

Eastern Community Legal Centre Inc.

48th Annual General Meeting - Minutes



3.00pm, Thursday November 29th 2022
Manningham Civic Centre and via Live-Stream

Attendance and Apologies

See list at back.

1. Welcome

Chairperson, Janet Matton welcomed all to the 48th Annual General Meeting of Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) and highlighted the theme of the meeting, 'Moments that Matter'.

2. Welcome to Country

Janet noted that Julie Coombes who was due to offer a Welcome to Country was an apology today.

3. Chair's Welcome

Janet acknowledged the Wurundjeri People, the Traditional Owners of the land on which she spoke from, the other lands that people were gathered on and paid respects to Elders both past and present.

On behalf of ECLC, Janet also acknowledged the special guests present at the AGM, as well as Board members, members, volunteers, staff and supporters. Manningham Council was acknowledged and thanked for hosting the event.

4. Acceptance of Minutes of 2021 Annual General Meeting

A copy of the Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting held on 25th November 2021 were provided to attendees.

Motion: That the minutes of the Eastern CLC 2021 AGM be accepted as a true and accurate record.

Moved: Christine Cowin

Seconded: Guy Masters

CARRIED

5. Acceptance of Minutes of 2022 Special General Meeting

A copy of the Minutes of the Special General Meeting held on 18th May 2022 were provided to attendees.

Motion: That the minutes of the Special General Meeting be accepted as a true and accurate record.

CARRIED

6. Board Report: Janet Matton, Chairperson

Janet noted that it's a privilege to be on the Board of ECLC and to assist in serving the needs of the Centre's vast population.

The AGM provides an opportunity to think about the year past and the year ahead. And like all organisations, the team have had a hybrid year of working from home, emerging into the office and emerging into the opportunity to meet with clients again face to face to ensure the needs are being met. The Centre also continues to have some fantastic partnerships which are essential to ensure the delivery of these services, and these continue to expand.

At a Board level, Janet noted that she is proud of the commitment, skill, passion and energy of the ECLC staff team. Janet expressed her thanks to all staff at ECLC and to her Board colleagues for their passion, dedication and commitment.

Finally Janet highlighted the importance of the next 12 months, particularly in the spirit of Moments that Matter, and invited all to think of this time as Australia heads to the referendum in favour of a Voice to Parliament. From an ECLC perspective, the Centre's stance will be very clear that we will assist in this process with intent to do everything we can to make sure it is a successful outcome for a Voice to Parliament. Everyone has a role to play and the most important thing is to ensure sure it is a respectful discussion and debate.

7. Financial Report: Luong Ta, Treasurer

Luong Ta highlighted that the 2021-22 financial year report saw a small operating deficit of \$2,245.

Revenue reported increased by over 20% which reflects increased funding and grants received from many sources to expand and maintain the services ECLC provides to the Eastern community directly and through partnership arrangements. Pleasingly over the last few years, the Centre has also taken the opportunity to reinvest into ICT and other systems to better prepare for the future.

Cashflow remains in a very healthy position with cash (and cash equivalent assets) on hand increasing by \$645,230 which reflects that more funding has been received by ECLC in advance of completing and delivering designated services and programs.

ECLC is in a great position and this reflects the great work of management and the organisation.

Motion: That the Financial Report be received.

Moved: Guy Masters

Seconded: Jose Abalo

CARRIED

8. Chief Executive Officer's Report: *Michael Smith, CEO*

Michael Smith welcomed everyone in attendance in-person and via live stream. Michael acknowledged the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung People of the Kulin nation and paid respect to their elders past and present and further acknowledged all First Nations people in attendance today.

Michael noted that it is an important time for the country and its relationship with its First Nations communities and highlighted the progress made in Victoria on Treaty as well as learning more about the real Truth of our history through the Yoorrook Commission. The Centre is looking forward to national progress on the Voice responding to the Uluru Statement from the Heart. ECLC has been pleased that its partnerships with local ACCOs and broader First Nations communities in the East have continued to deepen and assured all that ECLC will continue to be a strong ally and supporter of the first Nations Communities as we work for Voice, Treaty and Truth.

Michael highlighted the theme for the year being Moments that Matter. Over the last 3 years everyone has become very focused on what is really important - what really matters. While we have to constantly adjust, we have remained really concentrated on critical opportunities to make a difference. For the work that ECLC does with individual community members, those moments that matter are so important and they can be life changing.

Michael provided a number of client examples (as seen in Annual Report) that highlighted important Moments that Mattered in the connection between members of the community and ECLC.

As well as excellent client work, the Centre is also doing a lot of great work in the prevention space with a number of large projects in the prevention team. Michael highlighted:

- The launch of the You Me and MP's project at the Victorian Parliament
- Hidden Voices Project which empowered local community members to publicly share their often-difficult Moments that Matter in a supportive and safe environment.
- My Generation project which brought school age children together with seniors to do art and storytelling, addressing elder abuse through intergenerational connections.
- Large number of CLE sessions across a range of audiences

Michael noted that the Centre cannot achieve these on its own and spoke of the importance of partnership and collaboration, and the Centre's gratitude for these relationships. The example of a new partnership with the Cybec Foundation and Mallee Family Care CLC was given and Michael announced that the Centre's Mabels program will be expanding into Mildura and the Mallee because of these connections.

Michael further expressed this thanks to the Centre's funding partners, volunteers, staff team, as well as Janet Matton and the Centre's Board for their unwavering support, wise counsel and leadership. In particular Jose Abalo for his dedication to the Board over the last 12 years.

Michael highlighted that despite the positivity of those things, there have been other important moments that matter including:

- lack of safety of women and children, which is particularly highlighted during the current 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign. Michael spoke of the team's work in responding to family violence and the Centre's inability to meet the high demand.
- when the Victorian Government is yet to fund the legal support needed at the Ringwood Specialist Family Violence Court. The Centre is currently turning away women every week at the court which is heartbreaking for the team. It is currently a highly flawed model and is a long way short of what the Royal Commission proposed.
- funding cuts resulting in the foreseeable closure of the Lilydale Youth Hub.
- when Victoria has not yet raised the age of criminal responsibility which particularly impacts First Nations children.

On a more positive note, Michael added that with the support of the state government, ECLC will soon establish a new legal service for victims of crime. ECLC has also just received funding to advocate for system improvements across key sectors, drawing on the multidisciplinary practice lessons. And in more good news, in a key moment this morning, the Australian Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus announced the end of the gag clause which saw restrictions on CLCs speaking out and advocating for change. To finish the presentation, a short video on the My Generation project was presented.

9. Formal Presentation of Annual Report

Janet Matton presented the Centre's Annual Report and thanked the team for their work on the publication.

Motion: That the 2021 - 2022 Annual Report be received.

Moved: Christine Cowin

Seconded: Luong Ta

CARRIED

10. Appointment of Board Members

Four nominations were formally and correctly received for the four vacancies on the Board in accordance with the Centre's Rules:

- Ali Besiroglu
- Christine Cowin
- Katherine Dowson
- Luong Ta

The nominees were all **declared elected** for a two-year term.

11. General Business

Janet Matton made a special mention of Jose Abalo who was retiring from his position on the ECLC Board after serving over 12 years. During this time, Jose brought a great deal of wisdom and made an extensive contribution to the steering of the organisation.

Jose thanked Janet for her words and noted that he has been reflecting recently on the Centre and its programs, in particular back when he and Michael met back in 2008. During his time on the Board, Jose expressed that he learned a lot not only from the Board, but the staff also and felt it was a great honour to be a part of it.

12. Staff Presentation: Community Member's Legal Support Journey

Belinda Lo, Director of Legal Services / Principal Lawyer highlighted that this year celebrates the 50th anniversary of CLCs, which ECLC is one of the original 10. The CLC sector begun with volunteer lawyers wanting to ensure access to justice through the provision of legal services Belinda noted that ECLC has evolved greatly over the years. Belinda introduced staff members Al, representing the intake team, Cass, representing the community lawyers and Susan representing the client advocates.

The client story of 'Luke' was showcased in detail, a client who identified that he had some traffic matters with which he needed some advice and assistance during the Covid lockdown period. When attempting to engage with ECLC, Luke missed a number of telephone and in person appointments and made some disclosures that made it clear that he didn't trust the legal system. The community lawyer and client advocate supported Luke to address his concerns about the legal system and to finalise his matter which had a positive legal outcome for him.

The story as told through the experiences of the intake team, community lawyer and client advocate highlighted the importance of early intervention, multidisciplinary approaches (particularly through the HEAL program) and that integrated practice support the development of improved practice – including trauma informed, person centred and flexible service delivery models - increase the opportunities to engage clients and to ensure they remain engaged with the legal service throughout their journey.

13. Amplifying Community Voices Presentation

Donna Askew, Director Partnerships and Community Development provided a background of the Amplifying Community Voices in the East (ACVE), anti racism project. She spoke of the consultation with local community leaders and partnership work with local partners Centre for Holistic Health, IndianCare and Communities Council on Ethnic issues.

A key part of the ACVE project, sought to work with a group of community leaders to become Anti Racism advocates and supported community leaders to participate in workshops which focused on challenging racism and sharing their voices and experiences of racial discrimination. Capacity-building sessions were provided by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and Democracy in Colour, and were developed in consultation with the leaders, providing them with knowledge on Australia's Human Rights Framework, advocacy techniques and using their knowledge and lived experiences to speak out against racism.

ECLC also supported the community leaders to co-design and develop a video, 'Voices of Change – Action against Racism' to educate community members on how to identify and report incidents of racial or religious discrimination or vilification. This video was then shown to the audience.

Donna introduced Anti Racism Advocate Eva Lam who was closely involved with the project and took the opportunity to interview Eva about her involvement on the project.

14. Guest Speaker: *Maria Dimopoulos AM*

Janet introduced guest speaker, Maria Dimopoulos AM, Chair of Safe and Equal, and provided a short biography.

Maria begun her presentation by referencing the quote from June Oscar AO, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner – *“We stand at a pivotal moment in history - a point of reckoning when the gravity of truth is lifting the immense weight of an entrenched and institutionalised misrepresentation of our past and our present. Irrevocably shifting the balance in how we understand our nation, ourselves and our relationship with one another.”*

Maria followed this by noting she was positioning and grounding herself in this Country, in relationship of accountability to First Nations people and the tradition and unseeded ancestral lands and territories. Land on which she stands and where her work and life takes place.

Maria reflected on the theme “Moments that Matter” and noted that many of these have been painful, inspiring and joyous. Maria recalled many experiences throughout her life and career, in particular mentioning:

- her experience as a young migrant child growing up in Geelong, where those moments ended up deeply etching themselves in her life and particularly in her politics and ethics of care and love.
- her time attending Monash University, in particular, the defining moments of realising that in Australia, migrants, despite all the obstacles presented to them, seemed to be more easily afforded a place in a land that was violently stolen.
- having to confront the fact that there was a significant difference between herself as a racialised settler, and First Nations people – that she could no longer say she knew how they felt with regards to racism, as she didn’t.
- her determination to not only respond to racism in terms of migration and refugee experience but to also address “unfinished business” between multicultural Australia and first nations people in this country. Maria noted that we must as multicultural communities deal with the colonial past even though we still hear, “We didn’t create the problem”.
- observing a judicial officer in the 1980s argue the murder of a Greek woman amounted to a cultural one, and wondering what that meant, that it was somehow a reflection of her culture rather than the result of misogyny and patriarchy. During this time, she determined that she was going to challenge the use of culture and faith as source of deficit rather than strength. Those moments were met with considerable resistance.
- The feminist movement, that finally she’d “found her tribe”, only to be confronted yet again with moments of bias, silences and exclusions with regards to migrant and refugee women.
- Scrutinising positions of power, that we realise the privilege that comes from having a law degree or amazing opportunities, that we ask who is speaking and ensure that we’re not speaking over or silencing others.

Maria concluded by quoting Archie Roach - “it does wonders for a person to just be still and listen to someone else talk about their life and how they probably came through things. You never know what you’ll learn”. Maria expressed that she’s learned so much through a mountain of special moments and thanked all for the honour of being able to share today.

15. Thanks and Close

Janet closed the meeting at 4.46pm and thanked everyone in attendance.

Guests in attendance (in person)

Ali Besiroglu, Alistair Gall, Anna Chen, Catherine Simcox, Chris Cowin, Christine Mathieson, David Cooke, David Towl, Elly Taylor, Eva Hussain, Eva Lam, Francoise Le Gall, Guy Masters, Heather Burns, Helen Wright, Janae Hendrey, Janet Matton, Jose Abalo, Katherine Dowson, Louise Millar-Hoffmann, Lucy Duncan, Luong Ta, Lyn Dundon, Maria Stefanou, Maria Dimopoulos, Marianne Di Giallonardo, Michelle Thompson, Nhu Ngoc Tran, Nikki Harris-Allan, Richard Joseph, Sophie Sun, Stephen Mayne, Tabitha Lovett, Tonina Gucciardo-Masci

Staff in attendance

Susan Amos, Shane Anderson, Donna Askew, Gergis Ayoub, Kathryn Barnett, Katrina Barrett, Gail Blair, Danielle Bon, Connie Chen, Suzanne Cleary, Jill Exon, Vrinda Fernando, Kate Gibson, Deborah Goon, Mariam Guirguis, Capella Henderson, Ebony Hogg, Naomi Hynes, Anita Koochew, Susan Learner, Fiona Link-Freeman, Belinda Lo, Marika Manioudakis, Kichelle McFarlane, Cassandra Meade, Alistair Montfort, Jarm Nguyen, Holly Phillips-Kliska, Freya Pollard, Emma Pryce – Baxter, Trish Reck, Kelly Reid, Kerry Shepherd, Michael Smith, Jennifer Stewart, Steph Streets, Claire Thurstans, Chalita Ugrinovski, Shubhankar Vajpayee, Paul Were

Apologies

Bronwen Henry, Michael Sukkar MP, Jeanette McRae, Judith Voce, Cr Michelle Kleinert, Sonia Terpstra MP, Vivienne Nguyen, Bwe Thay, Sue Carlile, Bonnie Bedwell, Dr Michelle Ananda-Rajah, Bruce Atkinson, Cr Marcia Timmers-Leitch, Elke Smirl, David Plunkett, Cr Prue Cutts, Jill Gardiner, Barbara Crisp, Carmel Guerra, Matthew Bach MP, Edward Thomson, Jennie Robinson, Jenni Smith, Zak Fakhri, Hester Chee, Lisa Bradley, Melissa Reed, Iresha Buthgamuwa, Emma O’Brien, Donna Hayes, Julie Kitto, Cr Amanda McNeill