



ANNUAL REPORT

2022-2023

WOMEN'S LEGAL CENTRE ACT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Women’s Legal Centre acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work.

We recognise that this land was never ceded and the experience of colonisation and loss continues to affect the lives of First Nations women and communities today. Despite this, First Nations peoples’ connection to the land, sea and community is strong and continuing.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and future leaders, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the cultures and the hopes of First Nations peoples.



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CHAIR'S REPORT

I am delighted to share the remarkable progress of our Centre over the past year and our commitment to courageous, strategic and thoughtful governance.

This year, we introduced the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, a pivotal milestone that encapsulates our Centre's clear vision, a well-defined purpose, and transparent priorities for the future.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

Our Plan for the future revolves around three central priorities:

- 1. Exemplary Legal Services**
Our commitment to delivering the highest quality of legal services to women and communities is unwavering. We are dedicated to offering trauma-informed, multi-disciplinary, and community-based solutions that evolve and respond to the needs of women in our community.
- 2. Sustainable growth**
We are actively building a healthy and sustainable organisation. This involves fostering positive and enduring partnerships with Governments, expanding our funding base through community engagement, and supporting the practice and expertise of the Centre.
- 3. Voice for accountability and change**
Change is driven by visibility. We will use the experience of our clients, the expertise of our team and the support of our communities to drive structural change.

Our plan, crafted in consultation with our dedicated staff and key stakeholders, is firmly grounded in our core values and our deeply ingrained philosophy.

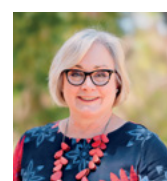
These principles guide everything we do, both in meeting the needs of our clients and in the operation of our organisation.



Change and hope are at the core of our mission, driving us to push boundaries and bring about transformative results.

The past year has been a testament to our capacity to advocate, innovate, and meet the evolving needs of our clients. The launch of our Strategic Plan marks the next phase of our journey. With unwavering dedication, we look forward to a future filled with progress and impact.

Thank you for your continued support and trust.



Trish Bergin
Board Chair

NEW LIFE MEMBER APPOINTED

Life Membership is a prestigious distinction, reserved for exceptional women who have made profound contributions to our core mission.

Katrina Fanning, a Wiradjuri woman, serves as the Director of Coolamon Advisors, a consultancy firm with a majority Indigenous ownership that is deeply committed to advancing Indigenous development, participation, and equitable outcomes.

Over the past six years, Katrina has been a devoted and influential member of our Board, this year as Deputy Chair. Her tenure with us has come to an end, but she leaves an indelible mark on the Centre.

Katrina's keen strategic acumen has shaped the organisation's growth and direction. Her guidance has directed the focus of the Board's work and has been a source of strength and inspiration for our staff.

Beyond the boardroom, Katrina has been a compelling advocate for the Centre's mission. Leveraging her extensive network, she has connected the Centre with key individuals, decision-makers, government officials, and various community and sporting organisations.



KATRINA FANNING, AO, PSM
LIFE MEMBER

Her ability to align our work with local and national priorities has garnered substantial support for our initiatives across numerous critical spheres.

Katrina has generously contributed her time, expertise, and deep knowledge to facilitate the Centre's inaugural Reconciliation and Cultural Safety Action Plan. Her authentic and personal leadership has brought this plan to life in a way that would have been impossible without her involvement.

We will miss her ongoing contributions, and extend our best wishes for her future endeavours.

CEO'S REPORT

This year, a woman called Sita contacted the Centre. Sita was from Nepal and had come to Australia with her husband, who was highly controlling.

She was referred by a multicultural support service when her husband had left their home, informed her he wanted to separate and threatened to remove her from his visa. She was five months pregnant with their first child after two recent miscarriages. She had just been fired from her job as a waitress, after expressing concerns about the cleaning chemicals being used, being worried they may have contributed to her miscarriages. She had also recently applied for parental leave.

Over the next few months, the Centre's Family Law; Employment, Discrimination and Sexual Harassment and Migration Practices collaborated with Sita to get things back on track. The Employment team settled an Unfair Dismissal claim, securing 10 weeks of lost earnings and converting her termination to a resignation to protect her future job prospects. The Migration Team informed the Department about Sita's changing circumstances, family violence, and the impending birth of her child, protecting her visa from her husband. The Family Law Team advised Sita on property, parenting, and spousal maintenance post-separation, and helped her plot a course that best protected her and her unborn child. Throughout, one of our Social Workers supported Sita, helping her to understand her legal issues, connecting her to immediate financial aid and support services, and providing her with gentle education and counselling on domestic and family violence.

The Centre's vision is that women are safe, strong and in control of their lives. This year we have kept working, evolving and agitating to make sure we deliver this vision.

Sita's story demonstrates the complex and intersecting systems and legal process that affect women's lives. The Centre has built a multi-disciplinary service model that wraps

around women to respond in full to these complexities.

This year, we have continued to deliver meaningful outcomes for women: a home, safety, protection for their family, an ability to plan a future.

This year is also a highwater mark for collaboration and partnership across the sectors we work with. One in four of the women we assisted came to us through a community partnership, almost two and half times the number who came through these channels last year. Specialist legal services are more accessible to more women in Canberra than they have ever been before.

In further positive news, the Centre has been chosen by the Commonwealth Attorney-General as one of three pilot sites for a specialised legal service for women affected by sexual violence. This follows the Centre's persistent advocacy and reflects the Australian Government's commitment to improving criminal justice responses to sexual violence. We look forward to working with new justice and community partners to empower victim/survivors of sexual assault through criminal and related proceedings.

While we continue to welcome change and evolution, what does not change at the Centre is the skill and dedication of the staff. They are professional and adept advocates, but they are also collaborative, flexible and creative colleagues.

This year, we have said goodbye to one of our longest standing and most influential team members, Claudia Maclean. You can read more about her exceptional contributions below. I want to thank Sarah Milson-Mahy and Rosa Grahame for stepping into broader leadership roles as we reconfigure – they demonstrate the depth of leadership in the Centre. I also extend my gratitude to our Chair, Trish Bergin, for her extraordinary commitment to the Centre this year.



Elena Rosenman
CEO

FAREWELL – CLAUDIA MACLEAN

In May 2023, Principal Solicitor, Claudia Maclean left the Centre after seven years. Her innovative and ambitious leadership have left a unique legacy at the Centre.

LEADING EXPANSION AND ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES

Over the past seven years, Claudia has built a legal practice that combines deep technical expertise with creativity and purpose. Under her guidance, the Centre's practice has grown from 3 solicitors to 13 solicitors, as well as a registered Migration Agent, a dedicated Intake and Paralegal team, community engagement capacity and a team of Social Workers. This expanded, multidisciplinary practice delivers real outcomes to women and their children in the Canberra community.

INSTILLING PROFESSIONALISM AND MENTORSHIP

Claudia has driven a focus on technical expertise and professionalism within the practice, ensuring we can provide women with effective legal assistance, particularly in complex cases affected by violence. Claudia's skill and technical ability, combined with her commitment to constructive feedback and mentorship, has nurtured the personal and professional growth of new lawyers and created an exciting new career trajectory within the legal profession.

DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Claudia leveraged the Centre's elevated practice to reinspire pro bono partnerships with law firms and other professional services. These new and enhanced partnerships have significantly increased the value and depth of the Centre's services and created a channel for women within the profession to share and contribute to our vision.



CLAUDIA MACLEAN
PRINCIPAL SOLICITOR

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP – TRAUMA-INFORMED LEGAL SERVICES

One of Claudia's most significant contributions has been the development of an evolving model of trauma-informed legal practice. Claudia's astute assessment of how experiences of gender-based violence, systems abuse, and trauma can drive women's engagement with legal processes was instrumental. It drove the slow and steady transformation of the quality of services we provide. She has worked closely with colleagues and collaborators across the Centre to develop, implement and refine a trauma-informed model of lawyering. This approach allows the Centre to build trust with women, leading to better and safer legal outcomes. When clients feel heard and respected, their experience of the legal system and the outcomes they can achieve change dramatically.

Claudia's contribution to the legal profession and the Canberra community was recognised in 2022, when she was awarded the prestigious ACT Law Society President's Medal.

DATA SNAPSHOT: CLIENTS

OVERVIEW

1637

CLIENTS ASSISTED

2281

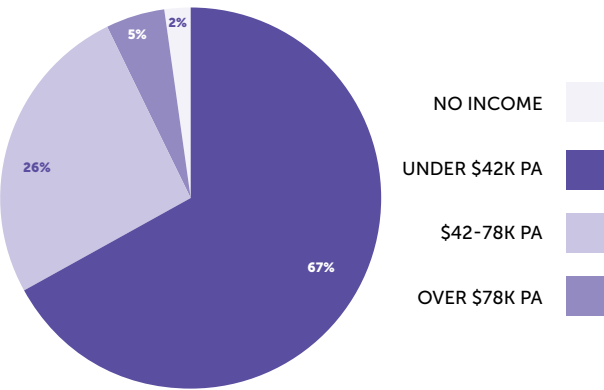
CHILDREN ASSISTED
THROUGH OUR WORK

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

- 34% WOMEN WITH DISABILITY
- 17% MAIN LANGUAGE AT HOME NOT ENGLISH
- 8% FIRST NATIONS WOMEN
- 95% OF NEW ONGOING FAMILY LAW CLIENTS AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

CLIENT INCOME LEVEL

New ongoing clients

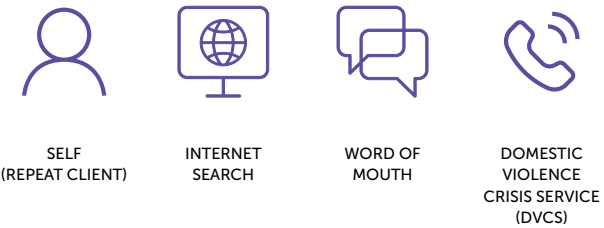


CLIENT SATISFACTION

- 93% THE CENTRE LISTENED TO MY LEGAL PROBLEM
- 98% IT WAS EASY TO CONTACT THE CENTRE WHEN I FIRST NEEDED HELP
- 98% THE CENTRE HELPED ME UNDERSTAND HOW TO DEAL WITH MY LEGAL PROBLEM

TOP 4 REFERRAL POINTS

This does not include referrals through partnerships



DATA SNAPSHOT: SERVICES

OVERVIEW

2189

LEGAL ADVICES

2402

SOCIAL WORK AND CULTURAL SUPPORT
– CLIENT CONTACTS

SERVICES

- 480 LEGAL TASKS
- 390 ONGOING LEGAL MATTERS
- 113 ONGOING SOCIAL WORK AND CULTURAL SUPPORT FILES OPENED
- 1410 CLIENT NEEDS ASSESSMENTS
- 2718 REFERRALS

TARGETED SERVICES

- 30% OF ONGOING LEGAL MATTERS PROVIDED TO WOMEN WITH DISABILITY
- 22% OF ONGOING LEGAL MATTERS PROVIDED TO WOMEN WHO SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AT HOME
- 16% OF ONGOING LEGAL MATTERS PROVIDED TO FIRST NATIONS WOMEN

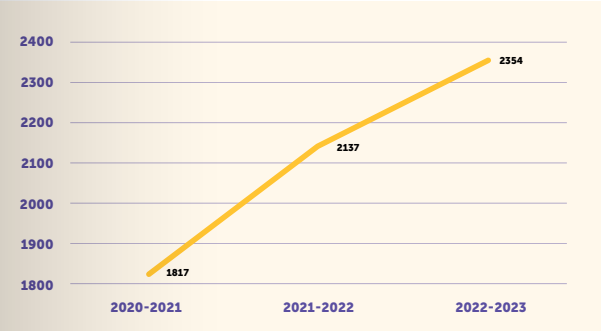
TOP 3 PROBLEM TYPES ONGOING MATTERS (CIVIL LAW)



TOP 3 PROBLEM TYPES ONGOING MATTERS (FAMILY LAW)



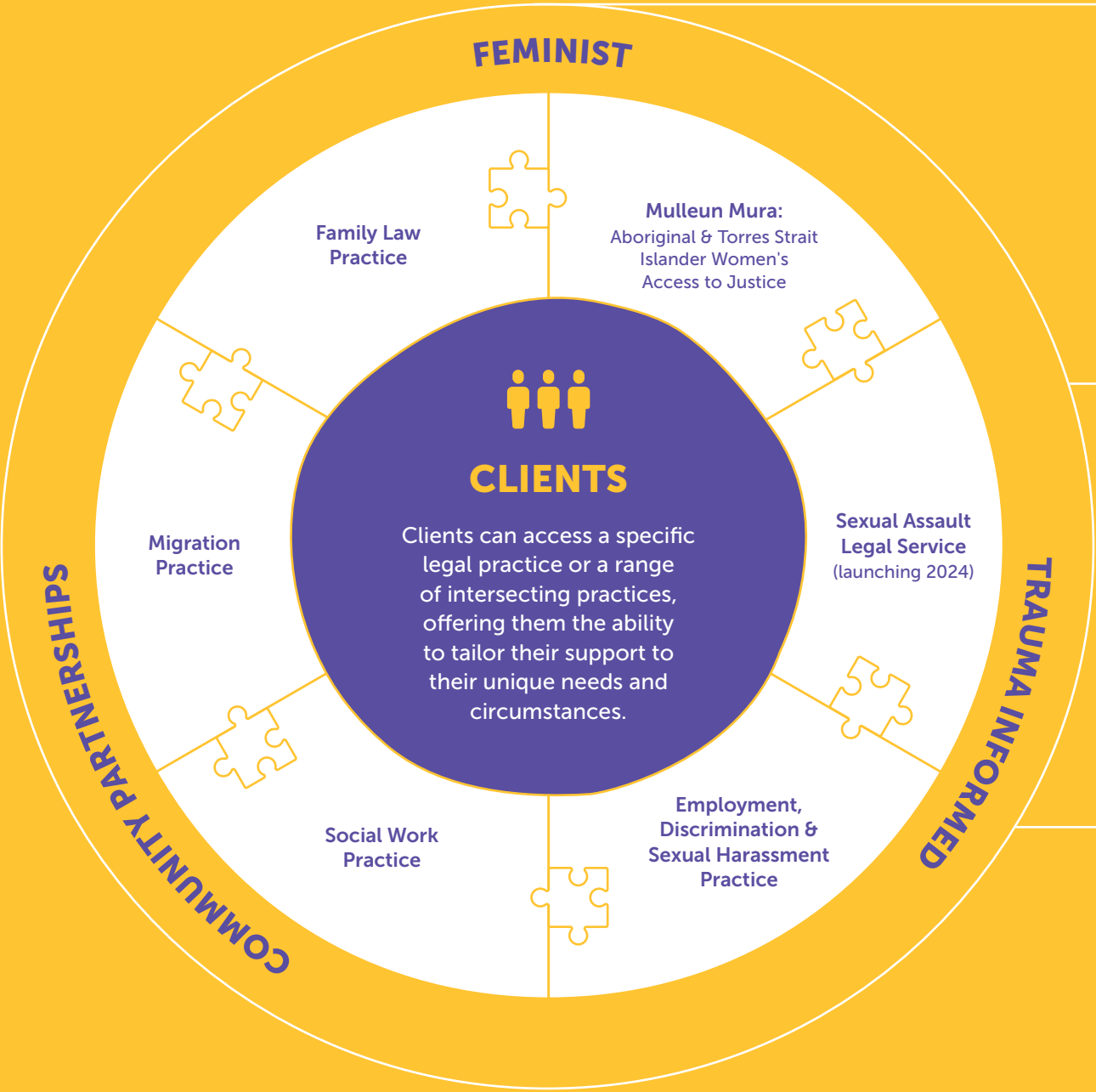
CALLS TO INTAKE & ADVICE LINE



90

TOTAL NUMBER OF COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

OUR SERVICE AT A GLANCE



VISION

Women are safe, strong and in control of their lives

PURPOSE

To use the legal system to improve women's lives and advance gender equality

VALUES

Respect
Respond
Connect
Collaborate
Change

OUR IMPACT: SAFETY

Supporting women’s safety is the Centre’s utmost priority.

We are dedicated to resolving women’s legal matters in a way that ensures improved safety for both them and their children.

Our multidisciplinary service model allows us to provide comprehensive and responsive support, working collaboratively to address intersecting legal and safety issues.

Leaving a relationship increases the risk of violence, including lethal violence, for women and their children. Ninety five, or more than nine in 10 of our new ongoing family law clients were affected by domestic and family violence.

In the 22/23 fiscal year, our Family Law Practice placed a sharp focus on negotiating arrangements for children that prioritised their safety and the ongoing safety of our clients.

The Practice has focused on the swift resolution of parenting matters without the need for court intervention whenever possible. This approach not only reduces fear and stress for women but also minimises trauma for children who have been affected by domestic and family violence. Agreeing on long-term care arrangements, guided by the best interests of the children, also significantly reduces the risk of ongoing and escalating parental disputes and litigation.

Our Migration Practice extended specialist assistance to 86 women on temporary visas who were affected by domestic violence this year. These women, who often face systemic isolation and exclusion, received critical support in accessing integrated legal and social work services to improve their safety.

Our Social Work Practice continues to play a crucial role in enhancing the understanding of gender-based violence among our clients and ensuring their safety throughout legal processes. This year, they delivered 852 counselling services and 154 DFV support and safety planning services – a remarkable 71% increase compared to the previous year.

In 21/22, we reported a significant increase in the number of women seeking rights-based responses to the issues of sexual assault as an important indicator of progress.

However, this increase has not been sustained. The reporting of justice responses to sexual assault in the current financial year has eroded women’s trust in these systems, and it is evident that significant action and reform are needed to regain their confidence.



.....

“I felt totally supported, heard, respected and cared for during a very challenging and difficult process. The professional support I received helped me navigate through the necessary steps to move forward with my freedom in a safe manner, I felt empowered through the entire process.”

.....

“[The Centre] are very helpful, trustable, they saved my life.”

.....

SERVICES TO WOMEN AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE



1813
legal advices



408
legal tasks



203
ongoing representation matters (closed)



154
DFV support & safety planning services

REMOTE ACCESS TO FAMILY VIOLENCE ORDERS TRIAL (RAFT)

In 2022, the Centre initiated the RAFT project – a trial program that allows women to obtain an interim Family Violence Order (FVO) without having to attend the ACT Court in person.

RAFT operates through our partnership with Gungahlin Child and Family Centre (GCFC). Through the trial, women can see a lawyer and make an application for an FVO, including appearing remotely at the interim hearing from the familiar and safe environment of the GCFC. The trial also ensures women can receive specialist safety planning and ongoing support through DVCS, the GCFC and Women’s Legal teams.

The trial has shown how a more responsive and flexible approach to FVO applications can improve access for women at risk of domestic and family violence, particularly women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the Gungahlin region.



.....

Giang came to the GCFC for help after the violence in from her ex-partner escalated and was witnessed by her young son. She doesn’t drive so could only access support in her local area. GCFC was a familiar environment as she and her son attended playgroup there. Giang was able to watch him in the GFCF playground during the appointment with the lawyer. Giang and the lawyer appeared at court remotely and an interim FVO was granted to protect her and her son.

“Applying and appearing at GCFC is less confronting and less scary than going to Court.”

.....

*All client names in case studies have been changed

OUR IMPACT: SECURITY

Women are more likely to experience poverty, to be in low-paid and precarious work than men. Post separation, women’s income drops more sharply than men and they are at increased risk of homelessness.

For these reasons, the Centre is dedicated to legal outcomes that protect women’s rights and entitlements and create the foundation for their financial security and enduring independence.

SUPPORTING WOMEN AT WORK

The Employment, Discrimination and Sexual Assault Practice has deep expertise in gender-based employment issues. They prioritise women in low-paid and/or precarious employment who are experiencing problems at work.

Many of our clients this year experienced multiple issues at work. For example, an initial query about access to hours of work or a leave entitlement may also uncover an under-payment, discrimination or sexual harassment.

Getting legal advice that women have indeed been treated incorrectly can provide avenues for some restitution, including reinstatement of pay or entitlements. Importantly, in the current employment market, and given many women have already left their workplace, legal assistance is also critical to building women’s understanding of their rights and entitlements at work, which they will bring with them to new positions.

“[The assistance I got from Women’s Legal Centre] changed my life because I lost my job and they helped me get my maternity leave.”

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE AND SECURITY AFTER SEPARATION

Another key area of our work involves providing advice and representation for women navigating the division of property after a separation. This year, this remained one of the most common reasons why women seek assistance from our Family Law Practice.

The Centre plays a critical role for women in the ACT, particularly for women who are not eligible for assistance through Legal Aid ACT but are not able to afford private representation.

Skilled legal assistance can ensure these women’s contribution to the family during a relationship is valued and property arrangements give them the best chance of building some economic and housing security and the foundation to move on and care for their children.



VISA SECURITY FOR MIGRANT WOMEN AFFECTED BY VIOLENCE

Migrant women are particularly vulnerable to violence and exploitation when their visas are sponsored by their violent partners. Many women want to leave the relationship but are worried their visa will be cancelled if they do.

This year, the Migration Practice has been actively involved in 27 ongoing cases to ensure visa security and independence for women who have been impacted by domestic and family violence.

“My whole situation changed, I got my permanent residency in the shortest time I could imagine! I went to them with no hope for everything but these women provided me with the right support and care. Anytime I felt like I wanted to talk to somebody, they are always available.”



446 legal advices related to employment conditions and entitlements and discrimination



113 ongoing legal matters to secure fair property settlements post separation



49 ongoing legal matters related to employment conditions and entitlements and discrimination



38 ongoing legal matters to secure financial assistance for women who have been victims of crime.



670 legal advices related to property settlements post separation



27 ongoing matters to secure visas for women affected by domestic and family violence

ROCHNA'S STORY

Rochna, a Thai-Australian woman in her late 60s, had endured long-term domestic violence at the hands of her husband. When they finally separated, she reached out to the Centre, seeking assistance to obtain a divorce, which was the most important part of separation for her. Rochna did not know she had any entitlement to the property and financial assets accumulated during the relationship.

Once her husband learned Rochna had sought legal assistance, he abruptly terminated the limited financial support he had been providing. This left Rochna in an extremely vulnerable position. The Centre’s Social Worker intervened, helping Rochna negotiate a rental moratorium with her landlord and engaging with ACTEWAGL to activate their family violence protocol, ultimately placing Rochna on a manageable repayment plan.

Concurrently, the Centre’s Family Lawyer contacted Rochna’s husband, seeking the reinstatement of support. Unfortunately, the request was denied, prompting the lawyer to initiate urgent proceedings in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. Swiftly, the matter was resolved through Consent Orders.

Rochna was granted a lump sum and ongoing spousal support payments of \$1,400 fortnightly. This financial lifeline enabled her to settle her rental arrears and maintain her tenancy.

Older single women constitute the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population in Australia, and separation can be a common trigger for homelessness among them. Separation can be a precipitating factor to homelessness for older women. The Centre’s unwavering support and representation ensured that Rochna did not become another statistic in this distressing trend.

*All client names in case studies have been changed

OUR IMPACT: RESPECT

Respect is a core value of the Centre. It drives the legal work we do and how we work with clients.

Legal processes can influence the level of respect accorded to women in the workplace and the degree of respect for the cultural knowledge and connections of First Nations women.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT PRACTICE

While the rates of sexual harassment have increased significantly in Australian workplaces over recent decades, many women do not take action because they are not sure their experiences fit the definition of sexual harassment, or are worried that making a complaint will make their situation worse.

The Employment, Discrimination and Sexual Harassment Practice assists women to understand how their experiences fall within the legal definition of sexual harassment and explores options to respond to this behaviour, including internal and external avenues of complaint. As in relation to sexual assault, we have been disappointed to see a sustained drop off in requests for assistance as on-going coverage of high-profile sexual violence cases extended through late 2022 and 2023.

TRAUMA-INFORMED LAWYERING

Respect is also at the Centre of trauma-informed lawyering, which the Centre has continued to implement and refine this year. The Centre has a systemic approach to ensure services and processes are designed delivered in a way that is responsive to the experiences of our client. All staff at the Centre received introductory and ongoing training in relation to trauma-informed service delivery.



“I found such a safe place to actually do something I never thought (or any friends or family for that matter) I could achieve. I’m eternally grateful for the Women’s Legal Centre.”

The Centre’s highly developed Reflective Practice Framework also ensures service design and improvement is continuous and responsive and works to minimise the significant risk of vicarious trauma for our staff.

The Centre is now recognised as a leader in relation to trauma-informed service delivery in a legal context and this year has delivered training and papers on our approach nationally and for the legal profession in the ACT. This way of working means the Centre is a trusted and safe service for women affected by violence and discrimination. Even when the outcome of a legal matter is not what they wanted, women find the experience of working with us begins the process of restoring their trust in themselves.

“The help I received from [the Centre] not only helped me legally but also improved my quality of life above and beyond any words in any language could describe. The patience, respect, empathy and compassion with which I was received, attended and advised is much more than I could have ever received had I gone to any other place for help. Thank you to the whole team at WLC for helping so many people like me.”



RESPECTING CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE IN PARENTING DECISIONS FOR FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN

In 2022/23 the Mulleun Mura Access to Justice Program has adopted a strategic litigation focus to improve outcomes for First Nations children.

We are seeking to improve judicial understanding of the importance of kin and culture and improve decision making regarding the care of First Nations children in the family law jurisdiction.

The Family Law Act includes a provision that obliges the court, when making decisions in relation to parenting or care arrangements for First Nations children, to consider kinship obligations and child-rearing practices of the child’s Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture. This provision is not widely known or used by lawyers, which means the court does not often have this evidence before it.

It is critical to recognise that First Nations communities have provided care, education, and nurturing environments for their children for over 60,000 years. The Mulleun Mura team is dedicated to providing the court with comprehensive evidence about the vital role of culture and identity in the lives of Aboriginal children. Our aim is to help create care arrangements that allow these children to thrive and connect to culture as a source of strength, identity, and joy.

OUR IMPACT: ENGAGEMENT

We are deeply engaged with the communities we serve so can we reach women, drive coalitions of support and effect real change.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND LEGAL EDUCATION

The Centre runs an extensive program of community engagement and education, designed to reach women and build their understanding of legal processes and their rights and entitlements.

This year, we worked with local community groups across Canberra to deliver information about legal services, domestic and family violence, family breakdown and problems at work. Building women’s understanding about gender-based violence and discrimination and the role of legal assistance means we can prevent the escalation of legal problems and circumvent the deterioration of women’s personal circumstances.

.....

“If I had known this [about domestic and family violence] before I would have left years ago”

Participant in community legal education session on family violence and separation for adult migrants.

.....

We have also provided training to professional networks, referring agencies and community partners to build a deeper understanding of the legal aspects women may face when they present to other services, and how legal assistance can contribute to women resolving the issues they face. Professional training supports early referrals, collaborative relationships, and builds our understanding of the support provided by other allied services.

COMMUNITY AND PRO BONO PARTNERSHIPS

The value of partnership is at the core of our service model. The community and pro bono partnerships we have mean we can provide deeper and better integrated services to the women we assist and can build coalitions of support for structural change.

This year, we have worked closely with our community partners to strengthen the collaboration and enhance the services we are able to offer to women. This year, 434 or one in four of the women we assisted came to us through a community partnership. This is almost two and half times the number of women that came through these channels last year. Our partnerships have made it easier for women in the Canberra community to access specialist legal assistance and made it easier for women to coordinate the support they need to stay safe.

SYSTEMS CHANGE

This year, the Centre continued to raise our voice to change the law and policy responses that disadvantage our clients or increase risk for women. This included supporting changes to improve the justice response to sexual violence and a proposed framework to support information sharing between domestic and family violence and justice agencies in the ACT.

The Centre played a leading role in the national consideration of paid domestic and family violence leave. The Centre’s unique combination of expertise in domestic and family violence and employment law means we have long been convinced of the crucial role that workplaces can play in society’s response to domestic and family violence. We celebrated the inclusion of 10 days paid leave in the National Employment Standards and eagerly anticipate a community where women’s employers actively support them in responding to violence.



90
Community
Legal Education
Activities



97
volunteers
and interns



335
women assisted through
volunteer services and
pro bono partnerships



12
law and policy
reform submissions
+ **23** WLSA
submissions



WLSA EO Lara Friedin, WLSA Chair Elena Rosenman, Attorney-General, the Hon. Mark Dreyfus KC MP, WLSA Representatives Yvette Cehtal and Zita Ngor.

LEADING NATIONAL COLLABORATION AND ADVOCACY – WOMEN’S LEGAL SERVICES AUSTRALIA

This year, the Centre played a critical role in the re-establishment of Women’s Legal Services Australia (WLSA), the national peak organisation for the 13 specialist Women’s Legal Services across Australia.

The Centre’s CEO, Elena Rosenman, has acted as the National Chair and Spokesperson for WLSA since late 2022, advocating for specialist women’s legal services and national level reforms to improve legal responses for our clients.

The Heads of our Employment, Discrimination and Sexual Harassment and Migration Practices chair two of the five policy working groups and senior staff represent the Centre across all WLSA portfolios.

Working within this national framework has given us a powerful platform for advocating change, and WLSA has played a significant role in bringing about improvements for women, especially in relation to the way Family Law Act and the Australian Migration Framework respond to domestic and family violence.

OUR PARTNERS: PRO BONO

Our Pro Bono Partners provide technical, legal and administrative services to the Centre and our clients.

These contributions are critical to the quality and quantity of services we are able to deliver into the Canberra community.

PRO BONO PARTNERS



OUR PARTNERS: COMMUNITY

The Centre is committed to delivering legal services through partnerships with community and health services.

We believe collaboration across sectors best leverages specialist services and builds the community response to gender-based violence and discrimination. Working through partnerships means we can reach women earlier in their legal matter, build the capacity of mainstream services to respond to gender-based violence and deepen our understanding of supports provided by our partners.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Child and Family Centres Gungahlin, Tuggeranong, West Belconnen

Lawyers from the Centre's Family Law Practice are based at the Child and Family Centres across Canberra on a regular roster throughout the week. Through these partnerships, lawyers work alongside Child and Family Centre staff to identify women who are affected by domestic and family violence and would benefit from legal assistance. Having an immediate and internal referral pathway means women can access that assistance in service locations they know and trust. The Centre also delivers the RAFT (Remote Applications for FVO Trial) Program through the Gungahlin Child and Family Centre. RAFT supports women to obtain an interim Family Violence Order without attending the ACT Court Building, greatly increasing the accessibility and safety of this protection.

Calvary Public Hospital Bruce

Lawyers from the Centre's Family Law Practice are also based at Calvary Public Hospital Bruce two days per week. These solicitors work with staff from the Maternity, Social Work and Aboriginal Liaison teams to provide specialist legal assistance to referred patients and provides secondary consults and training to staff.

Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS)

Through this partnership, lawyers from the Centre's Family Law Practice are posted into the DVCS crisis team. They provide early intervention legal information, advice and referral through the DVCS Crisis Line and specialist assistance to DVCS clients. Staff from both services exchange secondary consults and specialist training to build internal capability across the partners. This is the only partnership of its kind in Australia. It has been extraordinarily successful, even though it is only currently resourced to operate on a limited basis.

Canberra Institute of Technology Vocational Education Engagement Partnership (VEEP)

Through VEEP, the Centre provides legal advice, representation and community legal education to women in the early stages of their career in female dominated industries. VEEP is part of the Centre's commitment to early intervention, helping women understand their entitlements and avenues for resolving any problems, including sexual harassment, early in their careers.



This year we assisted **434 women** through our service partnerships. Almost one in three of every legal advices provided was provided through a community partnership.

OUR PEOPLE

BOARD AND COMMITTEES

The Centre has a strong, skilled and passionate Board who guide our strategic direction and ensure we meet our obligations as a transparent and accountable community organisation.

Our Board includes women from a broad range of professional backgrounds including senior women leaders from across the community, legal and government sectors.

Board members

Trish Bergin – Chair

Katrina Fanning – Deputy Chair

Agnes Kopras-Ianson – Treasurer

Linda Crebbin – Secretary

Alana Fraser

Rachael Jackson

Sabeena Oberoi

Zakia Patel

The Board is supported by two standing committees, the Governance Committee and the Finance and Risk Committee. The Committees include Board and independent members.

Governance Committee

Linda Crebbin – Chair

Trish Bergin

Yvonne Korn

Sabeena Oberoi

Finance and Risk Committee

Agnes Kopras-Ianson – Chair

Trish Bergin

Marinda Berger

Rachael Jackson

Christina Li

Rachael Jackson

OUR STAFF

The Centre has a diverse and dedicated staff team, with deep expertise in our key practice areas and broad professional experience across the government and non-government sector, community services and the private legal sector.

Executive Team

CEO

Elena Rosenman

Principal Solicitor

Claudia Maclean

Corporate Support Team

Finance Manager

Amanda Webb

Office Manager

Magda Kaczmarek

Executive Officer

Alison Killen

Corporate Services Officer

Alice McNeill

Client and Community Engagement

Client & Community Engagement Manager

Penelope Davie

Community Legal Education Coordinator

Zhenia Kavunenko

Intake & Assessment Team

Team Leader

Thivya Supramaniam

Paralegals

Bronte Arnott

Shelby Clarke

Sasha Daniel

Sahana Devarajan

Samra Karim

Olivia Kerr

Family Law

Principal Solicitor

Sarah Milson-Mahy

Deputy Principal Solicitor

Rosa Grahame

Senior Solicitor

Shireen Faghani

Solicitors

Shivani Banerjee

Anna Brassington

Emma Buckland (to January 2023)

Nicola Mildren

Graduate Solicitors

Brodie Hart

Holly Stapleton

Legal Assistant

Abeir Soukieh

Mulleun Mura Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Access to Justice Program

Managing Solicitor

Vanessa Graf

Senior Paralegal

Alex-Lee Hargy

Employment, Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

Principal Solicitor

Susan Price

Senior Solicitor

Ella Kelly

Graduate Solicitor

Isabel Michael

Migration

Head of Practice

Vanessa Burn

Paralegal

Gisele Li

Social Work

Head of Practice

Kasumi Ejiri

Social Workers

Kate Chen (to November 2022)

Emma Sherwood

Kai Zhang (from December 2022)

VOLUNTEERS, PLACEMENTS & PRO/LOW BONO ARRANGEMENTS

PLACEMENTS & INTERNSHIPS

Sadaf Azimi – AGS secondee
Alyssa Ellwood – AGS secondee
Gaia Ewing – ANU internship
Lily McDonald – King Wood & Malleson Internship
Lilyjoy Mureverwi – Social work student placement
Priam Rangiah – AGS secondee
Taylia Snell – King Wood & Malleson Internship
Zoe Wilson – Proximity Legal secondee

LEGAL VOLUNTEERS

Clayton Utz Employment Clinic:

Tal Aviram
David Blencowe
Cindy Chia
Shirley Chung
Lauren Hargrave
Kate James
Eilidh Jackson
Emma Letcher-Boldt
Rebecca Long
Deborah Mack
Charisse Matthews
Belinda Miller
Alison McMaster
Clare McNamara
John McPherson
Oliver Morris
Monique Munrio
Sarah Pain
Allie Patel
Quin Schluter
Isla Tobin
Daniela Trajkoska
Nicholas West-Foy
Jennifer Wyborn

Tuesday and Thursday Night Advice Service:

Arti Arora
Lauren Callahan
Catherine Coles
Jacquelyn Curtis

Julie Dobinson
Cristina Huesch
Bridget Madigan
Margot McCabe
Courtney Mullen
Rebecca Munk
Anna Neilan
Magdalena Orczykowski
Debra Parker
Meghan Read
Ellen Russell
Kate Riley
Monica Serici
Bernadette Smyth
Lucy Stramandinoli
Lessli Strong
Peta Sutton
Annie Visser

Friday Morning Clinic:

Rhonda Pagett

Sparke Helmore CALD Divorce & Wills Clinics:

Mya Anumarlapudi
Lauren Armstrong
Annie Arnott
Emma Bozic
Liz Cameron
Molly Campbell
Molly Covell
Lara Douglas
Laura Hinwood
Pooja Kumar
Cindy Huang
Monica Macor
Natalie Milenovic
Bridie Norman
Megan Peake
Rushil Sharma
Nicola Strangward
Madi Tidy
Mary Trimboli
Cathy Wang
Joyce Zhang

Shine Lawyers:

Tyler Farr
Justin Penafiel

Hijazi Curran Cameron DFV Clinic:

Chloe Curran
Holly Gunn
Leah McGowen
Jenna Storrier

Slater & Gordon:

Martin Carrick
Aleks Ceklic
Ella Rowe
April Zahra

ORGANISATIONAL VOLUNTEERS

Sharmilla Bargon,
Redfern Legal Centre – Legal Supervision
Alison Lendon – Leadership mentoring
Stephanie McNeill – Communications
Cassandra Schirripa, KPMG – Forensic accounting services

PRO BONO/LOW BONO BARRISTERS

Prue Bindon
Anca Costin
Rebecca Curran
Marcus Hassall
Keegan Lee
Sage Leslie
Gregory Stagg

FUNDRAISING PARTNER

Parker Coles Curtis



HELEN'S STORY

Helen started work for a waste removal company called Trash Kings in 2020. She was immediately subcontracted to second company but spent most of her time working at the premises of a third, Waste Not.

Over the following year, Helen was subjected to serious and repeated sexual harassment at the Waste Not workplace. Colleagues used team communications channels to share comments about her appearance. One colleague kept making advances to her despite Helen continually and politely rejecting him. Her social media accounts were subject to sexually explicit content. Sexual comments and gestures were made in her presence, and colleagues felt free to make comments on her appearance at work events. On top of this, Helen was subject to repeated physical assaults and threats of assault.

The comments and behaviour made Helen feel disgusting, sexualised, and unsafe at work. The situation became too much, and she resigned. When she contacted the Centre, she was unemployed and struggling with severe mental ill health and suicidal ideation due to the harassment.

*All client names in case studies have been changed

The Centre referred Helen to our pro-bono partner, Slater and Gordon, for assistance in obtaining workers compensation. At the same time, the Social Work team supported her to seek treatment for her mental health concerns.

Slater and Gordon were able to help Helen obtain workers compensation. This allowed her to take an extended period away from work to focus on regaining her mental health.

The Centre filed a sex discrimination and sexual harassment complaint in the Australian Human Rights Commission against all three companies on Helen's behalf. The Centre's solicitor and social worker represented her at two conciliations.

With their support, Helen made a powerful statement about the harassment she was subjected to and the pervasive impact it had, and continued to have, on her life.

After four months of negotiations, it was agreed all three companies would contribute to pay Helen a sum of \$110,000. The companies also reviewed their discrimination, bullying and harassment policies and provided training to employees, contractors, and workers. These organisational reparations will help create systemic change in this male dominated industry.

Throughout this case, given its complexity, our pro bono partners Slater and Gordon and Clayton Utz provided helpful insights on strategy.

Helen plans to use the compensation to re-train for a new career path.

ACT WOMEN LAWYERS AWARD 2022 FIRM OF THE YEAR

In October 2022, the Centre was named "Firm of the Year" at the biannual ACT Women's Lawyers Awards.

This esteemed recognition was a testament to the Centre's dynamic role as a contemporary community-based legal service, embodying a feminist model of practice in both our service offerings and operational principles.

The award celebrated the Centre's unwavering commitment to providing specialised legal support to women in Canberra for over 25 years. This commitment has been reinforced through recent substantial growth and continuous adaptation to meet the evolving legal needs of women. These enhancements have included the establishment of a family law litigation practice, the expansion of our Employment and Discrimination Practice, the creation of a specialised Migration Practice, and the formation of vital community and health justice partnerships.

The award acknowledged the Centre's pioneering work in developing a trauma-informed model of lawyering, designed to better address the unique needs of women impacted by gender-based violence. This approach allows us to better meets the needs of women affected by gender-based violence and supports a strong and sustainable organisational culture.

We have actively promoted the benefits of trauma-informed lawyering within the private legal profession, providing training to over 200 private practitioners in the past two years.

The award also acknowledged the deep partnership between the women lawyers across the private profession and government legal sector and the Centre. The Centre's enduring strength, influence, and effectiveness have been significantly bolstered by the invaluable contributions of numerous women lawyers outside the Centre, showcasing the remarkable synergy between our organisation and the passion, drive and purpose of women in the broader legal community.



OUR FINANCES

The Board and the Finance and Risk Committee provide financial governance for the organisation. Financial management policies and procedures, robust internal control mechanisms and timely, reliable and transparent financial information and advice assists the Board to make sound financial decisions. The financial reports have been audited by Nexia Australia and the Centre received an unqualified opinion.

The financial outcome for the Centre in 2022-23 resulted in a surplus of 8.7% of the annual revenue. This surplus was required to offset deficits in prior years, which were caused by delays finalising a number of grant agreements.

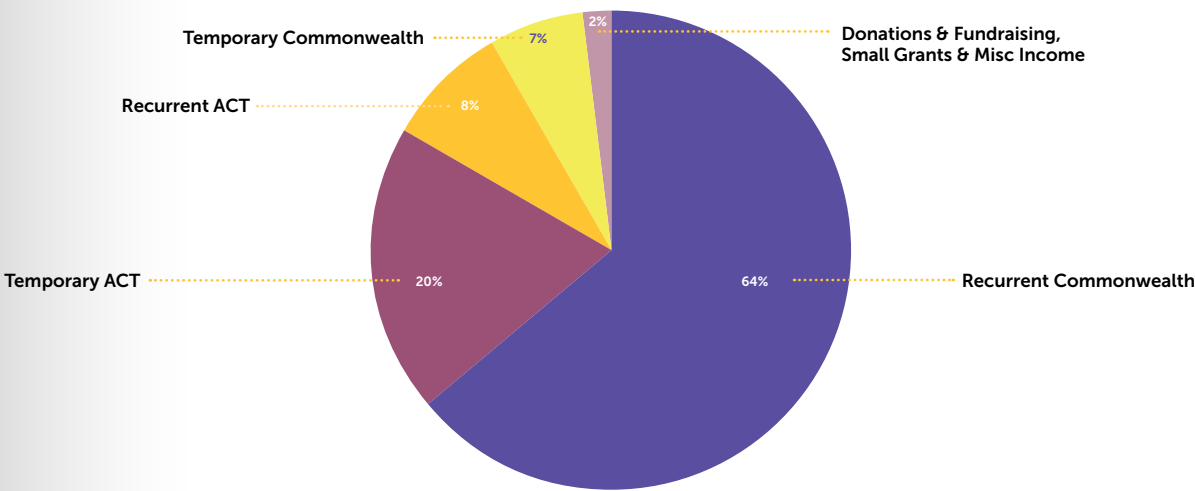
A significant amount of our core operating funding continues to be provided through temporary arrangements (two years or less). This includes funding for our Migration Practice, the Health Justice Partnerships and Sexual Harassment Practice.

As a service delivery organisation, employee expenses account for the majority of expenditure. In 2022-23, the Centre continued to make significant investments in supporting our trauma-informed practice model, with a focus on training and external supervision and debriefing. This investment supports the organisation to lower the significant risk of psychological workplace injuries, including vicarious trauma and burnout, caused by the nature of our work and support. As a result, we see higher retention rates and lower workers compensation insurance costs, demonstrating the financial benefit of our operating model to the organisation.

Revenue	\$
Recurrent Commonwealth	2,311,271.00
Recurrent ACT	297,705.00
Temporary Commonwealth	236,621.00
Temporary ACT	711,532.00
Donations & Fundraising, Small Grants and Misc. Income	59,962.00
Total Revenue	3,617,091.00

The Centre's Audited Financials are available on our website and can also be accessed on the ACNC website.

CENTRE REVENUE 2022-2023





www.wlc.org.au