

Law and Advocacy Centre for Women Ltd

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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

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.

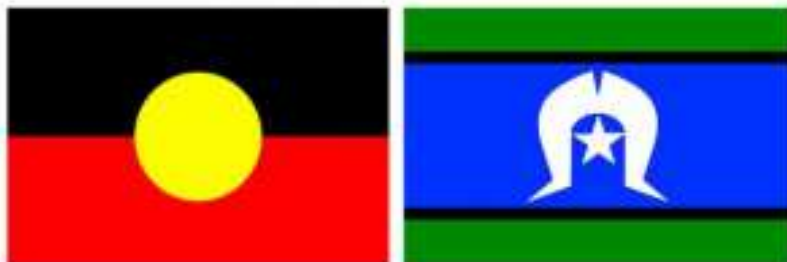
Sovereignty was never ceded.

About the artwork

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.



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CEO Message

Some years are harder than others. From a personal perspective, this year has been particularly tough. At times it has felt as though I am in a washing machine being tossed around and around, with no control and little respite.

Some things are difficult due to the usual push and pull of running a community organisation – perpetual funding pressures, staff turnover, responsibilities to clients and stakeholders, and the day-to-day pressures of front-line service delivery. Other things are much bigger.

With the growing costs of running our organisation outpacing our funding resources in the first half of this year, we were forced to take a hard look at our business model to ensure we were set up for sustainability and longevity. With the assistance of consultant Ray Ngo and the support and guidance of our Board, we undertook a thorough analysis of our revenue streams and our costs, which led to the development of new processes and practices that are aimed at ensuring our revenue can keep pace with our growth in client numbers and service delivery into the future. I'm pleased to say that we are reaping the rewards of this as we head into the next financial year.

But then there are the big things.

In March this year I lost my mother, Jill Pappas, to cancer after a short and brutal battle. It was a shock to us all and something from which we are yet to recover. Mum had been a staunch supporter of LACW from day one – whether through financial support, providing a sounding board for ideas, giving advice on not-for-profit governance or looking after my kids so that I could work and attend various out of hours commitments as we were trying to grow the organisation, mum was always there in the background to support and encourage us. The fact that she chose to leave a significant bequest to LACW is evidence of the belief and passion she had for our work.

In news that was at once wonderful and heartbreaking, we learned that our very own co-founder and Principal Lawyer Jill Prior was to be appointed to the bench of the Magistrates' Court in May 2024. This appointment is the highest endorsement of Jill's brilliance as an advocate and as a universally respected member of the legal community. We are overwhelmingly proud of Jill and know that Jill's appointment will help form part of a justice system that is more fair, equitable and empathetic.

Yet of course, losing our co-founder and leader – the 'North Star' of our organisation – presented its own unique challenges. And as timing would have it, our very clever, well-respected and brilliant Managing Lawyer of Child Protection and Civil law, Siobhan Whittle, in the same round of appointments became a Magistrate of the Children's Court – once again, an indication of her sharp legal mind, tireless work, and high regard within the legal profession.

CEO Message cont...

The relentless demands of our front-line service delivery meant that we had to put existential questions of our existence and identity as an organisation to one side, and ensure that we could get on with the job we had to do. Despite the sudden nature of these appointments, we were able to put in place a transition plan that enabled us to offer a seamless service to clients and remain engaged with our stakeholders and partners.

To this end I am forever indebted to Ellen Murphy, our newly appointed Principal Legal Officer who immediately stepped in following Jill's departure. Having served as LACW's Managing Lawyer, Crime, for just over 12 months, we knew Ellen was unquestionably the right person to take on this role, with universal praise from staff, clients and various stakeholders both before and following her appointment.

And now that the dust has somewhat settled, we realise that we can exist, and thrive, in a post-Jill world. The work does – and indeed, must – continue. We have built something that is too important to let go.

It has taken enormous reserves of strength to get through this year, and it would not have been possible without the support, understanding and dedication of our wonderful staff, our friends and our families, our incredible Board and Steering Committee, and the faith placed in us by our clients. It is for them that we continue – to provide the support, the understanding and the encouragement that in so many cases is not available to them anywhere else.

I would like to again thank Ellen, the LACW staff, supporters, Board, Steering Committee, friends and clients for their support throughout what has been a particularly tough year.

And to Jill – my colleague, mentor, friend, and our North Star – thank you, and congratulations. You are bloody amazing.



Elena Pappas
CEO and Co-Founder

Principal Legal Officer Message

Each year since we commenced operation, I have had cause to pause and reflect on the year that has passed – and the challenges and achievements of the organisation.

Over those 8 years there have been obvious and significant challenges – in the earliest years there was the excitement and anticipation in the promise of what was to come. In the absence of funding and with the wispiest of presence in the legal landscape, our focus was internal – on survival, and of strategies for keeping the door open each day.

I recall the very first phone call received from the very first client of LACW. This momentous occasion was the marker of the beginning. We had one phone in one room with one lawyer (me) on the ground, and one manager (Ellie Pappas) trying to grease the wheels. We had no files, a donated computer and a printer that sometimes worked.

This was the beginning.

Our client, an Aboriginal woman who was the mother of 3 children, was the victim of family violence. She had been charged by police with ‘public order’ offences whilst she tried desperately to challenge the removal of her children from her care. Her pain was palpable, her despair unimaginable and the need to wrap around her with services beyond the legal told us that our service had a model that was necessary.

That was the beginning of the motivation to fight for this model to survive.

Years passed, and we saw the growth of the organisation as we demonstrated, time and time again how the mutual limbs of case management and legal service were crucial to the impact on our clients’ lives.

Funding came in and we grew and employed more staff. Our offices changed to accommodate the growth, and our focus shifted – from “would we survive?” to how we could accommodate our growth.

Our clients’ stories were given voice by the work of the organisation. Those stories held true to common themes of abject poverty, homelessness, family violence, removal of children, mental and physical health issues and drug and alcohol addiction.

Then COVID came, bringing 2 years of manoeuvring the service response to accommodate the changing needs of our clients. We saw the contrast between fighting for services and housing for women, to a reality that had women housed and services provided. For many clients this offered the first stability of housing for years. And in some instances, this housing offered safety.

Principal Legal Officer Message cont...

But it was also a time of great isolation for many – family violence incidents and the risk of violence increased; and for some there was a wholesale reliance on the provision of supplies by community organisations.

What we learnt was that where there is an intention to provide housing and other supports, the multiple social and emotional wellbeing crises associated with poverty and homeless are offered some relief.

It was also during these years that I was reunited with a Tessa*, a woman I had first met almost 20 years earlier in regional Victoria at her home, when I went to visit her partner prior to court. She was at home preparing the evening meal with her 5 kids and her mother, who was angry and not coping.

Tessa welcomed me with her beaming smile and made me a cup of tea. At the end of our time there she asked if we would transport her mother into town to provide some relief to the family. I met her again in 2022 in custody. Her children were grown now. Her partner had passed away at 45 that same year. She was hoping to be released from custody to attend to sorry business in relation to an aunt.

She was a mess. She was dealing with compounded grief and was rendered homeless by the death of her partner. We spent the next 18 months working together.

She suffered the further loss of her mother – with whom she had recently reconnected. Without housing she was reliant on an abusive partner to make decisions about where she stayed and with whom. Things were dire.

LACW worked with her to access case management support, housing support, family violence and mental health support and access to a Koori Court hearing space.

After years, and in her strength and resilience, she found her feet and that beaming smile returned to her face. For her, this was an opportunity for a fresh start, a new beginning.

Through the changes in service delivery, the growth of the organisation and the challenges that arise every day, there is a constant and pervasive harm that continues to be impacted upon our clients. The challenges our clients face do not change unless there is listening and support.

The capacity of these women to continue to put one foot in front of the other and to trust in our staff is extraordinary and keeps us all going year after year.

We are privileged to watch the beginnings of their journeys to better days.

Principal Legal Officer Message cont...

To that end, and from the beginning – the staff of the organisation have been amazing. The staff *are* the organisation. They are relentless in their commitment to our clients, and they are creative in their responses to the needs with which they present.

We have watched the numbers grow and there has been no dilution of the passion – but a concentration of effort to produce outcomes that are meaningful and necessary for healing.

Our Board also grows and with the commitment of time and alignment of values, the organisation remains steady and strong and inspired, knowing the foundations of support beneath it.

And from the beginning there was support from family and friends of LACW. These people believed in the organisation at the beginning, when there was little to hang our hats on.

Jill Pappas was one of those people. She supported the organisation, its clients, principals and philosophy in a way that seems to be entirely consistent with what I have had the privilege of coming to know of her over the past 10 or so years.

She went about her care in a quiet way. She was intelligent and thoughtful in her intentions, and she carried a strength and a resolve that seemed unwavering. She was never up the front but rather quietly moving around the edges to contribute her time, thought, connection and wisdom. In addition, she has been one of the most consistent and generous donors to LACW.

She also raised children who contribute to the community and this is never more obvious than in the co-founder, fearless leader and CEO of LACW – Ellie Pappas. It is absolutely clear that Jill has instilled in Ellie precisely those qualities that invoke such sadness that she has passed. And a knowledge that we are in good hands going forward.

Here is my thanks for another amazing year of service and to all of the staff, volunteers, board members and supporters – those who have been here most recently and those who have been present from the beginning – thank you.

**client name changed*

Jill Prior, Principal Legal Officer and Co-founder,
with Di McDonald, Chair



About Us

The Law and Advocacy Centre for Women (LACW) is a 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 with case management support to address the underlying causes of women's criminalisation and imprisonment.

LACW acknowledges that we operate on First Nations land, and that our office is located on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Our Vision

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, delivering a holistic response with a focus on criminal defence

Our People

LACW was established by Elena Pappas (CEO) and Jill Prior OAM, who was LACW's Principal Legal Officer prior to her appointment to the Magistrates' Court this year. Jill also held previous roles as Principal Lawyer with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and Djirra. Elena is LACW's CEO, and in addition is the Co-Convener of Smart Justice for Women (a coalition of legal and community services working together to end women's criminalisation), and a Board member of the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

From a team of two in 2016, LACW has now grown to a team of 18 employees including 8 lawyers, 3 case managers and 2 project staff. LACW's lawyers include 3 accredited specialists in criminal law, and its case management team comprises professionals with significant experience working with criminalised women, in addition to qualifications in alcohol and other drug support and family violence support.

Service Summary

Specialist criminal legal advice and representation

The majority of LACW's legal work is in the provision of criminal defence advocacy in the Magistrates, County and Supreme courts, representing 80% of our legal work in FY24.

Associated legal need

Other areas of practice target legal issues that disproportionately impact criminalised women, specifically: family violence intervention orders; infringements and fines; victims of crime assistance and until recently, child protection. Our family violence intervention order practice focuses on women who are respondents to family violence intervention orders, and a significant proportion of our work involves women who are misidentified as perpetrators in family violence incidents and/or are victim survivors of family violence themselves.

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. This program has been built up utilising philanthropic support, donations and short-term government grants, including through the Integrated Services Fund funding our Pathways out of the Justice System program and our BARS to Safety Program, funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, which provides immediate post-release support to women exiting prison.

SupPORT Pathways Program

Our SupPORT Pathways Program connects women, trans and gender-diverse people who have had experience with or are at risk of engagement in the criminal legal system with opportunities to engage with community sport and recreation as a way of building resilience, community connection and wellbeing. We run programs in the community, including outreach to housing and other support services, as well as programs within the Dame Phyllis Frost and Tarrengower women's prisons.

Our Values

FEARLESS

We advocate in spaces that are often unseen, and challenge the status quo to fight for the rights of our clients

CLIENT-CENTRED

Our starting point is our clients and their needs

HOLISTIC

We provide wrap-around support that goes beyond addressing the legal problem

INCLUSIVE

We are inclusive of all who identify as female, trans and gender-diverse

ALLIES

We recognise the particular prejudice and discrimination faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the legal system and are committed to addressing this in our advocacy

Our Impact

OUR CLIENTS



62%

Have experienced or are at risk of family violence



46%

Are homeless or at risk of homelessness

32%

Are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander



61%

Have a disability including psychological and psychiatric disabilities

Total Clients Assisted in FY24

802

Clients that were new to LACW

41%

Total Clients Assisted since 2016

2059

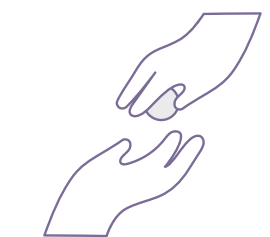
Our Impact

OUR LEGAL WORK



1008

Summary Crime matters in FY24



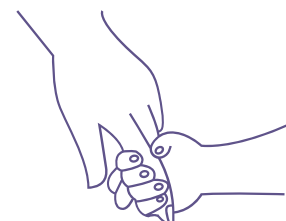
106

Indictable Crime matters in FY24



137

Family Violence Intervention Orders in FY24



61

Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal matters in FY24

60

Infringement/fines matters in FY24



31

Child Protection matters in FY24

Total Legal Matters in FY24

1605

New Legal Files Opened

951

Total Legal Matters Since 2016

6640

Our Impact

CASE MANAGEMENT SUPPORT



60%

Of Case Management clients have experienced or are at risk of family violence



44%

Of Case Management clients are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

48

Episodes of immediate post-release support under the BARS to Safety program



33

Nights of emergency accommodation provided

Total Episodes of Case Management Support in FY24

236

New Case Management Files Opened

168

Total Clients assisted in FY24

186

Our Work

Criminal Defence

Criminal defence continues to be the focus of LACW's service provision, making up nearly 80% of all legal matters worked on this year. This work involves providing advice and in-court legal representation to women, trans and gender diverse people charged with criminal offences.

This year, we have again continued to appear across all jurisdictions in Victoria - from the Magistrates' Court, specialist Koori Courts and therapeutic courts, to the County and Supreme Courts - and to provide a statewide service covering all metropolitan courts and a number of regional courts as well.

With multiple accredited criminal law specialists in our team, plus the benefit of wrap-around case management support, we are uniquely placed to respond to the needs of our clients to not only achieve the best legal outcomes - with only 5% of criminal matters finalised resulting in a term of imprisonment - but also assist clients access the support they need to find pathways out of the justice system.

Our early-intervention legal support assists women who are facing criminal charges but are not at risk of imprisonment. Funded through the Integrated Services Fund, the CLC Family Violence and Assistance Fund and the National Legal Assistance Partnership's specialist funding for Vulnerable Women, this work addresses a significant gap in service provision for women who are criminalised due to poverty, family violence, homelessness and intersecting layers of disadvantage, and would otherwise have no access to ongoing legal advice and representation.

79% Of our work is in criminal defence

25% Of criminal matters resulted in an adjourned undertaking

20% Of our criminal defence work is in regional courts

5% Just 5% of criminal matters resulted in a term of imprisonment

35% Of our criminal defence work is for women who would otherwise have no access to ongoing legal representation

We have acted in a significant number of serious matters in the County and Supreme Courts this year.

In one matter, our client had been charged with murder, and the alternative charge of manslaughter, in relation to the death of her partner. Her partner had subjected her to significant family violence over a number of years, including in the weeks and days prior to his death, and we were able to present evidence of this to the court. At the first stage of proceedings in the Magistrates' Court, we succeeded in having the murder charge discharged at committal, and only the manslaughter charge proceeded to trial.

With the support of our case management team, we then made a bail application on behalf of our client. This was ultimately successful, and she was released into the community with support from her family and a number of organisations coordinated by our team.

With the trial due to commence in the Supreme Court, several pre-trial rulings were made in our favour. On day one of the trial we made lengthy submissions, following which the Crown discontinued their case against our client and the charges were withdrawn.



Our Work

Intervention Orders

LACW's work in relation to Family Violence Intervention Orders focuses on matters where women have been named as the respondent to an order, where criminal charges are associated and where there are cross-applications for orders with our client listed as both an Affected Family Member (victim survivor) and Respondent.

The statistics around the mis-identification of our clients as primary perpetrators in family violence incidents remains stubbornly high, with one third of matters where our clients were named as Respondents to an order being cases of mis-identification, and 80% of clients reporting that they had experienced or were at risk of family violence, even where they were named as a Respondent.

Our work in this area also targets women who have particular intersecting layers of disadvantage that make them more susceptible to mis-identification. These include 30% of our FVIVO clients being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, 50% being homeless or at risk of homelessness, 14% coming from CALD backgrounds, and 65% living with a disability.

This work is funded through the State Government's CLC's Family Violence fund, and demand for our services in this area continue to grow, with 99 new matters opened this year and a total of 137 matters worked on.

137

FVIVO matters in FY24

30%

Of FVIVO matters are for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women

33%

Of matters were cases of mis-identification

65%

Of FVIVO clients live with a disability

80%

Of FVIVO clients had experienced or were at risk of family violence, even where they were named as a respondent in the proceedings

Our Work

Child Protection

LACW's Child Protection practice filled a significant gap in the services available to mothers with experience of the criminal legal system whose children were subject to child protection intervention. These women are often excluded from child protection proceedings, especially if they are in custody. Significantly, a high proportion of women we have assisted through our child protection practice are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women, reflecting the grossly disproportionate rates of child removal that persist in these communities.

Our Child Protection practice was established and led by Siobhan Whittle, an accredited specialist in both criminal law and children's law. In May 2024, Siobhan was appointed to the Children's Court as a Magistrate. This is testament to her extraordinary skill, hard work and knowledge of what is a complex and difficult system.

We are extremely proud of Siobhan and know she will make a thorough, empathetic and fair decision-maker.

Sadly, with the loss of Siobhan's expertise and the difficulties we have faced in making this practice financially sustainable, we are no longer able to provide advice and representation in Child Protection matters. Nonetheless, advocating for better outcomes for criminalised women with child protection involvement remains a critical part of our systemic advocacy work. This will be continued through our research project with the University of Melbourne and Elizabeth Morgan House, funded by the Victoria Law Foundation, which looks at the unmet legal and other needs of women who have had involvement in both the child protection and criminal legal systems.

31 Child Protection matters

32% Of Child Protection clients were experiencing family violence

30% Of Child Protection matters were in regional courts

38% Of Child Protection clients were living with a disability

61% Of Child Protection matters were for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander clients

“My time at LACW was not only professionally rewarding - it felt like an opportunity to contribute to a service that was doing something unique and client led. I loved being able to offer a high quality legal service that looked to assist the person, and not just the legal problem. It made the work feel much more meaningful, particularly in the child protection space where the focus is generally on what’s happening away from court. In my view, the case management team were central to bridging the gap between court orders and client action.”

*Magistrate Siobhan Whittle
Former Managing Lawyer, Civil and Child Protection*



Our Work

VOCAT Applications

It has been another busy year in our Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal practice, with several matters being finalised with some great outcomes for our clients. This has included applications brought on behalf of women who are victim survivors of lengthy and traumatic episodes of family violence, and women whose contact with the criminal legal system mean they have additional hurdles to overcome before their claims for compensation as victims will be accepted.

We are greatly indebted to Rose Blanden of Meridian lawyers who is seconded to us three days per week to undertake this work. She has become the driving force behind our VOCAT practice and we are incredibly grateful for her support. We also receive assistance from law firm Hall and Wilcox who manage a number of VOCAT files for our clients, and Clayton Utz who have become a referral partner in VOCAT matters.

We have been actively involved in consultations regarding the development of the Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS) which will replace VOCAT and is intended to provide a more streamlined, on-line process for claiming compensation and support for victims of violent crime without the need for a court hearing. We remain concerned that the new system may present barriers to our more vulnerable clients in terms of accessing on-line systems, and that requirements to address 'character tests' for victim applicants remain, which continue the stigma faced by criminalised women who have been victims themselves.

Infringements

Our Infringements and Fines work provides advice and advocacy to have significant infringements and fines waived on the basis of special circumstances, that is, homelessness, mental illness or alcohol and other drug addiction. In addition, we assist clients to make applications under the Family Violence scheme to have infringements and fines waived due to their experience of family violence.

We have had several applications both using the on-line system and through in-court advocacy, resulting in tens of thousands of dollars of fines being waived for our vulnerable client cohort.

“To see women and their children access counselling and financial assistance through VOCAT that will make a difference to their day to day life, is a testament to the client-centred approach at LACW in achieving access to justice. I have found it personally and professionally rewarding to work alongside our clients, applying for services and items that they have previously thought unattainable.

I have learned so much from our clients about their resilience, spirit and courage in finding a way forward for a more positive future for themselves and their children, having endured hardship and violence. It is inspiring that the team approach is central to the work at LACW. This is exemplified by the SupPORT pathways program with Jacquie, demonstrating the power of sport and a team approach to addressing client needs.”

*Rosemary Blanden
Pro-bono VOCAT lawyer, Meridian Lawyers*



Our Work

Case Management

LACW's wrap-around case management program has continued to support many of our clients in a myriad of ways, including referrals for accommodation, advocacy for admission into residential rehabilitation, coordinating with other specialist workers in care teams and family violence safety planning.

We've had a number highlights, including successful bail applications in tricky circumstances, continued engagement with some particularly vulnerable clients with complex situations, and some hard fought for NDIS applications approved.

Our team has remained strong, with team leader Mary Paterson, and case managers Mel Walshe and Georgie Adeney providing consistent support and fearless advocacy for our clients. Congratulations to Georgie who went on parental leave in late April. We were extremely fortunate to welcome back our experienced former case manager Lisa Chamouras who has slid right back in as if she never left.

We continue to have social work students complete their placements with us and provide much appreciated additional support. Thank you to Sarah, Paige, Nikki and Hayley for your contributions to our team.

This work, which is delivered through our **Pathways Out of the Justice System** program, is funded through the State Government's Integrated Services Fund, with the generous support of the Humanists Society of Victoria and the Pandora Kay and John Larkins Creativity Fund.

80%

Success rate in bail applications where case management support is provided

236

Episodes of case management support

186

Case Management clients supported

44%

Of case management clients are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

Systemic Advocacy

Submissions

We have continued to advocate at a systemic level for reforms that will provide better outcomes for criminalised women. A focus again this year has been on bail reform, where we have supported the advocacy of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and the family of Veronica Nelson in calling for the full implementation of legal reforms known as Poccum's Law to address the harmful and disproportionate impacts of bail laws on First Nations women.

This has included:

- Meeting with the Attorney-General to discuss proposed bail reform provisions
- Meeting with members of the cross bench including the Greens, Legalise Cannabis and the Animal Justice Party as part of Smart Justice for Women to amplify the messages around implementation of Poccum's Law
- Attending the re-launch of Poccum's Law on the steps of State Parliament to support Veronica Nelson's family.

In October 2023 the Victorian Government passed laws that go some way towards addressing the disproportionate impacts of bail laws on First Nations women. While they did not fully implement all the changes proposed through Poccum's Law, these reforms have already had an impact in reducing the number of women who are cycling through the Dame Phyllis Frost prison on remand.

Other systemic advocacy work this year has included:

- Making a submission to the review of the Spent Convictions Act
- Making a submission to the review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership funding agreement being undertaken by Dr Warren Mundy
- Meetings with the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Victorian Attorney-General and Victoria Legal Aid to discuss the need for adequate resourcing of specialist services for criminalised women
- Meetings with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the Greens and Homes Victoria to discuss the intersection between housing insecurity and criminalisation for women.

Strong Foundations Funding

We are thrilled to be one of the inaugural recipients of the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner's 'Strong Foundations' funding. This funding will provide us with \$1,000,000 over 5 years to strengthen our systemic advocacy work, provide security for our Case Management team and enhance our strategic and evaluation frameworks. We have appointed Laura Heffes as our new Director of Policy and Strategic Advocacy and look forward to strengthening our impact in this space in years to come.

Systemic Advocacy

Speaking Events

We have presented at a range of events to amplify our message around the particular needs of women with criminal legal system involvement, and to advocate for systemic and structural reform.

These events have included:

- Jill presenting to students at the Melbourne Law School around the intersections between family violence and criminalisation for women
- Jill providing training to Berry Street on issues facing women in the criminal legal system
- Elena presenting to WIRE Women's Support and Information in relation to our work
- Jacquie Phiddian (SupPORT Pathways Project Manager) and Sarah Abell (Lawyer) presenting to the YWCA about integrated practice models
- Elena presenting to the Humanists Society of Victoria in relation to our work
- Jill providing the key note address at the Dame Roma Mitchell International Women's Day lunch presented by Victorian Women Lawyers
- Elena presenting to lawyers at the Department of Premier and Cabinet as part of an International Women's Day event alongside Ingrid Giles (former LACW lawyer and now Coroner)
- Jill presenting on a panel at the bail reform conference convened by the OPP and Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
- Elena presenting to the St Vincent De Paul Society as part of their Reconciliation Action Plan learning sessions on our work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
- Ellen presenting on a panel in relation to reforms to Victoria Legal Aid guidelines around criminal charges arising from the mis-identification of women as primary aggressors in family violence incidents

We have also enjoyed engaging with a range of stakeholders at a number of events throughout the year. These have included:

- Sister's Day Out (in the community) and Sister's Day In (in prison) run by Djirra
- The Integrated Legal Impact Roundtable on Family Violence coordinated by Eastern Community Legal Centre
- Djirra's ACTIVism event as part of the 16 days of action against family violence
- A Women's Safety Roundtable convened by Nina Taylor MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Justice

We were also thrilled to welcome Nina Taylor MP to visit our office and discuss our work with criminalised women in more detail.

Systemic Advocacy

Smart Justice for Women

A significant part of our systemic advocacy work has been delivered through Smart Justice for Women, a coalition of nearly 40 member organisations as well as leading academics and experts, which LACW Co-convenes alongside the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

Smart Justice for Women includes members from the community legal sector, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, peak bodies, the community services sector, legal sector, academia, and other organisations who are committed to ending the criminalisation of women in Victoria.

A highlight this year was the launch of Smart Justice for Women's policy platform in December 2023. The event was generously hosted by Gadens and attended by over 80 attendees in person and 35 on line. Our CEO Elena Pappas presented as part of a panel discussion which was moderated by Louisa Gibbs of the Federation of Community Legal Centres. The panel also included Professor Eleanor Bourke, Chair of the Yoorook Justice Commission; Lyanne Morel, lived-experience advocate and member of the Victim's Advisory Panel at Safe and Equal; Nina Storey, lived-experience advocate and Flat Out's family violence justice coordinator; Tania Farha, CEO of Safe and Equal; and Fiona Patten, social justice advocate, former MP and leader of the Reason Party.



Our Projects

From BARS to Safety

In November 2023 LACW received funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner's grants program to undertake a new project - From BARS to Safety - Bail and Release Support for Women Exiting Custody.

This project provides immediate and intensive point of release support to women exiting prison who have been in custody for a short period of time. Material aid including assistance with transportation, clothing, emergency accommodation, food and mobile phones are provided alongside intensive case management to ensure that women are released into a safe environment which does not set them up to fail.

It fills a gap in service provision that otherwise sees women released from custody without the support needed to ensure their safe transition back into the community.



Our Projects

SupPORT Pathways

LACW's SupPORT Pathways Program empowers women, trans and gender-diverse people who are at risk of criminalisation to engage with sport and recreation activities in order to increase their social and emotional wellbeing and reduce their risk of involvement in the criminal justice system. It delivers recreation activity days, outreach programs to community and housing organisations, and in-reach programs to Tarrengower and the Dame Phyllis Frost women's prisons, in addition to connecting women with local community clubs and organisations including local AFLW clubs. Case managers also provide wrap-around support and referrals to specialist services.

The program aims to reduce stigma and overcome barriers that may prevent at-risk women from joining sport and recreation groups and activities. This not only assists in supporting individual improvements in physical and mental health and wellbeing, but it also has the capacity to strengthen communities by creating opportunities for connection and pathways for inclusion.

With the support of the Commonwealth Government's Strong and Resilient Communities funding program, we have had a huge year increasing the numbers of criminalized women and gender diverse people who have been engaged in sport and recreation activities through the program.

This year, the program has delivered a series of Come and Try group activities in the community and at the Tarrengower Women's prison aimed at providing a safe entry for women into sport and recreational activities. The activities are run by LACW program staff and use a flexible delivery approach where activities are taken to where the women are at. This approach recognises the high levels of trauma and significant support needs that many of the women have, and allows us to provide a launching pad for women into further community activity participation in the future.

The program in Tarrengower Women's Prison is provided through a partnership with the Mount Alexander Women's Sports Club (the Falcons) who have dedicated volunteers coming to the prison to run footy clinics. Feedback from program participants has been overwhelmingly positive. Their statements are simple yet profound and provide ongoing incentive for LACW to continue to provide programs like this for fellow members of our community, criminalised women.

“When I kick the footy, I’m not a prisoner or a ‘crim’, I’m YOUNG, I’m ME, and I’m FREE.”

“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 Participants, Tarrengower Women’s Prison



SupPORT Pathways Cont...

Evaluation

In October 2023 RMIT's Centre for Innovative Justice finalised their evaluation of the Women's SupPORT Pathways Program. The evaluation found:

- Strong evidence that women experienced participation in the program as positive and enjoyable – including through the addition of in-reach programs and 'Come and try' events. The prison program emerged as being particularly successful in facilitating joyful experiences for participants.
- The provision of 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 was delivered.
- Feedback from participants suggests that engagement with the program provided a range of positive benefits associated with desistance. This included by enhancing social connection, physical and emotional wellbeing and skills development - factors which have the potential to be protective against future criminal justice involvement.
- Seemingly small but important successes were identified throughout the Evaluation. These included women having the courage to try a new sport for the first time; to push through their initial social anxiety in a mainstream community club environment; and to participate in skills development opportunities, such as coaching accreditation. This in turn brought women a sense of confidence in their capacity to challenge themselves, to form new relationships and feel accepted.

"The Evaluation found clear evidence that, when resourced adequately, the SupPORT Pathways Program can provide criminalised women with community connection, a sense of purpose, structure and routine and opportunities to improve fitness, develop skills and link with support services – all in an enjoyable, recreational context. Insights from club consultations, surveys and practice observations also indicate that the program has real potential to shift negative perceptions in the community about people in contact with the justice system, and to increase understanding about the reasons for that involvement."

RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice - Evaluation of Women's SupPORT Pathways Project - Final Report October 2023

SupPORT Pathways cont...

SupPORT Their Inclusion

In April 2024, we launched the CIJ's evaluation of the SupPORT Pathways Project alongside a screening of the documentary "Equal the Contest," a powerful case study of gender inequity in modern day Aussie rules football in Central Victoria. This event attracted an audience of over 100, increasing awareness of the program and raising valuable funds.

Highlights included a key note speech by Peggy O'Neal AO, Chancellor of RMIT University and former President of the Richmond Football Club, a presentation of the key findings of the CIJ's evaluation by Catherine Caruana, and a panel discussion featuring the film-maker Mitch Nivalis plus members of the Mount Alexander Falcons.

LACW would like to thank and acknowledge our supporters who helped make this event such a huge success:

- Platinum sponsors **Drummond Street Services** and **Parnell's Barristers**
- Bronze sponsors **Meridian Lawyers** and the **Leo Cussen Centre for Law**
- suppliers of refreshments **Paramount Liquor** and **Shedshaker Brewing Company**
- the following businesses which contributed raffle prizes: **Eve Studio, Carlton Baths, Windy Hill Fitness Centre, Royal Ink Tattoos (and in particular Jackson Liversidge), The Lincoln Hotel, Girls with Hammers, The Firm Café Melbourne, Oliv & Koko and Seven Seeds Coffee Roasters.**

A special shout out and thank you to Mitch who provided the film for us to screen without any cost, our students Chi and Holly who contributed so much to the night, and Mina and Lou from RMIT for their support with all the logistics.





Partnerships

We are grateful for our ongoing partnership with the Centre for Innovative Justice at RMIT University.

We are co-located in RMIT's Pelham Street building alongside Youth Law, and benefit from a strongly collaborative and collegiate working environment.

We collaborate with the CIJ through Social Work Student placements, undertaking project work and client support. We have had between 3 and 4 Social Work students every semester completing 500 hours each of field education with us, with the supervision of Kat Ogilvie, CIJ's Social Work and Integrated Practice Manager (who was previously seconded to LACW). We also host students from RMIT's Bachelor of Laws and Juris Doctor programs.

In addition, we have supported the CIJ in their women's decarceration work, contributing to their reports 'Leaving Custody Behind: Foundations for communities and gender-informed criminal justice systems' and 'Lessons from COVID-19 – the use of bail, remand and sentencing for women.'

Student Placements

We are grateful for the contribution of the following students who have undertaken placements with us:

Social Work Field Education Students

Sarah Bostock
Paige Gilchrist
Nikki Butcher
Hayley Brandon
Lauren Dinsmore
Holly Cootee
Whitney Grewel

Marketing and Comms

Chi Hoang

Bachelor of Laws and Juris Doctor Students

Hanah Clancy
June Macaraeg-Casem
Melie Protat
Pooja Gupta
Sakina Ehsani
Omar El-rifei

Anna Hill
Scarlett Trewavis
Charlotte Gillespie

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time on placement at LACW. I have helped organise a fundraiser, learnt about integrated practice, engaged with program participants and other organisations, and have felt supported in doing so.

LACW's trauma-informed approach to their service has allowed me to understand that clients present with a range of intersecting issues that have led them to be engaging with LACW. I have been able to attend court and professional development seminars surrounding things that I have not been privy to in the past. Through the SupPORT Pathways Project, I have learnt how important sport and community is for people, and I think this is something that I would be keen to engage with and work in during my future social work career.

I have also learnt many things about myself. Supervision for me is invaluable and I have discovered my own limitations and the boundaries I may need to be better at implementing when I start practicing social work.

I have felt very welcome and the learnings I will take away from this organisation will help me in my future work. Thank you!

Holly Cootee, MSW, Field Education 2



Our People

Elena Pappas	Co-founder and CEO
Jill Prior	Co-founder and Principal Legal Officer (to May 2024)
Ellen Murphy	Principal Legal Officer (from May 2024); Managing Lawyer, Crime (to May 2024)
Siobhan Whittle	Managing Lawyer, Civil and Child Protection (to May 2024)
Asha Zomer	Senior Lawyer
Philippa Dixon	Senior Lawyer
Carmendy Cooper	Senior Lawyer
Ashlee McPhail	Senior Lawyer
Sarah Abell	Lawyer
Jaffa Withers	Lawyer
Beray Uzunbay	Lawyer (from May 2024)
Eliza Collister	Lawyer (from June 2024)
Danilee Pallister	Lawyer (December 2023-April 2024)
Rawan Badawi	Lawyer

Mary Paterson	Case Management Team Leader
Melissa Walshe	Case Manager
Georgina Adeney	Social Worker (Maternity leave from April 2024)
Lisa Chamouras	Case Manager (Maternity leave cover)
Jacquie Phiddian	SupPORT Pathways Project Manager
Penny Cula-Reid	SupPORT Pathways Project Officer

Mary Zaky	Paralegal
Maria Nocera	Paralegal
Sarah Cadzow	Administrative Assistant

Emma Jackson	Grants Officer (Complete Law Support)
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 Practical Legal Training Students

Erin O'Brien	Toni O'Sullivan
Lena Schulz	Selina Domingo
Georgia Egan-Griffiths	Lauren Campbell
Christina Cushen	Nelexi Pit
Mila Olsen	Maddy



Our Supporters

We could not do the work that we do without the generous support of our donors, project partners and friends.

We would particularly like to acknowledge the following organisations and individuals who have supported us this year.

Major Donors

Alan Grewal	George and Jillian Pappas
Alison Burt	Greg Thomas
Angela Smith	Heine Family Foundation
Anna Howard	Joanna Abell
Bridgid Cowling	John Rogan
Caitlin Edwards	Karin Temperley
Clare Moss	Katie Backholer
Caroline Jeppesen	Leo Cussen Centre for Law
Codie Bell	Lynn Buchanan
Count Charitable Foundation	Mark Madden
David Yarrow	Parnell's Barristers
Drummond St Services	Paul Scroope
Diane McDonald	Winnifred Cunningham

Funders

Commonwealth Department of Social Services
Commonwealth Bi-lateral Specialist NLAP Funding - Vulnerable Women stream
Humanists Society of Victoria
Pandora Kay and John Larkins Creativity Fund
State Government of Victoria - Integrated Services Fund
State Government of Victoria - CLC Family Violence and Assistance Fund
Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner
Victoria Law Foundation

Project Partners

Elizabeth Morgan House
The University of Melbourne
RMIT University - Centre for Innovative Justice
Mt Alexander Women's Sports Club (Falcons)

Pro Bono and Corporate supporters

Arnold Bloch Leibler
Clayton Utz
Hall & Willcox
Maddocks
Meridian Lawyers



Our Finances

Statement of Profit or Loss for the Year Ended 30 June 2024

	2024	2023
	\$	\$
Revenue	1,842,748	1,689,230
Accounting Fees	18,612	19,181
Advertising	987	380
Depreciation	2,633	2,626
Disbursements	110,691	83,777
Internet	1,068	1,068
IT Expenses	19,626	21,298
Memberships and Certifications	12,160	10,786
Office Supplies	742	119
Postage and Courier	1,257	567
Printing and Stationery	13,256	9,915
Professional Services	7,523	
Sub-Contractors	65,609	59,050
Sundry Expenses	2,170	3,619
Superannuation	168,188	138,155
Telephone	9,655	9,640
Training and Professional Development	4,084	2,826
Travel and Accommodation	9,611	8,031
Travel - Metro	1,860	900
Wages and Salaries	1,562,791	1,336,273
Other Employee Expenses	9,680	28,772
Project Expenses - CrimePrevention Grant	(3,433)	(2,441)
Project Expenses - Knowledge Grant	15,675	17,325
Project Expenses - Regional Pilot	6,218	11,663
Project Expenses - BARSGrant	2,672	
Project Expenses - CwlthSARC Grant	16,794	
TOTAL	2,060,129	1,763,530
(Loss) for the Year	(217,381)	(74,300)

Our Finances

Revenue for the Year Ended 30 June 2024

	2024	2023
	\$	\$
Revenue	1,842,748	1,689,230
Revenue from contracts with customers		
Fee Income	707,346	590,233
Grants - Government	932,435	814,401
Grants - Philanthropic	9,000	54,000
SUBTOTAL	1,648,781	1,458,634
Other Income		
Disbursements Claimed	99,120	72,131
Interest Received	15,249	10,118
Donations	77,075	147,963
Other Income	2,523	384
SUBTOTAL	193,967	230,596
TOTAL REVENUE	1,842,748	1,689,230

Our Finances

Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2024

	2024	2023
	\$	\$
ASSETS		
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,052,343	1,116,195
Trade Debtors	931	220,725
Prepayments	0	1,720
Total Current Assets	1,053,274	1,338,640
Non Current assets		
Fixed assets	4,716	7,349
Total Non Current Assets	4,716	7,349
Total Assets	1,057,990	1,345,989
LIABILITIES		
Current Liabilities		
Grant Income in Advance	320,602	386,324
Annual Leave	61,311	76,714
Sundry Creditors and Other Payables	124,094	107,037
Total Current Liabilities	506,007	570,075
Non Current Liabilities		
Long Service Leave	2,017	8,567
Total Non Current Liabilities	2,017	8,567
Total Liabilities	508,024	578,642
NET ASSETS	549,966	767,347
EQUITY		
Accumulated Funds	549,966	767,347
TOTAL EQUITY	549,966	767,347

Contact Information

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