



**KEY PROJECT:** HRCLS principal lawyer Sarah Rodgers welcomes two-year funding for a project that sees lawyers work once a week in support services for young people.

# Youth access to legal help will continue

BY ELLEN EBSARY

THE Invisible Hurdles project, providing young people accessing support services with free legal advice, has received another two years of funding.

The Hume Riverina Community Legal Service, auspiced by Upper Murray Family Care, launched a program in 2015 where a youth lawyer works one day a week at the Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre, Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service and North East Support and Action for Youth (NESAY).

The project received funding from the Victorian government up until May this year and an evaluation of the first stage is expected to be published in October.

A further \$200,000 over two years for Invisible Hurdles was announced last week, as one of eight Health Justice

Partnerships sharing in \$1.6 million across Victoria.

HRCLS principal lawyer Sarah Rodgers said having lawyers onsite at support services was crucial to support at-risk youth.

"We know young people will not walk into a lawyer's office off the street, so being on site with services who they trust has been crucial for the success of the project," she said.

"Making a difference for people affected by family violence is a key priority for our service.

"Young people affected by family violence often have numerous other legal problems, so providing a friendly, accessible, wrap-around service is critical."

NESAY chief executive Leah Waring said some of the legal issues that come up for young people presenting at their Wangaratta office in-

cluded family violence, court cases, and debts.

"When we have a young person present for support, one of the things we look at is if they have any legal issues," she said.

"Having a lawyer on site once a week means their questions can be answered straight away.

"They become part of our trusted team and that breaks down misconceptions about lawyers."

Ms Waring said NESAY's relationship with the other two organisations involved in Invisible Hurdles had been strengthened.

"Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service now rent a space in our office and as a result our young people have access to a doctor - that wouldn't have happened without the project," he said.

"I hope the funding will continue."