

First Nations
Women's Legal

ANNUAL REPORT

2024 - 2025

We respectfully acknowledge the Wulgurukaba and Bindal peoples of the Townsville region, and the Manbarra and Bwgcolman peoples of Palm Island, the Traditional and Historical Owners of the lands on which First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld carries out its essential work. I also honour the Torres Strait Islander peoples, South Sea Islander peoples, and all Traditional Owners of the lands and waters across which we operate.

We pay our deepest respect to Elders past, present, and emerging, whose wisdom, courage, and resilience have sustained Country, culture, and community for countless generations. We recognise their enduring connection to land, sea, and sky, and their tireless role in nurturing, protecting, and teaching the stories, knowledge, and law of our peoples. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and affirm our commitment to honouring the rights, voices, and leadership of First Nations peoples in all aspects of our work.

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Sharon Phineasa



Language:
Kalaw Kawaw Ya
Community Connection:
Dauan & Saibai Islands, Torres Strait, QLD

Sharon Phineasa is a proud Zenadh Kes woman and a descendant of the Ayth-Koedal (Crocodile) and Dhoeybaw (Wild Yam) clans of Saibai and Dauan Islands in the Top Western Torres Strait. Her deep love and respect for her tribal ancestry and cultural heritage inspire her to create artworks that preserve and celebrate these vital aspects of her ancestral identity.

The source of Sharon's inspiration comes from the Kulba Adithil—the old stories, myths, and legends passed down by Island Elders, particularly her grandfather, who was a traditional carver. Her childhood experiences growing up on the islands have provided countless stories and cultural memories that continue to shape her creative practice. "I feel a great responsibility to pass on the knowledge and stories that have been passed on to me through artistic expression," Sharon shares. "On many occasions, I have felt a strong connection to my ancestors as I have told their stories through this means.

"Raised both in the Torres Strait and "down south," Sharon's work beautifully weaves together traditional and contemporary influences. While her cultural roots ground her art in ancestral storytelling, her exposure to the contemporary world has allowed her to explore new mediums and styles. She celebrates her feminine creative flair by infusing her works with vibrant tropical colours, inspired by the vivid spectrum of Torres Strait reefs — from deep ocean blue, sea greens, to luminous turquoise. Her work also features flowing forms and cultural symbolism that reflect the warmth, strength, and beauty of island women.

Each piece captures a harmony between cultural identity and modern expression—bold yet deeply grounded in heritage. Sharon has more than 25 years of experience practising as an Indigenous artist. Her creative journey is deeply rooted in culture, identity, and storytelling, drawing inspiration from her Torres Strait Islander heritage and lived experiences. Over the decades, Sharon has developed a

distinctive visual language that celebrates connection to her saltwater people, community, and ancestral knowledge, while continuing to evolve her practice through contemporary forms of expression and collaboration.

Notably, she designed the 2016 North Queensland Cowboys Indigenous Round jersey and was selected as a Torres Strait artist delegate for the 2012 Festival of Pacific Arts. In recent years, Sharon also had her works featured in The LUME's immersive exhibition titled "Connection: Land, Water, Sky – Art & Music from Indigenous Australians. "Currently based in Townsville with her husband and children, Sharon continues to balance her commitments to family, work, community, and art. She finds time to reconnect with her creativity—not only for herself but as an act of cultural continuity.

"Their hopes and dreams live on in us," she reflects,"and it is our responsibility to continue to keep our culture strong in all aspects of our lives. "Through her artistic journey, Sharon's work stands as a living bridge between past and present, honouring her ancestors while celebrating the feminine spirit and inspiring future generations to take pride in their culture, stories, and identity.



Photo by Jane Andreassen

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT 2024 2025

Maiem – Seu Ngapa - Welcome

It is my great pleasure to present the 2024–2025 Annual Report, marking my second year as Chair of the First Nations Women's Legal Service Queensland (FNWLSQ). This year has been one of strategic focus, growth, and consolidation for the Board, as we continue to strengthen governance, ensure accountability, and build long-term organisational sustainability. The Board has remained steadfast in guiding FNWLSQ's vision and mission, ensuring that every decision and strategic priority reflects the voices, rights, and needs of First Nations women across Queensland.

Central to our work has been ensuring that the organisation's strategic direction is aligned with cultural values, community priorities, and best practice governance standards. The management committee has worked closely with our Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Penney Ferguson to refine the Strategic Plan, establish clear operational goals, and implement systems to monitor progress and outcomes. This strategic focus ensures FNWLSQ remains a culturally safe, responsive, and forward-looking service, capable of meeting the evolving needs of our communities.

I pay tribute to our Management Committee for their dedication, leadership, and commitment throughout the 2024–2025 year. The Committee has managed a demanding and challenging workload, overseeing governance, strategic planning, and key organisational priorities, including the recruitment of executive staff. Their expertise, time, and unwavering support have been pivotal in strengthening FNWLSQ's governance, guiding its strategic direction, and ensuring the organisation continues to deliver for First Nations women. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to each member for their contribution.

Sincere thanks to our CEO, Penney Ferguson, who commenced in November 2024, and to our Operations Manager, Jane Andreasen. Penney's leadership, vision, and dedication, alongside Jane's expertise and commitment to operational excellence, have been invaluable in supporting the board to advance strategic initiatives, enhance organisational structures, and strengthen the service's impact for First Nations women.

I want to highlight the extraordinary contribution of our Principal Solicitor, Cathy Peiera, who for seventeen (17) years performed dual roles as both Principal Solicitor and Coordinator, demonstrating leadership, expertise, and dedication. Balancing these dual roles required immense skill, resilience, and commitment, as Cathy managed the delivery of high-quality legal services while coordinating programs, staff, and community engagement. She navigated the significant challenges of ensuring operational efficiency, mentoring staff, and responding to the complex needs of First Nations women, all while maintaining a focus on culturally safe, empowering legal representation. With the commencement of our CEO, Penney Ferguson, Cathy's dual responsibilities concluded, allowing her to concentrate fully on her role as Principal Solicitor. Throughout her tenure, Cathy has also been a tireless advocate for systemic change and law reform, ensuring the voices, rights, and experiences of First Nations women are heard, respected, and acted upon. Her dedication, professionalism, and unwavering commitment have been central to FNWLSQ's success and its ability to meaningfully support and empower First Nations women.

A vital part of FNWLSQ's success continues to be our exceptional staff. I want to acknowledge the unwavering commitment, professionalism, and dedication of all our team members. Without their tireless work, FNWLSQ could not deliver the high-quality legal, advocacy, and community support services that First Nations women rely on.

I wish to sincerely acknowledge our funding bodies for their ongoing support. Without their continued investment and commitment, FNWLSQ would not be able to deliver the vital legal services, advocacy, and community programs that support First Nations women across Queensland. Their partnership enables us to maintain high-quality, culturally safe, and responsive services, and we are deeply grateful for their trust and collaboration in helping us achieve our mission.

It is important to recognise and acknowledge the First Nations women who engage with FNWLSQ's services. Your courage, resilience, and determination in the face of systemic barriers and personal challenges inspire and guide everything we do. It is your strength and voice that drives our work, and we are committed to supporting, empowering, and advocating alongside you. FNWLSQ exists because of and for you, and we are honoured to stand with you in your journey toward justice, safety, and self-determination.

Over the past year, the management committee has placed a strong emphasis on governance development with culture at the centre, ensuring that FNWLSQ remains resilient, accountable, and sustainable. This has included reviewing board processes, enhanced committee oversight, and embedding robust policies that safeguard the organisation's integrity and future growth. By strengthening governance and strategic oversight, the board ensures that FNWLSQ can respond effectively to emerging challenges, advocate for systemic change, and continue to empower First Nations women in all aspects of their lives.

Looking ahead, the board remains committed to providing strong governance, strategic guidance, and leadership that supports FNWLSQ's ongoing growth and sustainability. We will continue to focus on embedding cultural safety, gender-responsive and culturally responsive practices, and community-led decision-making across all aspects of the organisation. Our goal is to ensure that FNWLSQ not only meets the current needs of First Nations women but also continues to be a leading voice for justice, equity, and empowerment across Queensland.

In closing, I thank the management committee, executive team, staff, Elders, funding partners, stakeholders and community members for their ongoing commitment, support, and collaboration. It is through our shared vision, dedication, and cultural connection that FNWLSQ continues to thrive and make a meaningful difference in the lives of First Nations women and children. I am proud to be part of this organisation and look forward to the year ahead, building on our achievements, learning from our experiences, and strengthening our service for the communities we serve.

Au Essoau – Koeyma Esso – Thank you

Topsy Mola
Chairperson



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Topsy Mola

GAICD Chairperson

Community connection: Proud Waggadagam and Dowareb woman, with connections to Mabuiag and Murray Islands in the Torres Strait. Born and raised on Gurambilbarra - Townsville. Topsy joined our Management Committee back in 2018

Professional highlights include over 30 years' experience in human services and community development. As the Owner and Principal Consultant of Mola Consulting driving strategic reform across corporate, not-for-profit, and government sectors. For more than 15 years Topsy has led critical work in domestic and family violence prevention centred on healing and empowerment of women, families and communities previously impacted by violence and harm. Currently recognised for her cultural leadership and expertise in systems reform with a ministerial appointment to the State Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Group. Topsy is passionate about ensuring voices of First Nations women are heard at every level of decision-making and legal services are delivered in ways that are culturally safe, inclusive, and grounded in community.



Deniece Geia

Deputy Chairperson

Community connection: Palm Island. Girramay; Aboriginal and South Sea Islander descent.Deniece joined our Management Committee in 2023.

Professional highlights include Deniece's current role as the Community Justice Group Coordinator at Palm Island. No matter her career, her main goal has always been to keep women in the community safe and empowered. She has experience in the health and education sectors, then became Youth Coordinator at the local PCYC. For more than 10 years Deniece has done work in the criminal justice system to advocate and bring change. On top of that, she has been a local government executive and Politician. Many of the community may be in a worse position without Deniece's passion and dedication. In all her experience she has learned many women don't know what to do when faced with court, or child safety. She selflessly puts herself out there for the Bwgcolman community living in Townsville and outlying areas, in the hopes to connect them in having access to legal services, advice and representation.



Nina Shibasaki

Treasurer

Community connection: Daureb from Murray Island that is located in the Eastern Islands of Zenath Kes (Torres Strait) Nina joined our Management Committee in 2020

Professional highlights include working in various government and non-government agencies in her Townsville Community. She also worked in Education within the Zenadth Kes (Torres Strait) region. Her long-time experience lies with supporting women and families who have been severely affected by Domestic Violence and the Child Protection system. Nina has been a Child Protection Advisor for many years and now is working even harder to support criminalised women, young women and their families as Anti-Violence worker with Sisters Inside. The passion Nina carries every day that drives her is working closely with women and young women to help build strength, resilience and empowering them to be the best they can be for themselves, their family and their community. Nina generously gives of her time and expertise to make pathways and give opportunities for women and families that might not get them otherwise..



Josephine Smallwood

Community connection: Bindal elder with Jagalingou and Bidjara connections Josephine joined our Management Committee in 2023

Professional highlights include working 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.



Karen Johnson

Community connection: Kuku Yalanji; Waanyi; Birri Gubba; and Mununjali Karen joined our Management Committee in 2024

Professional highlights include achieving a Bachelor of Laws and a Bachelor of International Studies majoring in International Relations. She had the opportunity to go to Czechia on a short-term study program at Masaryk University. Focussing on constitutions and the governance of sovereignty. On a trip to Jordan and Qatar, she was informed about how international actors navigate and engage in diplomacy. Karen carries a deep passion for First Nations Peoples, in particular women, to become familiar with the legal system and to understand their legal rights. She is grateful to be a part of an Organisation that is vital in assisting our women by informing and representing their legal rights and interest. Karen's learning journey does not appear to be coming to an end anytime soon starting Practical Legal Training to grow even more in her understanding of the legal systems and potentially practice in the future.

Tara Bell

Community connection: Kalkadoon Tara joined our Management Committee in 2024

Professional highlights include Field and Compliance Officer with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development after 21 years in various roles within the Department. She is an authorised officer appointed by the Director General to exercise investigative powers and take compliance action. For 10 years Tara has served as a Director on the Board for the Kalkadoon Native Title Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC and Kalkadoon Community Pty Ltd. Meeting the needs of the Kalkadoon people to improve social and emotional wellbeing whilst adhering to and meeting the objects of the corporations' Rule Book. Tara is a well-respected point of contact for the Kalkadoon people in her community. Both her professional, voluntary and personal experience has exposed her to legal systems like court proceedings, sentence management, probation and parole with persons in custody. Her insights have been valuable on our Management Committee.

TREASURER'S REPORT 2024/25 FINANCIAL YEAR

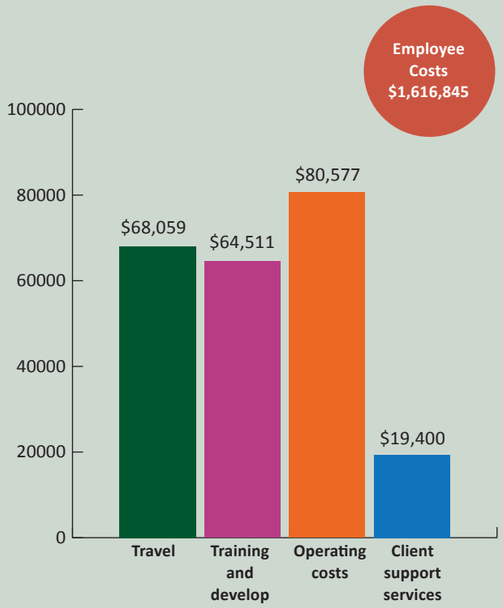
This year, the organisation continued to benefit from the ongoing support of its two key programs, funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG). In addition, supplementary funding was secured to further invest in staff capability, service delivery, and system enhancements.

Total grant funding received during the year amounted to $2,160,197.

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 $628,712 were also injected into the service in FY25. Total expenditure for the year amounted to $2,206,927, representing a decrease of approximately $12,430 compared to the prior year.

Major expenditure items included:



These costs are essential to the effective delivery of the organisation's objectives.

The Management Committee maintains strong financial oversight, reviewing actual results against budget on a bi-monthly basis. Of the total funding received and carried forward, $427,957 remained unspent as at 30 June 2025 and has been carried forward for use in FY26.

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$886,691

Held in cash and cash equivalents (including term deposits).

$155,464

Capital expenditure invested in the premises and equipment purchases.

$24,967

The total provision for employee benefits, comprising annual leave and long service leave, increased by $24,967 from the prior year.

Audit Outcome

The external auditor, Jessups, issued an unmodified audit opinion on the financial statements, confirming that they present a true and fair view of the organisation's financial position.

Lease Liabilities

Lease liabilities have decreased in accordance with the annual contract schedule.

Liquidity Position

As at 30 June 2025, FNWLS reported a current ratio of 1.40 (2024:1.23), indicating that the organisation maintains sufficient current assets to meet its short-term obligations as they fall due. The current ratio remains stable compared to the previous year.

In closing, the organisation remains in a sound financial position, underpinned by strong governance, prudent financial management, and continued support from key funding partners. The steady current ratio, responsible management of expenditure, and ongoing investment in staff, systems, and infrastructure reflect a commitment to sustainability and service excellence. With a solid foundation and unqualified audit outcome, the organisation is well positioned to continue delivering high-quality services and achieving its objectives in the year ahead.

This report was co-authored by Nina Treasurer and Tracey Accountant.

IMPACT REPORT

Townsville

Monthly clinic at the Women's Centre Yumba Meta, Flora House and Elsie House helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women escaping violence Regular visits to the Townsville Women's Correctional Centre in collaboration with Elders for Change

- Yarning circles and community education
- Legal and support service referrals

Prison Information Fair resulted in continued engagement for women in prison accessing our services.

Charters Towers

Monthly clinic in collaboration with Warringnu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation

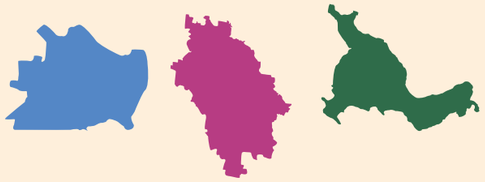
Attend local Community Events

Palm Island

Office based on Palm Island
Duty Lawyer service for the Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Court since 2016

Community Development supporting women who are experiencing DFV

- Support at DFV Court
- Attend Police Station
- Provide referrals and other supports
- Attend community events
- Deliver legal information sessions



We strengthen our community connections with outreach projects

We make an impact when we improve access to legal services for First Nations women living in regional, rural, remote and very remote communities.

We aim to change laws and policies that serve our communities

We make an impact when we participate in law reform and advocacy. We hope to change the laws and policies that actively work against First Nations women and their children.

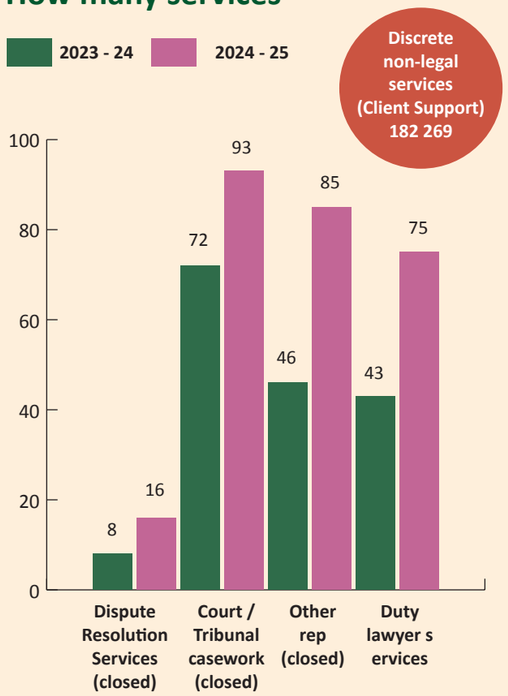
We operate from a strengths-based Service Delivery

There was growth in all areas of service delivery type when comparing 2023-24 with 2024-25. This growth is attributed to the recruitment of additional lawyers in late 2024 along with the dedication and commitment of all solicitors.

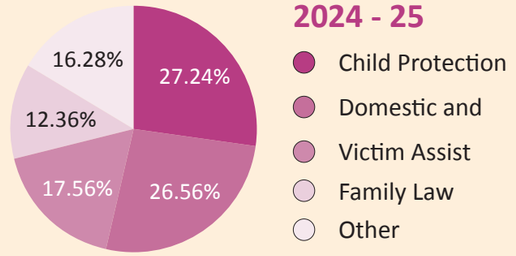
Strengths based service delivery

1290 Informations	**1119** Referral	**877** Legal Advice
1115 Legal Task	**269** Discrete Non-Legal Service (Client Support)	**19** Community Legal Education
5 Law Reform	**79** Stakeholder Engagement	**17** Community Education

How many services



Main Problem Types / Areas of Law



March 2025

Submission to expert legal panel on reforms to the Youth Justice Act 1992

2024/25

JAN FEB MAR
APR MAY JUN
JUL AUG SEPT
OCT NOV DEC

June 2025

Consultation with the Qld Sentencing Advisory Council

July 2024

Submission to the Independent Review of the Human RightsnAct 2019 (Qld) Submission to the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

May 2025

Submissions to the Qld Sentencing and Advisory Council assessing the impacts of domestic and family violence sentence reforms in Queensland

CEO REPORT

From 4 November 2024, the First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld (Serviceemployed its first indigenous Chief Executive Officer (CEO). I acknowledge and thank Cathy Pereira for running the Service in her previous dual role as Principal Solicitor / Coordinator. Without her, this Service would likely not exist today.

The strategic direction of the Service has always been guided by a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Many volunteers across several Management Committees over the years have worked hard towards the goal of having an identified position for the CEO. We now live in that reality.

The Change Journey has been Challenging

The Team have faced a challenging year. A restructuring creates enough disruption for a team let alone the weather event of February 2025 that caused us to relocate to a temporary office. The team moved to a hybrid model and at the date of writing, we are still displaced. Our clients rely on our presence at Federation Place and were also affected by this disruption.

New leadership always brings a new perspective and ways of working; starting with deep listening to find ways to meaningfully contribute to and lead the team. Over FY25, funders also took a special interest in the wellbeing and sustainability of the workforce by providing additional grants for Uplift and Pay Parity. Understanding the sector, the early work focused on building resilience into the team to counteract its highly transient nature.

Launching a review of the operations and positions within the Service was a risk worth taking. The aim was to make the best use of our resources, legal expertise and community knowledge. The team rapidly evolved during this time farewelling some of our longest standing team members and welcoming fresh faces. The team adapted to every change and this process took many twists and turns.

We had plans to transition to a paperless office including transitioning our Client Management System (CMS), much of which was fast-tracked when we went hybrid. Other parts of the plan were delayed, changing our CMS now scheduled for October 2025. Despite the setbacks, the team have rallied for one another and our clients to keep our Service running.

Negotiating New Funding Agreements

Community Legal Centre's Queensland (CLCQ) hosted a Leadership Forum that I was whisked off to on my first day at the Service. The hottest topic was the end of our previous 5-year funding agreements and what our futures will look like. This was intricate given the upcoming election and uncertain political climate at the time. The Service had even more at stake with the newly implemented restructure. The highest priority was to secure a favourable funding agreement. I want to take a moment to thank Christina and Vanessa from the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), and Sarah from Legal Aid Queensland (LAQ, managing on behalf of DJAG) for their management of our contracts and collaborative efforts to provide much needed legal services. The new funding amounts were announced about May 2025 because of sector advocacy, many meetings, consultations and strategic planning. The new government in Queensland appointed the Department of Justice to distribute its 2025-2030 contracts. The money still comes from both State and Federal governments but will be managed and reported to one central location. Allowing our corporate overheads to be more efficient.

Accreditation and Continuous Improvement

We have worked closely with CLCQ to ensure we maintain our Accreditation that was granted in early 2024. Much thanks to Penny (CLCQ) who has supported the work of our Service and her insights been invaluable throughout the year. Strategic Networks and the United Nations We participate in networks at a local, state and national level, for example, the National Rural Regional Remote and very Remote (RRRR) Network, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Network, and multiple Legal Assistance Network Forums. All of which add value and expertise to our Service delivery and strategic footprint.

The Women's Legal Services Australia have increased their visibility on a national scale, being recognised for its work through a new funding stream. The skills and collective knowledge that is shared as a member of this network from the leadership group to each of its committees is invaluable to the work we do on the ground. A special law reform project we were a part of this year was the 'First Nations Women's Engagement with the Family Law System – Insights from Women's Legal Services'. This report was a collaborative effort between WLSA and the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEVAW) and funded by the Australian Government. We look forward to its completion, findings and launch soon.

We were invited to attend the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69) at the United Nations in New York. I am grateful to the Management Committee for allowing me to represent our communities, and both Community Legal Centres Australia (CLCA) and Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA). The experience was filled with shared learning of indigenous peoples and women's experiences across the globe.

Final Thanks and Appreciation

My parents are my reason. With love, they worked hard and sacrificed to create opportunities for all their four children. Special thanks to Jane, our Operations Manager, who has been the backbone of keeping our operations going through multiple disruptions. Lastly, to Topsy and this Management Committee, your input and oversight has created the opportunity for my professional development and personal growth as well as the evolution of our Service. I appreciate the hours you volunteer and the cultural knowledge you generously share as we mold the First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld.

Thank you from your inaugural CEO,

Penney Ferguson
CEO



PRINCIPAL SOLICITOR'S REPORT

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Townsville region, the Bindal and the Wulgurukaba peoples, and the Manbarra and Bwgcolman, 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 2024-25 year

The 2024-25 financial year has been a challenging year for First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld ("FNWLSQ"). While we successfully restructured toward the end of the 2024 year, the service has been impeded to some degree in the delivery of services. FNWLSQ has appointed a First Nations Chief Executive Officer, Penney Ferguson and the Principal Solicitor role is now a stand-alone role. The Principal Solicitor remains responsible for the work of the solicitors and legal service delivery.

A snapshot summary of FNWLSQ's significant achievements in the 2024-25 financial year include:

- Restructure of the service
- Increased DV duty lawyer services to Palm Island
- Increase in legal casework
- Sustained outreach services to The Women's Centre
- Increased and consistent engagement with Warringnu in Charters Towers and other services and clients in Charters Towers
- Increased engagement with First Nations women in prison
- Increased delivery of child protection services to Mount Isa

Collaboration with legal & other

As Principal Solicitor at FNWLSQ for 2024-25, I acknowledge and thank the legal and related community partners who worked with us during the year. FNWLSQ collaborates with other legal and support services at a local, State and national level. I attend the WLSA Family Law and Domestic Violence subcommittee when possible. The meetings provide an opportunity for collaboration on law reform and updating information in relation to the impact of the family law system on women.

FNWLSQ engages in a range of other legal networks for collaboration, information sharing and referrals. In the 2024-25 year this has included:

- 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
- Community Development Worker / Cultural Adviser on Palm Island provided regular engagement with the Community Justice Group on Palm Island
- Community engagement with a range of networks including Elders for Change and the STARS school program

I would particularly like to commend the TAIHS Family Participation Program for its Family Led Decision Making services in helping families who are going through the Child Protection system to develop plans to support their children and promote reunification with their families. This important work of TAIHS has enhanced family connection for children in out of home care, notwithstanding the challenges of the child protection system.

Cross check & service targets (deliverables)

FNWLSQ completed the 2024-25 cross-check in collaboration with Townsville Community Law on 4 July 2025.

In 2024-25, FNWLSQ met most of its targets and exceeded many of them in spite of challenges to service delivery. The most marked increase occurred in the delivery of discrete non-legal services (increase of 47%) and DV duty lawyer services (74% improvement). Other improvements included increased casework in all categories (court/tribunal work; other representation; family dispute resolution). See stats Impact Report. Credit for these improvements is owed to the hard-working staff including solicitors and legal support staff. In terms of service delivery, the legal and legal support staff are to be commended for sustaining and even strengthening the service delivery in some respects during this most challenging of years.

Funders & pro bono

As the previous Coordinator, I thank our funding bodies for their ongoing financial support for the delivery of legal services to First Nations women in North Queensland.

The Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney General (DJAG) has provided ongoing funding to our service and has recognised the needs of First Nations women through its Baseline funding and Vulnerable Women's Funding which it has provided to FNWLSQ. I would like to thank and acknowledge the National Indigenous Australians Agency for its funding under the Indigenous Women's Outreach Project.

We are very thankful for the support of pro bono services from private law firms, in particular in this financial year McCullough Robertson for legal advice and Clayton Utz for support in a variety of capacities including support for Victim Assist work.

Management committee

The Management Committee of FNWLSQ is to be commended for undertaking many hours of work in support of the service, including supporting the legal work of the service and supporting the restructure and issues arising from the logistics of this significant change. Special thanks to Topsy Mola as Chair and Deniece Geia as Deputy Chair. 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.

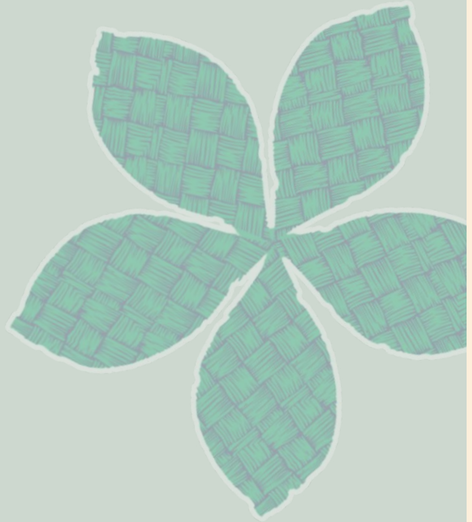
Staff & Students

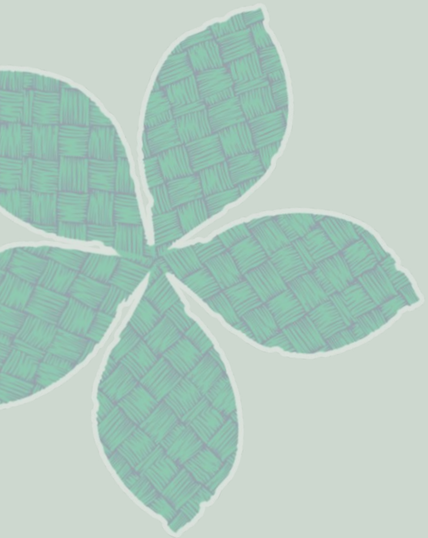
Kula and Grace began working with FNWLSQ in November 2024, both on a part-time basis due to their other commitments. Kula has remained with FNWLSQ and continues to work with us while completing her PhD in legal anthropology.

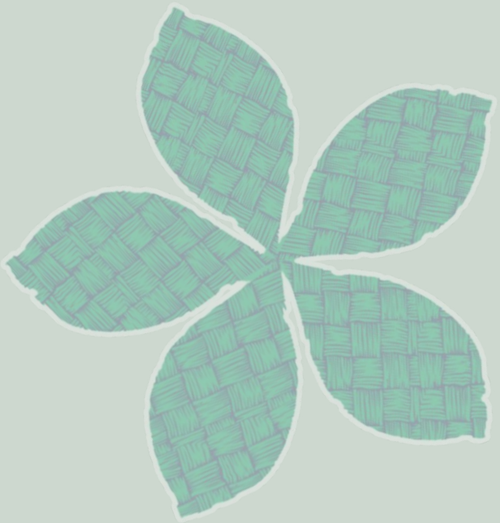
Two of our First Nations staff, Solicitor Serrina and administrative officer, Tobi left the service. One of our valuable long-term First Nations staff members left FNWLSQ during the 2024-25 year, Andrea Kyle-Sailor. Andrea's departure is a significant loss to the service and to the leadership that she provided in cultural, law reform, referrals and in particular to the service on Palm Island.

FNWLSQ welcomed new staff members, community development worker Shay-Leigh and administrative assistant Tallara in 2024-25.

In the 2024-25 year, FNWLSQ hosted a Work-Integrated Learning student from JCU, Sashini. Sashini's placement was disrupted due to the February weather events, but during her placement she undertook a variety of work, including development of an information sheet for coercive control and was a pleasure to work with. We wish her well in her ongoing legal journey.







THANK TEAM MEMBERS

First Nations Women's Legal extends its heartfelt thanks to our dedicated team whose professionalism, determination have been the foundation of our work throughout the year. In what has been a challenging and demanding period, every member of the organisation has contributed tirelessly to ensuring that our clients receive the highest quality legal and support services. The achievements of this year reflect the strength of our collective effort, the depth of expertise, and our shared commitment to improving access to justice for the communities we serve.

Aaminah Khan, Solicitor
Cathy Pereira, Principal Solicitor
Florence Onus, Community Development Worker
Jane Andreassen, Operations Manager
Jarmalia Coutts, Administration Officer
Jody Martin-Savage, Client Support Officer
Kula Kalinoe, Solicitor
Mheelin Sibley, Community Development Worker
Naomi Craigie, Paralegal
Penney Ferguson, Chief Executive Officer
Rachael Edwards, Solicitor
Raijeili Rokocibi, Secretary to Management Committee
Shay-Leigh Mow, Community Development Worker
Tallara Sorbello, Administrative Assistant
Tania Young, Senior Solicitor
Sunday Wedel, Senior Solicitor

During 2024-25, we farewelled:

Andrea Kyle-Sailor, Community Development Worker
Grace Tongatua, Solicitor
Serrina Kenny, Solicitor
Tobi Sam-Morris, Administration Officer

CLIENT JOURNEY STORY

One client's journey through a Child Protection matter

Three children were removed from a woman by the Department of Child Safety (Department). The main reasons given were parenting, minor substance misuse, and domestic violence by the father of the children. The children ended up in out of home care with non-indigenous carers and the Department seeking a 2-year order. The woman was being stalked by the father, the placement was unsupportive, and the client worked out of town to make ends meet. This did not help with the reunification. Our Service helped by giving legal advice, representation, and referrals. Eventually, the woman showed she could address all the issues and was able to find safe housing. The woman achieved a short order with the children returned home.

One client's journey through Domestic and Family Violence Court

An older woman was experiencing elder abuse by a younger family member. She was pressured to give authority to the abusive family member. This authority would 'help' her when she became ill. Instead, the older woman experienced financial abuse, she was distanced from others through social isolation, and there were regular threats of violence. Our Service gave legal advice and representation to this older woman to get protection from the abuse and coercive control. Eventually, the court granted a domestic violence order with strong conditions.

One client's journey through a complicated family law process

A woman feared for her child's safety and wellbeing. The father of the child was in and out of prison and after a release he took and withheld the child. Our Service was able to help the woman with an urgent recovery order. Even though the father got a lawyer and there was an agreement to return the child the father was incarcerated again for violent offences during proceedings. The matter was put on the Evatt List, which is a way for qualified professionals to manage high-risk family law cases in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. Thanks to our lawyers the court granted an Order to suspend all contact with the father before his release. Eventually, there was an agreement to give the father supervised contact at a contact centre. The matter was transferred to another location after both parties and the ICL moved away. ATSILS agreed to assist the client to final hearing after the support and transfer from our team.

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS

First Nations Women's Legal community engagement and development reached across a wide range of areas throughout the 2024-25 year, reflecting our commitment to building strong relationships in regional and rural communities.

Highlights of 2024-25 include:

Charters Towers Community Day

Our team was thrilled to take part in the vibrant Community Day in Charters Towers, hosted by Prospect Community Services. The event brought together locals, community organisations, and service providers to celebrate connection and raise awareness of the diverse support available in the region. It was a wonderful opportunity to share information about our services, meet with community members, and strengthen partnerships in a welcoming and energetic atmosphere.



Palm Island

Our Palm Island team was delighted to celebrate International Women's Day on Palm Island at the courthouse, where we connected with a wide range of community members and local stakeholders. The event ran throughout the day and offered opportunity for open discussions and meaningful engagement. Sincere thanks to the Palm Island stakeholders and Palm Island Community Company for their generous hospitality and for bringing the community together to honour women's achievements.



Visit from Deputy Director General of Justice Policy and Reform

First Nations Women's Legal was honoured to welcome Kate Connors, Deputy Director General of Justice Policy and Reform, to our Townsville office. The visit provided a valuable opportunity to discuss the complex work we undertake in Family Law, Child Protection, and Domestic and Family Violence. Our organisation remains fully committed to advocating for the rights and needs of our clients, striving to ensure their voices are heard within the legal system. This engagement further strengthens our relationships with government stakeholder to advance meaningful reforms and support for First Nations women and families.



sessions

First Nations Women's Legal delivered community legal education sessions throughout the 2024-25 year, focussing on a variety of legal topics. One of our Solicitors was honoured to be invited to a women's group on Palm Island to provide valuable information to women about their rights and options for support as a victim of crime.



NAIDOC Day

First Nations Women's Legal proudly participated in NAIDOC celebrations, an important occasion to honour and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Isander cultures, histories, and achievements. NAIDOC Day is more than a ceremony; it's an affirmation of identity, strength, and resilience that inspires our organisation's commitment to justice and advocacy for First Nations women.



Other events:

- Attendance at National Indigenous Legal Conference.
- White Ribbon Walk and Community Education Workshop with Kirwan Clontarf Academy
- Mayo Lecture: An Aboriginal Perspective (from the Bench) by Judge Nathan Jarro.
- First Nations Leadership Forum, Cairns with an On Country workshop on Green Island.
- Wunya 2024.
- Seniors Expo hosted by Department of Child Safety, Seniors, Disability Services and Multicultural Affairs.
- First Nations Youth Jobs Expo hosted by Regional Development Australia Townsville and NWQ.
- First Nations Women's Legal Services Qld Children's Day Art Exhibition.
- Community and Services Networking Forum hosted by Communities for Children Townsville West and The Smith Family.
- Community Cabinet with Queensland Government.
- Community Legal Education: Domestic and Family Violence Early Intervention. Delivered to STARS participants at Pimlico State High School, Thuringowa State High School and Heatly Secondary College.
- Gurambilbarra Townsville Pride Festival.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

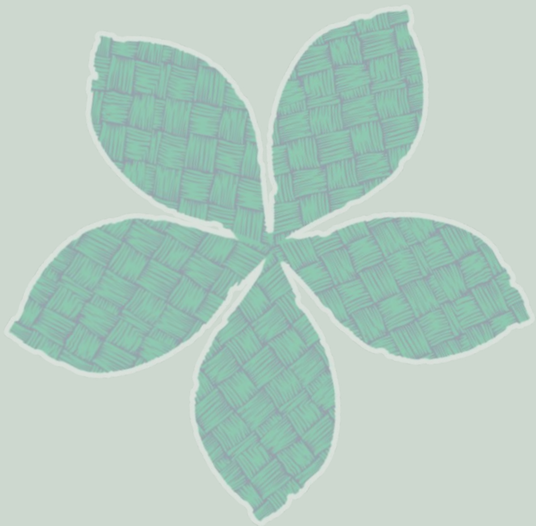
First Nations Women's Legal acknowledges and thanks our community partners who worked with us during the 2024-25 year, including:

- Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA)
- 4R Network (network of regional, rural, remote, and very 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 (Women's Shelters)
- Victim Assist Queensland (Townsville)
- Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service (TAIHS)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (ATSILS)
- Qld Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP)
- North Queensland Women's Legal Service (cross-referrals)
- Townsville Community Law, Legal Aid Queensland, and Qld Family Violence Legal Service (cross referrals and collaboration through the North Queensland Legal Assistance Forum)
- James Cook University's student placement program
- The Operational Working Group for the specialist domestic and family violence courts on Palm Island and in Townsville
- Charters Towers Warringu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation
- Prospect Community Services, Charters Towers
- High Risk Domestic Violence Team
- QPS Police Referrals
- Elders for Change
- STARS school program at various high schools in Townsville.

Networks

First Nations Women's Legal

- Women's Legal Services Australia Family Law and Domestic Violence Network
- North Queensland Legal Assistance Forum
- Child and Families Legal Assistance Forum
- Operational Working Group for the specialist DFV court in Townsville and on Palm Island



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our appreciation to **Community Legal Centres Queensland (CLCQ)** for their continued commitment to strengthening the sector through leadership development, training activities, accreditation support and advocacy for sustainable funding. We also acknowledge CLCQ for hosting the second Wunya Conference in Brisbane during 2024-25, which offered an important platform for the First Nations employee network across Queensland's CLC network to connect, share knowledge, and enhance best practice.

We warmly thank **Community Legal Centres Australia (CLCA)** for their strong support and leadership at the national level. CLCA play a key role in backing community legal centres all around the country by pushing for sustainable funding and policy and law reform.

We sincerely thank **Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA)** for their dedicated national leadership and tireless advocacy. Their successful efforts in securing a historic, dedicated funding stream for women's legal services through the National Access to Justice Partnership have been a major step forward in supporting women experiencing family and domestic violence across Australia. This landmark achievement strengthens the capacity for us to provide specialised, trauma-informed legal assistance and support, ensuring that women have access to the justice and protection they deserve.

We thank 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 and vulnerable women through its Baseline and its Vulnerable Women's funding. We thank the Community Legal Service Program (CLSP) team, in particular our State Program Manager, Sarah Helen, for their support and management of the CLSP.

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

We are very thankful for the pro bono support from our colleagues in the private profession. We can expand our capacity and support our ongoing services because of **Ashurst, Clayton Utz and McCullough Robertson.**

ORGANISATION INFORMATION

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admin@fnwlsq.org.au

www.fnwlsq.org.au

Monday to Friday 8.30am to 3.30pm

First Nations
Women's Legal

Our logo story

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.