

First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld

23-24 ANNUAL REPORT



Empowerment and Justice

The artwork portrays the empowerment and justice against adversities.

Aboriginal Australians have spiritual connection to the universe, often seeking guidance from the cosmos. The alignment of the stars served as a navigational tool, and delineated the seasons for hunting and gathering foods. Our ancestors offered protection throughout our journey. This profound relationship is illustrated in the upper section of the artwork.

At the centre of the artwork lies the land upon which we walk. Depicted are site maps, song lines, weaving mats, and waterways. The main feature of the central illustration is the water, symbolising the purification of bad spirits, the coming of rain signifies the dawn of new beginnings, conception and the emergence of new life — nourished by clean flowing water.

The focus of this illustration is the journey of the Aboriginal woman. Having endured neglect and abuse that fractured her spirit, she now experiences a transformative process. Through guidance, support, and healing, she reconnects with her soul, rediscovering her sense of self.

~ Mheelin Sibley

Table of Contents

Chairperson Report	6
Treasurer Report	9
Principal Solicitor Report	11
Palm Island Report	19
Case Studies	21
Community Engagement	23
Community Partners	26
2023-24 Management Committee	27
Staff and Volunteers	29
Acknowledgements	30

Traditional Acknowledgement

First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld Inc acknowledges and pays respects to the Wulgurukaba, Bindal, Manbarra and Bwgcolman peoples on whose lands we conduct our core business and to all Traditional Owners across whose lands we conduct our business. We pay our respects to First Nations leaders and elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. It always was and always will be the lands of the traditional First Nations peoples.

Our Mission

To empower First Nations women by providing legal services and raising awareness through community legal education, advocacy and law reform activities.

Who We Are

First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld Inc is a not-for-profit, community controlled, culturally competent community legal centre, operated by and for First Nations women. Based in Townsville and Palm Island, we provide free legal services in Queensland with a focus on North Queensland from the Northern Territory border to Palm Island and from Sarina to the Torres Strait Islands.

Our Pledge

We pledge to:

- Provide an environment which is culturally competent and culturally safe for First Nations women including cis women and sistergirls
- Treat our clients with respect, courtesy and professionalism and to listen to their concerns
- Provide First Nations women with information about the law and the services we offer
- Respond to our clients' enquiries and requests for information in an accurate and timely manner
- Provide quality legal advice and legal representation to the extent of our resources
- Provide First Nations women with alternative/assisted legal referrals if we are unable to assist

Chairperson Report



Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge the Wulgurukaba and Bindal of the Townsville region and the Manbarra and Bwgcolman people of Palm Island who are the Traditional Owners and the Historical Owners of Palm Island respectively. These are the lands on which FNWLSQ conducts its core business. I also acknowledge the people of the Torres Strait and the Traditional Owners of all lands over which we conduct our business.

I pay my respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging and recognise their connection to Country and role in caring for and maintaining Country through millennia and I acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. I would also like to acknowledge our South Sea Islander community, many of whom were brought to Queensland as forced labour.

As the current Chair of the First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld (FNWLSQ) since August 2023, I am pleased to present the 2023-24 Annual Report.

We are a unique legal service in Queensland, being the only gendered legal service for First Nations women and girls in Queensland. As such, we strive to empower, educate, inform and legally represent First Nations women and girls in areas identified as high needs for the women and girls in our communities.

I pay tribute to the strength and commitment of our Palm Island workers. In 2016 First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld took the initiative of commencing a women's legal service on Palm Island. I acknowledge that this was due to the hard work, dedication foresight and initiative of Andrea Kyle Sailor in establishing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Legal Services NQ (as it then was) on Palm Island. FNWLSQ remains the only women's legal service based on Palm Island.

The 2023-24 year has been a year of significant change. FNWLSQ has been undergoing restructure of the organisation, commencing with re-developing our Strategic Plan and Operational Plan, appointment of an Operations Manager and recruitment of a Chief Executive Officer. At the time of writing, our new CEO is Ms Penney Ferguson, a well-qualified Koori woman who will work with the Management Committee to progress the strategic direction for the First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld.

A significant part of building and improving on the work of FNWLSQ has been our long-standing relationship with other Women's Legal Services throughout Australia, (including Wiringa Baiya, a Women's Legal Service for First Nations women in New South Wales), under the umbrella of the Women's Legal Services Australia ("WLSA") network. In June this year, WLSA moved towards incorporation and the Management Committee of FNWLSQ endorsed our membership of the WLSA proposed corporation, now a company limited by guarantee. While our work will always be directed by and aimed towards meeting the needs of the First Nations women in our North Queensland communities, we acknowledge the learning and collaboration that WLSA has provided and from which we continue to benefit.

FNWLSQ has continued to provide culturally appropriate, quality legal representation, maintaining and improving some of our core outreach clinics and partnerships, boosting community legal education activities, advocating for law reform in areas affecting First Nations women and participating in public enquiries for issues impacting on the lives of our women.

Management Committee Members

The current Management Committee members elected at the last Annual General Meeting on 30 November 2023 are myself as Chairperson, Deniece Geia as Deputy Chairperson, Nina Shibasaki as Treasurer, Josephine Smallwood as Secretary and Christine Burgen as a member.

I wish to give a special acknowledge to the Management for their dedicated work in the 2023-24 year. The Committee has had an exceptionally heavy workload. Apart from the usual business and governance of the organisation, the Committee has held planning meetings, governance meetings and other special meetings to address issues arising such as recruitment of executive staff among other things. I would like to thank the Committee who have gone above and beyond the call of duty in giving their time and skill and labour to support and promote the work of FNWLSQ.

Staff

On behalf of the Management Committee of FNWLSQ, I acknowledge and thank all of the staff for their work during the year. They have worked hard to achieve the goals and vision of First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld Inc. The committee values the diligence, skill and integrity of the staff at FNWLSQ, in ensuring that services are professionally delivered to First Nations women in a culturally competent way.

In the 2023-24 year we welcomed new staff who have contributed to the development of the organisation. FNWLSQ welcomed (in order of recruitment):

- Tobi Sam-Morris, a Meriam woman, as receptionist
- Serrina Kenny, Wiradjuri woman, as solicitor
- Naomi Craigie, a Kalkadoon woman, as paralegal
- Mheelin Sibley, a Bwgcolman woman as an additional Community Development work on Palm Island
- Jane Andreassen as Operations Manager (a new position)

FNWLSQ have farewelled two staff, Sandy South, former office manager and Michele Boults, administrative officer and we wish them the best in their new endeavours.

Every member of the staff team have made valuable contributions to the work of the service and meeting the needs of First Nations women.

I thank the community development workers Andrea Kyle-Sailor (also cultural adviser), Florence Onus (also cultural adviser) and Mheelin Sibley. I thank Jody Martin-Savage for her valuable work as client support officer and acknowledge that the success of our clients in their legal matters depends very much on Jody's support in facilitating women's access to legal and other services, particularly for women with children and women living with disability.

I thank the solicitors for their diligence, skill and dedication. In the 2023-24 year our solicitors have been Cathy Pereira (Principal Solicitor), Tania Young (senior solicitor), Sunday Wedel (senior solicitor), Rachael Edwards, Serrina Kenny and Aaminah Khan. I acknowledge the skill that Sunday and Tania each bring to their respective areas of practice. I acknowledge Aaminah Khan for their continued support for the Palm Island domestic violence Duty Lawyer and casework service and the Charters Towers outreach service. I commend Serrina Kenny for her client rapport and proactive approach to practicing Queensland law after relocating from the ACT to work with FNWLSQ.

Special acknowledgement and congratulations to Serrina Kenny, who has been awarded the Queensland Law Society 2024 First Nations Solicitor of the Year Award for Excellence. We are very proud to have such a dedicated young First Nations solicitor working for our service and assisting our women.

I thank the staff management team, Principal Solicitor/Co-ordinator, Cathy Pereira and Operations Manager, Jane Andreassen for their diligent management of the service in this year of change.

I would like to extend our deepest appreciation to Cathy Pereira for her outstanding contributions to the advancement of First Nations legal services in Queensland. Your leadership and unwavering commitment to justice have been instrumental in empowering Indigenous communities and ensuring equitable access to legal support.

Under your guidance, First Nations Women's Legal Service Qld has become a beacon of hope and advocacy, addressing critical issues with compassion and integrity. Your efforts to amplify First Nations voices and foster culturally safe practices have not only transformed lives but also strengthened the framework of reconciliation and inclusion across our communities.

Thank you for your tireless dedication, and the genuine care you bring to this essential work. You have set an inspiring example of how leadership can drive meaningful change, leaving a lasting impact on the path to justice and equality for all.

Funding

I would like to thank the Commonwealth and State Government funders for their valued support for the work undertaken by FNWLSQ.

Department of Justice and Attorney General (Qld)

I would like to thank the Department of Justice and Attorney General (Qld) for its continued core funding and Vulnerable Women's funding which has been vital to FNWLSQ extending its service and providing more effective legal services to First Nations women in Queensland.

I also thank the Federal Government for its recognition of the need for increased funding for vulnerable women through its grant of funding under the Vulnerable Women's Program (distributed and administered by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (Qld).

National Indigenous Australians Agency

I would like to thank the National Indigenous Australians Agency ("NIAA") for its continued financial support under the Indigenous Women's Outreach Project ("IWOP").

Our core funding and Vulnerable Women's funding, in addition to the IWOP funding, have been the life blood of the services that FNWLSQ delivers. Without this support many more women would have nowhere to turn for legal protection and support when their safety and the safety of their children is at risk. Many more children would be removed from their families due to the lack of legal support to address child protection issues. Palm Island women would not have a duty lawyer service that understands their issues and helps them to find solutions tailored to their safety needs and protection. Women in Charters Towers would have no culturally competent service to turn to in times of crisis.

It is therefore with gratitude that we thank the Queensland and Federal Governments for the continuation of these vital funding programs.

Topsy Mola
Chair
First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld

Treasurer Report

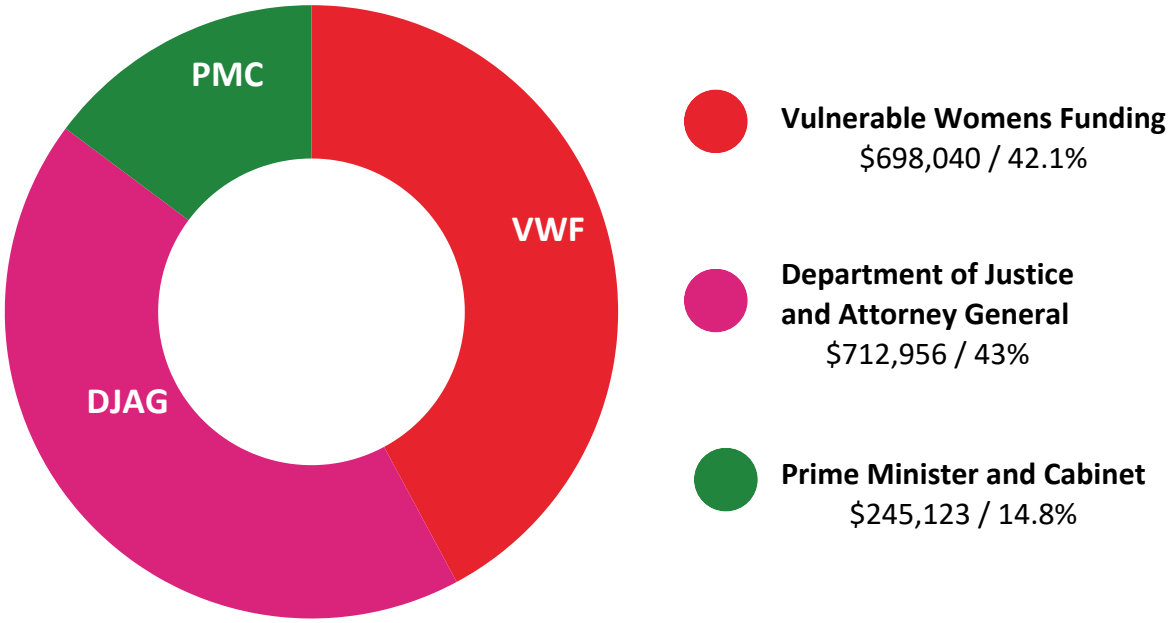


Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge the Wulgurukaba and Bindal of the Townsville region and the Manbarra and Bwgcolman people of Palm Island who are the Traditional Owners and the Historical Owners of Palm Island respectively. These are the lands on which FNWLSQ conducts its core business. I also acknowledge the people of the Torres Strait and the Traditional Owners of all lands over which we conduct our business.

Financial Year Summary:

This year has seen the continued support of two key funding programs, the Indigenous Women's Program Funding (IWOP) as provided by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC), and family law and outreach services as provided by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG). Further income has been received in the current year from DJAG for the Vulnerable Women's program. A total of **$1,656,119** grant funding was received during the year. A breakdown of this funding received is below:



This funding has enabled the service to provide First Nations women with the means for early intervention, reducing the level of personal and family conflict as well as providing access to quality dispute resolution, rather than costly litigation.

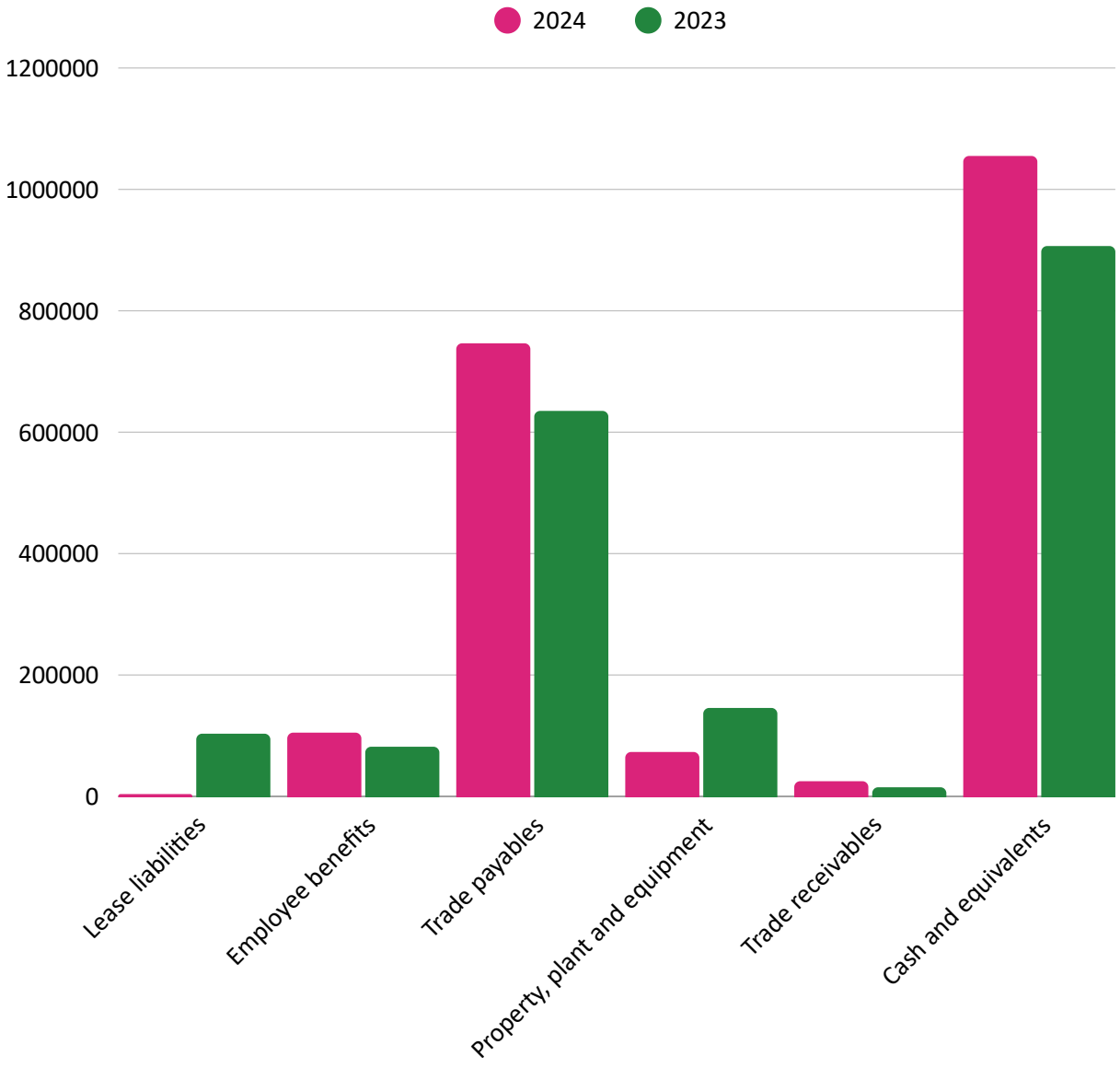
Prior year unexpected funds of $541,681 were also injected into the service in FY24.

Expenditure totalled $1,565,603 which is a decrease of approximately $12,430 compared to the prior year. The major costs included employee costs of $1,214,23, operating costs of $25,734, travel costs of $47,340, training and development costs of $30,962 and client support services of $11,552. These costs are critical to the service carrying out its objectives. The Management Committee closely monitor actual to budget results on a bi-monthly basis.

Of the total funding received and carried forward, a total of $628,712 had not been spent within FY24 and has been carried forward for use in FY25.

Key Financial Information:

- A total of **$1,005,067** is currently held in cash and cash equivalents (including term deposits).
- **$3,485** has been spent on premises and equipment purchases.
- At 30 June 2024, FNWLS has a current position of 1.23 (2023: 1.19), which means that the service has sufficient current assets to be able to pay current liabilities as and when they fall due. The current position has remained consistent with the previous year.
- The total provision for employee benefits (annual leave and long service leave) has increased by **$23,205** from the prior year.
- Lease liabilities have decreased in line with the annual contract amount.
- The auditor, Jessups, has issued an unmodified audit opinion on the financial statements.



Nina Shibasaki
Treasurer
First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld

Principal Solicitor Report

Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Townsville region, the Bindal and the Wulgurukaba peoples, and the Manbarra and Bwgcolman peoples, the Traditional Owners and Historic Owners of Palm Island respectively, on whose land we conduct our core business. I pay my respects to the Traditional Owners of the Torres Straits and to all of the Traditional Owners, past, present and emerging, across whose lands we conduct our business.

Overview of the 2023-24 Year

The 2023-24 financial year has been a year of growth and fundamental change for First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld (FNWLSQ). FNWLSQ has strengthened and streamlined its management structures, through restructuring the organisation. Governance procedures have been streamlined and improved. The organisation has renewed its accreditation, developed a fresh Strategic Plan and Operational Plan to meet strategic goals. The organisation has met its service delivery targets and strengthened its outreach program, building stronger relationships with outreach services..

A snapshot summary of FNWLSQ's significant achievements in the 2023-24 financial year include:

- Restructure of the service
- Increased employment of First Nations staff, in particular at executive and professional levels
- Development of a new Strategic Plan
- Whole of service engagement in an Operational Plan to implement strategic goals
- Exceeding service delivery targets under our Service Agreements
- Embedding of services on Palm Island with a leased office and recruitment of an additional Palm Island community development worker
- Increased and consistent engagement with Charters Towers Warringnu and other services and clients in Charters Towers
- Increased engagement with First Nations women in prison
- Initial program of Domestic Violence legal education to the STARS schools program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls
- Advocacy and law reform submissions in areas of significance to First Nations women including the Inquiry into children in residential care
- Representation in the Senate Inquiry in Cairns into Missing and Murdered First Nations women and children, including support to the family of a Victim
- Cultural Competence training for staff
- Continuing strong collaboration with local and national networks
- Consent to join the membership of the new Women's Legal Services Australia, a company limited by guarantee
- Accreditation assessment and renewal

Structural Change

In the 2023-24, FNWLSQ's Management Committee has achieved a significant restructure of the service by appointment of a First Nations Chief Executive Officer and an Operations Manager dedicated to overseeing the management of the service.

Since the expansion of funding and increase in staff, commencing at the end of 2021, FNWLSQ has sought to provide a stable and sustainable service structure that would support legal service delivery to those most in need in regional and remote areas, provide a better quality service through innovation, and have the capacity to better raise awareness of the rights and issues affecting First Nations women in Queensland at a local, State and national level.

Among its work of overseeing the governance of FNWLSQ, the Management Committee redeveloped the FNWLSQ Strategic Plan, attended restructure meetings which analysed the opportunities, financial capacity and obstacles to making the change and the Chair assisted in recruitment. FNWLSQ also redeveloped an Operational Plan to implement the Strategic goals of the organisation, assisted greatly by the Operations Manager who facilitated the process.

At time of writing, FNWLSQ has appointed Penney Ferguson as CEO, Jane Andreassen as Operations Manager, and has recruited two early career solicitors. Although all of these appointments were finalised after 1 July 2024, the work to achieve the change was undertaken by the Committee in the 2023-24 year.

Strengthening of Services to Outer Regional and Remote Areas

FNWLSQ has had a long-term commitment to improving access to legal services for First Nation women living in Townsville and in more remote regional towns and communities. FNWLSQ has consistently maintained legal clinics in support services that assist women in crisis, including The Women's Centre in Aitkenvale, the NQ Domestic Violence Service ("DVNQ"), and Yumba Meta's Women's Shelters used by First Nations women escaping domestic violence.

FNWLSQ staff provided regular outreach visits in Townsville at:

The Women's Centre safe space for women

DVNQ Domestic Violence North Queensland

YUMBA-META LIMITED 1973-2023 Flora House & Elsie House



Charters Towers

One of the achievements of the 2023-24 year has been the embedding of service delivery and non-legal support services on Palm Island and in Charters Towers. FNWLSQ solicitor, Aaminah Khan has been instrumental in strengthening contact with the Charters Towers Warringnu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation. Warringnu offers a support services to First Nations people and has provided access for First Nations women needing legal support for a range of legal services such as domestic violence, child protection and other civil law matters. Aaminah and paralegal, Naomi Craigie have provided a monthly outreach service and visits with individual clients of FNWLSQ in Charters Towers. Relationships have been strengthened through attendance at events such as the Warringnu 30th year celebration.

Palm Island

FNWLSQ first established a fortnightly Domestic Violence duty lawyer service on Palm Island at the end of 2016 thanks to the initiative of Andrea Kyle-Sailor who became our first community development worker on Palm Island. Andrea has supported many women experiencing domestic violence and she has assisted Palm Island women in multiple ways: at the police station; assistance to attend DV court; explaining legal processes and terminology at court and at legal advice sessions; referrals to legal and other services for support; attendance at community events and providing legal information. Andrea's work has assisted women on Palm Island to be better informed of their rights and to access help and exercise their rights, in particular through the Domestic Violence court. In 2023 FNWLSQ obtained the lease of an office,

replacing the temporary spaces utilised. In June 2024, FNWLSQ began recruitment for a second community development worker to assist with the work on Palm Island. Community Development worker, Mheelin Sibley, was appointed after the end of the 2023-24 year.



Florence and Rachael attended the Information Fair, at Townsville Women's Correctional Centre.

Prison

Florence Onus has maintained regular visits to the Townsville Women's Correctional Centre in collaboration with Townsville Elders for Change. Activities include yarning circle, community education and referrals. Visits have been approximately monthly. FNWLSQ collaborated with Prisoners Legal Service to provide information to women in prison at a Prison Information Fair on 12 February 2024. Solicitor Rachael Edwards, and CDW Florence Onus, ran an information stall at the event and provided information and referrals for women. FNWLSQ solicitors and Client Support Officer Jody Martin-Savage, provide legal visits for women at the prison regularly on an "as-needs" basis.

Collaboration with Other Service Providers

FNWLSQ has continued strong collaboration with other legal and support services at a local, state and national level.

Women's Legal Services Australia

At a national level, FNWLSQ has continued strong engagement with Women's Legal Services throughout Australia through the Women's Legal Services Australia network.

WLSA advocates on behalf of women including First Nations women, in relation to the issues primarily affecting women who are assisted by WLS's. The work of WLSA is informed through the WLS's that participate in its committees. Some of the critical issues that WLSA has worked on in the 2023-24 year have included the impact of domestic violence on women and children, affirmative consent, the Family Law Amendment Bill and the need to ensure continuity of funding for vulnerable women who rely on the services provided by Women's Legal Services throughout Australia.

Women escaping violence are particularly impacted by the availability of women's legal services or their lack of availability. As many of their matters are complex, availability of specialist and trauma-informed legal assistance for women is essential to address issues such as domestic violence which impacts every aspect of women's lives from capacity to care for their children, to employment and the capacity to effectively engage in other legal issues such as family law.

Other Networks

FNWLSQ engages in a range of other legal networks for collaboration, information sharing and referrals. In the 2023-24 year this has included:

- ATSIWN – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Network
- ATSILAF – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Assistance Forum
- NQLAF – the North Queensland Legal Assistance Forum
- CAFLAF – Child and Families Legal Assistance Forum
- The Operational Working Group (OWG) for the specialist DFV court in Townsville and Palm Island

- Regular engagement with the Community Justice Group on Palm Island
- Community Development Worker engagement with a range of networks including Elders for Change (see section on community engagement)

Legal Services

FNWLSQ solicitors provide discrete advice, court representation and non-court casework. FNWLSQ recognises that vulnerable women often present with a range of legal issues which may require multiple legal services and non-legal support. The need for legal representation may include a range of problems such as housing / homelessness, domestic violence, parenting disputes, education issues for children, structural discrimination, poverty and family disputes. Non-legal support may involve in-house client support or referral to other support services such as Housing, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Service (TAIHS), health, counselling at places such as The Women's Centre, Financial counselling and dispute resolution and referrals for children's support.

Services Delivered

FNWLSQ has exceeded its overall targets and has met or exceeded its individual targets for legal advice and representation services, with a total of 6,592 services and 492 clients, including 293 new clients.



Information



Referrals



Legal Advices



Legal Tasks



Cases Opened



Discrete Non-Legal Support



Cases Closed



Community Legal Education Resources



Community Legal Education Activities



Outreach Services



Community Engagement



Law Reform

Clients by Location

Geographically, FNWLSQ's clients are predominantly from outer regional areas, a category that captures regional towns where FNWLSQ delivers services, including Townsville, Mount Isa, Charters Towers, Mackay and other regional areas. A smaller but significant portion of services are delivered to remote and very remote areas including Palm Island.

78%

Outer Regional

17.7%

Remote & Very Remote

2.8%

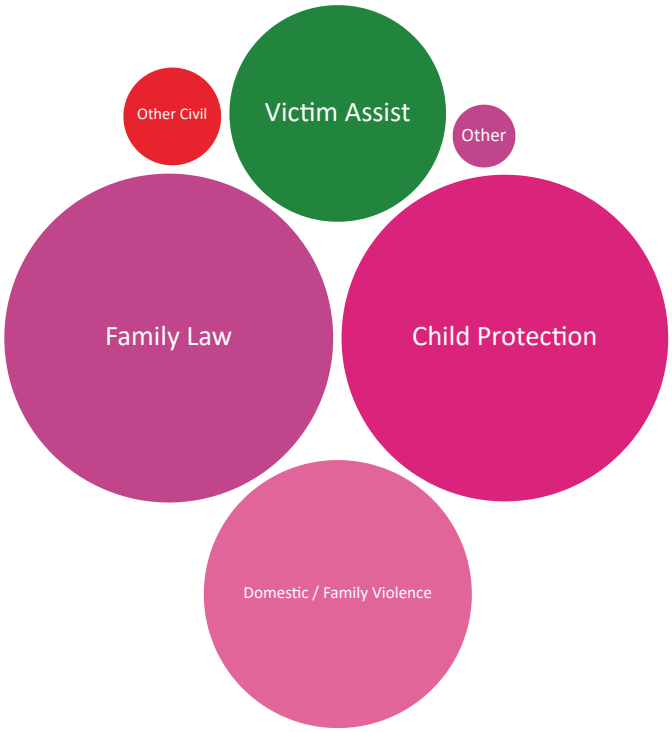
Inner Regional

1.3%

Major Cities

Areas of Law

The services provided by FNWLSQ are predominantly in 4 main areas of law (Family Law, Child Protection, Domestic/Family Violence and Victim compensation), with Family Law and Child Protection being approximately evenly divided). There has been a growing demand for Victim compensation which now forms one of the main services provided. FNWLSQ has also provided assistance and / or representation in legal matters such as Blue Card reviews, school exclusions and other school issues, discrimination and referrals for a range of non-legal or civil issues.



Area	# of Services	Percentage
Family Law	521	43%
Child Protection	514	42.4%
DFV	346	28.5%
Victim Assist	226	18.6%
Other Civil	46	3.7%
Other	19	1.5%

Court Attendance and Involvement with the Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Court and Other Courts

FNWLSQ is one of the legal services providing services to the Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Courts. FNWLSQ also provides remote court attendances by video link or by phone, to a range of regional and other courts where clients would not otherwise have legal representation.

During the 2023-24 financial year FNWLSQ provided representation in the following courts and tribunals:

- Specialist DFV courts in Townsville and Palm Island
- Magistrates Court, Children's Court and QCAT in Townsville
- Magistrates Court Mackay, remotely
- Children's Court, Proserpine
- Ayr and Charters Towers Magistrates Courts, in person and remotely
- Mount Isa Children's Court
- The Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, Townsville
- The Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia remotely

Collaboration with Other Services

The women we assist are often experiencing disadvantage in multiple areas of their lives, such as domestic / family violence, intersectional discrimination, financial disadvantage, homelessness, unemployment, mental health and child protection issues. Women experiencing coercive control from a partner or recent ex-partner may feel traumatised, overwhelmed and disempowered in dealing with the multiplicity of issues.

Where FNWLSQ is unable to provide a legal service, we will try to find another legal service to refer to, such as other community legal services, Legal Aid services, pro bono services, and in rare cases where a woman has financial capacity, to private law firms.

Non-Legal Support Services

FNWLSQ also provides a range of non-legal supports. In the 2023-24 year FNWLSQ provided 182 non-legal support services. FNWLSQ provides referrals to specialist non-legal services to assist clients to access personal support and support for their legal matter, for example, referral to the Townsville Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Service (TAIHS), counselling (e.g The Women's Centre), DV services (eg Domestic Violence NQ) and others. Community partnerships, established through networks and formal and informal agreements, have helped to build strength in promoting the safety of women and their children by improving awareness among other community organisations and increasing collaborative planning and engagement.

Law Reform

FNWLSQ undertook a number of law reform issues and collaborated with other services in relation to some law reform submissions, including:

- October 2023 contribution to consultation on the Human Rights Review into Strip Searching of women in prison (QHRC)
- August 2023 written submission to Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce in relation to the Criminal Law (Coercive Control and Affirmative Consent) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023
- October 2023, written submission to Review of Queensland's Residential Care System
- Contribution / endorsement WLSA submission, Family Law Amendment Bill 2023

Cultural Competency

As a community controlled service for First Nations women, cultural competence and cultural safety are integral to our practice. FNWLSQ's Management Committee are required to be appropriately qualified First Nations women. The Management Committee includes both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. As at the end of the 2023-24 year, First Nations women comprised over 50% of our staff. FNWLSQ's community development workers, Andrea Kyle-Sailor and Florence Onus also hold the title as cultural advisers to the organisation.

FNWLSQ also provides cultural competency training for Staff annually. On 5 December 2023, Glenda Duffy from Dawn Consulting provided a cultural competence training day for all staff.

Accreditation



FNWLSQ is an accredited community legal centre. A requirement of accreditation is maintaining quality standards of governance and service management. Re-accreditation inspections are carried out regularly prior to accreditation renewal. FNWLSQ's accreditation status was renewed on 17 April 2024 and is current to 17 April 2027.

Special Commendations for Staff

Congratulations to First Nations Solicitor, Serrina Kenny, who was awarded the Queensland Law Society Excellence in Law, First Nations Solicitor of the Year 2024 Award. Serrina is a strong advocate for First Nations women and we congratulate her on her award.

Special Commendation to Jane Andreassen who commenced (initially as Acting Operations Manager) in April 2024. Jane led our Operational Planning day, has overhauled many of the internal structures of the organisation, including financial management, office restructure, human resources, IT and electronic data. Jane continues to lead the transition of our data management system.

Thanks and commendations are also due to staff for their work and input to the broad range of services provided by FNWLSQ including:

- Andrea Kyle-Sailor for her representation at the Senate Inquiry in Cairns into Missing and Murdered First Nations women and children, including support to the family of a victim.
- Andrea Kyle-Sailor and Florence Onus for their presentations at the Family Safety Summit in Perth in 2023 and the 2024 CLCQ conference, presenting on the issue of domestic violence and intergenerational trauma.
- Andrea Kyle-Sailor for providing panel support and Florence Onus for presentation and Serrina Kenny for attendance at the Indigenous Justice Forum in Brisbane in February 2024.
- Jamarlia Coutts and Tobi Sam-Morris for managing intake clients with kindness, understanding and cultural appropriateness - their work makes our work possible.
- Jody Martin-Savage for her empowering and supporting women in her client support role.
- Jody Martin-Savage for organising FNWLSQ engagement at the International Women's Day event in Ingham on country, 8 March 2024.
- Tania Young and Rachael Edwards for ensuring consistent delivery of outreach services at crisis services in Townsville.
- Sunday Wedel for her strong child protection representation for First Nations women in Townsville and Mt Isa.
- Tania Young for her strong family law advocacy and representation for women in situations of high risk.
- Aaminah Khan for developing the Charters Towers outreach program and her strong advocacy as DV duty lawyer and casework on Palm Island.

- Florence Onus for initiating the contacts for domestic violence education to First Nations girls in the STARS schools programs.
- Sunday Wedel, Naomi Craigie, Serrina Kenny and Jody Martin-Savage for development, support, delivery of information and attendance at the STARS events.
- Tania Young and Sunday Wedel for their supervision of students and early career solicitors.



Serrina, Michele, Naomi, Jody and Tobi visit Nywaigi country for International Women's Day 2024.



Florence and Naomi visit Nywaigi country during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, May 2024.

Student Placements

In the 2023-24 year, FNWLSQ hosted two Work-Integrated Learning students, Amber Justice and Jordan Ashby. I would like to thank Amber and Jordan for choosing FNWLSQ to undertake their studies and for their contributions to our work. We wish them well in their future endeavours.

Management Committee

The Management Committee of FNWLSQ is to be commended for undertaking many hours of work to achieve the changes sought to restructure and streamline FNWLSQ in this 2023-24 financial year.

Special thanks to Topsy Mola as Chair for her exceptional leadership of FNWLSQ as we navigate these significant changes. Topsy's commitment and support to FNWLSQ on multiple levels has been exceptional.

The committee is to be commended for their consistent and active interest in the work of the service. I speak for all staff in expressing our appreciation and gratitude for their dedication and guidance to the service throughout the year.

Cathy Pereira
Principal Solicitor / Coordinator
First Nations Women's Legal Service Qld

Palm Island Report



The First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld (FNWLSQ) office on Palm Island has been instrumental in providing crucial support and services to the local community. Andrea Kyle-Sailor initiated the Palm Island service and has made significant contributions to addressing the unique legal needs of First Nations women on Palm Island.

Our office provides a range of domestic and family violence and other civil law services, including child protection matters, Victim Assist and Blue Care reviews. FNWLSQ continues to provide a fortnightly domestic and family violence duty lawyer service on Palm Island. Special thanks to Andrea, who has been integral in supporting women attending court by ensuring they are aware of court attendance, understand the nature of their legal proceedings and their legal options. Andrea's role in the duty lawyer service has been invaluable, as she assists solicitors with case knowledge, communication, transportation logistics, and liaison with clients, the Community Justice Group and Qld Police.

As a cultural advisor, Andrea provides guidance on cultural issues, collaborates with other agencies, Solicitors, Magistrates and other professionals to understand cultural competency and cultural safety. Andrea also provides cultural awareness to visitors and ensures visitors are aware of protocols specific to Palm Island.

Throughout the 2023-24 year, Andrea has engaged with the women on Palm Island through community activities, sharing information and referrals. Activities included but are not limited to, the Voice to Parliament Referendum, NAIDOC day events, and more. As a community development worker, Andrea engages in collaborative networks with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and community-based organisations in North Queensland and national networks such as the National Network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Legal Services. Andrea actively participates in the Operational Working Group for the specialist Domestic and Family Violence court on Palm Island. This engagement ensures that domestic and family violence cases are handled with cultural competency and appropriate legal support.

Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children

Andrea Kyle-Sailor attended a public hearing of the Legal and Constitutional Reference Committee Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children in November 2023. Andrea's testimony highlighted the challenges faced by the community on Palm Island. Andrea emphasised the limited scope of our service, which focuses on civil law matters such as domestic and family violence orders and child protection, rather than criminal cases. Despite this, Andrea noted the pervasive impact of violence and systemic issues on the island, including inadequate police response times. Andrea also discussed the cultural incompetency within the justice system and the need for more culturally safe specialist courts. Furthermore, Andrea highlighted the housing crisis on Palm Island, which exacerbates domestic violence issues. Andrea's testimony underscored the systemic failures in addressing violence against First Nations women and called for improved responses from law enforcement and support services.

International Women's Forum

Andrea was honoured to attend the International Women's Forum in Rockhampton in February 2024, organised by Sandra Creamer, board member of the International Women's Forum (FIMI) and Order of Australia medal for her leadership for First Nations Women and people on issues including health, rights and self-determination. The forum focused on economic empowerment, capacity building and leadership development.

The forum commenced with a Welcome to Country by the Darumbal people of the Rockhampton and surrounding areas. Forum sessions included an elders panel discussing localised issues affecting Indigenous women and girls and international guest speakers from Guam, New Zealand, Peru, Bolivia, and Hawaii. Each presenter spoke strongly about their work and their admiration for the work of First Nations women.



Aaminah Khan, Solicitor at FNWLSQ and Andrea Kyle-Sailor, Community Development Worker and Cultural Advisor at FNWLSQ attending Palm Island Domestic Violence Court.

Case Studies

Case Study One - Child Protection Early Intervention

Pre-emptive Action

First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld (FNWLSQ) assisted a mother who had recently reconciled with the child's father after raising the child as a single parent for years. Child Safety intervened and threatened to commence legal proceedings or remove the child. FNWLSQ advocated for the mother and met with the child safety officers to discuss the relevant issues. All parties agreed to a Safety Plan, with the child to remain with his mother under the terms of the Safety Plan.

Case Study Two - Family Law and Domestic Violence; Urgent Intervention / Critical Issues

FNWLSQ assisted a mother *Belinda, who had been experiencing domestic violence from her partner, "G", for many years. G was extremely controlling. He would control Belinda's friends. He would constantly go through her phone and demand that she explain everything in her internet history. G then attempted suicide and when Belinda tried to assist him, he blamed her for his suicide attempt and said that she did not support him enough. A few weeks later, Belinda decided to end the relationship as she could not cope with the abuse any longer. G took their child and disappeared. Belinda was extremely afraid for the child due to G's mental health, which had declined, and he had access to weapons.

FNWLSQ assisted Belinda to file urgently for a Domestic Violence Protection Order and began preparing documents to file for a Recovery Order to recover her child. G then returned with the child and remained in the home, refusing to allow Belinda to take the child from the home. FNWLSQ attended Court the following day and obtained a Domestic Violence Order with strict "no contact" conditions. The child was named on the DVO. The Police removed G from the residence. Due to obtaining an extensive and strict "no contact" Protection Order, Belinda and her child were protected from Belinda's abusive ex-partner, G.

Belinda thanked FNWLSQ and said that she was incredibly appreciative of our help in protecting her and her child.

** Not her real name*

Case Study Three - Child Protection - QCAT Application - Protection of Family Relationships

*Celia had 2 children who were under a Long-Term Guardianship Child Protection Order to the Chief Executive, Department of Child Safety. As a mother, Celia cared deeply about her children and maintained her contact with the children and her eldest child often expressed a wish to be with their mother. As the children were in long-term guardianship, the Department gave a lower priority to increasing the children's contact with their mother. Celia was able to see her children only 1.5 hours per month. Celia was not allowed to provide gifts to the children. The Department required her to give the gift to a Child Safety officer, who would unwrap the gift and then hand it to the child. The Department then changed Celia's contact with the children, requiring her to see them separately once a month. This deprived the children of a sense of "family" at their visits. The Department ignored Celia's concerns about her fear that the children were being abused in their foster placement, until the evidence was so strong that the Department had to remove the children from their foster carer due to abuse.

FNWLSQ assisted Celia to file an application in QCAT to review her contact. At the QCAT Compulsory Conference FNWLSQ assisted Celia not only legally but also emotionally with our client support officer.

FNWLSQ assisted Celia to negotiate with Child Safety. As a result of FNWLSQ support and assistance, Child Safety agreed to increase the children's contact with their mother. They agreed to Celia attending her eldest child's soccer games. The children were allowed regular telephone contact with their mother and were permitted to attend cultural events with her. They agreed to Celia handing the wrapped gifts to the children.
The ongoing support from FNWLSQ has enabled Celia to maintain more regular and meaningful family contact with her children. The experience was also empowering for Celia who felt heard and supported.

** Not her real name*

Case Study Four - Housing - Shortage of Community Housing

FNWLSQ assisted a Palm Island woman, *Renee, who was being evicted from her home due to a policy decision. Renee's situation was made more difficult by the fact that she had extended family members living in the house who would also require accommodation. Crown Law was representing government interests in applying the policy under Tenancy law.

As tenancy is not an area that we usually practice in, we initially sought to refer Renee to more specialist or pro bono services. Other services that we approached either could not assist or took the view that this was a cut and dried tenancy issue with no merit and it did not meet their casework guidelines. For Renee and her family the issue was critical, living in a small community with a housing shortage, as the deadline for eviction approached. Through further negotiation with Crown Law, FNWLSQ managed to secure alternative appropriate housing for Renee and her family in their community and the matter was resolved. The client was very happy with the outcome.

** Not her real name*

Case Five - Child Protection: Mother Acting Protectively. Keeping Children in Parental Care

NWLSQ assisted *Lani, to keep her children out of foster care after Lani had fled a domestic violence relationship. Child safety wanted to remove Lani's 3 children including newborn babies, based on their assessment that the father was a risk to the children's safety because of domestic violence. Lani had acted protectively by escaping the relationship, reporting the domestic violence to the police and going to a Women's Shelter. The court had issued a domestic violence order (DVO) and bail conditions prohibiting the father from having contact with Lani and the children. Lani was supported by the DV High Risk Team. Lani had arranged DV counselling for herself and was engaged with Domestic Violence services. Safety Plans were in place for the protection of the children.
In spite of the numerous protective factors, the Department wanted to remove the children, and applied to the court for a short-term custodial order. Attempts to negotiate with the Department failed. FNWLSQ represented the mother in the court proceedings. The Children's Court declined to grant interim custody of the children to the Department despite several attempts by the Department to obtain custody. The children remained in the care of their mother.
Without the assistance of FNWLSQ, Lani's children, including newborn babies, would have been removed. Instead of being directed to services to assist her to address the issues and keep her and her children safe, she would have had to deal with the trauma of child removal and the children's lives would have been disrupted. Outcomes for children may range from disruptive to devastating, noting that many children in out of home care are placed in residential placements due to the lack of home placements and 40% of children in youth detention come from a residential placement.

** Not her real name*

Community Engagement

Community engagement and development has continued strong throughout the 2023-24 year through stakeholder engagement, training and education, and cultural advice provided to the community sector and wider community.

Highlights of 2023-24 include:

CLCQ Conference Presentation
Applying First Nations Cultural Intelligence, Knowledge Sharing and Ways of Being and Doing.
Florence Onus and Andrea Kyle-Sailor presented on ways that knowledge of cultural traumas, intergenerational trauma and First Nations ways of being and doing, impact the work performed and the capacity of a CLC to work effectively with First Nations staff and clients.

National Indigenous Justice Forum, Brisbane
Andrea Kyle-Sailor and Florence Onus presented at the National Indigenous Justice Forum held in Brisbane during February 2024. Andrea was honoured to participate in a panel discussion, with Florence presenting an overview of our service and work being achieved in the domestic and family violence space.

Victim Assist: Cultural Healers Information Session
Florence Onus attended an information session hosted by Victim Assist to discuss the procurement process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and businesses that provide culturally safe therapeutic healing practices. This session was informative and will help guide our service when assisting clients with Victim Assist applications.

Department of Justice and Attorney General - First Nations Justice Office
FNWLSQ met with the Principal Projects Officer and the Community Engagement Officer at the First Nations Justice Office who provided an overview of their roles and how our organisations can work together to address and reduce domestic and family violence in the community.

Gurambilbarra Townsville Pride Festival
First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld are committed to providing and improving access to legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Queensland, including cis women, and sistergirls.

Jane Andressen and Aaminah Khan participated in the Gurambilbarra Townsville Pride march and hosted a stall at the Festival. We congratulate the organisers for an inclusive event where every one was welcome.



Jane hosting the FNWLSQ stall at Gurambilbarra Townsville Pride Festival, June 2024.



Small Steps 4 Hannah: Hannah's Story

Naomi Craigie and Serrina Kenney attended an interactive educational workshop hosted by Small Steps 4 Hannah. The workshop helps to identify the red flags and early warning signs of coercive control behaviours and helps to drive positive behaviour change.

Hannah Clarke and her three children were killed by Hannah's husband, the children's father in 2020. The two-hour social impact workshop is based around the events and people in Hannah's life - what they saw, heard and their suspicions.



Naomi and Serrina from FNWLSQ with Michael Jeh from Small Steps for Hannah, for the presentation of "Hannah's Story".

QCOSS Human Rights Consultation

Florence Onus was invited to participate in discussions with Scott McDougall, Qld Human Rights Commissioner, regarding the draft Anti Discrimination Bill 2024.

Information Fair at Townsville Women's Correctional Centre

FNWLSQ collaborated with Prisoners' Legal Service (PLS) to participate in the Legal Information Fair held at Townsville Women's Correctional Centre and initiated by PLS. Our staff engaged with women in the prison and provided legal information and resources. FNWLSQ staff assisted with information and intakes for future legal advice.

Other events:

- CLCA Review of Standard 16, Cultural Safety for First Nations Staff and Clients
- Beyond Awareness Workshop: Cultural Safe Practice in our Sector
- NAIDOC events; Corporate Breakfast, Deadly Day Out, Elders Speak
- The Referendum for The Voice to Parliament consultation with Dr Pat Anderson
- Elders For Change
- Anniversary of the National Apology event hosted by Relationships Australia Qld



NITV article published on SBS website promoting workshops in secondary schools delivered by FNWLSQ.

FNWLSQ features in NITV

First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld were pleased to see an article featuring our service and the work being conducted in High Schools across Townsville.

"Early education is critical, with many young women beginning unhealthy relationships at school which can continue throughout their lives" Sunday Wedel, Senior Solicitor at FNWLSQ.

The workshops have received positive responses from the young women so far. "Some of them have come out and said, I didn't know that was domestic violence" explains Naomi Craigie, Paralegal at FNWLSQ.

Community Legal Centres Queensland Conference







Top Left: Andrea Kyle-Sailor, Penny Sullivan (CLCQ) and Erica Kyle (Townsville Community Law) at CLCQ Conference in Brisbane, May 2024.

Top Right: Andrea Kyle-Sailor presenting at CLCQ Conference in Brisbane, May 2024.

Bottom Left: Andrea Kyle-Sailor, Margaret Hornagold (Legal Aid Qld), Barrister Joshua Creamer (Chair of Queensland's Truth Telling and Healing Inquiry) and Florence Onus at CLCQ Conference in Brisbane, May 2024.

Wunya - First Nations Employee Network Event



Group photo of 2023 Wunya attendees from CLCs in QLD.



Florence Onus at 2023 Wunya Smoking Ceremony.

Community Partners

On behalf of FNWLSQ, I acknowledge and thank our community partners during the 2023-24 year, including:

- Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA)
- 4 RRRR network (network of regional, rural and remote community legal centres)
- NQ Legal Assistance Forum
- Townsville Community Justice Group
- Palm Island Community Justice Group (referral pathways)
- Palm Island Community Corporation
- Domestic Violence North Queensland ("DVNQ")
- The Women's Centre Aitkenvale (monthly legal clinic)
- Yumba Meta Housing and Flora House and Elsie House Women's Shelters
- Victim Assist Queensland (Townsville)
- Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service ("TAIHS")
- Qld Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP)
- North Queensland Women's Legal Service (cross-referrals)
- Townsville Community Law CLC ("TCL"), Legal Aid Queensland ("LAQ"), and Qld Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service ("QIFVLS") (cross referrals and collaboration through the North Queensland Legal Aid Forum ("NQLAF")
- James Cook University's student placement program
- Community Gro Community Centre
- The Operational Working Group for the specialist domestic and family violence courts on Palm Island and in Townsville
- Charters Towers Warringnu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation
- High Risk Domestic Violence Team
- QPS Police Referral system

Women's Legal Services Australia

Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA) are the peak organisation for Community Legal Centres specialising in women's legal issues. Members of WLSA provide women with access to free legal assistance and support to escape and recover from violence and abuse.

First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld are proud to be a member of WLSA.

2023-24 Management Committee



Topsy Mola

Chairperson

Topsy was born and raised in Townsville and is a proud Wagadagam and Dowareb woman from Mabuiag Island and Dowar Island in the Torres Strait. A proud Torres Strait Islander woman with expertise in providing high level governance, strategic planning and cultural advice.

Topsy has worked in the human services and community development sector in both Government and non-Government sector for 30+ years. For the past 15 years Topsy has channelled her interest in leading change, advocacy, and support to families who have witnessed and/or experienced domestic and family violence. Through this work, Topsy has been appointed by the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Domestic and Family Violence to the State Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Domestic & Family Violence Prevention Group.

Topsy is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and has recently completed the Company Director's course. One of Topsy's passions is walking through the process of self-empowerment and professional support of people. This work enables individuals to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence and to recognise their full potential, skills and self-worth.

Deniece Geia

Deputy Chair



Deniece is a proud Bwgcolman woman from Palm Island. Deniece served two terms as a Councillor on Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and has held roles within Council including Deputy CEO and Acting CEO. Deniece is a member of the Palm Island Justice Group and currently works for Palm Island Community Company.

Deniece has advocated and represented her community on Palm Island for many years. Deniece joined FNWLSQ committee in 2023 and was elected Deputy Chair.



Nina Shibasaki

Treasurer

Nina is a proud Dauareb woman from Murray Island that is located in the Eastern Islands of Zenath Kes (Torres Strait). Nina joined FNWLSQ management committee in February 2020 and was elected as Treasurer. Nina has extensive community experience, having previously work at Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Services (TAIHS) for 14 years as a CPAC worker and Recognised Entity Advisor/ FGM facilitator. Nina currently works as an Anti-Violence Advisor with Sisters Inside.

Josephine Smallwood



Secretary

Josephine is a local Bindal elder with Jagalingou and Bidjara connections. Jospehine joined the FNWLSQ management committee in November 2023. Josephine has worked in government and non-government organisations as well as the private sector.

Josephine has an interest and passion for politics and driving policy changes with a social justice focus. Josephine has worked with families in crisis experiencing domestic and family violence, housing issues, legal issues and other issues impacting the community. Josephine is passionate about arts and culture, and views life through a cultural lens.

Josephine would like to see FNWLSQ deliver more intervention and prevention services for First Nations women, and believes in a holistic approach that includes families, stakeholders and agencies.

Christine Burgen

Committee Member

Christine joined the FNWLSQ management committee in November 2023. Christine has experience working in the community and legal sector in both Queensland and Northern Territory, having worked at Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service and Katherine Family Violence Prevention Legal Services.

2023-24 Staff Members

Thanks are due to all staff of FNWLSQ who have worked extremely hard throughout the 2023-24 year:

Administration Staff

- Tobi Sam-Morris

Community Development / Cultural Advisors:

- Andrea Kyle-Sailor
- Florence Onus

Client Support Officer:

- Jody Martin-Savage

Paralegal:

- Naomi Craigie

Solicitors:

- Tania Young
- Sunday Wedel
- Serrina Kenny
- Rachael Edwards
- Aaminah Khan
- Cathy Pereira
  (Principal Solicitor / Coordinator)

Acting Operations Manager:

- Jane Andreassen

Former Staff:

- Michele Bults
- Sandra South
- Minyaada Swan

Acknowledgements

Peak Body

First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld Inc. thanks the staff at Community Legal Centres Queensland for their proactive support, providing leadership forums, training and support for accreditation and best practice within CLC's in Queensland. We thank CLCQ for hosting its inaugural Wunya conference in Brisbane in 2023-24, which provided a forum for First Nations workers throughout the Queensland CLC sector to meet for networking, information sharing and training. All First Nations staff of FNWLSQ have attended the Wunya conferences.

Funders

First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld Inc thanks our funding bodies for their ongoing support for the service. In particular, thanks to:

The Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney General (DJAG) for its ongoing provision of funding to our service and for funding and recognising the needs of First Nations women through its Baseline funding. FNWLSQ acknowledges and thanks DJAG for its commitment to supporting the rights and needs of vulnerable women through the Vulnerable Women's Funding which it has provided to FNWLSQ. This has enabled the service to grow and extend its service on Palm Island and other regional outreach areas.

We thank the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) for its funding under the Indigenous Women's Outreach Project.

We thank the CLSP team, in particular our State Program Manager, Sarah Helen, for their support and management of the community legal service program.

Pro Bono Support

We are very thankful for the support of pro bono services from private law firms:

- McCullough Robertson for assistance in relation to leases and governance;
- Clayton Utz for support with governance training and frequent mentoring for FNWLSQ's Victim Assist services.

First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld Inc

ABN: 42 109 450 961

Servicing Queensland, Townsville and Palm Island

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admin@fnwlsq.org.au

www.fnwlsq.org.au

Monday to Friday 9:00am to 5:00pm

Monday to Friday 9:00am to 4:00pm



Our Logo

The woman holding the child is the association. The flower represents the beauty of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The vines represent the family and keeping culture alive.

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