



L | A | C | W
LAW & ADVOCACY
CENTRE FOR WOMEN

LACW ANNUAL REPORT 2022



Acknowledgement of Country

LACW acknowledges that it operates from the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations. We pay our respect to their elders, past and present, and to the traditional owners and elders of the lands throughout Victoria on which we conduct our work.

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face particular prejudice and discrimination in the legal system, and in particular in relation to policing, child protection involvement and incarceration. We are committed to addressing these issues in our advocacy and representation. Sovereignty was never ceded.



The artwork used in this report – Healing Garden – was created by Stacey, a proud Taungurung/Boon Wurrung artist with experience of the criminal legal system.

As Stacey explains, “the healing garden is a place of refuge. The blue tongue lizard goes there to get away from the environment of the jail. This is the place where Thelma and I went to heal together.”

LACW has licenced this artwork through The Torch, a not-for-profit organisation that provides art, cultural and arts industry support to Indigenous people with experience of the criminal legal system.



CEO's Report

This is now our third annual report written in the 'COVID era.' For an organisation that has been open for just over 6 years, this is pretty significant to say the least. For almost half of our operating life we have been dealing with working conditions that are unprecedented, a funding landscape of uncertainty, and ongoing health and safety risks that have required a nimble and careful approach. It is fair to say that flexibility, adaptability and resilience are now part of our DNA.

Through all of this, we have had the privilege of a dedicated and hard working team of lawyers, case managers and support staff who have continued to turn up for their clients - whether in person or remotely - day after day after day, ensuring their rights are upheld and their support needs met.

And despite the challenges of remote engagement, long delays and incredibly harsh conditions in custody due to isolation and lock-down requirements, our clients have shown up, have engaged with our support and have embraced the opportunities provided to them, despite the odds stacked against them.

We have seen the very successful introduction of our Child Protection practice, filling a significant gap in the services available to criminalised women in Victoria who are facing child protection proceedings. We have continued to grow our criminal defence practice, expanding further into regional areas and increasing our ever growing client base. And we have provided ongoing case management support to an even greater number of clients, who have also benefited from the provision of practical support such as emergency accommodation, transport and vouchers.



CEO's Report cont...

We have also launched the Women's SupPORT Pathways project, a new initiative to link criminalised women with local community football clubs as a way of building social and community connections and addressing the stigma that is often faced by criminalised women in the community.

In reflecting on the past year, I would like to pay tribute to two very important people that we have said goodbye to. We were deeply saddened by the loss of two members of the extended LACW family - Jo Prior, Jill's mum, who has been a strong supporter and regular presence around our office since our inception, and Sue McPhail-Ibbeson, the mother of Ashlee, our lawyer who has been with us for five years. Both mothers have nurtured and raised incredibly dedicated, inspiring and fearless advocates who have given so much to LACW. They will be forever in our memories and in our hearts.

To all of our supporters - thank you. Without you, we would not have been able to face the challenges of the past year and come out stronger, and even more determined to continue to fight for the rights of our clients, helping them forge pathways out of the justice system.

Elena Pappas
CEO and Co-founder

with Jacquie Phiddian (left), Project Manager
and Kylie Heine (right), Board member





PLO's Report

I dare not say that we have reached a point of organisational stability. It seems each time we conceive of, let alone utter that word 'stable', we are blindsided once again.

Given the past couple of years, it was always anyone's guess what the last 12 months would ask of us, and of the women that we represent.

The Courts have continued to shape-shift and adapt to unpredictable needs of users and unplanned absence of those staffing the Courts, those using the Courts and people affected by cases heard there.

Almost three years into the impacts of COVID-19, the legal system is bruised and battered and it seems there is still some time to go before the previously seen robustness will return, and be certain. There seems to be constant review and ongoing collaboration to ensure the systems in place are efficient and can manage what remains an overwhelming backlog of cases that have not been able to be finalised over the past years.

I am not a fan of boxing, but I keep coming back to the vision of a boxer, 8 rounds in, against the ropes, puffing and panting, held up by the semblance of structure in the ropes that shape the ring. Still standing. But tired.

The courts will recover. The Judges, Magistrates, lawyers and Court staff will find their feet and the structural stability in this system will prevail.

For our clients, however, the interaction with the Court system is invariably the outward presentation of a life that is anything but stable.

There are women now who are trying to conceive of a life without violence. They are crippled by the inability to keep their own children safe from that violence and they will be plagued by thoughts of their escape – away from that violence. Between 70 and 90% of women in prison identify as victims of family and other violence. 62% of our clients have told us that they are victims of family violence.



PLO's Report cont...

Those same women will be wondering what will happen if they call the police to come in response – and for many women whether their children will be taken from them as a result of a report of a ‘failing’ on their part to act protectively. And for Aboriginal women and children that reality has seen the removal of children at higher numbers than ever before.

There are women who are wondering how they will keep safe overnight on the streets of Melbourne and across Victoria. How they will keep warm? They will wonder about what their dinner will be and how they will get through tomorrow. Women exiting prison have identified housing instability in over 50% of cases.

Those same women will cry for the children that are not in their care and despair at when they will see them again. Or how. Most women in prison are mothers. And there are women who are being released from custody – they will surface from Dame Phyllis Frost Centre or from the cells beneath the Magistrates' Court with just a myki ticket and the clothes on their back.

Where will they go and how will they get there?

And if they have mental health issues or drug and alcohol issues, where will they access medication or pharmacotherapy? The reality is that some will return to unsafe environments where violence is more likely.

They will do so because there is no better option. And so these women, our clients, are more likely to be visible to police and to the community. They are more likely to present in a way that prompts a police intervention and more likely than not, they will return to custody.

And more often than not we will hear stories of the woman who is sleeping in her car, driving unlicensed to a ‘safe’ place overnight, she will be taking food to eat because she has no money, she will be swearing and angry in the streets, she will be dishevelled and unapproachable.



PLO's Report cont...

This same woman might be foraging through cars to find coins or stealing things to survive. More often than not she will be using drugs or alcohol because she doesn't want to experience any of this life with the clarity that sobriety brings.

And so whilst the legal system steadies itself and prepares for a return to normalcy and stability – we as a community have done little to advance the resourcing of fundamental services to respond to this chaos – the same chaos that was present before COVID-19.

Women are still exiting prison to homelessness. Women are still without safe and secure accommodation for them and their children. There are not enough beds in rehabilitation facilities for women, inadequate mental health treatment responses and women remain more likely to experience poverty. The result? The overwhelmingly consistent drivers of criminalisation for women persist.

Women should not be in custody because they have no safe place to live. They deserve to live without family violence. They deserve to know where they will sleep each night. They should not wonder where their next meal will come from or how they will get to their medical appointments. And their children deserve this too.

Providing a legal response alone is not enough if we want to see long term change. When we give women safe and stable housing we give them the opportunity to heal. When we ensure there are supports for women then they can see a way forward and there is hope.

I recently reconnected with Stacey. She was the inspiration for our “Stacey’s Closet” – an abundance of clothing for our clients who face court or are released from custody without decent clothes or shoes. She is also the woman who created the beautiful art that now adorns our website and this report. She has found strength and hope for her future, and central to that vision for her future is somewhere to live and community to connect with. She is lucky. I thank her for her support of us, for her wise counsel, her insight and for her humour.

PLO's Report cont...

I would like to thank our lawyers who remain passionate and fierce in their advocacy for our clients. They are unrelenting in their strive to provide the highest quality legal advice and representation, and they are unyielding in their kindness and care for our clients.

The same can be said of our amazing support staff who sit at the coal-face and hear the pain and sorrow of women desperate for someone to help. The paralegals allow these women to feel safe and un-judged in their stories. This work is sometimes thankless but absolutely integral to our success.

Our case managers are the team who have stepped into those chaotic narratives and started to unravel lives that are tangled and messy. They are determinedly present for our clients and have seen life changes for our clients that will have lifelong impacts. If only we had more of them to reach all our clients.

I thank our Board who have, once again, guided us through this year with wisdom and a sense of scaffolding around us that is quiet but steely.

Finally I thank Elena Pappas, CEO and Co-founder of LACW who has managed to keep all the parts moving and never fails to do so with intelligence, calm and good measure.

Thank you.

Jill Prior
PLO and Co-founder
with Di McDonald (Board Chair)





Our Vision

LACW's vision is that all women in Victoria can access pathways out of the justice system through exceptional legal representation and support.

We are committed to being the leading provider of specialist, gender-responsive legal and case management services to women throughout Victoria, delivering a holistic response with a focus on criminal defence.

Our Approach

Many women share common pathways to criminalisation. A specialised service for women that understands and addresses those issues is better placed to interrupt the trajectory that sees women enter and become entrenched in the criminal legal system.

We provide a thorough assessment as part of our intake process that identifies both legal and non-legal needs. We provide intensive case management to ensure that clients' needs are met. We have close relationships with other allied service providers including arrangements for warm referrals and ongoing shared case management.





Our Work

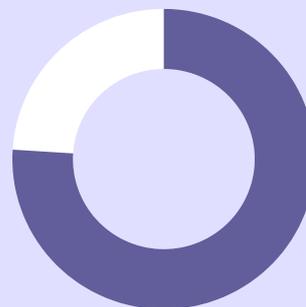
1498

New Legal Matters Opened in
2021-2022



76%

Of New Legal Matters Opened
are Criminal Defence files



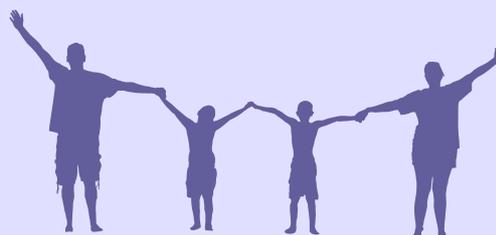
110

New Case Management Files
Opened in 2021-2022



65

New Child Protection files
opened in first year of practice



Our Clients

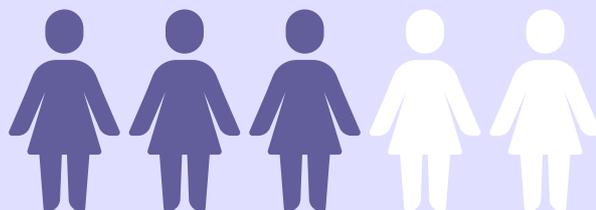
677

Total Clients Assisted in
2021-2022



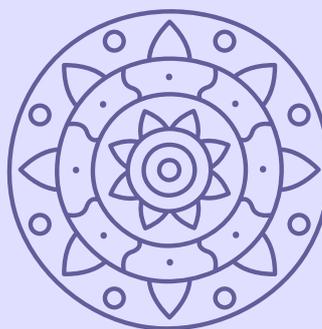
62%

Are experiencing or at risk of
family violence



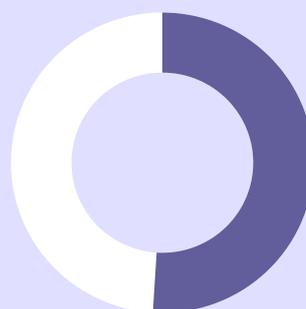
36%

Of our work is for Aboriginal or
Torres Strait Islander clients



51%

Proportion of clients that were
new to LACW in 2021-2022



Our Impact

444

Matters where clients would have had no ongoing legal help if not for LACW



226

New Regional matters opened



75

vouchers for material aid dispensed



46%

Case Management clients requiring assistance with housing pathways





Our Projects

Pathways out of the Justice System

LACW's Pathways out of the Justice System program has continued to provide early intervention legal and case management support for women, in particular those who are not eligible for legal aid funding due to the nature of their charges or their lack of prior criminal history. Women supported under this program include many who have been misidentified as the primary aggressor in family violence incidents. We are grateful for the renewed funding through the CLC's Family Violence and Assistance funds to continue this work.



Our case management team
L-R: Mary Paterson, Lisa Chamouras, Georgie Adeney (Paralegal and Social Work Student) and Virginia Moebus-Nelson



Regional Pathways Project

Our regional pathways project has been funded now for two years through the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, enabling us to establish a pilot program in Swan Hill and Mildura providing legal advice and representation to women facing criminal charges who are otherwise ineligible for legal assistance. We have been successful in obtaining additional funding through the National Legal Assistance Partnership's Specialist Grants for Community Legal Centres (Vulnerable Women stream), which will provide scope to expand these services to other regional locations, with an emphasis on the areas identified as having the highest unmet legal and support needs.

Regional Connections

Jacque Phiddian
(SupPORT Pathways Project Manager)
and Anna Howard, Senior Lawyer





Integrated Services and Holistic Support

LACW provides an integrated practice with the case management team working alongside lawyers to support clients access the services they need. LACW's Case Management team is lead by a qualified Social Worker with many years of experience working with criminalised women. We are grateful for the funding provided through the Integrated Services Fund administered by the Federation of Community Legal Centres to support this work.





RMIT Student Placements

LACW works in close collaboration with the Centre for Innovative Justice at RMIT University, hosting Social Work students who undertake practical and research placements focused on providing a best-practice model of integrated service delivery. Students have experienced LACW's general case management practice, have worked in the Women's SupPORT Pathways project, and have also undertaken project work developing a resource on embedding trauma-informed practice within the community legal sector.

We also hosted Juris Doctor students from RMIT's Graduate School of Business and Law, who assisted in mapping the services available to criminalised women in regional areas to assist in identifying service gaps and opportunities.



Student Support and Integration

Kat Ogilvie, Social Work and Integrated Practice Manager, Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT (left), with Lisa Chamouras, Case Manager

Women's SupPORT Pathways Project

The SupPORT Pathways Project connects women who have lived experience of the criminal justice system with community football clubs throughout Melbourne. LACW is leading the project with support from the Victorian Amateur Football Association (VAFA) and RMIT's Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ).

Clubs are provided with appropriate training and resources, and the lived experience of participants is embedded in all aspects of the project.

We would like to thank Catherine Caruana and Elena Campbell from the CIJ for their work in evaluating the first phase of the project, and the Preston Bullants and Williamstown CYMS for embracing the project in its pilot year. Most importantly, a huge thank you to Misty and Kerry for their dedication, hard work and feedback as project participants and lived experience experts.

This project is funded by the Department of Justice and Community Safety's Crime Prevention Innovation Fund.

Launching SupPORT Pathways

Members of the Mt Alexander Falcons Women's Footy Team with Jacquie Phiddian, Project Manager





Systemic Advocacy

It has been a busy year for our systemic advocacy work. LACW has made several submissions to various policy and law reform inquiries in its own right, as well as supporting the work of Smart Justice for Women, a coalition of organisations working together to end women's criminalisation, which is co-convened by our CEO Elena Pappas and the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

Submissions made

- Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System (September 2021)
- UN Report on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls (January 2022)
- Systemic Review of Police Oversight (February 2022)
- Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Children Affected by Parental Incarceration (April 2022)

Systemic Advocacy
LACW Staff participating in
the Walk Against Family
Violence





Systemic Advocacy Spotlight

Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System

LACW provided an extensive submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System in September 2021, in addition to having significant input into the submission made by Smart Justice for Women.

Significantly, Elena appeared to give evidence in person to the Inquiry on behalf of Smart Justice for Women, and Jill appeared to give evidence on behalf of the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

...in the journey of a human being from their first contact with the justice system to the point of incarceration ... there are points of intervention all the way along that journey ... there is a very clear path that we can see, and at each point there are available interventions that are not outlandish... They are housing and mental health and other social supports, and where we tweak those points of intersection, then we are stopping this cascade of disadvantage - that ends up being a custodial sentence - where we start having whole other discussions.

Jill Prior, PLO, LACW, appearing for the Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria Inc., public hearing, Melbourne, 19 October 2021, Transcript of evidence, p. 37. As quoted at page 76 of the Final Report on the Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System.



Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System

In the Inquiry's Final Report, LACW was cited as an example of the advantages of health justice partnerships, and of "the ways in which community legal centres can achieve holistic outcomes for their clients, and reduce further interaction with the criminal justice system."

In one matter, [LACW's] lawyer and social worker assisted Jane [an alias] who had criminal charges against her. Among other factors, Jane was homeless, had an acquired brain injury and experienced mental ill health as a sexual assault survivor. The social worker put in place important supports for Jane which made her well enough to engage with the legal process and then proceeded to set up longer-term plans for ongoing support from services that the client had previously struggled to engage with.

As the court could see that there was a detailed support plan in place for Jane, she was allowed to continue to engage with support services, rather than receiving a custodial sentence. The integrated approach not only led to a successful legal outcome, but also enabled Jane to address the underlying causes of her offending.

Pages 87 and 436 of the Final Report on the Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System, Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, March 2022.



Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System

Case examples provided by LACW were also used as examples of good practice where an assertive case manager can support women to address multifaceted or complex support needs.

A LACW client had a disability and an unused NDIS package because she did not know how to access it. She had complex mental health issues and was the primary carer for her son. Her case manager supported her to access her NDIS funding, linked her with regular social support and counselling, and found her some respite support as a carer. She has since reduced her mental health medication, is happy and connected to her community and is linked to a paid employment pathway. Before working with her LACW case manager, she struggled to find other support given her involvement with the criminal justice system and criminal history.

A LACW case manager was working with one older woman who had a traumatic childhood, suffered from mental illness and had experienced a long period of homelessness. When she was referred to us, she was sleeping rough and was unmedicated and suicidal. Her LACW case manager has supported her to find stable accommodation, which means she has been able to re-engage with her doctor and access medication and support for her mental illness. She has benefited from having one consistent case manager who has taken a trauma-informed approach to supporting her.



Speaking Events

Our staff and management team have been engaged in a number of notable speaking events this year, including:

- Jill Prior (PLO) presenting at Victoria Legal Aid's statewide Criminal Connections Conference on bail applications and s.3A of the Bail Act concerning Aboriginal applicants.
- Linh Cao (Managing Lawyer - Crime) providing training to Women's Legal Service in relation to the intersections between intervention orders and criminal matters.
- Siobhan Mansfield (Managing Lawyer - Civil and Child Protection) and Carmendy Cooper (Senior Lawyer) delivering a presentation at the Federation of Community Legal Centres' Continuing Professional Development event on our Child Protection practice.
- Jill presenting at a Victorian Women Lawyer's event on opposing the expansion of the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.
- Jill delivering ongoing training to Practical Legal Placement students at the Leo Cussen Centre for Law.
- Linh appearing on 3CR's Done by Law program to talk about the work of CLCs.
- Jill featuring on the Williams and Lonsdale Podcast 'Lives in the Law.'

Linh Cao, Managing Lawyer, Crime, and
Mary Paterson, Case Manager





Bail Law reform

Our clients continue to be disproportionately impacted by changes to bail laws in Victoria that have made it much more difficult for people facing criminal charges to be released on bail while awaiting the outcome of their legal proceedings.

For the first time in Victoria, there are now more unsentenced women in prison than there are women serving sentence. Most of these women will be released without being sentenced to a further prison term. Most do not pose a threat to community safety. Almost all have particular vulnerabilities and support needs that are not being met.

We have been working hard to ensure that women are not warehoused in prison due to a lack of housing or support. We have run several bail applications across the Magistrates, County and Supreme Courts to advocate for the release of our clients so that they can engage with community-based support that will address the causes of their criminalisation.

In addition, we have advocated for law reform through our involvement with Smart Justice for Women and through engagement with Members of Parliament and other government actors.





Our Finances

Statement of Profit or Loss for the year ended 30 June 2022

	2022	2021
Revenue	1,330,211	1,539,238
Accounting Fees	19,245	10,181
Advertising	140	520
Bad Debts	-	2,697
Depreciation	2,844	427
Disbursements	92,303	57,695
Internet	1,068	1,068
IT Expenses	15,827	14,964
Memberships and Certifications	10,161	8,311
Office Supplies	415	308
Postage and Courier	769	1,203
Printing and Stationery	9,575	7,662
Professional Services	5,550	5,550
Sub-Contractors	54,005	51,100
Sundry Expenses	1,993	1,511
Superannuation	117,839	75,519
Telephone	9,021	5,933
Training and Professional Development	1,355	3,029
Travel and Accommodation	3,139	2,017
Travel – Metro	208	53
Wages and Salaries	1,180,891	808,188
Other Employee Expenses	49,354	72,891
Project Expenses - Crime Prevention Grant	85,997	-
TOTAL	1,661,699	1,130,827
Profit for the Year	(331,488)	408,411



Our Finances cont...

Revenue for the year ended 30 June 2022

	2022	2021
Revenue from contracts with customers		
Fee Income	464,602	463,105
Grants - Government	675,032	712,275
Grants - Philanthropic	-	8,466
TOTAL	1,139,634	1,183,846
Other Income		
Cash Flow Boost	-	58,082
Job Keeper	-	127,500
Paid Parental Leave	-	13,570
Disbursements Claimed	78,101	47,423
Interest Received	191	435
Donations	111,977	98,276
Other Income	308	10,106
Total	190,577	355,392
TOTAL REVENUE	1,330,211	1,539,238



Our Finances cont...

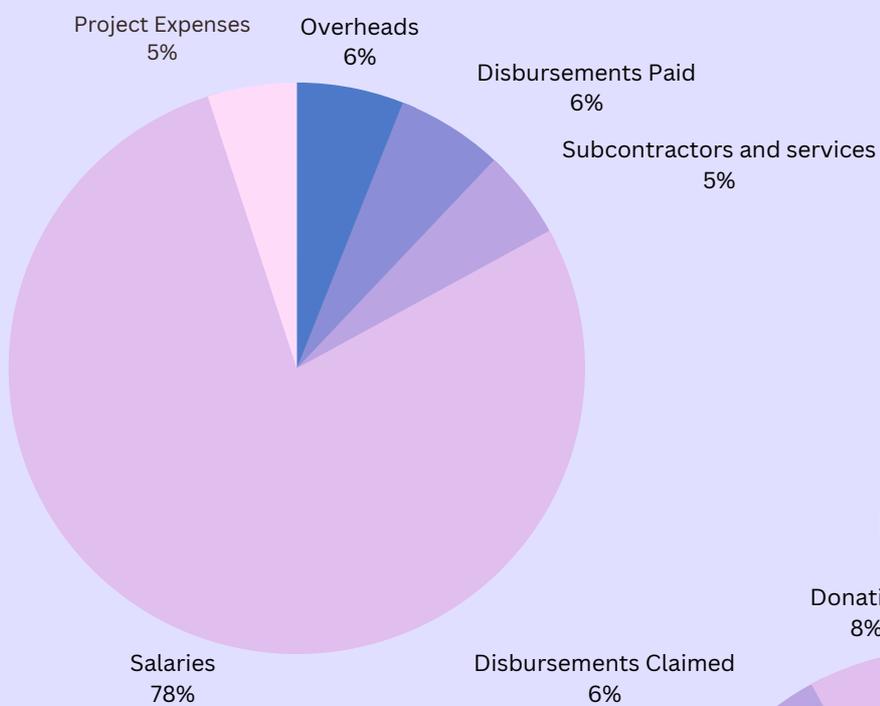
Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2022

	2022	2021
ASSETS		
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,379,164	1,415,986
Trade Debtors	237,500	
Prepayments	1,339	-
Total Current Assets	1,618,003	1,415,986
Non current assets		
Fixed assets	9,975	8,435
Total Non Current Assets	9,975	8,435
Total Assets	1,627,978	1,424,421
LIABILITIES		
Current Liabilities		
Advanced Grant Income	507,693	130,907
Annual Leave Provision	73,730	53,100
Sundry Creditors and Other Payables	196,278	60,966
Total Current Liabilities	777,701	244,973
Non Current Liabilities		
Long Service Leave Provision	8,630	6,313
Total Non Current Liabilities	8,630	6,313
Total Liabilities	786,331	251,286
NET ASSETS	841,647	1,173,135
EQUITY		
Accumulated Funds	841,647	1,173,135
TOTAL EQUITY	841,647	1,173,135

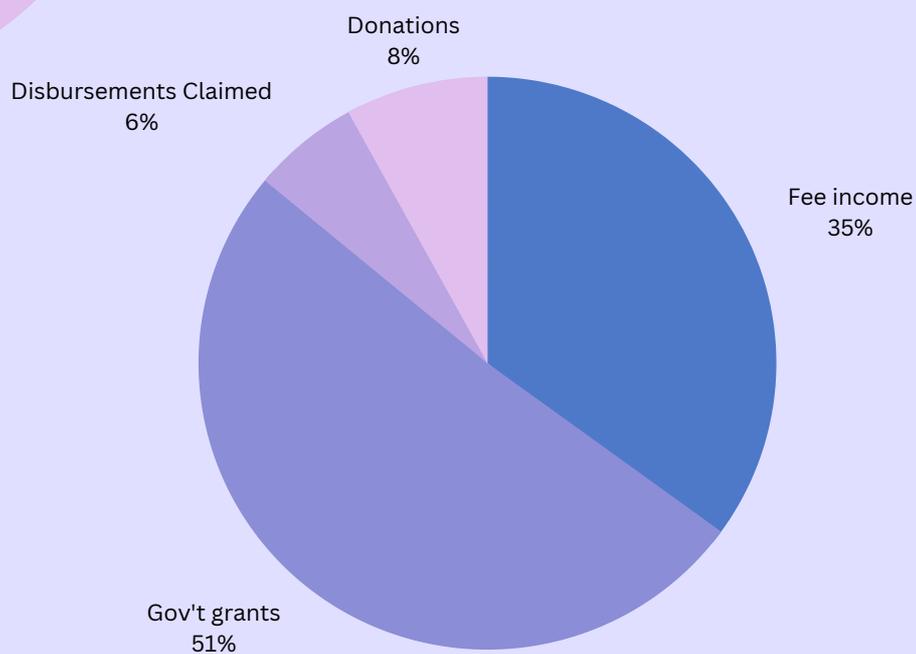


Our Finances cont...

Expenses



Revenue





Our People

Staff

Jill Prior (PLO)
Elena Pappas (CEO)

Linh Cao (Managing Lawyer – Crime)
Siobhan Mansfield (Managing Lawyer – Civil)
Virginia Moebus-Nelson (Social Work Team Leader)

Anna Howard (Senior Lawyer)
Carmendy Cooper (Senior Lawyer)
Laura Heffes (Senior Lawyer – Sept '21-Mar '22)
Philippa Dixon (Senior Lawyer)
Asha Zomer (Lawyer)
Ashlee McPhail (Lawyer)
Eleanor Ryan (Graduate Lawyer)
Sarah Abell (Graduate Lawyer)
Rose Blanden (Pro bono Lawyer - Meridian)

Lisa Chamouras (Case Manager – to Mar '22)
Mary Paterson (Case Manager)
Mel Walshe (Case Manager – from Mar '22)
Jacquie Phiddian (Project Manager)
Georgie Adeney (Paralegal)
Matilda McGuire (Paralegal – from Jan '22)
Isabella Burton (Paralegal – Sept-Dec '21)

Contractors

Emma Jackson (Grants Officer)
Alan Bunting (Bookkeeper)

Rose Blanden, Pro-bono lawyer, and
Ashlee McPhail, Lawyer





Our People cont...

Board

Di McDonald (Chair)
Paul Scroope
Kylie Heine
Elena Pappas
Jill Prior

Steering Committee

Crystal McKinnon
Anoushka Jeronimus
Roj Amedi

Volunteers

Natasha Grant
Isabella Burton
Matilda McGuire
Freja Campbell Walker
Josh Synan
Eliza Hew
Mary Zaky
Marli Mathewson
Chloe Hetherington

Student Placements

Renee Shankar
Jesse Fleming
Hilary Hunt
Eleri Morgan
Chloe Sinclair
Kelly Hinton
Georgia Egan-Griffiths
Alexandra Firth Donato
Sophie Hunt
Amity Clayfield
Eve Isaac
Ariane Greenfield
Gretha Lombaard
Esther LeCouteur
Tunisha Chawla
Lucia D'onofrio

Lawyers Carmendy Cooper, Eleanor Ryan
and Asha Zomer





Our Supporters

We would like to extend our huge thanks and appreciation to all the individuals and organisations who have supported us this year.

Particular thanks to Minim Wines, Blackhearts and Sparrows and Veraison Magazine who ran a fundraising event to support our case management program, to the PwC foundation and Maddocks Foundation for supporting our Winter Appeal, and to the organisers of the Remand Crisis Fundraiser in April.

We have had an unprecedented number of supporters this year through our fundraising appeals, in particular our Winter Appeal in June - thank you so much for all your contributions.

Special thanks also to Hall and Wilcox for their pro bono and IT support, and Meridian Lawyers for seconding Rose Blanden to us to assist with our VOCAT work.

Our Christmas book drive is becoming a fixture of the festive season and we thank everyone for their kind donations to help our clients put something special under the Christmas tree for their children.

Ashlee McPhail and Georgie Adeney wrapping gifts for LACW's Christmas Book Drive





Our Supporters





Organisation Details

Law and Advocacy Centre for Women Ltd

ABN: 84 602 365 542

147-155 Pelham Street, Carlton Vic 3053

PO Box 13315, Law Courts, 8010

Phone: 03 9448 8930

Fax: 03 9923 6669

info@lacw.org.au

www.lacw.org.au



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LAW & ADVOCACY
CENTRE FOR WOMEN

Lisa Chamouras (Case Manager), Emma Jackson (Complete Law Support) and Philippa Dixon (Senior Lawyer)

