

Westjustice

Fairness, safety and justice for Melbourne's West



Building Data Capability to Maximise Impact

EIF Empowerment Fund
Public Report

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Project Summary

Westjustice is a sector leader in multidisciplinary, integrated practice leading into early intervention services that achieve impactful justice and life outcomes for our clients. We help thousands of clients a year to achieve valuable justice, economic, health, and life outcomes through our multidisciplinary integrated practices model, linking our clients with legal assistance, financial counselling and social work services.

A previous data transition project, funded philanthropically, identified a data capability gap that made it difficult and burdensome to measure the impact of our work for ourselves, track the effectiveness of our services, and to demonstrate to others the effectiveness of our programs in achieving measurable life outcomes that also reduced the pressure on acute services. It also found that our current data maturity was low, with data capture often varying across teams, not entered in a timely manner and had inconsistencies and errors. In addition:

- The frameworks and infrastructure that historically governed our data collection practices were outdated, hard to use, and limited in demonstrating impact. They did not accurately reflect the needs of our clients or measure the impact of our services on their life outcomes. For example, this system only provided three different 'problem type' fields to describe the nature of employment-related legal problems, when in reality there are 17 different employment-related legal problem types commonly experienced by our clients.
- As is common for the community sector, we operated with around 50 programs with a variety of funding streams that have their own data collection requirements that was in addition to the sector frameworks and infrastructure. This meant that we were unable to clearly demonstrate outcomes across each of the programs in a way that measured life outcomes across the organisation rather than deliver on key metrics for our funding streams.
- Many of our projects were only funded for service delivery and rarely included support for quality data collection and reporting. This made it hard for our organisation to find the resources to enable data collection, which we must support in-kind with our already stretched resources.

Through the *Building Data Capability to Maximise Impact* project, Westjustice has been successful in addressing these data capability gaps, upskilling our staff, and begin building a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and learning framework for our organisation that allows us to effectively measure our performance in delivering meaningful life outcomes for the people of Melbourne's West, demonstrating the effectiveness of our services to others including taking pressure off other more acute services and putting our clients at the centre of everything we do. The activities as part of this project included:

- Creating the new role of Data and Impact Program Manager (DIPM) as part of the Policy, Impact and Engagement Team to lead this work and successfully transform Westjustice's data capabilities.
- Building a systemised and consistent approach to data collection and use across the organisations, after a comprehensive audit of data and collection processes, analysis of our current level of data maturity, an audit of reporting requirements, and consultation with staff across the organisation to guide the work.

- Establishing ongoing staff data capability building, training and upskilling activities, such as the Data and Measurement Network, regular staff engagement with the DIPM, and presentations at Senior Leadership Team meetings.
- Uplifting the organisation's data capability, and creating processes for collecting quality, timely and consistent data across all our teams
- Successfully streamlining service delivery data into Actionstep, which is now the centralised management system for record enquiries, advices, casework, contacts, stakeholders, community legal education and community development work. This was a significant transformation piece and has made it possible for us to explore opportunities for consistent data capture and reporting on the effectiveness of our services.
- Completing a comprehensive data audit, which has allowed us to more easily approach funders with the most appropriate indicators that aligns with their reporting requirements and our program objectives.
- Building a collective, deep and reflective understanding of our data including indicator gaps in our impact reporting. In particular, Westjustice has set its Priority Outcomes in the Westjustice Strategy 2024-27 as Improved Wellbeing, Empowerment and Participation, Housing Security, Financial Security, Personal Safety and Social Inclusion. We were able to identify the gaps in our data to demonstrate these indicators and build in additional reporting to ensure this was captured. Similarly, we now understand what demographic data we collect and how this can be applied to our Priority Cohorts. Identifying indicators in both these areas is helping to understand who our clients are and what their needs are. This will be extremely helpful in program and service planning in the future.
- Building better and stronger use of our data, so that we can tell our client stories and demonstrate how our work is helping them achieve meaningful, improved life outcomes that also result in significant cost savings to government and reduced pressure on acute services.

The discovery and consultation work as part of this project has also been hugely beneficial in informing the ongoing development of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) approach for the entire organisation. We have begun the process of establishing a set of data and MEL principles and objectives, developing an organisation-wide data management framework, aligning our strategic planning and intended results into our Priority Cohorts and Outcomes, developing measurements plans for each individual program area including Actionstep and survey data, and a survey question bank to ensure consistent outcomes data across our programs.

With additional support, we can continue to deliver this MEL approach and allow our funders, including government to assess our efficacy, impact and value and ensure that the investment is delivering meaningful and measurable life outcomes for people and taking pressure off acute services that can result in real savings to government. Once this is established, Westjustice will be in a position to share this model across the community legal sector and scale this capability across Victoria.

Key achievements/findings

- Successful uplift of our entire organisation's data capability and creation of systems to ensure quality, timely and consistent data collection
- Transition to the centralised practice management system, Actionstep
- Completion of a comprehensive discovery and consultation phase focused on creating an in depth understanding of what data we collect and why
- Successful engagement of staff and leadership in data capability uplift activities that have built the foundations of a strong monitoring and evaluation culture
- Better and stronger use of our data, to tell client stories and demonstrate how our work is helping them achieve improved life outcomes that also result in significant cost savings to government and reduced pressure on acute services.

Insights

Learnings for the Organisation

Westjustice staff have always been committed to collecting quality data and generally understood the value of data in monitoring the impact of our services, but they needed the skills to support this and effectively measure the impact on our clients. This project has helped us to build a systemised data collection approach across the different programs that supports our staff and the organisation as a whole.

Placing the DIPM into a centralised, enabling team has been hugely beneficial for the organisation and the success of this project. The Policy, Impact and Engagement team works closely with Impact Areas across the organisation to uplift their skills and knowledge and to develop consistent approaches and systems. Having the DIPM in this team has allowed them to work across our Impact Areas to create a deeper understanding of how our staff view and use data, and encourage a culture of consistent, measurable, outcomes-focused service delivery for our organisation. The DIPM role has been critical in ensuring strategic data thinking is embedded across the organisation and increasing the data maturity and capability of staff.

Continuing to build data capability and nurture data maturity will be extremely important going forward, including continuing to support the DIPM to deliver a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Approach that effectively measures our impact on our clients and demonstrate this to government and philanthropic investors.

Learnings for the broader social sector

Through this project, we have increased our data capability immensely and we can now monitor our progress against the Priority Outcomes set out in our organisational Strategy. This will help us to understand the effectiveness of our services in delivering meaningful life outcomes for the people of Melbourne's West, as well as demonstrate a real, reduced pressure on acute services and delivering significant cost savings to government. Westjustice will be in a position to work with our community legal sector partners and the Federation of Community Legal Centres to share this knowledge base across the sector and build this capability across Victoria.

Social sector organisations wishing to uplift their data capability should consider having a dedicated role or project lead in a cross-organisation team to lead and deliver a successful data transformation project. In addition, it will be important to successfully engage staff in the discovery, consultation and implementation phases as this will help to build data maturity through creating a collective commitment to quality data collection and use.

Additional information

Westjustice is a rights-based Community Legal Centre servicing Melbourne's West on the lands of the Bunurong and Wurundjeri peoples and including the LGAs of Wyndham, Maribyrnong, Hobsons Bay, Melton and Brimbank, a population of over a million people. Melbourne's Western Suburbs are the thriving backbone of the state, and home to Australia's most diverse and fastest-growing population.

We provide place-based, multi-disciplinary programs, and partner with values-aligned organisations to focus on servicing those most impacted by legal issues to ensure people have access to the services they need where they need them.

Our service area incorporates the fastest growing and most multicultural communities in the country (as at the 2021 Australian Census). But many Western Suburbs are also in crisis by many metrics, comprising areas of significant disadvantage and higher than average youth offending rates, family violence rates, workers in casualised and insecure employment.

In this environment, we consistently see complex legal issues and the cyclical impact this has on longer term economic, health, and life outcomes. This is why our services and programs focus on prevention and early intervention in the cycle of economic precarity, criminalisation, violence and housing insecurity to produce benefits for the people we work with and save government significant investment in downstream impacts of social problems. Our programs are tested, trialled, evaluated and codified – an approach that means the risk for investment is low, but the fiscal and human returns are high.

Our Strategy 24 - 27

As outlined in our [Strategy 2024-27](#), we work to uphold peoples' rights by providing free legal, social work, financial counselling services, community engagement, and advocacy for systemic reform across the five impact areas of Workers' Rights, Children and Young People's Rights, Women and Gender Diverse people's Rights, Economic and Housing Rights, and Our Team.

Our work aims to achieve six priority outcomes for these impact areas, which is the first time Westjustice has had consistent client goals across the organisation (rather than team by team). These are: improved wellbeing, personal safety, financial security, housing security, social inclusion, and empowerment and participation.

Alongside these Impact Areas and Priority Outcomes sit our Priority Cohorts: People experiencing family and gender-based violence, LGBTQIA+ people, People experiencing poverty, People with disability, Culturally and racially marginalised people, and First Nations People.

Our Strategy also outlines key activities to enhance our measurement and evaluation including creating our monitoring and evaluation framework and embedding this across the organisation, strengthening how we tell our story, and improving and streamlining our reporting processes.

For enquiries, contact us.

For further information about this project and its findings, please contact:

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