoring and learning from the experience of establishing legal outreach clinics at the MRCs (Legal Aid manager; SSI manager):

> [The Steering Committee brought Legal Aid NSW, SSI and MRCs together to] problem solve and to evaluate and assess as the program was being rolled out, and work towards integrating that feedback rather than waiting till the end and saying, 'Okay, well that could have been done better, we'll know for next time.' **(SSI manager)**

Critically, the Steering Committee was identified as a 'good learning opportunity' in which the Parties could learn more about the 'legal world' and the 'migrant community world' (SSI manager; Legal Aid manager).

Together, the MRC CEO Survey respondents and the informants indicated that the Steering Committee provided a 'dynamic' forum in which the Parties could monitor and review the use of limited resources and avoid 'reinventing the wheel'. It was a forum to proactively scan for and gather issues from the frontline staff and then address those issues to build the capacity of the outreach clinics to operate more effectively and efficiently, and 'always keeping front of mind that these resources are scarce, where can we best put them?' (SSI manager; Legal Aid manager). At Steering Committee meetings issues are:

> brought to the table, and are discussed in terms of what impact does that have on the way that we deliver services, how do we then tailor our services, what changes should we make to be more responsive to those particular issues. **(Legal Aid manager)**

Initial service challenges related to content (area of law) and CLE, as well as operational and logistic issues such as client access, space, promotion, coping with high or low client demand, factors affecting particular communities, appointment management systems, waiting lists, use of and access to interpreter services, better triaging and referral, and how existing resources might be better deployed (SSI manager). The Steering Committee initially met monthly during the establishment phase of the SSI outreach clinics, and bi-monthly thereafter during the first year of the SSI Partnership.

Features of effective partnering and collaboration

Assessed against the criteria of the Partnership Assessment Tool, the SSI Partnership can be considered to be successful, and to have a solid foundation for effective collaborative practice and partnership working. However, it appears that the collaboration and relationship between Legal Aid NSW and MRCs has been stronger at some centres than others as noted further in Section 4.3 (Effective referral pathways).

The partnership assessment indicates a number of barriers to effective partnerships and collaborative practice were overcome, evidenced by a lack of challenges associated with personal agenda, politicking, and asymmetrical power (Nous Group 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014). Two identified challenges to effective collaboration, however, merit further discussion as they appear to be factors affecting the operation of the outreach clinics at some locations MRCs, namely geographical distance and staff turnover. In addition, collaboration between Legal Aid NSW and MRCs appears to be particularly important with respect to family law matters given the way in which cultural factors impede access to justice for the MRC client group.

Given that the SSI Partnership arrangements were the same for all of the outreach clinics, service challenges encountered at particular locations may therefore be attributed to particular circumstances and service environment, such as the strength of the relationship between Legal Aid NSW and the MRC and the legal practice area. These challenges are examined further in the discussion and conclusion.

Benefits of the SSI Partnership

Participants in the interviews and surveys identified a number of benefits of the SSI Partnership for MRCs and their clients. Benefits accruing to Legal Aid NSW are discussed in detail in Section 4.3, in the context of the legal assistance services that the SSI Partnership enabled.

There was a strong consensus that the benefits of the SSI Partnership for clients, MRCs and Legal Aid NSW, outweighed the costs and burdens. This was reported by management from Legal Aid NSW and SSI and by all but one respondent to the MRC CEO Survey. One respondent CEO indicated that the costs and benefits had been about the same.

A range of benefits for clients were identified by respondents to the MRC CEO Survey and Client Services Surveys, highlighting not only the greater access to legal assistance provided by the clinics but also the impact of that assistance. Key themes identified were that the outreach clinics provided:

- access in a 'one stop shop' environment, for many clients who would otherwise not have be able to obtain legal assistance
- access to important services that can influence and affect clients' future
- solicitors and MRC support workers working together to provide better assistance to clients
- assistance to take action and avoid having further legal problems down the track
- solutions for complex and confusing matters
- clients having better understanding of how to get help, what is happening, who is helping them, and how to do more to help themselves
- improved understanding and access to the Australian legal system and services
- comfort and confidence to seek legal assistance due to the clients' familiarity, trust and confidence in MRC staff and services
- professional follow-up assistance
- clients having someone to assist them through the process, rather than them having to deal with it all themselves
- clients being more confident about handling their legal problems.

Respondents to the MRC Client Services also indicated that partnering in the legal outreach clinics have made a positive difference to their own work. Key benefits of partnering were that it had:

- assisted workers in their core business of assisting newly arrived communities
- improved understanding of client issues and needs and strengthened workers knowledge base
- helped workers provide clients with appropriate services, advice and referrals to Legal Aid
- improved their relationship and trust with the client
- afforded opportunity to follow up with the client and legal advisers.

MRC CEOs were also asked to consider whether there were any benefits of the outreach clinics provided under the SSI Partnership for funders and government. Respondents identified the immigration clinics as reducing burdens of the Department of Immigration. Similarly, respondents identified the family law clinics as reducing the burden on child protection and family services and also reducing short- and long-term burdens on health services. Respondents also articulated a range of wider benefits, including improved:

- access and equity for a very disadvantaged group
- knowledge and understanding of the legal system
- client ability to contribute productively to the community.

In addition, MRC CEOs pointed to the cost effectiveness and efficiency of the arrangements, including:

- cost effective and equitable access
- reduced pressure on later public legal services
- reduced burden on current and future health services
- faster response to consumer driven needs
- improved client trust in legal services.

The purpose of the SSI Partnership was to provide legal assistance services to disadvantaged CALD communities. The partnership has been critical to this intention. Equally important however, is a model of service delivery which effectively and efficiently delivers appropriate legal services to those clients who most need it.

Section 4.3 examines how the legal outreach services provided through the SSI Partnership conform with best practice, as articulated by Legal Aid NSW's *Best Practice Principles for Legal Aid NSW Outreach Services*.

4.3 Key features of the legal assistance service model

Best practice principles inform the design of Legal Aid NSW outreach services. These indicate that services should be planned and targeted, engaged with target client groups and the services that assist them, coordinated across Legal Aid NSW practice areas, client centred, consistent, resourced and sustainable, and evaluated (Legal Aid NSW, *Best Practice Principles for Legal Aid NSW Outreach Services*; Forell, McDonald et al. 2013). In the interviews, Legal Aid NSW managers indicated that the outreach services provided under the SSI Partnership appeared to 'tick all the boxes' and cohered with best practice outreach: 'there's a lot of thought a planning in it, and none of it was ad hoc' (Legal Aid manager).

The *Best Practice Principles for Legal Aid NSW Outreach Services* and NPA service priorities provide a useful framework for identifying the key features of the service model that helped increase access to legal services for the target client group (COAG 2010; Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014). The following features are examined below:

- targeted services
- service reach and engagement with target clients
- appropriate services
- effective collaboration and 'joined-up' services
- effective referral pathways
- coordinated legal assistance services
- early and timely legal assistance
- suitable administrative arrangements.

Targeted outreach services

Critical to the success of the project is that the 'clients who are receiving the service' are those that the outreach services were intended for (Legal Aid manager). Target clients were described as migrants from CALD communities experiencing similar socio-economic disadvantage to other Legal Aid NSW clients (Legal Aid manager). They were also described as being socially isolated, entrenched in their own communities, and facing barriers to accessing assistance from a Legal Aid

NSW office (Legal Aid Manger; Legal Aid Manger). As such they accord with Legal Aid NSW and NPA priorities.

Four key compelling 'roadblocks' identified as being experienced by the target client group were:

- lack of knowledge about the Australian legal system, remedies and services
- fear and misunderstanding of courts, the justice system and legal services
- shame and fear associated with having a legal problem, particularly family problems
- lack of financial resources for private legal services.

Legal Aid NSW's legal outreach and CLE to MRCs was a strategy to overcome these identified roadblocks, by bridging the 'cultural distance' to these clients by working with and through MRCs. As the following solicitor explained:

> if they're already in contact with the MRC, they're already getting advice and assistance ... A lot of immigrants, if they're newly arrived in this country, don't understand the legal system and don't understand the accessibility of the courts ... and also they don't understand that Legal Aid can give advice and help them ... **(Family solicitor)**

Many MRC clients face barriers to legal assistance services because they have emigrated from countries with different justice systems. A cross-section of informants indicated that this was particularly so in the case of recently arrived migrants that lacked 'knowledge and understanding of the legal system in Australia' (MRC CEO Survey respondent). There was consensus across each Legal Aid NSW practice area that the SSI outreach clinics were seeing a very high proportion of target clients. This view was strongly supported by the CASES and snapshot data reported above. For example, one solicitor observed that:

> out of all the people I've seen at the MRC over the last year, I've only ever seen one person who was English speaking as the first language, came from a Greek background but was actually second generation. Everybody else has ... struggled quite a lot with language, with their English. **(Family solicitor)**

Another solicitor indicated that clients at MRCs were '100 per cent' the target client group (General civil solicitor). Different legal practice areas, however, reported particular service challenges with comparatively lower number of family assistances provided to MRC clients, particularly when compared to immigration and other civil assistances.

Legal Aid NSW informants explained that the rationale for instituting family outreach services to MRCs was to provide services for disadvantaged clients from a CALD background who do not ordinarily avail themselves of services available from Legal Aid NSW. Interviewees cited a range of cultural factors engulfing family problems as formidable obstacles to the target client group, particularly women (who well represented among family and immigration law clients), seeking legal assistance. As the following Legal Aid NSW manager explained, many:

> new arrivals come from countries and communities where they don't think of family law as something that the legal system would be helping them with. They see that as something that their own community, their own religious leaders, have to deal with, and it's a bit of a step for them [to seek legal assistance]. **(Legal Aid manager)**

Lack of understanding of rights and options under Australian family law mean some clients are particularly vulnerable, such as where a client has been led to believe that she would 'never see the kids again' if she sought a divorce from her husband (Family solicitor). For such clients, the provision of 'very basic' information and advice can have substantial impact. Case examples 1 and 2 (boxes 4 and 5) provide examples of how family legal outreach provided under the SSI Partnership had made an important positive difference to clients.

Case example 1

I had one client who has no English whatsoever, has two little children, one is about 11, one is about four or five, so the older one is not that young. What the father essentially told her was that, 'Because we want to separate, I'm going to take one of the children and you can take the other'. And so she hasn't seen [one] child at all for two years … She believed that this is the way that the Australian system works–where you divide everything 50–50. And so she came to me wanting a divorce … at the end of the session—because I started asking her questions about the living arrangements for the children—she told me that the 11-year-old she hasn't seen in a very long time. That's when I gave her advice about what options are available for her to at least spend time with her son. And she was in tears. She didn't know that was an option available to her. She didn't know that all the property that was under his name that she would be entitled to [claim] … basic things that we take for granted … She was in complete tears. She couldn't believe that there was a possibility that she was going to see her son. (Family solicitor)

Family solicitors also explained that domestic violence was a factor in a high proportion of matters. One solicitor indicated that, in her experience, 90 per cent of the matters she had at MRCs involved domestic violence, although it is important to note that this is not necessarily something that is unique to the MRC client group, as family solicitors indicated that domestic violence was also a common experience amongst client groups assisted in other service setting. There was, however, a common view expressed by family solicitors that cultural factors heightened the barriers for many MRC clients. Cultural factors could heighten client fear, shame and dependency, such that many MRC clients with family law problems experiencing domestic violence may be unwilling to seek assistance from mainstream legal services and other service settings.

Case example 2

… we have seen a few people in the MRCs for example where they're mothers and they come from a culture where the father has more control over the children and the decision making in relation to the children. And they don't understand that this is not how it works in Australia—it's the best interest of the child that's the most important consideration, and the relationship that the child has with the parents, and it's not all about what the father of the children wants. They say, 'If I leave him because I'm in a violent relationship, he will get the children.' And the answer is, 'No, he won't necessarily get the children. It's not a foregone conclusion. The court will make separate decisions about the children and you need to protect yourself'. (Family solicitor)

One Legal Aid NSW manager also noted that the experience of providing family law outreach at the MRCs had 'inverted' the service challenges more normally experienced by Legal Aid NSW's family and civil legal practice areas:

> It's certainly been a challenge for family lawyers to be educating people about what is family law. That's not something we've had to do, I mean it's often been the other way around that the civil lawyers are walking around saying 'Let me tell you what civil law is—it's your everyday problems' … In fact it's the other way around, [MRC clients] all [understand what] immigration is, they all get it, but they don't actually understand family law. **(Legal Aid manager)**

Legal Aid NSW informants explained that immigration outreach for MRC clients was intended to extend access to legal services to clients who would not ordinarily come to Legal Aid NSW head office in central Sydney to seek assistance. The target clients were characterised as disadvantaged people who:

> Don't come into the city. Can't afford the train ticket. Have a disability … They're so entrenched in their own communities in South West Sydney that the idea of getting on a train and coming somewhere else for legal advice is just probably quite daunting. I think that's the main strength of doing outreach advice—to get into the community. **(Immigration solicitor)**

Immigration outreach was predicated on enhancing access to legal assistance in South West and Western Sydney, an area shown to have a particularly high prevalence of recently arrived migrants who are socially disadvantaged (ABS 2013; see also Table 1).

Immigration solicitors were of the view that MRC clients were generally aware of needing assistance with immigration matters. While they had experienced high demand for immigration assistance, MRC clients' understanding of immigration law tended to be clouded by a 'big rumour mill' in local communities (Immigration solicitor). Immigration solicitors agreed that that there were 'many misconceptions about how immigration works' in the target communities and that this created service challenges, such as first having to clarify and explain immigration law' (Immigration solicitor). Immigration solicitors further reported that they saw a number of clients whom they thought would have difficulty obtaining assistance from other public legal services and explained that some MRC clients do not travel very far from, and rarely if ever leave, their local area:

> I've seen quite a few guys on disability, one woman's blind, one woman can't walk properly … one couple, both of them have really serious health problems. They would never come into the city. In fact, if I talk about something they're, 'Is it in Liverpool?' **(Immigration solicitor)**

A number of MRC clients were also identified by immigration solicitors as having been unable to act on immigration information and advice that they had obtained from other sources, and that the ability of Legal Aid NSW solicitors to provide minor assistance made a substantial difference to clients.

Reach and engage target clients

Another key feature of the legal assistance model is its capacity to reach and meet the needs of clients through the location of the outreach services and collaboration with MRCs. Locating outreach at places already known and used, and providing services consistently, are effective strategies to reach and engage target clients (Forell & Gray 2009; Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014).

Location

A defining feature of the model of service is the way in which it is embedded into, and integrated with, other assistance services targeted to the CALD community and recently arrived migrants, including the suite of settlement services provided to recent humanitarian arrivals by MRCs. In fact, a cross-section of interviewees identified MRCs as being the 'ideal' and most appropriate location[11] to reach the target client group by successfully meeting their access needs (General civil solicitor; Legal Aid manager; SSI manager). MRCs were described as 'ideal' for a number of reasons. First, they are a well-known and well-frequented 'first port of call' for target clients seeking help (Coumarelos et al. 2012a; Pleasence et al. 2014). For instance:

> … they'll come in to the MRCs [when] they just need help. They don't know what they need … and it's the caseworker who kind of filters them off and says, 'Okay, we've got an immigration issue or you've got a family issue, and they filter them off from there.' **(Family solicitor)**

> Because it's a familiar environment, people are already coming. Law in of itself is a minefield to people—that's articulate English-speaking people, it's a minefield … And I think the fact that you're there in that safe environment, it makes the legal person more approachable. **(Steering Committee representative)**

11 It should be noted that the immigration outreach service for Fairfield MRC is hosted at Fairfield Legal Aid Office and Bankstown Legal Aid Office rather than at the centre. When the outreach service was first established, there was no space to accommodate the immigration clinic at Fairfield MRC. Referral relationships were developed and warm referrals were made from the Fairfield MRC to Legal Aid offices.

MRCs are also an effective location because, with a range of other assistance services provided, they are 'like a one stop shop' that target clients are likely to use to obtain other services:

> We know at those sort of places, eventually—because of the setup, if there are six different projects going on, for example Dress For Work, No Interest Loan Scheme, citizenship tests, English programs … community kitchen, food bank—one way or another they will be coming there … **(General civil solicitor)**

There was a strong consensus amongst MRC survey respondents that locating legal outreach at MRCs makes them more accessible. Each respondent to the MRC CEO Survey indicated that the outreach clinics were a 'good fit' and complemented other services available at the MRC (MRC CEO Survey respondent).

Second, MRCs provide a more accessible location for many clients because they feel more comfortable seeking and obtaining assistance there (SSI manager; Family solicitor). MRCs are embedded in the local migrant communities of particular geographic locations. They are typically accessible, known and used by local migrant communities:

> There's public transport links, they can get there easily, they're accessible … they're known through word of mouth and through promotion in the broader community but also targeting small emerging communities and there's a range of networks with community leaders and with organisations, with businesses at that local level. **(SSI manager)**

Family solicitors explained, by way of example, that in Liverpool, where the Legal Aid NSW office is located only a few streets from Liverpool MRC, clients appeared to strongly prefer to obtain legal assistance at the MRC because: 'They know where it is. They know the people. They can speak to the people in reception easily' (Immigration solicitor).

Family solicitors reported that MRCs were a preferable location for outreach because they offered clients a 'safe' and 'neutral' location to obtain family law information and assistance, particularly for clients suffering domestic violence. Solicitors suggested that locating outreach services at MRCs was pivotal to target clients' access to family law services:

> The people I'm seeing, I can guarantee they will never walk through the front door of Legal Aid, because they can't be seen here. If anyone sees them coming into this office, it's huge issues. **(Family solicitor)**

> They're ashamed to be approaching a lawyer, and to be getting assistance. Whereas when they go to the MRC they could be there for any sort of purpose … So it's more of a safe place for them, especially when there are such high levels of domestic violence … it's definitely giving us access to people that we normally wouldn't be able to assist. **(Family solicitor)**

Third, the infrastructure and resources typically available at MRCs make them a suitable host location for outreach legal services (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013). For example, compared to other possible outreach locations, the collaboration with MRCs had made:

> … things a bit easier to my understanding. Whereas if you are in a different setup which is not a migrant resource centre you really sometimes feel that there is a lack of resources … **(General civil solicitor)**

Each solicitor interviewed reported that the MRCs provided appropriate facilities and interview rooms that were as good or better than those in any other outreach host organisation,[12] although MRCs are all managed independently, and differences in administrative arrangements across MRCs were noted. Solicitors reported that they were 'hospitable' and provided a 'good atmosphere' to see clients (Immigration solicitor; General civil solicitor). MRCs 'fit the

12 One notable difference between SSI outreach and in-office appointments noted during the interviews was the lack of a 'panic button' at MRC interview rooms (Family solicitor). Like other outreach locations, solicitors performing outreach at MRCs have to be mindful of occupational health and safety. Solicitors indicated that MRCs were a safe outreach location because MRCs typically provide a range of other services and there is 'always people around' (Family solicitor; Immigration solicitor).

purpose' and enabled 'the same provision of service, just done in a location that's more accessible' for the target client group (Family solicitor).

Although MRCs were generally well regarded as outreach locations, some MRC locations were identified as being better than others. For example, MRC offices located in high foot-traffic areas and closer to public transport links and shopping centres appeared to solicitors to be busier and consequently to refer more clients to the legal outreach clinics.

Reach

A cross-section of informants indicated that SSI outreach successfully reached and assisted disadvantaged and socially isolated clients in 'extraordinary ways', 'people who I think we wouldn't have had contact with if it hadn't been for this program' (Legal Aid manager). MRC CEOs similarly highlighted how the service model had extended access to legal assistance services for a socially excluded and particularly vulnerable client group:

> A strength of the Legal Aid clinics is that it has allowed some of the most vulnerable clients to access legal services due to it being in an environment where there is established trust and relationship, and support for other issues. **(MRC CEO Survey respondent)**

> Clinics have made seeking legal assistance significantly more accessible for clients—particularly for clients with significant settlement needs due to language barriers, confidence in accessing mainstream services, and accessing services. **(MRC CEO Survey respondent)**

Solicitors from each legal practice areas similarly identified how the outreach clinics had successfully reached target clients with substantial legal needs and poor access to legal assistance from mainstream services:

> Some of the stories are so desperate and compelling that you just think, well, where—what were these people doing about these issues before? Where did they go? **(Immigration solicitor)**

> I don't know where these clients would go. If we weren't providing that service, they would probably get shunted to the local community legal centre, which obviously has a fixed capacity, and once you get to the capacity where do the clients go? These clients may just simply never … get the assistance that we're providing for them. **(Family solicitor)**

Client needs

One advantage of a tightly-defined target client group was that their needs were clearly articulated and considered during the planning and targeting of the outreach services. SSI outreach was characterised by solicitors as being 'different to all the other outreaches that I've done' because of the 'very specific needs' of the clients (General civil solicitor; Family solicitor). Cultural factors affected, first, clients' experience of legal problems, and second, their ability to act to try and resolve them. While other Legal Aid NSW clients also typically experience various forms of socio-economic disadvantage, consistent with the FLC (2012) report, many MRC clients were described as having 'extra vulnerabilities' that affect their access to services (Family solicitor). These included formidable access to justice barriers associated with: their lack of English language skills; experiences of trauma and torture; mental and physical health issues; lack of knowledge of the legal system in Australia; and lack of awareness and trust of mainstream services (MRC CEO Survey respondent).

SSI outreach was identified as successfully meeting the 'extra vulnerability' and access needs of the target client group. For example, one solicitor explained that:

> I have clients at duty and other outreach clinics that also have similar sorts of characteristics and attributes … But at the MRC I do feel that if our service was not there, I genuinely believe … over 70 per cent of these clients would not go to court, over 70 per cent of these clients would not call a Legal Aid solicitor and say 'I need to get some legal advice.' **(Family solicitor)**

MRC CEO Survey respondents reported that SSI outreach was an 'improved model of service' that provided 'significantly more accessible legal services' (MRC CEO Survey respondent). Key themes in participant responses included:

- legal assistance that overcomes language, confidence, trust and other accessibility barriers
- access to services in a safe environment where clients already go
- greatly improved access to credible and trusted legal assistance
- greater understanding of where to go for legal assistance
- access to legal assistance that follows through with the client
- support from bilingual workers who know what the clinics do and how they can help to better coordinate MRC and Legal Aid NSW services and streamline referral to legal services.

Case example 3 illustrates how a number of features of the service model, in particular the location and support provided by MRC staff, together help to successfully meet client access needs.

Case example 3

I remember one client in particular. She has been in Australia for over 35 years, but cannot speak a word of English. Cannot read or write in her mother tongue, which is Arabic. She was completely isolated. And all those sorts of things … She was seeing a DV worker … and still experiences quite severe domestic violence. She was always very hesitant to get other organisations or services involved. She was also hesitant to call the police. She never called the police after years of being, essentially, tortured … until she spoke to this worker, and this worker said, 'Look, she knows and she will understand' … That would not have happened had I not had a good relationship with the worker and the service … Had they not seen what type of work that we do—because … with time, I think that improves relationships and types of referrals. (Family solicitor)

Consistency

Another feature of effective legal outreach is providing consistent and predictable services (Forell & Gray 2009; Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014). Consistency of SSI outreach was identified as being particularly important for client access, and something that helped to keep the outreach clinics 'front of mind' of the MRC client services staff who are an important and pivotal source of client referral (Legal Aid manager; SSI manager).

One challenge experienced by Legal Aid NSW's family practice area has been inconsistent demand and client appointments at some SSI outreach locations. Given the strong demand for immigration and general civil outreach services under the SSI Partnership, as demonstrated by the CASES data, this challenge appears to reflect the barriers to family law services identified by the FLC (2012), rather than model of legal assistance service. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that legal problem characteristics are a strong driver of inaction and advice-seeking behaviour (Coumarelos et al. 2012a; Pleasence 2006; Pleasence et al. 2014).

Family solicitors stressed that inconsistent 'client numbers' do not reflect the 'hard work and commitment from both ends' of the SSI Partnership (Family solicitor; Family solicitor). Building trust concerning family law matters appears to have been more difficult and to have taken more time. However, because important trust and relationships had been established with MRCs and local migrant communities during the first year of the SSI Partnership, there was a view that demand for client appointments had been building and 'getting stronger and stronger':

> I feel that if things remain as they are, the services will only improve, because that's what I've seen … there has been more clients booked in, a better relationship, better assistance, more requests [for CLE] and I think that only comes with time and with trust and with commitment and hard work … **(Family solicitor)**

Respondents to the MRC surveys suggested that where client demand for services had been inconsistent, there was a need for more marketing and promotion of outreach services, as well as other efforts to raise awareness of the services with the local migrant community and organisations (MRC CEO Survey respondent; MRC Client Services Survey respondent).

One factor contributing to inconsistent demand for family services at some MRC locations appears to be the breakdown or interruption of relationships consequent to MRC staff turnover. For example, informants explained that change in staff and management at Illawarra Multicultural Services during the first year of the SSI Partnership led to a decline in client appointments. Family solicitors reported seeking to 're-start' clinics after a break in service, and seeking to liaise with MRC staff to get clinics going again (Family solicitor).

In contrast, MRC locations with higher family outreach client numbers appear to have benefited from having maintained a more consistent 'presence' at the MRC, which supported stronger relationships and collaborative practice by providing more opportunity for solicitors to engage and liaise with MRC staff:

> I do feel like if you have a good relationship and you're present and you have a presence in that community, then more people want to come to you … **(Family solicitor)**

The geographic dimension of maintaining relationships and providing family outreach services to Illawarra Multicultural Services and Northern Settlement Services poses challenge in terms of consistency and efficiency. Family solicitors only travel to SSI outreach when client appointments have been booked. Consequently, when no clients have been booked, there is little opportunity for family solicitors and MRC client services staff to interact.

Appropriate services

Appropriate legal services are accessible and tailored to match the legal need and capability of the target client group (Coumarelos et al. 2012a; Pleasence et al. 2014). A cross-section of informants indicated that the SSI Partnership outreach clinics were appropriate to the needs of the client group because they were culturally appropriate, provided in-person and assisted clients to resolve legal problems. Informants also indicated that Legal Aid NSW's ability to provide CLE and follow-up advice and assistance to clients needing it, and the collaboration with and support of MRC staff and services, further supported the accessibility and appropriateness of SSI outreach.

Culturally appropriate service

As discussed above, the location of the outreach services in MRCs was a pivotal aspect of providing a culturally appropriate service in locations accessible to the target client groups:

> The beauty of localised services … is we've got staff based in migrant resource centres and … the benefit of it is that it allows for an integration of service delivery. But it also allows our constituents [to] know the service. And they're comfortable. So when they see something promoting the service they go, 'Okay, I know how to get there, I know the public transport, I know their system of operating, how to make an appointment and who to call, and, oh yes, that worker speaks my language'. So it's just all those roadblocks [that] are normally in the way are removed … We really do like the idea of having these clinics based in a geographical area and in an actual service centre that people who are traditionally very hard to access are comfortable and familiar with. **(SSI manager)**

Critically, MRCs provide a 'safe space' and a 'comfortable space' for clients, and that makes a 'big difference' to their access (Family solicitor; Immigration solicitor). The use of translation and interpreter services and support of bilingual MRC staff help to overcome language barriers.

Informants also suggested that the service model was more culturally appropriate because it was 'more respectful' and tailored to clients' particular access needs, and was therefore a more 'efficient' and 'effective' way of providing legal assistance services:

> It really is efficient and it's culturally appropriate because a person's language has been considered and … it's in a safe environment, a comfortable environment. **(SSI manager)**

> They are comfortable in talking to you and I strongly believe if the client is comfortable in talking to you that makes a lot of difference. **(General civil solicitor)**

MRC staff also contributed to the accessibility and appropriateness of the SSI outreach clinics by identifying, encouraging, supporting and referring clients to legal outreach. A majority of respondents to the MRC Client Services Survey indicated that they thought the clinics were culturally sensitive to clients' needs and that they were comfortable referring their clients. Some MRC respondents also noted that Legal Aid NSW had some bicultural and bilingual solicitors and that this increased the cultural appropriateness of SSI outreach services.

In-person services

A cross-section of informants identified that having an in-person form of legal assistance 'makes a lot of difference' to both the ability of clients with limited English skills to engage with a legal advisor, and the ability of legal advisors to assist clients (General civil solicitor; Family solicitor):

> … since we've already got that added barrier of language as an issue … working with communities that are illiterate, don't speak English, you need to have that face-to-face interaction. You need to have that personal exposure, I think. That is far more effective. I've been able to communicate with members of the Vietnamese community and Chinese community, African community. We don't speak a common language, we are obviously using the interpreter, but … it's a lot more effective when you can see your client and you can explain and you can show. Clients have said that as well, to be honest. Clients have also said that this has been a lot more useful than reading a translated factsheet … **(Family solicitor)**

A common view expressed by solicitors was that they thought face-to-face interaction provided for more effective communication because clients 'take in way more' than they would over the phone (Immigration solicitor). Telephone legal assistance services were also described as being ill suited to 'more culturally inhibited' and socially disadvantaged and excluded clients (Legal Aid manager). For example, lack of English language skills makes obtaining telephone advice and assistance from mainstream agencies particularly difficult and frustrating (General civil solicitor). Informants indicated that face-to-face legal services were also more culturally appropriate for clients where trust and fear are barriers to legal assistance services and where solicitors have to establish rapport with the client (Family solicitor):

> … for this client group in-person services are very important. It's just unlikely they would ever make use of a telephone service, particularly with all the trust relationships. **(Family solicitor)**

Rapport between legal advisor and client was seen as being especially critical for legal issues 'that go to the heart', such as many family law and immigration issues (Legal Aid manager):

> … it makes a big difference when they can see that face and that person is sympathetic and you can interact with them … and also if English isn't their first language they pick up the body cues and all of that stuff. **(SSI manager)**

> We are talking about people that are revealing the most intimate, most personal details of their life; they don't want to be just calling a 1800 number. **(Family solicitor)**

In-person services also allow solicitors to read clients' documents, which is particularly important when those documents are in English and the client is unable to read them and is therefore unable to explain what they say over the telephone. Immigration solicitors reported that they typically read numerous client documents at appointments and that:

> … often [clients] don't know what's in their documents because they don't read them. So you really need to be there to read them. **(Immigration solicitor)**

Immigration solicitors further explained that clients are often unaware of the relevance of particular documents to their matter:

> … they might come with one document that they want to show you, but in their bag they have other things … Sometimes I just say, 'Give me your bag' and look through their documents. **(Immigration solicitor)**

For clients who are literate in a non-English language, in-person services also afford the opportunity to provide them with legal information in their own language that 'they can then take away and read and absorb in their own time' (SSI manager). For example, the snapshot data reported above indicated that solicitors provided written legal information in 19.5 per cent of client consultations, of which nearly one-quarter was provided in a non-English language (see Appendix B).

Services appropriate to legal need and capability

Under the SSI Partnership, solicitors can provide any combination of legal information, advice, minor assistance, and follow-up advice and assistance, as well as referral to non-legal and other more appropriate legal assistance services. This suite of services allows services to be tailored and extended to appropriately match clients' legal need and capability (Pleasence et al. 2014).

In all, it provides a more holistic approach to legal assistance tailored to individual client need and capability (see COAG 2010; Coumarelos et al. 2012a; Pleasence et al. 2014). To illustrate, first, SSI outreach provides access to legal information and advice for socially disadvantaged and isolated clients who tend to have a limited understanding of Australian law. Second, SSI outreach has the capacity to provide minor assistance and follow-up advice and minor assistance to clients with limited skills and resources who are unlikely to be able to successfully action legal information and advice themselves. Third, SSI outreach also provides access to support and assistance from other MRC services that can also help to overcome personal skill and resource limitations.

One reason informants regarded SSI outreach as being tremendously beneficial was because, even with 'basic' legal problems, MRC clients often lack the ability to take basic self-help steps (General civil solicitor).

Solicitors from each practice area explained that, due to the nature of the legal matter and MRC clients' often limited understanding of Australian law and communication skills, clients advised that they have particular courses of action open to them often require follow-up appointments to assist them take those actions. Immigration solicitors reported that sometimes they needed multiple appointments with clients because:

> The first time they come in there's big gaps in the information that's provided and, sometimes you can't even give advice because you need to know X, Y and Z and they can only tell you about X. **(Immigration solicitor)**

Some MRC clients 'need very intensive assistance' to prepare applications and marshal supporting documents (Immigration solicitor). Legal information and advice can often only take people 'some of the way' in immigration matters (Immigration solicitor). For example, immigration solicitors described how some clients at SSI outreach had previously received information and advice about how to lodge a visa application from other advisers, but that they 'just can't do it themselves' (Immigration solicitor). Immigration law was characterised as being area of law that is 'a documentary rich process', and largely paper-based and bureaucratic (Immigration solicitor). Lack of English language skills, therefore, limit clients' ability to self-help.

General civil solicitors similarly explained how many MRC clients needed minor assistance because of their personal circumstances and limited English language skills:

> [If] I have a client and that client has requested an interpreter. We immediately know this client doesn't have the capacity to write a letter. **(General civil solicitor)**

> … definitely, if he's or she's from a non-English speaking background, [a] newly arrived migrant or refugee … we know they don't have the capacity. We say, 'Okay, let me pick up the phone or let me type the letter for you' … **(General civil solicitor)**

As the following solicitor explained, some MRC clients need heighted forms of assistance:

> There's always going to be some clients that need more help than others. Obviously the clients that need more help than others are the ones that can't even function in society, whether it's due to the language barrier, their capacity to understand you, to mental health issues. Or they could be victims of trauma … as a result of what they've experienced, they can't actually progress their legal problem. **(General civil solicitor)**

Because Legal Aid NSW's resources are limited, solicitors are unable to provide minor assistance to every MRC client. To conserve scarce resources for those clients most in need of minor assistance, solicitors assess client need on a matter-by-matter basis. Solicitors reported applying Legal Aid NSW's minor assistance guidelines to determine which clients receive minor assistance. For example, solicitors described assessing client capability by asking questions about their family and community support, as well as making judgements about 'their mental and physical health, their age, how well they speak English, their education' (Immigration solicitor). Similarly, family solicitors described considering a 'whole range of things':

> … it can depend on the urgency of the issue, it can depend on their capacity, their level of education, their language skills, their ability to finance something privately, any mental health issues, any violence issues which makes them more vulnerable, are they young, are they from overseas, do they have family support. So it's a really huge range of things that we assess individually, based on the client at the time as to what would be appropriate for them. **(Family solicitor)**

Lack of original supporting documents, such as marriage certificates and the like, can also mean that relatively 'legally straightforward' issues can be procedurally complex (Family solicitor). In such matters, simply providing a client with a divorce application or referring them to a CLE divorce class was not a realistic option because successfully progressing the matter is 'not that easy' because lack of supporting document typically means extra procedural steps are required, and therefore more tasks to be successfully completed (Family solicitor).

Because of the particular needs and limited capability of the MRC client group, a cross-section of informants cited CLE to MRC staff as another important feature that enhanced the appropriateness of the legal assistance services provided under the SSI Partnership. The role of CLE to MRC staff is discussed further below.

Effective collaboration and 'joined-up' services

Another important feature of the service model is the collaboration between Legal Aid NSW and the MRCs, and the coordination between legal assistance services.

Collaboration between Legal Aid NSW and MRCs

MRC staff are key conduits that help to successfully 'bridge' clients to SSI outreach. They operate as an intermediary and were described as almost being 'a broker or an agent', and as critical for effective referral pathways (Legal Aid manager). Caseworkers and other client services staff were described as invaluable in terms of helping clients to feel comfortable seeking legal assistance (Legal Aid manager). At those MRCs where mature and deep relationships between Legal Aid solicitors and MRC client services staff were manifest, MRC staff were 'champions' of the legal outreach services (Steering Committee representative).

Previous research has established client and host agency trust as a key feature of best practice outreach legal services (Forell & Gray 2009; Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014). MRC staff, particularly caseworkers, play a critical role in engendering trust in Legal Aid NSW and its services, particularly with respect to more socially isolated and vulnerable clients, and critically, client trust can transfer from the MRC to the outreach clinic (General civil solicitor). For instance, family solicitors described how fear, shame and lack of trust and confidence were all primary barriers to seeking family legal assistance services, and particularly for MRC clients experiencing domestic violence and fearful of the justice system (Family solicitor). Case example 4 illustrates how transfer of client trust can overcome 'roadblocks' stemming from mistrust of the justice system.

Case example 4

I had another client from … she was from Bangladesh, but she'd been here since she was a little girl, growing up in Western Sydney in the Bangladesh community [and experiencing] domestic violence … had no trust in the Australian legal system despite spending the majority of her life here. Came in and saw me and she's like, 'Why would you help me, no-one has ever helped me in my entire life?' You know, several small children, and I said, 'Okay, look, we have to get you out of here.' … when I spoke to the caseworker, I think it was last week, yes, she's living in a refuge and she has an appointment to come back and see me in a few weeks. (Family solicitor)

Because MRCs and their staff have deep connections and relationships with the local migrant communities, they are an important source of information about the particular experiences and needs of target clients. For instance, solicitors explained how working at MRCs made it easier to identify systemic issues being experience by particular communities, 'because every community has got different needs' (General civil solicitor). Improved understanding of local needs and cultural factors also makes it possible to more appropriately tailor services. As one solicitor explained:

> It's really handy that you have so many people from different backgrounds, nationalities, working there and if there are any cultural issues or language barriers or anything … these workers are there … **(General civil solicitor)**

Another key feature of the collaborative practice identified by a cross-section of informants was the provision of CLE to MRC staff. MRC staff are ideally placed to act as legal problem noticers and to refer clients to SSI outreach (Coumarelos et al. 2012a; Pleasence et al. 2014). Collaboration was central to creating an effective referral network and supporting MRC staff to both 'spot' clients who would benefit from legal assistance, and refer them to the outreach services:

> Having training across some of those areas is very empowering for them because you don't know what you don't know. But once you actually attend that training you think, 'Okay, I understand how the Commission works, I understand the different areas of law. I understand the components around referrals for my clients' and so there's a sense of confidence in that—in that referral process, that they understand. **(SSI manager)**

Ongoing liaison and engagement between Legal Aid NSW and MRC staff not only helped to raise awareness and understanding the available outreach services by keeping them 'front of mind', but also supported better and collaboration and integration with MRC staff and services (Steering Committee representative). Such engagement was described as being like 'an unofficial CLE', and as helping to remind MRC staff that 'we are here', 'we are a free service', and 'these are the sorts of things we can do for your clients' (Family solicitor).

Good inter-personal relationships and 'open communication' between Legal Aid NSW and MRC staff also helped collaborative practice (Family solicitor). Informants reported that some MRC staff were in regular telephone or email contact with Legal Aid NSW staff to clarify whether or not it would be appropriate to book a client into an outreach clinic (Family solicitor; General civil solicitor).

Informants indicated that MRC staff were involved in supporting clients before, during and after legal appointments. For example, in addition to spotting and referring clients to legal outreach, MRC staff sometimes supported clients, with their consent, during legal appointments: 'Sometimes they sit in with really vulnerable clients or clients who they've had long-term contact' with Immigration solicitor). Solicitors reported that this 'helps us a lot. To be very frank, I would say to some extent it reduces our workload' (General civil solicitor).

A majority of respondents to the MRC Client Services Survey indicated they contributed to the SSI outreach services in a number of ways:

- Identify that clients may have a legal problem.
- Tell clients about or refer clients to legal services.
- Book clients in for appointments with the Legal Aid advice clinic.
- Encourage or support clients to seek or take up legal help.
- Refer clients to additional services that provide support with that issue.
- Liaise with Legal Aid NSW / lawyer to see if the legal advice clinic can assist a client.
- Provide information (written or oral) about rights, the law or legal processes.
- Provide emotional support to clients who are pursuing legal solutions.
- Build client trust in the law as a solution.
- Assist with gathering documents/completing forms.

Solicitors similarly reported how MRC staff and services helped them to deal with the non-legal aspects of clients' legal problems:

> I have lots of clients where I will assist with a particular issue, and then I know what other workers are around to assist [the client] with their other problems that I can't assist with–so whether that's accommodation, whether it's bills, whatever it may be, I know that I can refer to them. So not only do [the workers] assist with the admin side of things and spotting the clients, but they also have all these other additional skills where it becomes like a one-stop shop almost, for our clients. **(Family solicitor)**

Having settlement services caseworkers available to support recently arrived migrants could help to improve the advice and assistance that solicitors were able to provide. For example, as the following solicitor explained, caseworkers are helpful because they often work with clients over:

> … a very long period of time, so they know their history, they know their background information and that's really, really helpful … [they] can fill you in on anything you need. For instance, if you want to progress a hardship application, you want that sort of background information regarding when they've arrived and how many children and if they've come on a refugee—you know, [their] visa status or what type of problems they face in society. That's when it's handy to have a caseworker. **(General civil solicitor)**

Coordination between legal assistance services

Legal Aid NSW is the largest legal practice in NSW, and as noted in the CASES and snapshot referral data reported previously, SSI outreach clients are sometimes referred to other Legal Aid NSW services as well as other public and private legal services. For example, immigration solicitors noted how clients were sometimes referred to the general civil outreach service that attended the MRC the next day, and that there had also been cross-referral of clients between immigration and family outreach services (Immigration solicitor). Family solicitors also reported how family law problems were sometimes bound up with immigration matters, and that during the SSI Partnership there had been occasions where clients had benefited from being able to obtain both family and immigration assistance (Family solicitor). Family solicitors further explained how one of the features of their services is how they can 'upscale' assistance by referring clients onto EIU colleagues providing duty services at the Family Court, which may be necessary for urgent matters, and how matters might also graduate to a grant of legal aid:

> One of the features of the unit, because even though we're not their solicitor and we don't act under a grant, the whole point of us doing what we do is to help them do whatever they need to do. Some people need to do nothing, they just need some legal advice and then they need nothing else … other people, like I say, if it's an urgent application that needs to be made … then we will either make a phone call or if it's within our own unit … the duty service in the court, we will ring the person who's on duty, we'll send them an email or say this is the urgency … that's the feature of the whole unit … **(Family solicitor)**

Immigration solicitors identified one advantage of having the immigration clinics for Fairfield located at the Bankstown and Fairfield Legal Aid offices is that it facilitated the cross-referral of clients:

> You can say to the person after the appointment, 'Go round to reception,' and you can walk around and help them make a family or … a general civil appointment so they can get that advice. And write it down for them and give it to them on a card so they know when they're coming. **(Immigration solicitor)**

Legal Aid NSW outreach solicitors also described how they 'triaged' clients and helped to connect them to more appropriate forms of legal assistance, such as referring clients to other public legal assistance services (Family solicitor; General civil solicitor).

Effective referral pathways

One reason why collaboration and integration between legal and non-legal service providers has been identified as a feature of effective legal assistance services is because its holds the promise of more seamless and effective referral practices. Empirical research has demonstrated that people are increasingly unlikely to successfully make it to a referral destination with each additional referral they receive (Pleasence 2006). A key feature of the legal assistance service model is therefore the close and effective referral by the MRC to legal outreach.

As the discussion above and the referral data reported earlier have indicated, the collaboration between Legal Aid NSW and MRCs has been characterised by effective referrals into and from the legal clinics.

One key aspect that supports effective referral is where the outreach clinics have been able to achieve good positive results for clients (General civil solicitor; Family solicitor; Immigration solicitor). Demonstrating good client outcomes builds reputation for the outreach service and solicitor with the MRC and local community (Family solicitor; see also Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014). Because Legal Aid NSW and MRC staff have 'mutual clients', it is highly unlikely that that MRC staff will make referrals to a service that does not help their clients: 'If I had referred a client and if a particular worker didn't assist with what I thought they would, then I wouldn't be referring again, and I think that's very similar to the MRC project' (Family solicitor).

In our interviews, a number of solicitors contrasted the challenge they had experienced in providing appropriate referrals at some other outreach locations which are not a 'one stop shop', and which do not have caseworker and other client support services available. In such locations, solicitors may have to first make inquiries to identify appropriate and available services, and may also have to consider making referrals to multiple agencies (Family solicitor). The range of services available at MRCs can therefore not only shortcut identification of appropriate non-legal services, but facilitate more culturally appropriate and seamless referral.

For example, solicitors are able to make simple and direct referrals to MRC services for some of the non-legal aspects legal problems:

> … because [the MRC] do have the caseworkers available, I can—and I have that relationship with the caseworkers—I can just make that straight referral … I go back to the caseworker and say, 'Look this is the issues, I've explained the legal framework to her or to him, but this is what they need. They need urgent assistance with [this]' … **(Family solicitor)**

As Case example 5 illustrates, a close working relationship can be especially important when there are services available that can assist clients who are experiencing domestic violence.

Case example 5

Last week … I had a client who disclosed that she was in a very abusive relationship. I provided her all the legal advice that she needed and then I offered her, [said], 'There are domestic violence case workers here. Would you like to speak to her? These are the sorts of things that she can offer', and she said, 'Yes'. So we literally went outside and knocked on the door, I said 'I have a potential client, do you have time to speak to her for a while?' and she said, 'Yes'. If she doesn't have the time then I would book her in for an appointment. (Family solicitor)

There was evidence that, at some outreach locations, the depth of the relationship between MRC and Legal Aid NSW staff supported more effective referral practices, such as liaison between MRC caseworkers and Legal Aid NSW solicitors and legal support officers to clarify whether or not to book a client for outreach. For example, MRC informants reported how collaborative practice improved referral practice and appropriateness:

> Referrals can be discussed, therefore cutting back on inappropriate use of the service… **(MRC Client Services Survey respondent)**

> [it's] extremely helpful for caseworkers to troubleshoot cases and issues with qualified Legal Aid Staff to make appropriate appointments and referrals. **(MRC CEO Survey respondent)**

Early and timely legal assistance

SSI outreach was described as a key early intervention strategy, particularly for clients with limited awareness of their legal rights or 'don't understand how relevant their problem is', characteristic of many MRC clients (General civil solicitor). Informants described how they saw the model of legal assistance under the SSI Partnership as 'actually making accessing legal services early, and using the right pathways, front of mind' (Steering Committee representative). Solicitors indicated that SSI outreach was an earlier and more preventative form of legal service intervention (General civil solicitor; Family solicitor). MRC survey respondents similarly reported how SSI outreach connected clients with legal assistance that helped avoid further legal problems (MRC CEO Survey respondent; MRC Client Services Survey respondent). Informants identified collaboration between Legal Aid NSW and MRC staff, and particularly CLE initiatives, as being critical to the ability of the SSI outreach to provide earlier access to legal assistance. One family solicitor identified the particularly important role of CLE to MRC client services staff:

> One of the things that I did when we first initiated this SSI and Legal Aid partnership was that I wanted to talk to all the staff members … I wanted them to be our client spotters. I wanted them to know when to refer, when not to refer, how to make appropriate referrals. So I would go to all their different staff meetings, I would create different CLE events. I'd have a half-day workshop on family law, a half-day workshop on domestic violence, those sorts of things, so the workers themselves were confident in what the legal issues may look like, and when to refer to us … **(Family solicitor)**

For example, when MRC staff successfully identify clients with a legal problem who are unaware that they could potentially benefit from legal assistance and book them into the outreach clinics, that client is able to obtain earlier legal assistance than they may otherwise have done:

> A lot of problems start, obviously, before people come to see a lawyer. And with a lot of these clients, they're engaging the caseworkers prior to seeing us at a stage where their problem has just escalated … it's part of our holistic approach … [to] stop the problem from escalating in the early stage … **(General civil solicitor)**

Suitable administrative arrangements

Informants explained how administrative arrangements for the legal outreach clinics were broadly similar across legal practice areas and MRCs, but varied from location to location depending upon the individual MRC staff and resources. The majority of the outreach clinics had staff taking appointments and (sometimes) filling out advice forms at the time of making the appointment. The advice form is then forwarded to Legal Aid NSW for conflict checking and then the client and appointment details are forwarded to the relevant outreach solicitor. Other administrative arrangements varied depending on the level of client demand, and the MRC's preferred way of operating. For example, where client demand for appointments at SSI outreach was high, the MRC operated a waiting list. Some MRCs employed a system of reception staff confirming appointments with clients prior to appointments. Different MRCs also have different arrangements for managing the legal outreach clinics. One approach that was identified by informants as working well was where the MRC had appointed a manager to oversight and be the central point of contact for legal assistance services under the SSI Partnership (Family solicitor; Steering Committee representative). Where clients need interpreter services, MRC staff arrange those services with the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National).

Solicitors noted that the administrative arrangements generally worked well, although they expressed frustration when telephone interpreter services are not available as scheduled, when they are on hold for long periods, and when the telephone interpreter service cuts-out (Immigration solicitor; Family solicitor). The high proportion of MRC clients with poor English and means that telephone interpreters are required for many SSI outreach appointments:

> Just getting them on the phone. We can be on hold for 14–15 minutes trying to get an interpreter on the phone. When you have a 45-minute appointment there's a third of your appointment gone just waiting for an interpreter. They drop out, the line drops out, and you have to ring back and go through the whole process. The interpreters are quite often the most frustrating part of the whole appointment. **(Family solicitor)**

Because interpreter services are provided by an external supplier, the outreach clinics are dependent on the capacity of that supplier to provide those services as scheduled.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The results demonstrate that the SSI Partnership and model of legal assistance successfully provided accessible and appropriate legal services to people from diverse cultural backgrounds in accord with NPA access to justice principles of accessibility, appropriateness, equity, efficiency and effectiveness. Specifically, the SSI Partnership:

- increased legal assistance to CALD communities, particularly in West and South West Sydney
- appropriately targeted legal assistance to disadvantaged and vulnerable people
- increased collaboration and cooperation between Legal Aid NSW and MRCs to provide more 'joined-up' services to better meet legal and other needs.

Specialist outreach legal services to SSI member organisations were provided by Legal Aid NSW in accord with its obligations under the MOU.

Analyses of the interview and survey material also suggested a number of key lessons concerning how legal assistance services can be designed and implemented in conjunction with a non-legal service partner to appropriately reach and assist a socially disadvantaged client group isolated from mainstream legal services.

Elsewhere, based on insight from Legal Aid NSW managers and practitioners, we have identified features of good practice in outreach services (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013). Experience providing legal outreach through the SSI Partnership in the first 12 months after its launch further extends understanding of outreach design and practice. In particular, there appear to be a number of benefits in 'joining' with the 'right' partner and in arrangements that support successful collaboration.

The following discussion first summarises the data indicating the success of the project in reaching and assisting target clients. It then draws out lessons arising from the analyses of the data and information collected for this evaluation on:

- effective partnering for legal assistance services
- sustaining strong services
- valuing service delivery to hard-to-reach clients.

5.1 Reaching culturally diverse clients: project outcomes

An important question for this evaluation was whether or not the SSI Partnership had successfully reached the 'right' type of clients. Analyses of the CASES data revealed that the SSI Partnership has successfully provided legal assistance to a high proportion of CALD clients who are socially disadvantaged, face considerable barriers to mainstream legal services and are disproportionally underrepresented in other Legal Aid NSW service data. Specifically:

- In its first formal year of operation, SSI outreach comprised 2.5 per cent of all family and civil assistances provided by Legal Aid NSW, but 9.5 per cent of assistances to people born in non-English speaking countries.
- Nearly 90 per cent (88.3%) of SSI outreach assistance was provided to people born in non-English speaking countries, compared to only 16.6 per cent of assistance provided through other outreach and 24.1 per cent of assistance provided at Legal Aid NSW offices.
- Only 10 per cent of SSI outreach assistance was to clients born in Australia, compared to 79 per cent of assistance provided through other outreach and 72 per cent of assistance provided at Legal Aid NSW offices.
- The snapshot data indicated that clients attending SSI outreach tend to have poor English proficiency, with more than half (52.1%) rated by solicitors as not speaking English well or not speaking English at all.

- More than one in five (42.9%) SSI outreach assistances were to clients who had been in Australia up to five years.[13] The distribution of assistances by client residential LGA indicates the appropriate targeting of services to those parts of NSW where recently arrived and new and emerging communities are located—particularly in West and South Western Sydney. As locations of new communities may change over time, in part due to immigration policy (including settling new communities in regional locations), a degree of flexibility in the future placement of services is vital.

Clients assisted through the SSI Partnership were found to have similar employment and benefit status to Legal Aid NSW's socially disadvantaged clients at other service settings. Although these figures need to be treated with some caution (given the proportion of missing data for other outreach and Legal Aid NSW offices), a higher proportion of assistances at SSI outreach appears to be to clients who are not employed (70.3%) when compared to other outreach (54.8%) and Legal Aid NSW offices (54.7%). Influencing this will be the higher proportion of SSI Partnership clients who are women.

Together, these results provide compelling evidence that the legal assistances services provided under the SSI Partnership successfully reached and assisted the intended target client group.

Overall, some variation in the provision of SSI outreach was observed during the first year of the SSI Partnership. Client demand was observed to be stronger and more consistent at some locations than others, and variation by legal practice area was also observed. In particular, more consistent client demand was observed for immigration and other civil matters than for family matters. Analyses of the interview and survey material indicate that, consistent with previous research and the findings of the FLC (2012) that in part led to the SSI Partnership, there are strong cultural barriers to clients from CALD communities seeking legal assistance for family law matters. There was overwhelming support from informants that SSI outreach for family matters was successfully reaching the 'right' clients and that the assistance provided was making a substantial difference to those clients. This is discussed in more detail in Section 5.4: Valuing service delivery to hard-to-reach clients.

Analyses of the type and volume of assistances provided through the SSI Partnership compared to other outreach and Legal Aid NSW offices revealed some notable differences. Together with the snapshot data, they indicate flexibility in the services delivered. First, a comparatively *lower* proportion of assistance at SSI outreach was provided in the form of minor assistance. In part this is most likely to reflect the comparatively higher proportion of all assistances provided for immigration matters (51%) than for family (28%) and general civil (21%) matters and the lack of options available to the client. Second, when SSI outreach clients need legal assistance, they may require *more intensive* forms of assistance than clients in other service settings, and particularly other outreach settings. A significantly *higher* proportion of assistances per matter at SSI outreach involved two or more advices or minor assistances (32.9%) when compared to other outreach services (24.0%). This greater need for assistance was also reflected in a comparatively higher average number of assistances per matter for SSI outreach (1.61) than for other outreach (1.48) and Legal Aid NSW offices (1.55), notwithstanding the comparatively lower proportion of overall assistance at SSI outreach being minor assistance.

Another key evaluation question concerned the impact of providing immigration law services in outreach locations close to target communities, compared to Legal Aid NSW's head office in the Sydney Central Business District. The analyses firstly revealed that assistances for immigration matters under the SSI Partnership were *in addition* to rather than a replacement of immigration assistance provided through Legal Aid NSW Sydney head office. This in part reflects the very high demand for these services, as well as the increased capacity of Legal Aid NSW to provide this assistance.

Although immigration assistances provided under the SSI Partnership only comprised around one-third of all immigration assistances in the period September 2013–February 2014,

13 While only 10.5 per cent of assistances at other outreach and 14.9 per cent of assistances at Legal Aid NSW offices were provided to clients who had been in Australia up to five years, the high numbers of other outreach and Legal Aid office assistances for which year of arrival is missing undermines the value of this comparison.

the *additional* assistances provided contributed to an overall increase in the proportion of immigration assistance provided to clients born in non-English speaking countries, and female clients.

The provision of additional services in targeted geographic locations was also reflected in the residential postcodes of clients assisted, with effective targeting of services to clients resident in South West and Western Sydney. Large increases were observed in immigration assistances to clients resident in Liverpool, Bankstown, Rockdale, Holroyd, Canterbury, Penrith and Fairfield.

5.2 Effective partnering for legal assistance services

Partnering and collaboration between legal and non-legal services will often be pivotal to effective legal outreach (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014). Yet, partnering and collaboration is neither straightforward nor a cost-saving measure, and organisations are warned that it should only be considered when the 'stakes are really worth pursuing', there is a good fit between complementary agencies, and collaborative practice achieves better outcomes than could be achieved without collaboration (Huxham & Vangen 2003, p. 13; Pleasence et al. 2014; Nous Group 2013).

There was strong evidence indicating that SSI and its member MRCs were appropriate, trusted and complementary organisations for Legal Aid NSW to collaborate with, to successfully overcoming identified access to justice 'roadblocks' and provide legal assistance to CALD communities. Using service locations already known and frequented by the target client group was an effective strategy and helped to overcome their 'extra vulnerabilities' and access needs, and in particular, a low level of understanding and awareness of Australian law and public legal services. MRCs also had the necessary infrastructure and resources to be suitable host locations for legal outreach. Collaboration with MRC client services staff before, during and after legal appointments appeared to increase the accessibility and cultural appropriateness of the legal outreach services for some particularly vulnerable clients.

CLE to MRC staff, both formal and informal, was well regarded by informants, and seen to be crucial to the development of good referral networks. The effectiveness of the referral pathway from MRC to clinic is reflected in the high proportion of SSI outreach clients (as seen in the CASES and snapshot data) referred to the clinics by community organisations and migrant resource centres.

The SSI Partnership contained a number of structural features that formed a strong foundation for collaborative working, in particular:

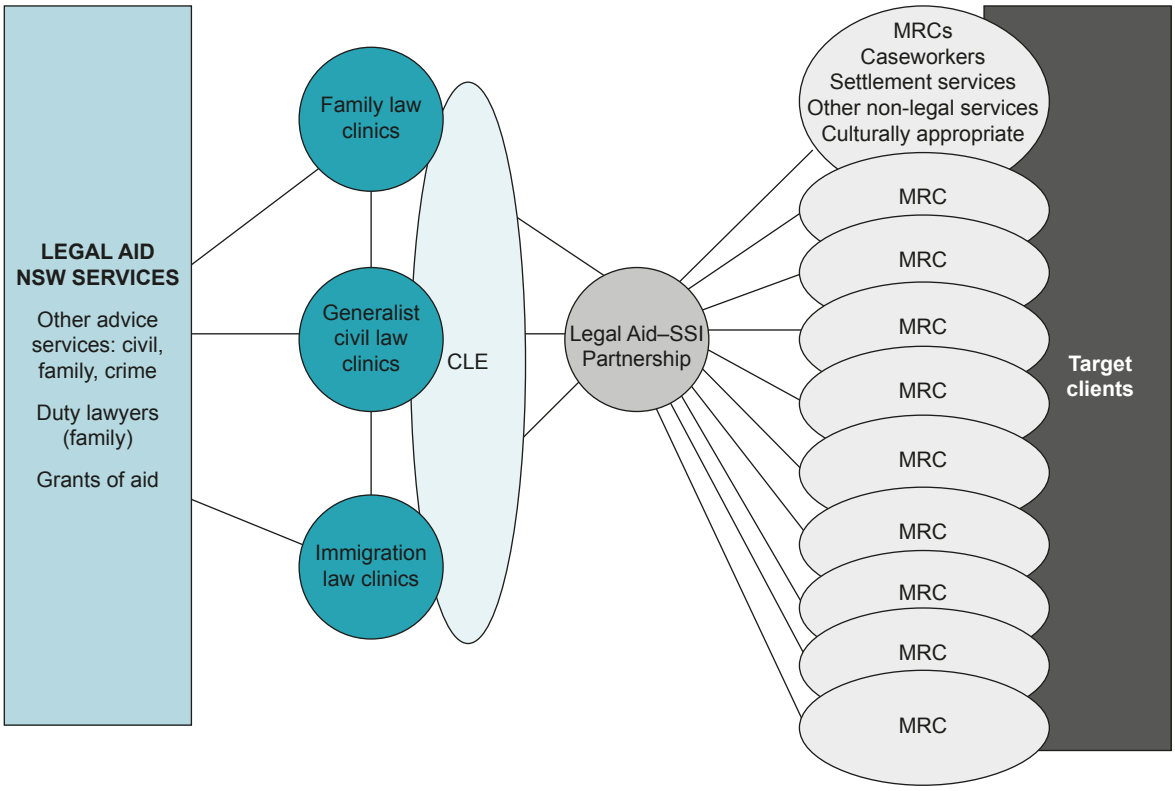
- the baseline needs analysis
- NPA funding requirements
- MOU terms and conditions
- peak organisational relationship between SSI and the MRCs
- the Steering Committee, and interaction between Legal Aid NSW and MRC staff.

The SSI Partnership arrangements provided for and supported robust partnering in strategic planning, implementation and frontline service delivery. What is particularly interesting is the way in which the SSI Partnership brings two disparate service networks to forge a pathway to legal services for target clients.

Figure 10 depicts the client pathway created by the SSI Partnership. It indicates how the SSI Partnership and collaboration with MRCs, and their other non-legal and culturally appropriate services, successfully connected socially disadvantaged and isolated clients to Legal Aid NSW's legal outreach services, and through them, to Legal Aid NSW's other legal assistance services. In short, they connect two networks of already joined-up services.

As the SSI Partnership matures and collaborative relationships become stronger, a stronger pathway between target communities and Legal Aid NSW services is likely. Given that MRCs are embedded in local migrant communities, to the extent that Legal Aid NSW legal outreach and CLE services are embedded in MRCs, a pathway to more accessible and culturally appropriate form of legal assistance service can be created (see Figure 11).

Figure 10. Client pathway created by the Legal Aid–SSI Partnership



There appear to be substantial benefits to legal services partnering with other human service providers that share a common target client group. Legal Aid NSW and MRCs were regarded as providing complementary services. There was evidence to indicate that Legal Aid NSW's services helped MRC staff to provide better assistance services to clients, and that MRC staff similarly helped Legal Aid NSW solicitors to provide better assistance services to clients.

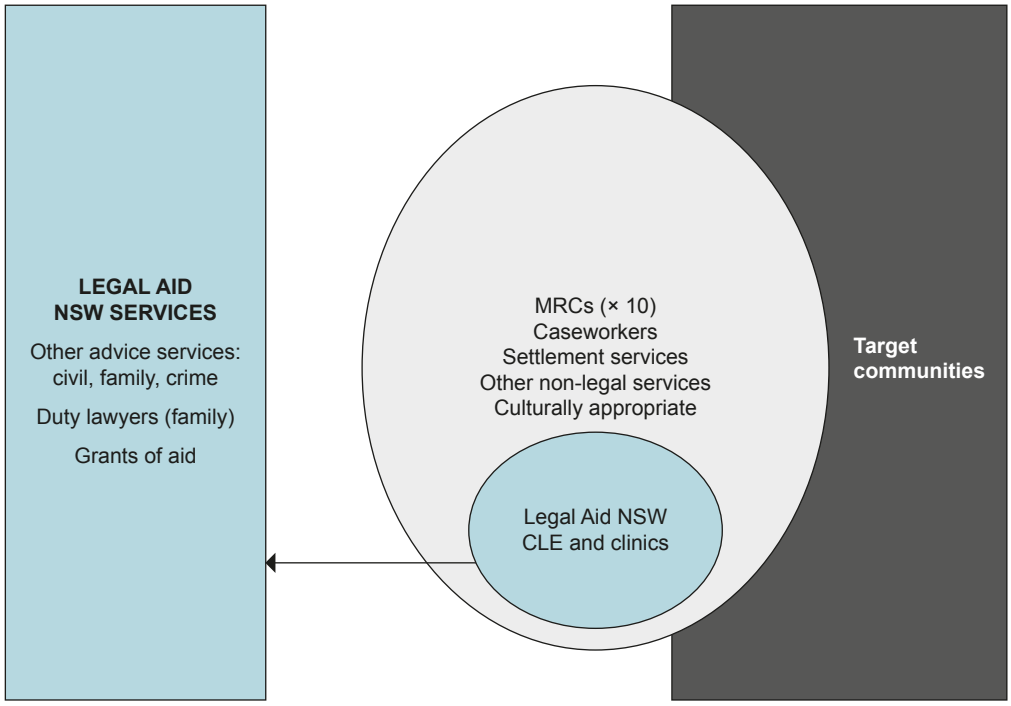
To effectively join-up with human service providers, legal services need the organisational capacity to do so. Legal Aid NSW has many economy-of-scale advantages over other public legal service providers, which appear to significantly enhance its ability to forge effective partnerships.

It is also worth noting that Legal Aid NSW has extensive experience and specialist expertise in both the areas of law relevant to the needs of disadvantaged clients and in service delivery through outreach to this client group. Specialist skills relevant to outreach include skills to communicate with and assist clients with lower capability and the capacity to forge and sustain relationships with host agency workers (Forell, McDonald et al, 2013 p. 78). There was strong indication that SSI outreach solicitors provided appropriate and culturally sensitive services.

Legal services joining-up with other human service providers who are already joined-up and provide various assistance services, and who share similar values and client-focussed approach to service provision appears to foster fruitful collaborative working.

While strong, the SSI Partnership requires ongoing effort from top to ground to maintain the effective collaboration necessary to effectively reach 'hard-to-reach' clients. This requires commitment and resources. Resources are required not only to support clinic hours, but to support ongoing liaison between the peak organisations and the work (including formal and informal CLE) to sustain frontline relationships in clinic locations. Expenditure of resources can be valued in terms of the access and assistance afforded to particularly disadvantaged groups with high legal need (and the impact of that need) and low access to legal assistance.

Figure 11. Client pathway in a mature SSI Partnership



5.3 Sustaining strong services

Legal outreach provided through the SSI Partnership coheres with all of Legal Aid NSW's best practice principles for outreach services and each of the steps for planning effective legal outreach services depicted in Figure 2 (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014).

However, experience of SSI outreach in the first year after its launch suggests that adhering to best practice principles for outreach legal services, in and of itself, is not a guarantee that service challenges will not arise. Experience of SSI outreach indicates that particular service challenges can present for particular areas of law and service locations, notwithstanding a model of service that generally works well.

There are consequences of partnering with a peak organisation. On the one hand, partnering with a peak has efficiency and effectiveness dividends in terms of streamlining the negotiation and implementation of legal assistance services at multiple service sites. On the other hand, some service sites, as well as some host–provider relationships, are likely to be better than others. As such, outreach practice may have to be tailored to needs arising at particular locations.

Analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data and information collected for this evaluation suggest two lessons. First, inconsistent demand was observed at some SSI outreach locations, particularly for family law services. Generally, a 'virtuous circle' appears to have resulted where there are stronger Legal Aid NSW and MRC relationships, that support higher client referral and service provision, in turn fostering stronger rapport, reputation and relationships, and maintenance of stronger client referral. Consistency of service is a key feature of best practice outreach, and in the case of SSI outreach, service consistency appears to have helped keep legal outreach 'front of mind' of MRC staff and to have provided more opportunity for informal interaction and awareness rising. Consistency of service also provides more opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of access to legal services and to build the 'word of mouth' reputation of legal outreach, particularly amongst the observed key sources of client referral, namely MRCs and family and friends.

In lieu of consistency of service provision, ongoing CLE and other possible awareness raising strategies may be required. In fact, there appears to be a symbiotic relationship between legal outreach and CLE. The interview data suggest that legal outreach services thrive when supported

by CLE, and particularly CLE and other informal awareness raising efforts targeted to non-legal service providers who become an integral part of client referral networks. However, where there is neither consistency of outreach service, nor ongoing CLE and awareness raising efforts, it is unsurprising that client demand may be inconsistent.

Where relationships with particular MRCs appear to have, on occasion, weakened through inconsistent client demand and the challenge of maintaining relationships across geographic distances, particularly in the wake of staff turnover, further investment in sustaining relationships may be required. On the one hand, it can take time and resources to build up relationships at a host MRC, and to build a local referral network through CLE to MRC staff and the local community. On the other hand, relationships can be quickly eroded by management change and staff change. One consequence of joining-up with others for service provision is that collaborative relationships have to be maintained. Given that a high proportion of client referral to SSI outreach was found to come from community organisations, and most likely the host MRC, maintaining those relationships is critical for client referral and service.

Second, cultural factors appear to create stronger barriers to legal assistance services with respect to issues where there is heightened culturally sensitivities. A common characteristic of socially disadvantaged client groups is that they are generally less likely to characterise their problems as being 'legal', tend to have lower awareness of public legal services, and are more likely to take no action in response to legal problems. In particular, people with a non-English main language have been shown to be significantly more likely to take no action for legal problems because they thought it would be too stressful to try and resolve the problem compared to people with an English main language (McDonald & People 2014).

The smaller number of assistances provided at family law clinics compared to immigration clinics in particular, together with the feedback from all informants, highlights the fact that service challenges may vary by legal problem type. This finding is consistent with legal needs research which consistently demonstrates that legal problem type is a strong driver of legal problem-solving behaviour (Coumarelos et al. 2012a; Pleasence et al. 2014).

5.4 Valuing service delivery to hard-to-reach clients

The research literature and interview and survey material indicate that family law matters are culturally sensitive for many people from the CALD community (FLC 2012). It was notable that family solicitors identified service challenges providing family law outreach under the SSI Partnership, and that the more usual service challenges experienced by the family and civil practice areas had been 'inverted'; SSI outreach clients tend to generally perceive when they may have an immigration 'legal' problem, but do not necessary perceive family problems as 'legal'. Characterising problems as being 'legal' is often a first step to seeking or being pointed in the direction of legal assistance services (Balmer & Pleasence 2012; Pleasence et al. 2014).

Another challenge of providing legal outreach for family matters is reluctance to pursue legal solutions for cultural reasons. For example, a strong and consistent theme in the qualitative analyses was the fear and shame experienced by many SSI outreach clients with a family law problem. Although immigration and general civil outreach solicitors reported the SSI outreach clients also had limited understanding or their rights and options under Australian law, and many had limited personal resources and capabilities that limited what they were able to do to help themselves, there was generally not the same level of fear and shame with seeking legal assistance.

However, there was a strong consensus from a cross-section of informants that:

- legal outreach for family matters under the SSI Partnership was the right service model to successfully reach and assist MRC clients
- the services provided were culturally appropriate made a difference to clients.

Critically, not only was SSI outreach regarded as helping clients in 'extraordinary ways', but clients of family outreach were also characterised as being people that Legal Aid NSW were unlikely to have been able to assist without the support from MRC client services staff, particularly caseworkers, enabled by the SSI Partnership and collaboration with MRCs.

While client numbers were lower in family law clinics, the divide bridged to provide this assistance was arguably greater. It can take longer to reach and build trust with target clients and communities, and thereby increase client numbers. Client capability can demand more intensive and time-consuming assistance. As with outreach services more broadly, consideration needs to be given to performance measurement options which enable service delivery to the most disadvantaged to be appropriately valued or 'weighted', even when more resources are required to support these services.

5.5 Conclusion

Effective legal services, particularly for disadvantaged client groups, have recently been identified as being targeted, timely, integrated and appropriate (Pleasence et al. 2014). Effective services are targeted to the needs and behaviour of particular client groups; they negotiate identified access to justice barriers, and are provided in a form that suits cultural and capability considerations. Where necessary, effective services are 'joining-up' and collaborating with trusted host agencies to reach into communities who have high legal need but are otherwise isolated from legal assistance (Forell, McDonald et al. 2013; Pleasence et al. 2014).

The SSI Partnership and the services provided under it, provide a model of such service delivery.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Data collection tools

A1. Snapshot data collection sheet

Legal Aid Outreach @ SSI: Data Collection Sheet for Law and Justice Foundation
MATTER NO: _____

1. **Practice area:**
   ❑ Family ❑ Immigration ❑ General civil
2. **Date:** _____
3. **Outreach location:**
   ❑ Auburn MRC ❑ Fairfield MRC (Cabramat.)
   ❑ Fairfield MRC (Fair.) ❑ Illawarra Multic. Services
   ❑ Liverpool MRC ❑ Metro MRC (Campsie)
   ❑ Metro MRC (Marrick.) ❑ Nth SS (Bateau Bay)
   ❑ Sydney MCS ❑ SydWest Multic. Services
4. **Client's year and month of arrival in Australia:**
   Year: _____ Month: _____
5. **Client's ethnicity:** _____
6. **Client's proficiency in spoken English**
   ❑ Not at all
   ❑ Not well
   ❑ Well
7. **Client's visa/residency status**
   ❑ Unlawful ❑ Bridging
   ❑ Humanitarian ❑ Family
   ❑ Skilled ❑ Permanent resident
   ❑ Citizen ❑ Other (*specify*): ____
8. **Client status (*for Immigration only*)**
   ❑ Applicant
   ❑ Sponsor (*Please specify applicant's country of residence*) _____
   ❑ Other (*specify*):_____
9. **Action by solicitor (*tick all that apply*)**
   a) Information
   ❑ Verbal
   ❑ Written—English (e.g. Self-help resource)
   ❑ Written—Non-English (*please specify* language): _____
   b) Advice
   ❑ Legal/procedural advice, action to take etc.
   ❑ To take alternative legal action
   ❑ To take non-legal action
   ❑ To take no action (i.e. do nothing)
   ❑ No legal options are available
   ❑ To apply for a grant of legal aid
   ❑ Other form of legal advice *(specify)*: ____
   c) Minor assistance
   ❑ Research/enquires (e.g. phone calls)
   ❑ Drafting new documents
   ❑ Amending existing documents
   ❑ Negotiating with other parties
   ❑ Writing letters to other party/third party
   ❑ Assistance completing an application for legal aid
   ❑ Completing other forms (i.e. non-Legal Aid)
   ❑ Other forms of minor assistance *(specify)*: _____
   d) Referrals given to client
   ❑ No referral necessary
   ❑ Referred to another Legal Aid NSW service:
      ❑ Another Legal Aid outreach clinic
      ❑ Legal Aid Family Law duty scheme
      ❑ Legal Aid in-office advice/assistance
      ❑ Legal Aid community legal education (e.g. divorce class)
      ❑ Other Legal Aid service *(specify)*: _____
   If referred to another Legal Aid NSW service, please specify the area of law: _____
   ❑ Referred to another legal/non-legal service (*specify name of service*): _____
   If another legal service, please specify the area of law? _____
   If a non-legal service, please specify the type of service? _____
   ❑ Nowhere to refer client (*specify reason e.g. 'no suitable services in the area'*): _____
10. **Immediate assistance required? (i.e. within 24 hours)** ❑ Yes ❑ No
11. **How did the client find out about this clinic?**
    ❑ Repeat/ongoing client of the clinic
    ❑ Friend/family/acquaintance
    ❑ MRC worker/programs
    ❑ Other agency/professional (i.e. other than MRC)
    ❑ Community legal education session
    ❑ Another Legal Aid service
    ❑ Signage/brochure
    ❑ Other *(please specify)*: _____

A2. MRC CEO Survey

(Reformatted from SurveyMonkey.)

MRC manager survey on Legal Aid NSW Advice Services

Legal Aid NSW has been providing outreach legal assistance services for clients of a number of migrant resource centres (MRCs) in New South Wales. These services include legal advice clinics for clients (onsite or nearby) as well as community legal education for clients and staff. We at the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW are assisting Legal Aid NSW to evaluate their outreach legal services to MRCs: to find out who has been assisted, what help has been provided, what has worked well and what might be improved.

As part of the project, we are keen to hear from the CEO (OR DELEGATE) of each MRC, about any difference made in having Legal Aid NSW outreach legal assistance services available at your centre or for your clients.

All responses are anonymous and we will not report results in a way that would identify you or your MRC.

The survey should take 15 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary but we would greatly value your experience and perspective.

1. **What is the name of your MRC (this will not be reported)**
2. **What is your position at the MRC?**
3. **Please describe the client groups served by your centre?**
4. **What types of outreach legal services are currently provided by Legal Aid NSW to your MRC? (tick all that apply)**

   ❑ Family law clinics ❑ Immigration law clinics ❑ Civil law clinics

   ❑ Community legal education for clients ❑ Community legal education or training for staff
5. **Prior to the setup of the outreach legal services, where did your clients go for legal assistance with the legal problems now addressed by the clinic(s)? (tick all that apply)**

   ❑ Nowhere ❑ Legal Aid Office ❑ Legal Aid Clinic at other MRC

   ❑ Community Legal Centre ❑ Private lawyer ❑ Private migration agent

   ❑ Pro bono lawyer at our MRC ❑ Pro bono migration agent at our MRC

   ❑ Salvos Legal ❑ Don't know ❑ Other (please specify)
6. **Compared to what was available before, please describe how the introduction of the Legal Aid advice clinic(s) has changed access to legal assistance for your clients?**
7. **On average, how many days do your clients currently wait for an appointment at the legal clinic for: (please indicate n/a if the clinic type is not available at your MRC)**

   Immigration problems?

   Family law problems?

   General civil law problems?
8. **Is that longer, shorter or about the same as the waiting time for legal assistance before the clinic commenced?**

   Immigration problems

   ❑ Much longer ❑ Bit longer ❑ About the same ❑ Bit shorter ❑ Much shorter

   ❑ Don't know ❑ Not applicable

Family law problems

❑ Much longer ❑ Bit longer ❑ About the same ❑ Bit shorter ❑ Much shorter

❑ Don't know ❑ Not applicable

General civil law problems

❑ Much longer ❑ Bit longer ❑ About the same ❑ Bit shorter ❑ Much shorter

❑ Don't know ❑ Not applicable

9. **What barriers (e.g. personal, cultural, geographical) do your clients face in dealing with CIVIL LAW problems such as IMMIGRATION, credit/debt, discrimination, employment, fines and housing problems?**
10. **What barriers (e.g. personal, cultural, geographical) do your clients face in dealing with their FAMILY LAW issues?**
11. **Are there any other considerations that should inform service delivery to your clients?**
12. **In your view, what helps to make the Legal Aid advice clinics accessible and appropriate to your client group (e.g., location, staffing, type of assistance offered, liaison between Legal Aid and MRC staff)?**
13. **Is there anything that might be improved to make the legal advice clinics more accessible, appropriate or useful to your clients?**
14. **In your view, what difference does it make having the Legal Aid advice clinics available to your clients?**
15. **What have been the major challenges, if any, in having Legal Aid advice clinics provided at your service?**
16. **Overall, would you say that:**

    A) the benefits to your MRC of having Legal Aid advice clinics outweighed any costs/burdens

    B) the costs or burdens to your MRC outweighed the benefits?

    C) the costs and benefits been about the same?

17. **Have the legal clinics been a 'good fit' for your MRC?**

    ❑ No ❑ Yes

    Please describe why/why not

Community legal education

18. **Have staff or clients at your MRC received community legal education or training from LegalAid?**

    ❑ No ❑ Yes, clients ❑ Yes, staff

19. **What role, if any, has community legal education by Legal Aid played in supporting use of the legal advice clinics?**

Management

20. **The formal partnership supporting the legal advice clinics is between Legal Aid NSW and SSI, and has a Steering Committee comprised of representatives from Legal Aid NSW and the MRCs. What have been the benefits for your service in that arrangement?**
21. **What have been the challenges of that arrangement for your service?**
22. **If there have been any challenges or issues concerning the operation of the Legal Aid advice clinics, HOW have they been resolved? (please just note n/a if there have been no issues to resolve)**

23. **Thinking beyond your own service, what would you identify as the benefits to funders/government, of having Legal Aid advice clinics provided at your service?**
24. **Do you have any other comments about Legal Aid's outreach legal assistance services?**

Thank you for making a valuable contribution to this research by sharing your experience and expertise.

A3. MRC client services staff survey

(Reformatted from SurveyMonkey.)

MRC client services staff survey on Legal Aid Advice Services

Legal Aid NSW has been providing outreach legal assistance services for clients of a number of migrant resource centres (MRCs) in New South Wales. These services include legal advice clinics for clients (onsite or nearby) as well as community legal education for clients and staff. We at the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW are assisting Legal Aid NSW to evaluate their outreach legal services to MRCs: to find out who has been assisted, what help has been provided, what has worked well and what might be improved.

As part of the project, we are keen to hear from reception staff and client services staff at MRCs about any difference it has made having Legal Aid NSW services available at your centre or for your clients.

All responses are anonymous and we will not report results in a way that would identify you or your MRC.

The survey should take 10 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary but we would greatly value your experience and perspective.

1. **At which MRC do you work? (this will not be reported)**
2. **What is your position at the MRC?**

   ❑ Front desk/Reception ❑ Caseworker/Client services ❑ Other (please specify)
3. **Approximately what proportion (%) of your clients are:**

   Newly arrived (less than 1 year in Australia)

   Recently arrived (15 years in Australia)

   Settled migrants (more than 5 years in Australia)
4. **Approximately what proportion (%) of your clients would you describe as:**

   Speaking English well

   Reading English well

   Writing English well
5. **What barriers (e.g. personal, cultural, geographical) do your client groups face in dealing with CIVIL LAW problems such as IMMIGRATION, credit/debt, discrimination, employment, fines and housing problems?**
6. **What barriers (e.g. personal, cultural, geographical) do your clients face in dealing with their FAMILY LAW issues?**
7. **In your role, what do you do to assist clients who need help with legal problems? (select all that apply)**

   ❑ Identify that clients may have a legal problem

   ❑ Tell clients about or refer clients to legal services

   ❑ Refer clients to additional services that provide support with that issue (e.g. counselling)

   ❑ Liaise with Legal Aid NSW/lawyer to see if the legal advice clinic can assist a client

   ❑ Translate legal information

   ❑ Book clients in for appointments with the Legal Aid advice clinic

   ❑ Provide information (written or oral) about rights, the law or legal processes

   ❑ Encourage/or support clients to seek/take up legal help

   ❑ Build client trust in the law as a solution

   ❑ Provide emotional support to clients who are pursuing legal solutions

❑ Interpret advice from lawyer for client

❑ Assist with gathering documents/completing forms

❑ Attend legal advice appointments to support clients

❑ Provide court support (e.g. support at a court, tribunal or other legal process)

❑ Is there anything else? (please specify)

8. What types of outreach legal services are currently provided by Legal Aid NSW to your MRC? (tick all that apply)

❑ Family law clinics ❑ Immigration law clinics ❑ Civil law clinics

❑ Community legal education for clients ❑ Community legal education or training for staff

9. In total, approximately how many clients did you see or assist in the last month?

10. Of those, approximately how many clients did you refer to a Legal Aid advice clinic?

❑ None ❑ 1 ❑ 2 ❑ 3 ❑ 4 ❑ 5 ❑ 6 or more (please specify)

11. If you did not refer any clients to the Legal Aid advice clinic, why was that?

12. Thinking about the Legal Aid advice clinics AND any other legal services, where do you refer your clients who have the following types of legal problems? (Please select up to two choices from drop down boxes)

First place

A) Immigration issues

B) Family law issues

C) Civil law issues (consumer, credit/debt/discrimination, employment, fines, housing etc.)

Other place

A) Immigration issues

B) Family law issues

C) Civil law issues (consumer, credit/debt/discrimination, employment, fines, housing etc.)

13. Before the Legal Aid advice clinics commenced (March 2013), did you refer clients to legal services?

❑ I was not working here before the clinics commenced ❑ No ❑ Yes

14. Where did you refer clients for the following types of legal problems?

Immigration law

Family law

Civil law

15. Thinking back over the last year, have the Legal Aid advice clinics made a difference to your clients?

❑ No ❑ Yes

16. Is there an example you would like to provide of the difference made? (no names please)

17. What helps to make the Legal Aid advice clinics appropriate to your client group (e.g., location, staffing, type of assistance offered, liaison between Legal Aid and MRC staff)?

18. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Legal Aid advice clinics?

I am comfortable to refer my clients to the clinics

❑ Strongly disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neither agree or disagree ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly agree

The clinics are inconvenient for clients

❑ Strongly disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neither agree or disagree ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly agree

I find the clinic lawyers culturally sensitive to my client's needs

❑ Strongly disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neither agree or disagree ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly agree

The clinics do not assist my clients to resolve their legal problems

❑ Strongly disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neither agree or disagree ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly agree

The clinics help clients understand their rights and responsibilities

❑ Strongly disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neither agree or disagree ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly agree

The clinics occur when they are scheduled

❑ Strongly disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neither agree or disagree ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly agree

I prefer to refer clients elsewhere for legal assistance

❑ Strongly disagree ❑ Disagree ❑ Neither agree or disagree ❑ Agree ❑ Strongly agree

19. Is there anything that might be improved to make the legal advice clinics more accessible, appropriate or useful to your clients?

20. What difference does it make to YOU/YOUR WORK, having the Legal Aid advice clinics located at your MRC?

Turning now to the community legal education and training provided by Legal Aid NSW to your MRC.

21. Have you attended any community legal education or training sessions run by Legal Aid NSW for MRC staff or clients?

❑ No ❑ Yes

22. What have been the main things that you learned from the community legal education training?

23. Has the community legal education run by Legal Aid changed the way that you assist clients?

❑ No ❑ Yes *If yes, please describe*

24. Have your clients attended any community legal education sessions run by Legal Aid NSW?

❑ No ❑ Yes

25. How (if at all) did the information or education session assist your clients?

26. Do you have any other comments about Legal Aid's outreach legal assistance services?

Thank you for making a valuable contribution to this research by sharing your experience and expertise

Appendix B: Snapshot data—results

To obtain more specific information about the clients assisted and the types of help provided at the legal clinics, solicitors recorded additional data over a four-week 'snapshot' period (24 February–21 March 2014). Solicitors completed a separate data form for each appointment or 'client consultation'.[14] In total, information on 154 client consultations was obtained:

- 116 (75.3%) for immigration matters
- 26 (16.9 %) for family law matters
- 12 (7.8%) for other general civil law matters.

The proportion of consultations for immigration matters appears substantially higher than the proportion of assistances for immigration (51.1%) that over the course of the first full year of the SSI Partnership (Mar. 2013–Feb. 2014), and the proportion of family and civil law assistances, significantly lower. Factors which appear to contribute to this difference include:

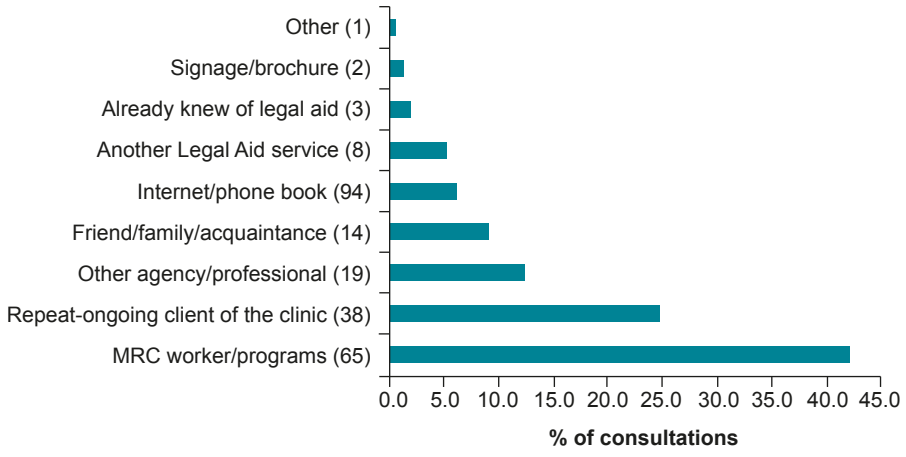
- an increase in the roll out and attendance at immigration law clinics as the project has progressed
- the fact that more commonly for immigration matters there is only one assistance per matter, compared to family and civil matters (so for each family and civil consultation multiple assistances are more likely)
- the civil law clinic at Fairfield MRC (Cabramatta CC) not being included in the snapshot data collection (see Section 2: Methodology)
- the family law clinic not being active at Illawarra MRC during the snapshot month, meaning that family law assistances are under-represented in these data.

All these factors have contributed to differences between the snapshot data presented below and the CASES data reported earlier. Differences will also arise from differences in the way questions were asked, how concepts (e.g. types of assistance, timeframes etc.) were defined and when data were collected.

Referrals to the clinics

Solicitors asked clients how they 'found out about the clinic'. In 65 consultations (42.2%), clients indicated that they found out about the clinic through an MRC worker or program, while a further 38 consultations (24.7%) were with clients who had received assistance from the clinic on a prior occasion. In another 19 consultations (12.3%), clients were referred by another agency or professional and in 14 (9.1%), clients were informed about the clinic by a family member or friend. Only 3 people (1.9%) already knew about Legal Aid NSW (Figure A1). The high rate of referral

Figure A1: Pathways and referrals to the clinics, snapshot period 24 Feb.–21 Mar. 2014



Source: Legal Aid NSW, snapshot data, 24 February–21 March 2014.
Note: N = 154 consultations.

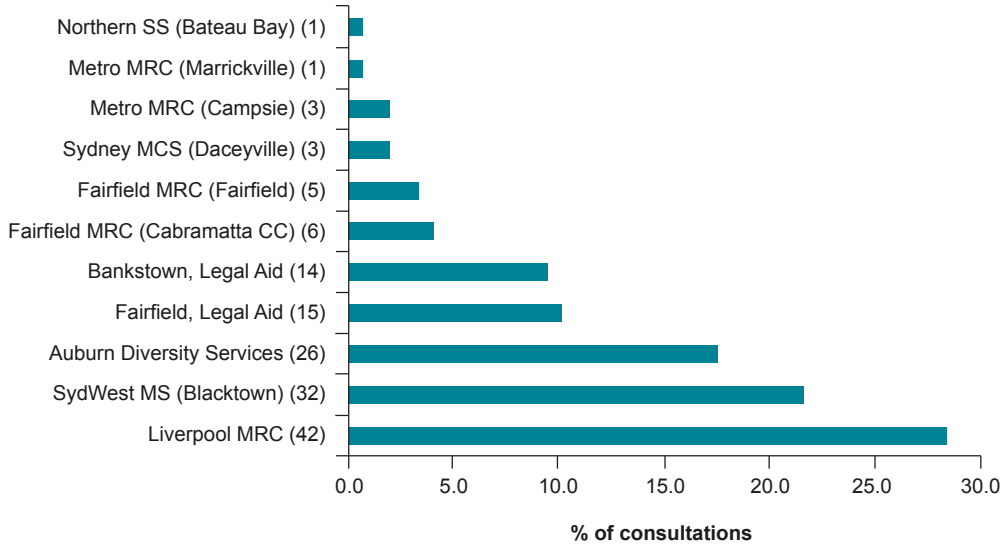
14 A client may have one or more appointments (over a period of time) for each matter they are helped with. In each appointment the lawyer may provide one or more types of assistance (e.g. procedural advice, assistance writing a letter, a referral to another service).

from MRC workers, other agencies and family and friends would suggest that the clinics are well embedded in networks which support the target client group.

Consultations by outreach location

Figure A2 provides details of consultations provided during the snapshot period by outreach location. Three locations: Liverpool MRC (Immigration and Family clinics), SydWest MS (civil law clinic) in Blacktown and Auburn Diversity Services (immigration) accounted for more than two-thirds (67.6%) of the client consultations represented in the snapshot period.

Figure A2: SSI Partnership client consultations by outreach location, snapshot period 24 Feb.–21 Mar. 2014



Source: Legal Aid NSW, snapshot data, 24 February–21 March 2014.
Note: N = 148 consultations. Information on location was missing for six consultations.

Clients assisted

Year of arrival

Solicitors recorded the month and year of arrival, allowing for a more accurate assessment of how long clients had been in Australia (In CASES only year of arrival is recorded).

As indicated in Table A1, a higher proportion of consultations in the snapshot period were to clients who arrived in Australia within the last 24 months (23.4%), compared to the proportion of assistances to Legal Aid NSW clients in general (6.8%), and the SSI clients in particular (20.6%). This reflects the high number of consultations for immigration matters recorded during the snap shot period, particularly in Liverpool and Blacktown.

Table A1: SSI Partnership client consultations: client years in Australia, snapshot period 24 Feb.–21 Mar. 2014

	Client consultations	
Years in Australia	*N*	*%*
Up to 24 months (2 years)	36	23.4%
25 months–5 years	34	22.1%
More than 5 years	36	23.4%
Total	**106**	**68.8%**

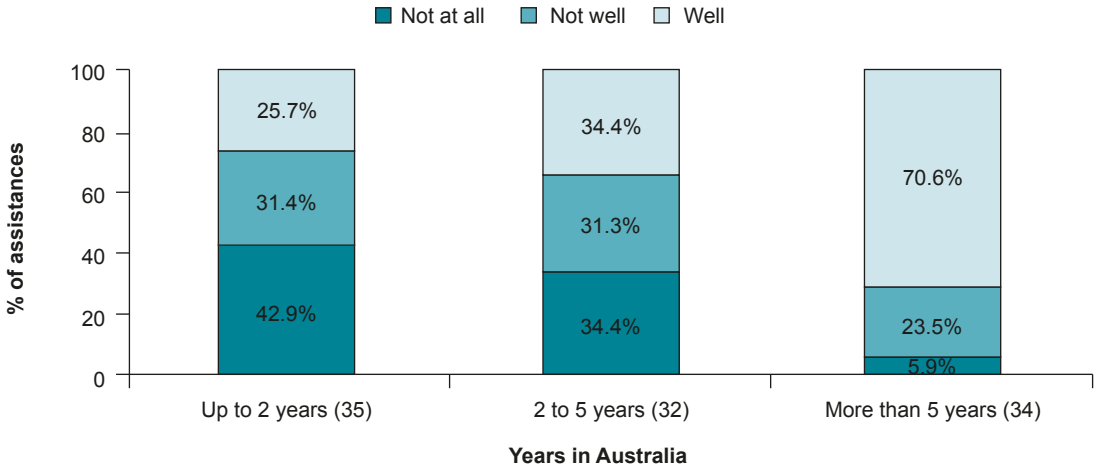
Source: Legal Aid NSW, Snapshot data, 24 February–21 March 2014.
Note: N = 106 consultations. Information on month/year of arrival was missing for 48 (31.2%) consultations.

English proficiency

In each consultation during the snapshot period, solicitors recorded their own assessment of how well the client spoke English (Figure A3). Based on these assessments:

- nearly half (48.0%) consultations were with clients who spoke English 'well'
- one-quarter (25.7%) were with clients who were rated as not speaking English well
- just over a quarter (26.4%) were recorded as not speaking English at all.

Figure A3: SSI Partnership client consultations: client English proficiency by years in Australia, snapshot period 24 Feb.–21 Mar. 2014



Source: Legal Aid NSW, snapshot data, 24 February–21 March 2014.
Note: N = 101 consultations. Information on arrival time in Australia or English proficiency was missing for 53 consultations.

Unsurprisingly, proficiency of English was significantly associated with clients' arrival time in Australia. For those clients who had been in Australia for less than two years, 25.7 per cent of consultations were provided to those who were rated as speaking English 'well' (Figure A3). By comparison, for those who had been in Australia for more than five years, two-thirds of consultations (70.6%) were provided to those who were rated as speaking English 'well'. Those clients rated as speaking English 'well' were significantly more likely to have been in Australia for more than five years.

Visa-residency status

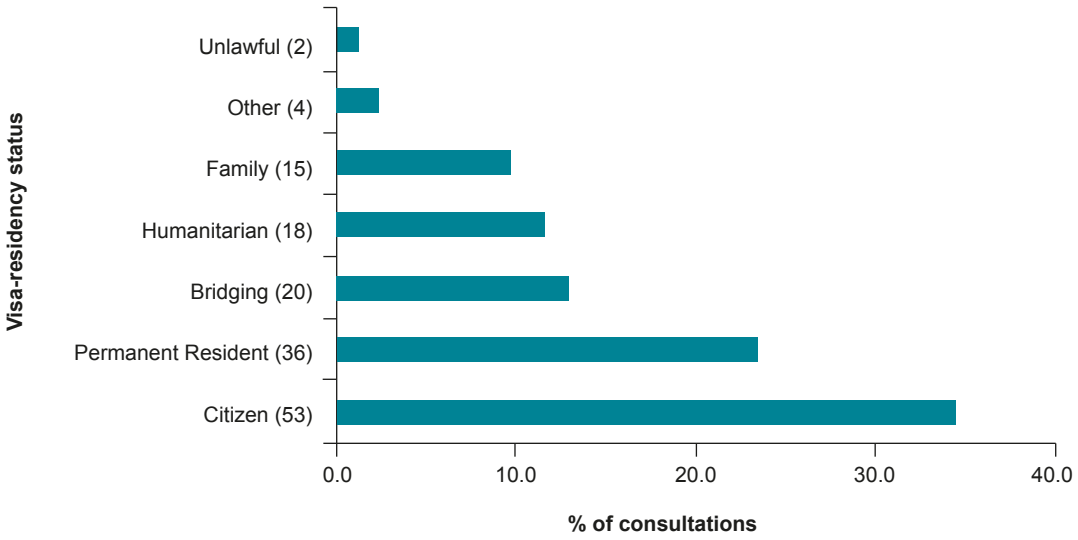
Figure A4 indicates that more than one-third (34.4%) of consultations were provided to those who had Australian citizenship, 23.4 per cent to those who had a permanent visa, and 13.0 per cent to those holding a bridging visa. A very small proportion (1.3%) of consultations were given to clients who did not have a lawful visa at that point. No client held a skilled visa.[15]

In more than 70 per cent (72.2%) of all *immigration* consultations, clients were seeking assistance in relation to sponsoring a family member, while 27.8 per cent of consultations were with the applicant directly. The high number of sponsorship consultations may relate to the Liverpool MRC being one of five trial sites in Australia for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection's 'Community Proposal Pilot'.[16]

15 Some clients were recorded as having more than one type of visa (e.g. an humanitarian and a permanent visa) as they were seeking to sponsor someone in another country. However, the double recording has been removed in the data analysis, and one client one visa is counted.

16 The Community Proposal Pilot makes up to 500 visa places available under Australia's Humanitarian Program. It allows approved proposing organisations to propose someone in a humanitarian situation outside of Australia for a Refugee and Humanitarian (Class XB) visa. See http://www.immi.gov.au/visas/humanitarian/offshore/community-proposal-pilot.htm#whatIsCPP for more detail.

Figure A4: SSI Partnership client consultations: client visa status, snapshot period 24 Feb.–21 Mar. 2014



Source: Legal Aid NSW, snapshot data, 24 February–21 March 2014.
Note: N = 148 consultations. Information on visa status was missing for 6 consultations. 'Other' category of visa included New Zealand citizen, student or visitor visa.

Requirement of immediate assistance

Clients were asked whether or not they needed immediate assistance (i.e. within 24 hours) for their problems. In only 7 consultations (4.5%), clients required immediate assistance.

Assistance provided in consultations: actions in detail

While CASES records the broad type of assistance provided (advice or minor assistance and referrals), the snapshot data collection gathered more detailed information about the actions, or specific types of assistance provided by lawyers: types of information, types of advice, types of minor assistance and more details about the referrals made.

In the vast majority of consultations, more than one action (specific type of assistance) was recorded. In four out of five consultations (81.9%) solicitors provided two or three specific types of assistance (Table A2). Because the categories of assistance are broader (including information provision) and more granulated, there are a higher number of multiple assistances reported here compared to in the CASES data.

Table A2: SSI Partnership client consultations: number of specific types of assistances per consultation, snapshot period 24 Feb.–21 Mar. 2014

	Consultations receiving that number of assistances	
Number of assistances provided	*N*	*%*
1 specific type of assistance	9	5.8%
2 specific type of assistances	62	40.3%
3 specific type of assistances	64	41.6%
4 specific type of assistances	19	12.3%
Total consultations	**154**	**100%**

Source: Legal Aid NSW, snapshot data, 24 February–21 March 2014.

Types of assistance provided

In all consultations, clients were provided with information and/or advice. The most common specific forms of assistance were:

- verbal information (83.8%)
- procedural advice (79.9%)
- written information (19.5%)
- minor assistance in the form of research or undertaking further enquiries (19.5%)
- referrals to non-legal aid services (26.0%)
- referrals to other Legal Aid NSW services (13.0%)
- advice (11.7%) and/or assistance (5.2%) to complete an application for Legal Aid
- assistance to complete forms (apart from Legal Aid forms) (10.4%).

In more than half (52.6%) of all consultations, an onward referral was not considered necessary, and in 15 per cent of consultations, solicitors indicated there was nowhere to refer clients.

Table A3 indicates how the pattern of assistance varied by area of law.

Table A3: SSI Partnership client consultations: specific types of assistance by area of law, snapshot period 24 Feb.–21 Mar. 2014

Types of assistance		*Number of consultations in which specific assistance provided*		
		Family N = 26	*Immigration N = 116*	*General civil N = 12*
Information	Verbal (129)	24	95	10
	Written: English (30)	5	25	0
	Written: Non-English (11)	8	3	0
Advice	Procedural advice, action to take (123)	24	88	11
	To take alternative legal action (13)	2	10	1
	To take non-legal action (14)	5	9	0
	To take no action (8)	0	8	0
	No legal options are available (15)	0	14	1
	To apply for a grant of legal aid (18)	7	9	2
	Other form of legal advice (1)	0	1	0
Minor assistance	Research/enquiries (30)	3	19	8
	Drafting new documents (10)	4	6	0
	Amending existing documents (4)	0	4	0
	Negotiating with other parties (0)	0	0	0
	Writing letters to other party/third party (4)	0	4	0
	Assistance completing application for legal aid (8)	3	5	0
	Completing non-legal aid forms (16)	0	15	1
	Request for new information (4)	0	4	0
	Write summary of advice for client (4)	0	4	0
	Other forms of minor assistance (5)	0	5	0
Referrals	Referred to another legal aid service (20)	9	6	5
	Referred to another legal/non-legal service (40)	10	27	3
	Referred to private migrant agent (8)	0	8	0
	Referred to court or tribunal (1)	0	1	0
	Referred to private lawyer (8)	1	6	1
	Referred to community services (9)	5	4	0
	Referred to community legal centre (5)	0	5	0
	Referred to MRC (5)	2	3	0
	Referred other non-legal aid (7)	2	3	2
(No referral)	Nowhere to refer client (23)	0	23	0
	No referral necessary (81)	11	66	4

Source: Legal Aid NSW, snapshot data, 24 February–21 March 2014. Clients may have been referred to more than one place.

Table A3 indicates that in family law consultations:

- Nearly all clients were provided with verbal information (and/or written information in English or non-English) and procedural advice.
- More than one-third were referred for further Legal Aid NSW services.
- One in five were referred to a community service.
- Minor assistance was in the form of drafting new documents (4 consultations), undertaking further research or enquires on the matter (3) and assisting with the application for legal aid (3).

In immigration consultations:

- One in four (82%) of clients were provided with verbal information, while around one-quarter (24.1%) were provided with written information in English or non-English).
- While three-quarters of consultations (88 consultations) involved procedural advice, in 14 consultations (12%), clients were advised there were no legal avenues open to them for that issue. In eight consultations clients were advised to take no action and in nine consultations they were advised to take non-legal action.
- Minor assistance most commonly involved undertaking further research or enquiries (19 consultations or 16.4%) or assisting clients to complete forms (relating to government processes, not legal aid–15 consultations or 12.9%).

The 12 civil law consultations involved verbal information and/or procedural advice. In eight of the 12 consultations, clients were assisted with minor assistance in the form of research or enquiries being made on their behalf about the matter. Five clients were referred on to other legal aid services.