

Annual Report

2023



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LAW & ADVOCACY
CENTRE FOR WOMEN

Table of Contents

S
T
R
U
C
T
U
R
E

01. Introduction
02. CEO and PLO Messages
03. What We Do
04. Our Impact
05. Our Work
06. Client Stories
07. Projects
08. Partnerships
09. Systemic Advocacy
10. Our New Website
11. Finances
12. Our People
13. Acknowledgements

INTRODUCTION

LACW acknowledges that we operate 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.



MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

Building a community of support

Building an organisation from the ground up requires you to wear many 'hats.' In the early days of LACW, Jill and I would cover off on everything from reception and admin, case management, bookkeeping, marketing, fundraising, IT (with mixed results and very low expertise) and of course regular court appearances. As we have grown, we have been able to entrust a number of these responsibilities to other - usually much more capable - people, with the result a much more specialised, professional and seamless service offering. It has also taken me away from court work, and limited my direct engagement with clients.

I was, therefore, somewhat fortunate this year to have needed to jump back in the saddle for a couple of court appearances while we were recruiting for new lawyers. What struck me after having had some time away from court was the level of coordination and preparation that is needed before each and every court appearance. What is ultimately presented to the court, neatly packaged and coherent, is the result of countless hours of work - often responding to crisis situations, unpredictable circumstances and a multitude of client needs - right up to the door of the court. What undoubtedly makes this process more successful is the input from support people - in particular, our social work and case management team - so that the story that is presented is one of strength and hope. This was particularly the case in one of the matters I appeared in, where a team of support people, including from our SupPORT Pathways Project, helped to facilitate a successful outcome for our client. The result brought with it some of the most positive and generous remarks from a Judge that I have ever heard in the context of a criminal proceeding.



Elena Pappas - CEO and Co-founder

“The strength of the team we have around us has allowed us to grow and develop in reach and capacity, in a way that ensures we are sustainable and able to meet the challenges of the future.”

MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO CONT...

This was no doubt due to the hard work put in by our client in preparation for what was to come, but something that could not have been possible without the team of support people around her.

Similarly, Jill and I are so fortunate now to have an incredibly dedicated and hard working team at LACW. This is headed up by a strong leadership team who work alongside us to ensure that our staff and clients receive the best support possible to make them thrive. I particularly want to thank Linh Cao (Managing Lawyer - Crime) and Virginia Moebus-Nelson (Social Work Team Leader) who we bid farewell to during the year, but who have left an indelible mark on our service and implemented so many improvements to help us grow; Ellen Murphy and Mary Paterson who have now stepped into these roles; and Siobhan Whittle who has continued to support our staff throughout these changes.

Our growing team of lawyers, case managers and project staff have continued to amaze me with their dedication and support, not just for our clients, but for each other as well. And our incredible support staff - at the front line of everything we do - have been compassionate, patient and resilient in the face of ever increasing demand for our services.

The leadership of our PLO, Jill Prior, in driving us to excel in all that we do and set the highest standards for exceptional advocacy on behalf of every single client, has no doubt cemented our reputation amongst courts and service providers as the leading provider of legal advice, representation and support to criminalised women in Victoria.

We look forward to continuing this work alongside our incredible staff, with the support of our dedicated Board and the steady guidance of our Steering Committee. And we will do so with a steadfast commitment to our clients to build a community of support around them that continues to strive for the best outcomes possible.



MESSAGE FROM OUR PLO

Reflections on strength and resilience

As I sit to write this report and to necessarily reflect on the year that has passed, I have positive reflections that are easily drawn upon.

Perhaps this is the case because there is comfort in the knowledge that, for a further 12 months, our organisation has continued to offer support to women in contact with the justice system in a way that is caring and considered, and goes beyond the legal response.

Perhaps this is because we have seen a justice response for clients that has allowed 80% of the women we represent to be bailed by decision makers. This has seen the population of Dame Phyllis Frost Centre consistently half empty.

Perhaps it is because we have seen the reunification of women with their children through strong advocacy across both our child protection and criminal practices, lawyers and case managers working together to ensure that our advocacy doesn't just start and end on our feet in Court.



Jill Prior - PLO and Co-founder

“Our staff have remained strong and stable. This has allowed continuity for clients, and a reputation that our staff will work hard for outcomes for women who are experiencing trauma, chaos, instability, hardship.”

MESSAGE FROM OUR PLO CONT...

I am comforted that when we are away from our office there are consistent and reliable administrative staff turning up every day and answering the calls of our clients, reliably and with unfaltering dedication acting as the buffer for the distress and the pain in those calls.

There is no secret amongst the legal profession that a 'good fit' for a client referral to LACW usually translates as a client who requires a significant level of support, who is presenting with complex needs and who would benefit from intervention in multiple areas. We welcome every one of these referrals. It is with great pride that our staff are recognised as willing to take on these challenges and to confidently provide support in a way that produces lasting and meaningful change for that woman.

Just last week we appeared for a young Aboriginal woman in an application for bail. We were seeking that she be bailed pending a sentence appeal. In what was an appropriately short application she was granted bail to return home to a remote, interstate town. The decision to grant her bail was made at 11.00am. But this is when the real work began. After hours of delay she was finally released in the late afternoon. She arrived at our office at 5.00pm from prison – on a Friday, once support services had closed for the weekend. She had nothing but a plastic bag of her own clothes and a one day myki travel card.

We spent the next two hours booking a complex series of trains and buses, two nights accommodation (one locally, one interstate) and provided her with vouchers, clothes, toiletries and a list of information about what she needed to do. She had no identifying documents, no phone and no money. We really needed to get this right. After a tense weekend and a series of phone calls from her – plus a last minute taxi fare to her motel late at night – she made it home at 8.30pm the following day. This took two lawyers, one case manager and a lot of calls as well as the network of support and programs to ensure this was a possibility.

The story here though, for this young woman, is that she is home for Christmas and back with her mother and her daughter. She is out of custody and has a chance to re-engage with her community and her family in a way that will see stability return. It is alarming to think how different that story looks if we place the full stop after her release from prison in Deer Park, with nothing but a plastic bag of clothes and a myki card.

This highlights the tangible impact of a service that goes beyond the court work and seeks to ensure that women are supported home safely. This, in turn will reduce the frequency of return to Court and drastically reduce the likelihood of a return to a custodial setting.

This surely is a good story. And one that is a version of what I experience every week at LACW.

MESSAGE FROM OUR PLO CONT...

Yet, feelings of great sadness are equally available to me. There are fewer words that come to hand but pervasive sadness and trauma around the untimely loss of our clients.

As has been the case in every year we have been operational, the last year has seen the passing of a further four clients of our service. Those women, the work we have done together and the individual stories that each of them carry has left an indelible mark on me individually, on this organisation, and on our staff.

It is not coincidence that these four young women have passed.

Each was a young Aboriginal woman.

Each was a daughter, sister, aunt, cousin and mother.

Each passing has left family bereft and children filled with unfathomable sorrow.

The passing of these women is premature and deeply saddening.

And for us, as members of the legal profession and as members of the community – these deaths cannot be without impact. And nor should they be unspoken.

Their deaths do not happen in a vacuum. They are women who were caught in part of a justice system that over-polices Aboriginal communities. They are women who are disproportionately impacted by legislative reforms around bail. They are women locked up by a police force unwilling to even make decisions on bail. They are women who are sentenced by courts that are obliged to sentence them as individuals, but are limited within the confines of the four only sentencing options available.

These women are impacted by lack of housing, by intergenerational trauma, and by the stains of colonisation. They are impacted by removal of their children at a higher rate than ever before and they are grieving those removals. Sometimes that grief is managed by medication, and sometimes by alcohol and drugs.

We are all contributors to this story. We as a community are able to stand up and call for change. Call for reform to laws and call for housing instead of prisons. Because when we don't, we walk past these women. And when we turn away, nothing changes and this sickens us all as a society. And sometimes... women die.

MESSAGE FROM OUR PLO CONT...

We are saddened – for our own sense of grief but for the unacceptable and relentless loss to community and the profound distress in the knowledge that these deaths are untimely, preventable and premature. We send our deepest condolences to the family and communities of these women and vow to continue to work alongside those who follow them.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has worked with our clients and with our staff this year. The Court staff, and other stakeholders, make a difficult task much easier.

I look forward to the year ahead. I am excited to see change and to continue to work alongside staff, volunteers and law students who come to LACW everyday, fighting for those changes. Our team is hard working, empathetic and committed to better outcomes for our clients. They walk with fire in their bellies when injustice is alive and they celebrate the victories with clients when they happen.

Our Board continues to support us with guidance throughout all of this and I am deeply indebted to them for their patience, humour and diligence in their commitment to our clients and staff.

I also pay special thanks to our unstoppable CEO Elena Pappas who steers our ship through choppy sea and does so with calm and with grace and a good deal of intelligent advocacy to the legal community.

“Our clients are our drivers. They are patient and they are forgiving and they forge on with strength in adversity that is awe-inspiring and, at times unbelievable. I thank them for trusting us with their stories and for believing in our service.”

OUR VISION

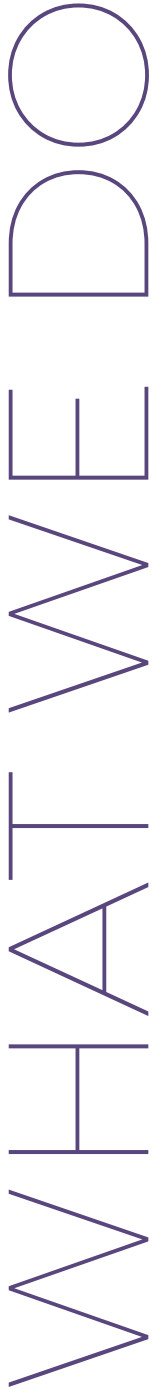
That all women in Victoria can access pathways out of the justice system through exceptional legal representation and support.

OUR MISSION

To be 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 STORY

The Law and Advocacy Centre for Women is a not-for-profit, community legal centre located in Carlton and operating across Victoria, including all metropolitan and a number of regional courts. It is the only legal service in Victoria whose primary focus is to provide a gender-specific approach to assisting women who are in, or at risk of entering, the criminal legal system. LACW was established in 2016, specifically in response to the rising rates of imprisonment and criminalisation for women. Its mandate is to combat these trends by providing a holistic approach to women in the justice system, providing a wraparound service that combines legal advice and representation alongside case management to address the underlying causes of women's criminalisation and imprisonment.



CRIMINAL DEFENCE ADVOCACY

Our primary focus is on specialist criminal defence advocacy. We provide gender-informed legal advice and representation on behalf of clients in all jurisdictions in Victoria, including the Magistrates', County and Supreme courts, as well as specialist Koori Courts, the Assessment and Referral Court and the Neighbourhood Justice Centre.

ASSOCIATED LEGAL NEED

We also provide targeted advice and representation in areas of legal need that disproportionately impact criminalised women, specifically: family violence intervention orders; child protection; infringements and fines; and victims of crime assistance. We focus on women who are respondents to family violence intervention orders, including women who are misidentified as perpetrators in family violence incidents or have previously been victims of family violence themselves. Our child protection practice fills a significant gap in service provision for criminalised women with Child Protection involvement. This is particularly important given that a majority of women in prison are mothers.

INTEGRATED CASE MANAGEMENT

Our Integrated Case Management services provide wrap-around support to women facing criminal charges, linking them in with the services and support they need to address the underlying causes of their criminalisation.

Our Case Management approach includes our groundbreaking SupPORT Pathways program, which provides women in or at risk of entering the criminal legal system with the opportunity to connect and engage with community sport as a way of supporting health, wellbeing, resilience and connection.

OUR IMPACT

853

New legal matters opened in FY23



140

New Case Management matters opened in FY23



2582

Total legal matters worked on in FY23



947

Total clients assisted in FY23



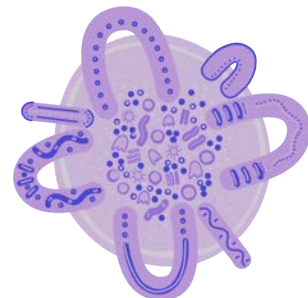
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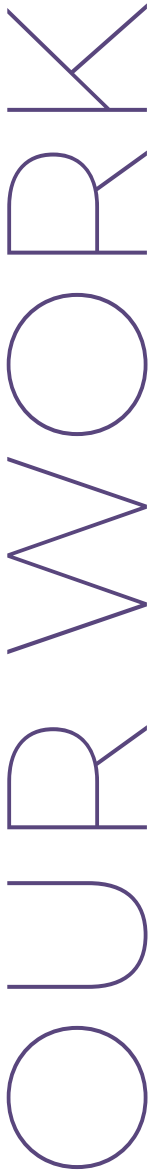
Total clients provided with case management support



35%

Of our work is for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander clients





CRIMINAL DEFENCE

LACW is Victoria's leading specialist criminal defence service for women. Our practice is led by three accredited specialists in criminal law.

It has been another incredibly busy year for our criminal law practice. This has been driven by an increase in the referrals we have received for women in custody, including those at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and those in police or court cells, and an increase in our complex and indictable work.

Funding under the National Legal Assistance Partnerships specialist funding for vulnerable women has enabled us to expand our reach to more regional areas of Victoria. This followed the successful completion of our regional pilot in Mildura and Swan Hill which was funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board.

Our early intervention work to assist women who are ineligible for legal aid due to their lack of prior criminal history or the nature of their charges continues with the assistance of funding through the CLC Family Violence and Assistance Funds and Integrated Services Fund. This includes advice and representation for women mis-identified as perpetrators in family violence incidents.

562

New summary crime matters opened



57

New indictable and appeal matters opened

80%

Of our work is in criminal defence

39%

Of new matters are for clients who would not qualify for legal aid due to the nature of their charges or lack of prior history

2086

Total criminal defence matters worked on in FY23

CRIMINAL DEFENCE CONT...

We bid a fond farewell to our Managing Lawyer of Crime, Linh Cao in May this year. Linh had been with us since October 2018 when she joined the team as a Senior Lawyer. She was promoted to the position of Managing Lawyer in 2021 and has been instrumental in the growth and development of LACW, including through mentoring junior staff, developing relationships with key stakeholders and upholding the highest possible standards of advocacy and client care. She has left an indelible mark on our service and will remain an important part of the LACW family.

We were thrilled to welcome Ellen Murphy as our new Managing Lawyer of Crime. Ellen brings a wealth of experience from her previous roles at Victoria Legal Aid, private practice and with the county Court. We also welcomed three new lawyers, Jaffa Withers, Rawan Badawi and Riya Kundu, who have injected a great sense of drive and enthusiasm to the team. This year also saw the promotion of Asha Zomer to the position of Senior Lawyer, after having started with us back in 2017 as our very first paid paralegal. Alongside Senior Lawyers Philippa Dixon and Carmendy Cooper, and lawyers Ashlee McPhail and Sarah Abell, our team has grown in size and strength to meet the ever growing demand for our service across the State.



SIGNIFICANT CASES

LACW has represented clients in several significant cases, including Supreme Court bail applications, which have created important precedent in relation to the factors relevant to women, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, when applying for bail. These have been referenced in several educative resources in relation to bail, including by the Judicial College of Victoria.

Re Firebrace [2023] VSC 137

In this case, our client was required to establish exceptional circumstances in order to be granted bail. We successfully argued that her intention to plead guilty in Koori Court should be considered as a relevant factor when making this determination. The court found:

- Bail is a significant matter for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander accused, both because of their over-representation in the criminal justice system and for cultural reasons.
- Any opportunity for an applicant's plea to be heard in the Koori Court is a very significant matter in considering whether exceptional circumstances have been established.

Re KF [2022] VSC 349

In this case, our client was granted bail in circumstances where she was required to meet the 'compelling reasons' threshold for bail. The Court found:

- The profound grief caused to an Aboriginal accused by the death of two family members while on remand, and the sorrow and guilt associated with not being able to participate in Sorry Business, as well as the Sorry Business obligations imposed as the senior next of kin, may meet the threshold of 'compelling reasons' justifying the grant of bail.
- The application of s 3A of the Bail Act - concerning an applicant's Aboriginality - may be central to the question of 'unacceptable risk' where the bereavement experienced by the accused on remand, and her need to participate in important cultural obligations, should serve as an incentive to avoid doing anything that would require her return to custody. Further, her strong family connectedness at a time when her family needed each other should serve as a protective factor.

Re CL [2022] VSC 151

Our client was an Aboriginal woman charged with offending where she had a significantly lesser role than the coaccused. There was a real question whether, if she were sentenced in light of her significant personal challenges, alongside mitigating factors relevant to her Aboriginality, she would receive a lesser sentence than the time she would spend on remand. Accordingly, compelling reasons were established and she was granted bail.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

LACW fills a significant gap in services for women who are respondents to family violence intervention orders and have associated criminal charges. With funding from the Community Legal Centres Family Violence fund and an NLAP specialist grant for vulnerable women, we provide advice and representation to women across Victoria who are charged with breaching family violence intervention orders, and who are named as the respondent to an order.

A significant proportion of these cases involve women who have been misidentified as the perpetrator in family violence incidents, and also involve women who have themselves been victims of long-standing family violence.

As well as providing advice and representation to individual clients, we also work in collaboration with other services across the sector to address issues around misidentification and the policing of family violence. We are a project partner in Inner Melbourne Community Legal's Beyond Survival - Policing Family Violence project in collaboration with Flat Out Inc. We are also active members of the Federation of Community Legal Centres Family Violence Working Group, and have participated in Victoria Police's Predominant Aggressor workshops, to ensure that the experiences of criminalised women are not left out when developing responses to family violence.

159

Family Violence intervention order (FVIVO) matters

40%

IVO clients have a disability

54%

Of IVO clients have themselves experienced family violence

33%

Of FVIVO matters are for Aboriginal clients

Between 70-90% of women in prison have been victims of violence and abuse, in particular family violence and sexual assault.

Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, 2017.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Our Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal work focuses on criminalised women who have been the victim of a violent crime, including complex family violence matters. We continue to receive outstanding support and assistance from Rose Blanden of Meridian Lawyers, who is seconded to us on a pro bono basis to assist with our VOCAT work. We are also indebted to Hall and Wilcox for their ongoing assistance. We have also established a new partnership with law firm Clayton Utz to assist us with any VOCAT matters that are outside our scope of service.

90

VOCAT matters worked on

1095

Hours of pro bono support provided by Meridian Lawyers

35%

Of VOCAT clients have a disability

32%

Of VOCAT matters are for Aboriginal clients

CHILD PROTECTION

Our Child Protection practice is led by Siobhan Whittle, an accredited specialist in Children's Law. Our practice fills a significant gap in the services available for women who are criminalised and also have Child Protection involvement. The high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women we have assisted with Child Protection matters is a reflection of the grossly disproportionate rate of child removal for Aboriginal mothers, which must urgently be addressed.

We have received funding from the Victoria Law Foundation to undertake a research project in collaboration with Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Services and researchers from the University of Melbourne to look at the experiences and unmet legal and other needs of women who have had involvement in both the criminal legal and child protection systems.

54

Clients assisted with Child Protection cases

44%

Of Child Protection clients were experiencing or at risk of family violence

46%

Of Child Protection clients have a disability

78%

Of Child Protection clients are Aboriginal

CASE MANAGEMENT

LACW case management has (as always) had a busy year, with steady referrals from our legal team. In December we said goodbye to our beloved social work team leader Virginia Moebus-Nelson, but were delighted to welcome our newly graduated social worker, and previous paralegal and student, Georgie Adeney, to our team. We were also thrilled to appoint Mary Paterson as our new Case Management Team Leader, with Mel Walshe rounding out our small but mighty team.

We continue to work collaboratively with services and prison staff to ensure our clients are released from custody with a warm bed to go to and material aid to get food in their bellies. For our clients in the community we continue to advocate strongly on their behalf, and have had great outcomes with women completing residential rehabilitation, saving tenancies where women were facing evictions and generally ensuring our clients are healthy and safe by linking them in with mental health services, NDIS packages and family violence supports. We have also enjoyed, and our clients have appreciated, increased opportunities to meet clients face to face to support them at court.



SPECIALISED PROGRAMS

PATHWAYS OUT OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Our signature program provides pathways out of the justice system for socially and economically disadvantaged women facing criminal charges and related legal matters, by providing specialist, gender-informed legal advice and representation alongside in-house social work/case management assistance.

Funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board enabled us to continue our work in Mildura and Swan Hill, providing early intervention legal advice and representation to women facing criminal charges but ineligible for legal aid funding. Following on from the success of this regional pilot, we were able to secure multi-year funding under the National Legal Assistance Partnership to continue and expand this work into further regional areas.

The integrated social work and case management support provided under this project has been funded once again through the Integrated Services Fund, administered by the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

In addition, we would like to thank the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, the Humanists Society of Victoria, Pandora Kay and John Larkins, the Argo Foundation and the Melbourne Women's Fund for supporting this work.

"Our clients regularly fall through the cracks as they are put in the 'too hard basket.' This is why we will relentlessly advocate for their needs, and we will ensure they are offered the same opportunities afforded to anyone else."

Mel Walshe, LACW Case Manager

STRESSORS

IMPACT FOCUS: HOUSING

Family violence is a key driver of women's criminalisation. It is also a key driver of housing instability for women. Research indicates up to 90% of women in prison have been victims of violence. Tragically, many women released from prison are forced to choose between homelessness and unsafe housing due to the risk of family violence. Housing instability as a result of family violence can entrench cycles of poverty and disadvantage, leading to offending behaviour often driven by survival needs, mental ill-health and drug and alcohol dependency. These intersecting issues not only entrench homelessness but make it more difficult for criminalised women to engage in a sustained, meaningful way with mainstream housing services.

With this in mind, and with the assistance of an Innovation Grant through the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, we sharpened our focus on the provision of housing and family violence support for our clients, in particular those exiting prison. We tracked our progress against outcome measures that addressed these two critical areas of need, and have demonstrated the value in providing wrap-around support to women that provides protective factors against further criminalisation and imprisonment.

93%

Of case management clients maintained ongoing engagement with housing services



77%

Of case management clients were supported on a long-term housing pathway

83%

Remained engaged with alcohol and other drug services for the duration of their involvement

82%

Reported or were observed to have an improvement in their health and wellbeing

72%

Reduced risky substance use patterns

WOMEN'S SupPORT PATHWAYS PROJECT

The Women's SupPORT Pathways Project connects women who have experience of the criminal legal system with community football clubs as players or volunteers. Now in its second year, the benefits for the women who have been able to connect with community clubs have been significant. Some have played Aussie Rules football in a team for the first time, while others have developed new skills and knowledge. One participant even achieved her Level 1 Coaching accreditation. But perhaps the most significant impact has been the feeling of being accepted and part of the community through being part of a women's sports club.

This year we were thrilled to welcome Penny Cula-Reid to our project team alongside our Project Manager, Jacquie Phiddian. Together, the project team has continued to provide intensive support to each participant including regular phone calls, face to face meetings, and providing links for additional support when needed. In addition, team members keep in regular contact with clubs to help them better understand the experiences of trauma and violence that many of our women have experienced, and to find ways to support their involvement that are strengths based and trauma informed.

The program also provides women opportunities for positive connection – including with the program team, club members, wider services and with each other. In particular, women's relationship with the program team emerged as a key benefit of the program, and one which often appeared to transcend the typical client-worker relationship due to the program's unique focus and the context in which it is delivered.



WOMEN'S SupPORT PATHWAYS PROJECT CONT...

An interim evaluation provided by RMIT's Centre for Innovative Justice identified a number of positive outcomes delivered by the project, as well as recommendations for improvements going forward.

As a result, we adjusted the project model to provide group-based activities facilitated by the project team. This enabled staff to deliver an entry into recreational activity that supported engagement, was accessible and provided a launching pad for women into further community activity participation in the future.

These group-based activities included Come and Try sessions held at Princes Park and outreach sessions delivered at women's housing services.

Further to this, an exciting connection was made by the project team between Tarrengower Women's Prison and a regional women's football club, the Mount Alexander Women's Sports Club (the Falcons), which allowed the development of a footy skills in-prison activity. Commencing in March 2023 this program has become an ongoing regular fixture for the women in prison, providing opportunities for greater health and wellbeing for the women and breaking down stigma and barriers within the local community.

We have had fantastic feedback from participants, which has encouraged us to continue to expand our offering and connect with an even greater range of clubs and programs to provide support to criminalised women.

With funding initially provided through the Victorian State Government's Crime Prevention Innovation fund, we are excited to report that the project has received an additional 2 years' worth of funding from the Commonwealth Government's Strong and Resilient Communities program.

"This is the first time in my prison sentence that I have felt accepted by the community. Thank you for seeing us as human beings".

Project participant

RMIT UNIVERSITY AND THE CIJ

We have continued our partnership with the Centre for Innovative Justice at RMIT University. This involves our co-location with fellow Community Legal Centre Youth Law at our Pelham Street premises, collaboration on research, evaluation and systemic advocacy, and the placement of Social Work and Law students within our centre during semester.

This year, the CIJ have been instrumental in the development of our Women's SupPORT Pathways project, providing an interim evaluation that helped shape the growth and development of the project to increase its reach and impact.

In addition, we have collaborated with the CIJ on their research project Lessons from COVID, which looks at how the criminal legal system's response to the pandemic impacted women, and the additional barriers that women experienced accessing support due to pandemic restrictions.



SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

We have hosted 9 Social Work students on placement from RMIT, including our very own Georgie Adeney who has since been appointed as a Graduate Social Worker with us.

Our Case Management team has been assisted very ably by students Courtney Wade, Natalie Geyer, Kathleen Lambeth and Bella Dalglish, who assisted with the day to day case management provided to clients of our practice.

In addition, our SupPORT Pathways project hosted social work students Liz McGrath, Karen 'Paxy' Paxman, Ella McNicol and Alyce McVicar, who were instrumental to the success of our come and try days and our outreach to Tarrengower prison.

LAW STUDENTS

We have hosted 3 RMIT law students undertaking both clinical legal placements and internships. This has included Victoria Walker, Thomas Kanz and Aurora Leggett.

In addition, we have hosted students from other universities and those completing their practical legal training placements.

4500

Hours of Social Work student supervision

12

RMIT Student placements



STUDENT REFLECTIONS

Karen 'Paxy' Paxman

My first experience of student placement at the Law and Advocacy Centre's SupPORT Pathways Project was nothing short of invaluable. To have the opportunity to work alongside Project participants - women who have had experience of the criminal justice system - and support them in achieving their goals was such a rewarding process. The nature of this project also allowed us to work alongside local football clubs, which involved guiding and educating coaches and players in working with our participants in an informed and inclusive way, along with highlighting the unique challenges they face. The guidance and support from our Project Manager Jacquie, and the other LACW staff as a collective, have not only enriched my professional knowledge but have also shaped me personally, and I feel very prepared to embark on my next placement journey in the new year.

Ella McNicoll

I had the good fortune of undertaking my final student placement for my Masters of Social Work with LACW, in the Women's SupPORT Pathways Project. Under the guidance of project lead, Jacquie Phiddian, and working within an integrated practice framework, I was afforded the opportunity to build my knowledge of the legal system in Victoria and the issues and challenges that face criminalised people. Additionally, it was wonderful to be a part of such a unique program, which recognises the holistic needs of people who have been criminalised, championing care and community as an antidote to the dehumanisation experienced in the carceral system. The program recognises the value of community footy and was consistently guided and strengthened by the participants and their lived experiences. I have had the chance to speak with other students who worked on the program at different stages, both before and after I was on board and hear how it has grown and developed thanks to the invaluable knowledge and tireless efforts of the participants, alongside Jacquie's guidance.



SUBMISSIONS

We have made several submissions to parliamentary and law reform inquiries throughout the year. This has included:

- Two submissions to the Yoorrook Justice Commission on Systemic Injustice in the Child Protection System and Systemic Injustice in the Criminal Justice System (November 2022);
- A submission to the Sentencing Advisory Council on Sentencing Deferrals;
- Contributions to the Cultural Review of the Adult Custodial Corrections System and an inquiry into Judicial Bullying.

In addition, our submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Children Affected by Parental Incarceration was referenced in the Inquiry's final report released in August 2022.

We have spoken at several events to highlight the issues impacting women in the criminal legal system. These have included:

- The Women's Legal Service masterclass on family violence
- The Tilly Highton Social Justice Address, University of Melbourne
- A panel event on Women's De-carceration convened by the Fitzroy Legal Service
- A panel on Women's Fatal Use of Force, Deakin University
- Training to the Victorian Bar
- Training to the Hume Riverina CLC

"The growing number of women being held in Victoria's prisons should be a cause of alarm, especially when considering the impacts this has on children. More women in prison means more mothers in prison, with consequential deleterious impacts on their children."

Final report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Impacts of Parental Incarceration, p. 36 quoting LACW's submission.

SMART JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

LACW has continued in our role as co-convenors of Smart Justice for Women, a coalition of members from the legal assistance sector, the community services sector, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, academia and similar organisations who are committed to ending the criminalisation of women in Victorian. Priorities for Smart Justice for Women this year have included advocating for the implementation of the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Children Affected by Parental Incarceration, and supporting the family of Veronica Nelson in agitating for significant bail reform.

This advocacy has involved several meetings with members of Parliament and the cross-bench, cross-sector collaboration and knowledge sharing through regular stakeholder meetings, and our CEO Elena Pappas appearing at a webinar during Law Week on the harmful impact of Victoria's bail laws and why they need to change.

BAIL REFORM

In addition to our work through Smart Justice for Women, a key focus of LACW's own systemic advocacy and law reform work has been around reforming Victoria's harmful and damaging bail regime.

In January 2023, Coroner McGregor released his findings into the death of Veronica Nelson, a proud Gunditjmara, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta woman who passed away in custody at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre on 2 January 2020. LACW had been Ms Nelson's legal representatives at the time, and we remain deeply shocked and saddened by her death.

LACW was joined as an interested party to the inquest, and we made several submissions regarding the particular vulnerability of First Nations women in prison, the draconian nature of Victoria's bail regime, and addressing the failings of the police and the State to comply with their obligations under international law and under Victoria's Human Rights Charter in relation to Ms Nelson's arrest, detention and lack of adequate health care.

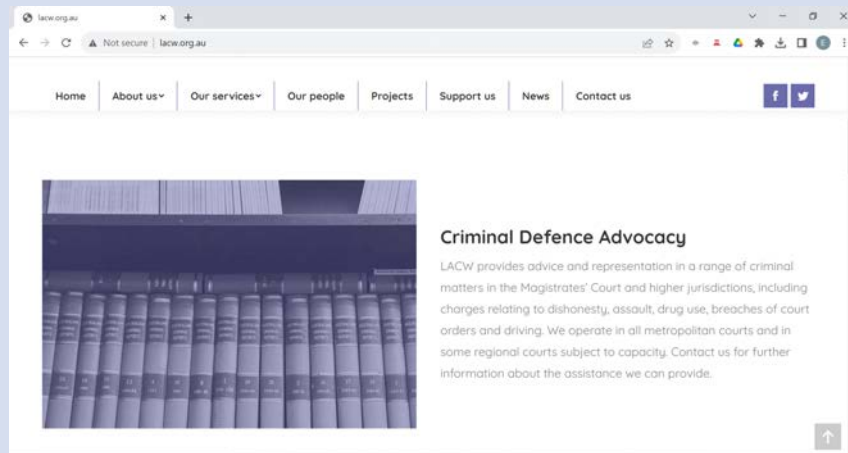
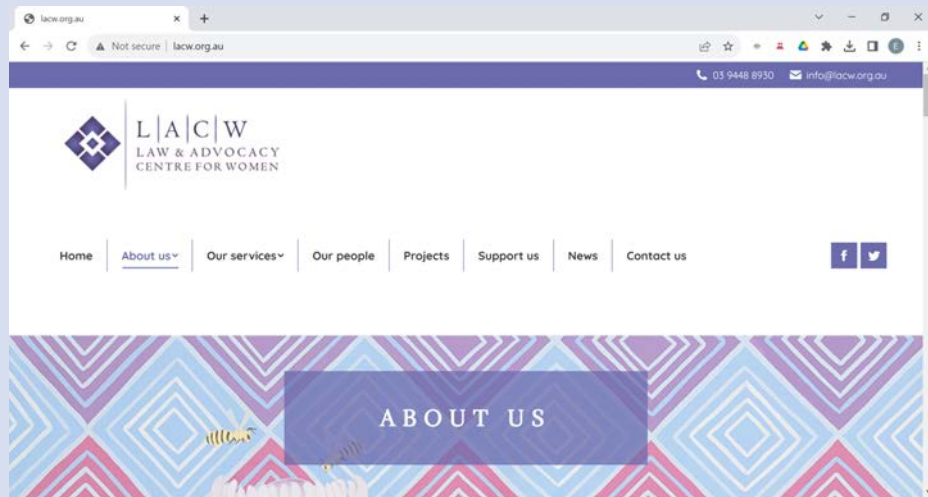
We are indebted to Michael Stanton of Counsel for his extensive pro bono assistance in this matter.

Following the release of the Coroner's findings, which delivered a scathing critique of Victoria's bail regime, we have joined the calls of Ms Nelson's family for the implementation of Poccum's Law to reverse the damaging impact of the current bail regime on First Nations women.

We again express our deepest condolences to Ms Nelson's partner, mother, family and community.

NEW SITE LAUNCHED

We were incredibly proud to launch our new website this year. Designed by Clare Ralston and Rowan Hills of Native Techonlogy, the website, like our Annual Report, features the stunning artwork of Stacey, licenced through the Torch program.



LAW & ADVOCACY CENTRE FOR WOMEN

The Law and Advocacy Centre for Women Ltd is a community legal centre in Victoria specifically for women who are in or at risk of entering the criminal legal system. LACW combines excellence in legal advice and representation for women, with a commitment to holistic and preventative case management and engagement with therapeutic services.

[About us](#)

[Support us](#)

STACEY'S STORY

Stacey is a Taungurung/Boon Wurrung artist and Torch staff member who likes to paint about her journey. This includes the struggles that First Nations people face and the layers of intergenerational trauma that comes with this, including the despair that's been passed down to her and how she gets through those struggles. Stacey's grandfather and his siblings were removed under government policies and today Stacey describes herself as a grandchild of the Stolen Generation.

When Stacey was young, she didn't want to be an artist because it might not provide a regular source of income. 'Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I could pursue a career in art and the more I become established the more confident I get in just being myself'.

In 2013 Stacey started working at the Koorie Heritage Trust where she met an Elder who helped her join the dots with her family connections. 'The Elder told me that I am Taungurung/Boon Wurrung. Since that day I don't paint dots anymore. My inspiration is the beautiful designs and patterns from traditional artefacts of my ancestors'.

Stacey is exploring and reclaiming southeast Australian designs through her paintings, referencing concentric diamond designs from traditional shields and clubs from south-eastern Australia. 'The traditional patterns that I use keeps me connected to my cultural heritage'.

'Making art for me is really long process. I go through lots of feelings in the process but at the end I feel a sense of accomplishment when I finally complete a piece of artwork'. She likes to paint about her culture, her story, her journey and about being close to sister-girls 'and the strength I can draw from that.'

'When I paint I feel like I'm not in jail and it takes me to a time and place that is relaxing and I feel connected. I feel connected to culture, I feel connected to my story and my identity'.

She has a close relationship with another Torch artist Thelma Beeton. 'Thelma taught me what's it's like to be a true sister'.

'I think when I went to prison, I had this mindset that I was like stripped of everything'. The Torch program had a positive influence and allowed her to feel connected and strengthen her connection to culture, and she was appreciative of the support The Torch provided during her jail sentence.

'We looked forward to the Arts Officers coming in every fortnight, encouraging us, supporting us, getting feedback on who may have bought our art and it lifts our spirits when you're in jail. It encourages me to wanna do more'.

STACEY'S STORY CONT...

Upon release, Stacey felt blessed to be supported by The Torch, and they expressed their excitement about her being back in community. She is currently doing some work as an Art Support Assistant at the Torch. 'I get to learn the process from once the art gets to The Torch program and what happens to it, how meticulous and gentle and caring all the art staff are in processing the painting. It's really fascinating to see all the time and energy that's put into preparing a piece of artwork'.

With the help of The Torch program, Stacey also managed to pay for her daughter's education and pay for her grandmother's funeral. 'It's giving me the financial freedom to make choices and be one step further away from poverty. I was obviously really scared if that was even possible. Whether I was just I reaching too high and I'm still pinching myself'.

Stacey has now put an offer on a unit, which got approved! She says this would not have been possible without The Torch.

'You know how things happen for reason and how I had to do jail and I had to do a long sentence. The seven years gave me plenty of time to do lots of healing and as a result it was just convenient as well to chip away at my artwork and accumulate a deposit for a home loan'.

She is proud of herself and for making a plan while she was still inside and sticking to it. 'I don't want to end up back in prison, I don't want to spend it all on unnecessary possessions and I really was focused on doing something productive with the money'.

"Painting diamonds
is healing for me. And now
I can pass that healing down to my
children and future grandchildren".

Stacey, artist at The Torch

PROFIT AND LOSS

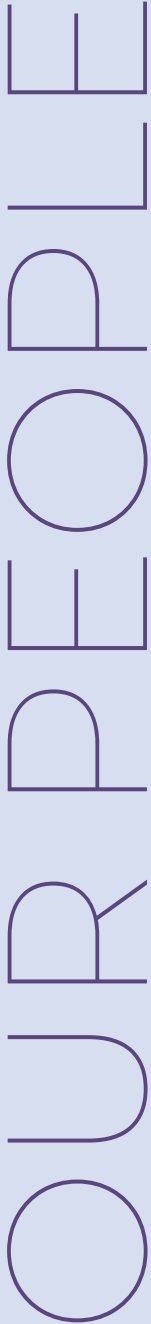
	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Revenue	1,689,230	1,330,211
Accounting Fees	19,181	19,245
Advertising	380	140
Depreciation	2,626	2,844
Disbursements	83,777	92,303
Internet	1,068	1,068
IT Expenses	21,298	15,827
Memberships/Certifications	10,786	10,161
Office Supplies	119	415
Postage and Courier	567	769
Printing and Stationery	9,915	9,575
Professional Services	-	5,550
Sub-Contractors	59,050	54,005
Sundry Expenses	3,619	1,993
Superannuation	138,155	117,839
Telephone	9,640	9,021
Training/Professional Devel	2,826	1,355
Travel and Accommodation	8,031	3,139
Travel – Metro	900	208
Wages and Salaries	1,336,273	1,180,891
Other Employee Expenses	28,772	49,354
Project Expenses - CPG	(2,441)	85,997
Project Expenses - KG	17,325	-
Project Expenses - Regional	11,663	-
TOTAL	1,763,530	1,661,699
(Loss) for the Year	(74,300)	(331,488)

REVENUE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2023

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
Revenue from contracts with customers		
Fee Income	590,233	464,602
Grants - Government	814,401	675,032
Grants - Philanthropic	54,000	-
TOTAL	1,458,634	1,139,634
Other Income		
Disbursements Claimed	72,131	78,101
Interest Received	10,118	191
Donations	147,963	111,977
Other Income	384	308
TOTAL	230,596	190,577
Total Revenue	1,689,230	1,330,211

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2023

	2023	2022
	\$	\$
ASSETS		
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,116,195	1,379,164
Trade Debtors	220,725	237,500
Prepayments	1,720	1,339
Total Current Assets	1,338,640	1,618,003
Non current assets		
Fixed assets	7,349	9,975
Total Non Current Assets	7,349	9,975
Total Assets	1,345,989	1,627,978
LIABILITIES		
Current Liabilities		
Grant Income in Advance	386,324	507,693
Annual Leave Provision	76,714	73,730
Sundry Creditors and Payables	107,037	196,278
Total Current Liabilities	570,075	777,701
Non Current Liabilities		
Long Service Leave Provision	8,567	8,630
Total Non Current Liabilities	8,567	8,630
Total Liabilities	578,642	786,331
NET ASSETS	767,347	841,647
EQUITY		
Accumulated Funds	767,347	841,647
TOTAL EQUITY	767,347	841,647



STAFF

Jill Prior (PLO)
Elena Pappas (CEO)
Linh Cao (Managing Lawyer – Crime to May 2023)
Ellen Murphy (Managing Lawyer – Crime from May 2023)
Siobhan Whittle (Managing Lawyer – Civil & Child Protection)
Virginia Moebus-Nelson (Social Work Team Leader to Dec 2022)
Mary Paterson (Case Management Team Leader from Jan 2023)
Anna Howard (Senior Lawyer – to Oct 2022)
Carmendy Cooper (Senior Lawyer)
Philippa Dixon (Senior Lawyer)
Asha Zomer (Senior Lawyer)
Ashlee McPhail (Lawyer)
Eleanor Ryan (Lawyer – to Sept 2022)
Sarah Abell (Lawyer)
Jaffa Withers (Lawyer)
Rawan Badawi (Graduate Lawyer)
Riya Kundu (Graduate Lawyer)
Rose Blanden (Pro bono Lawyer)
Mel Walshe (Case Manager)
Jacquie Phiddian (Project Manager)
Georgie Adeney (Paralegal – to Dec 2022; Social Worker – from Jan 2023)
Matilda McGuire (Paralegal – to Dec 2022)
Maria Nocera (Paralegal)
Mary Zaky (Paralegal)
Sarah Cadzow (Administrative Assistant)
Penny Cula-Reid (Project Support Officer – from Jan 2023)
Chanda Anderson-Prior (casual admin support Sept/Oct 2022)
Emma Jackson (Complete Law Support – Grants Officer)
Alan Bunting (Bookkeeper)

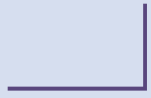
BOARD

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



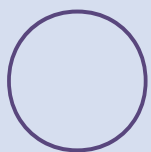
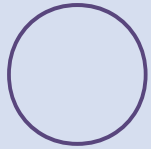
STEERING COMMITTEE

Crystal McKinnon
Anoushka Jeronimous
Roj Amedi



VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENTS

Lydia Zakkas
Erin O'Brien
Stacie McArthur
Collette De Silva
Mila Olsen
Freja Campbell-Walker
Jessica Myers-Denton
Emma Nguyen
Humera Ginai
Courtney Wade
Natalie Geyer
Kathleen Lambeth
Bella Dalgleish
Karen Paxman
Elizabeth McGrath
Alyce McVicar
Ella McNicol
Victoria Walker
Thomas Kanz
Aurora Leggett



LACW would like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their support and commitment to our work

SUPPORTERS

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Australian Communities Foundation
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Diane McDonald
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Hall and Wilcox
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Humanists Society of Victoria
JRA Support Fund
Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
Jill and George Pappas
Maddocks Foundation
Medley Property Group
Melbourne Women's Fund
Meridian Lawyers
NetWealth Investments
Pandora Kay and John Larkins
Paul Scroope
PWC Foundation
State Government of Victoria
Victoria Law Foundation
Victorian Legal Services Board

CONTACT

LAW AND ADVOCACY CENTRE FOR WOMEN LTD



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