

CAWLS
Women's Legal Service

2016/17
ANNUAL
REPORT

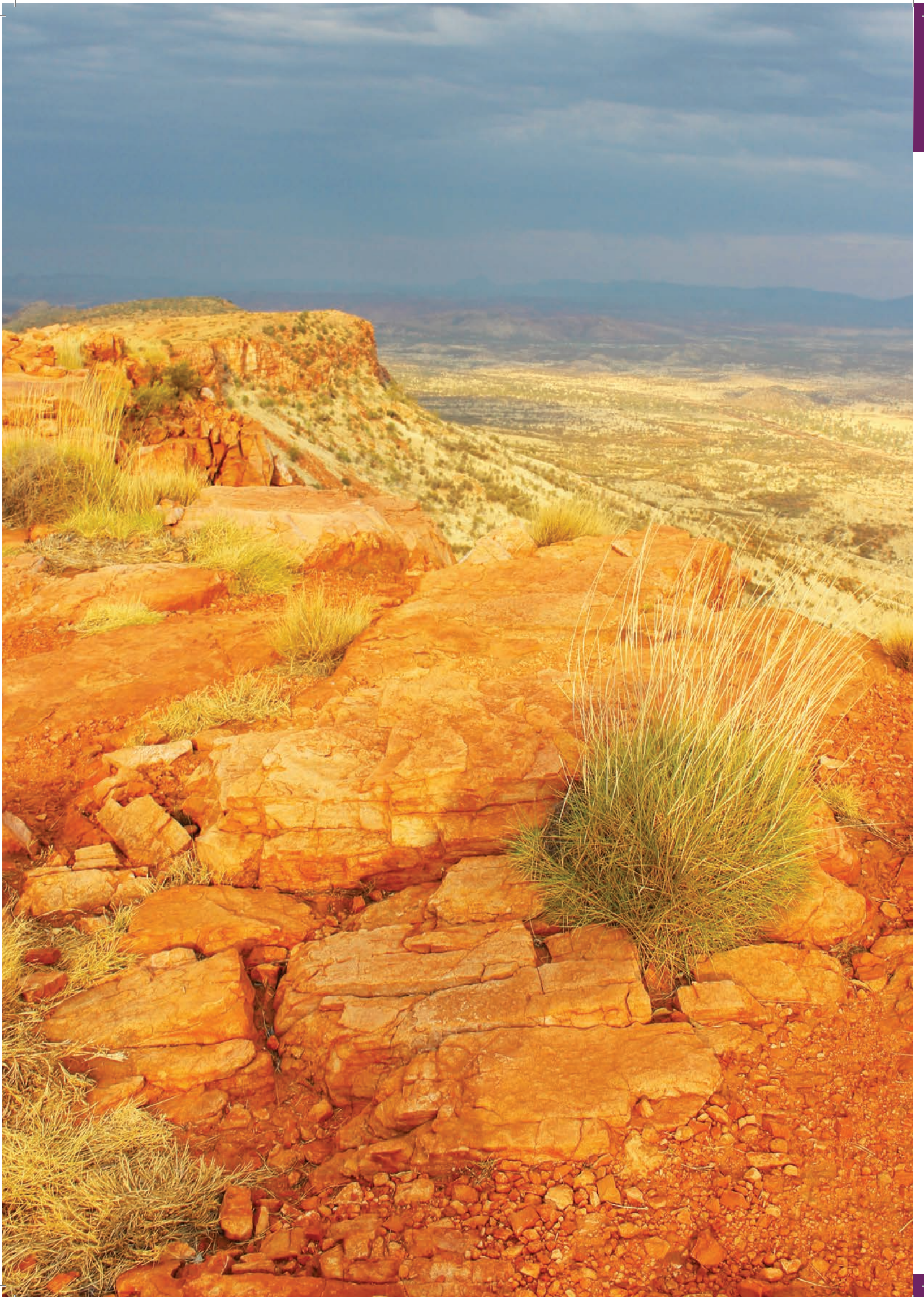


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CAWLS

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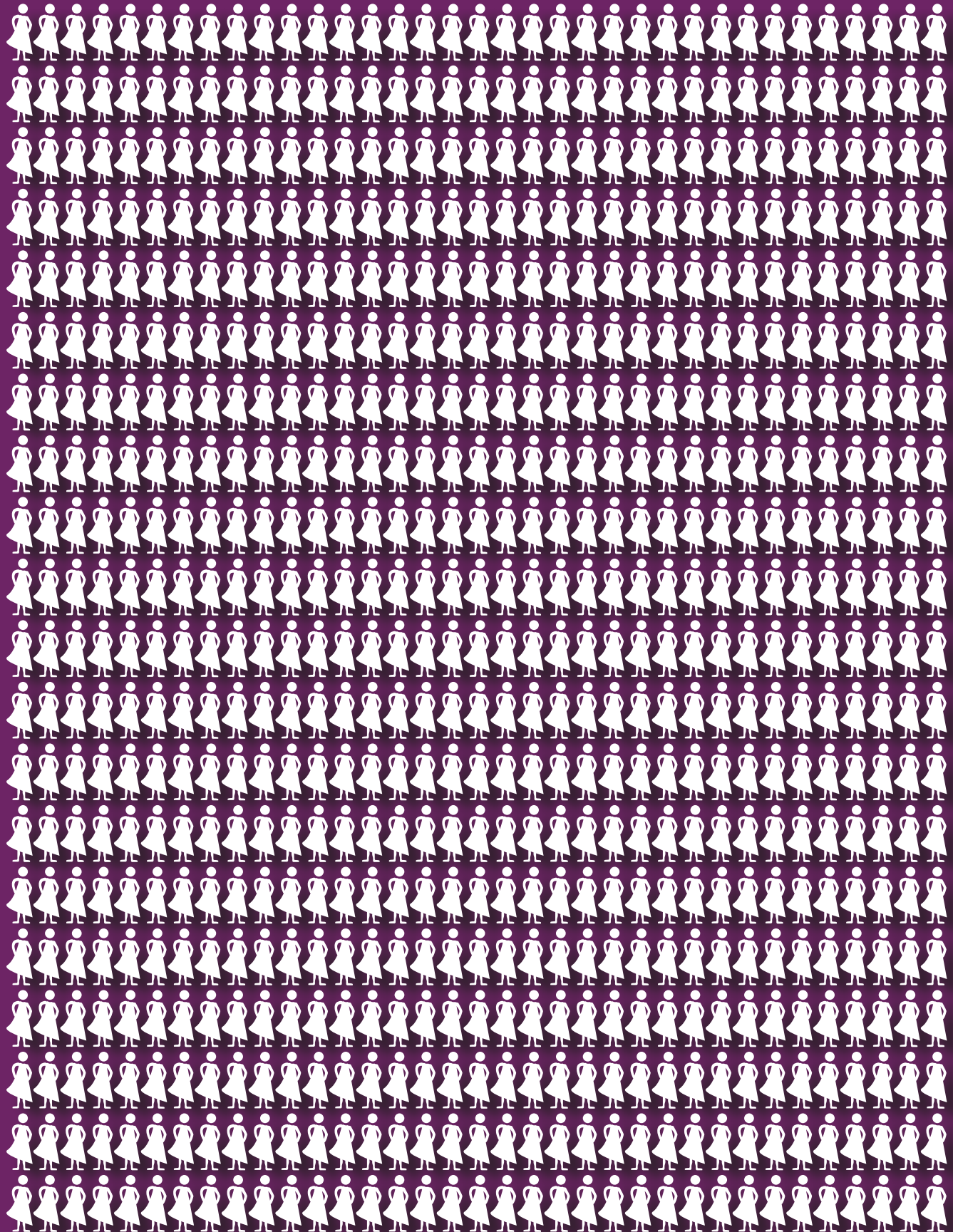
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We assisted nearly 700 women in 2016/17



About CAWLS

CAWLS is a not for profit organisation, based in Alice Springs, providing free confidential legal information and advice to all women in the Central Australia and Barkly regions.

In 2016/17 CAWLS received funding from both the Commonwealth Government and the Northern Territory Government. This funding allows us to provide a generalist legal service to all women in Central Australia, provide Community Legal Education as well as a Specialist Domestic Violence Unit incorporating a Health Justice Partnership.

National Partnership Agreement

CAWLS is funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department under the National Partnership Agreement to provide a generalist legal service to all women in the Central and Barkly regions. Under this funding agreement CAWLS provides free legal advice clinics, ongoing casework, and representation where appropriate as well as support and referrals to all eligible women as part of our generalist women's legal service.

Domestic Violence Service

The Northern Territory Attorney-General's department funds CAWLS to provide a Domestic Violence Legal Service. This service offers free legal advice, representation and support to women who are victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence assistance makes up a substantial component of CAWLS work. Women can receive immediate assistance through our drop-in service operating every weekday from our office or over the phone; appointments can also be made in advance if preferred. CAWLS also provides Community Legal Education to other organisations, town camps and schools on domestic violence in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and the surrounding remote localities as part of our remote outreach program.

Indigenous Women's Program

CAWLS is also funded by the Commonwealth Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet under the Indigenous Women's Program as part of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. This program provides legal advice, representation support and legal education to Aboriginal women in the Central and Barkly Regions. Throughout the past year CAWLS has continued visiting Santa Teresa, Ali Curung, Ti Tree and Tennant Creek, where we have further developed relationships with the community and strengthened the rapport that gives women and organisations confidence in CAWLS service delivery. CAWLS also regularly visits Town Camps around Alice Springs to meet with women and has provided Legal Education, particularly around domestic violence, to school students.

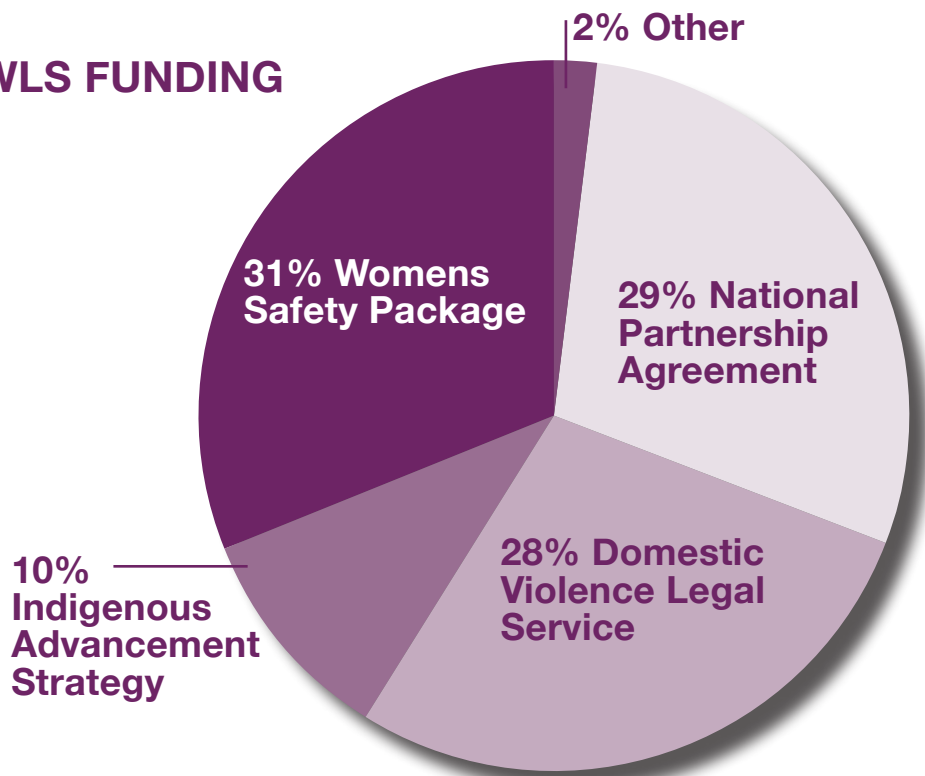
Women's Safety Package

CAWLS receives funding from the Commonwealth Attorney-General's department as part of the Women's Safety Package. Under this funding agreement a Specialist Domestic Violence Unit (SDVU) and Health Justice Partnership (HJP) was established in 2015. Our SDVU provides wrap around support to female victims of domestic violence, forming close relationships with stakeholder organisations in the region. The SDVU is continually developing and growing as needs are identified.

CAWLS Health Justice Partnership includes a MOU with the Central Australian Health Service and a MOU with Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Corp. This MOU provides training and professional development to health professionals on domestic and family violence as well as legal information, advice and case management to eligible women referred by health professionals. In 2016/17 CAWLS has on a weekly basis maintained a physical presence within primary health locations. CAWLS also provide an on-call service for health professionals to make referrals for patients who have been victims of domestic violence.

Funding distribution

CAWLS FUNDING



Advice clinics

- Domestic Violence
- Child protection
 - Family Law
- Victims of Crime Compensation
 - Credit & Debt
 - Housing
- Employment issues
- Motor Vehicle Accidents
- Wills & Estates

Activities

- Domestic Violence drop-in clinics
- Health Services Outreach
- Remote Outreach – Tennant Creek, Ali Curung, Santa Teresa
- Community Legal Education
 - Prison Clinics
- Ongoing representation
 - Duty Lawyer

Referrals

- Women's Shelter
 - Police
- Private Lawyers
 - Mediation

Strategic Plan

VISION

We aspire for a future where women and their children are safe, living with dignity and respect

MISSION

Our purpose is to help women in Central Australia and the Barkly Region with their legal matters, providing legal assistance, community legal education, and specialised support services for those affected by domestic violence

VALUES

Integrity – Respect – Inclusion – Quality

OBJECTIVES

1. To provide free and confidential legal assistance
2. To increase legal literacy and understanding through the provision of legal education
3. To enable professionals to identify, support and refer victims of domestic violence to appropriate services
4. To advocate for law and policy reform seeking changes beneficial to our clients

STRATEGIES

- We understand the interconnected complex legal issues facing our clients, particularly those affected by domestic violence
- We are accessible, proactive and responsive
- We have good governance and sound management practices
- We apply evidence based evaluation processes for reporting and ongoing improvement

ACTIVITIES

1. Through advice clinics we provide information and advice in a range of civil law areas with focus on:
 - Domestic violence
 - Child protection

- Family law (divorce, property & children)
- Tenancy
- Employment
- Discrimination
- Credit and debt
- Complaints
- Victims of crime applications

Advice clinics occur at the Alice Springs CAWLS office, at our outreach locations including local and remote health centres, the Alice Springs Correctional Centre, and in Tennant Creek. A domestic violence assistance service is also provided by phone and drop-in.

2. Ongoing casework and representation
3. Provide appropriate referrals to other organisations
4. Provide training to professionals and service providers
5. Community legal education to the wider community through:
 - Attending community events (e.g. info booths and stalls)
 - Participating in awareness campaigns (e.g. social media, radio broadcasting)
 - Educational materials (e.g. brochures, CAWLS website, videos)
 - Providing an outreach service visiting local organisations, Alice Springs town camps and remote communities
 - Maintaining the online Service Directory for family law and domestic violence services
6. Contribute to law and policy reform and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness of legal issues affecting our clients:
 - Make submissions to government
 - Engage with government representatives, media agencies, human rights organisations, and other stakeholders
7. Collaborate with government and non-governmental agencies and services, including participating in network meetings and developing and maintaining partnerships

Chair's Report

It has been my great privilege again this year to be the Chair of Central Australian Women's Legal Service. The Board re-affirmed CAWLS' vision of enabling, educating and empowering women to better engage in the legal system so their rights are considered and respected by the implementation of a new strategic plan for the period 2017-2020. This overarching strategic vision enables business and work plans to be aligned and more streamlined.

The Board continues to focus on ensuring the service functions at its optimum level and provides excellent service to the women of the vast community it serves. As such the Board has been involved in approving and monitoring all important initiatives within the service, from formalisation of a new organisational structure to reviewing and updating policies and processes to ensure CAWLS runs efficiently and effectively and complies with two clear goals in mind: good governance and meeting the requirements of the National Accreditation Scheme (NAS) for Community Legal Centres. This accreditation will provide CAWLS with a quality assurance process that gives funding bodies and clients' confidence that we are operating according to best practice and industry standards.

Whilst a focus inwards on accreditation is ongoing, the service has had an outward change with a move to new and expanded premises. Our new location can accommodate staff in a more conducive environment and provide space for training and small conferences. Despite the challenges of relocating the team have settled well into the new premises and are enjoying the benefits of the improved location.

Networks, partnerships and community legal education have influenced the service moving forward as we develop our role by building alliances and partnerships in delivering specialist services. An example of this is our Health Justice Partnership, remote outreach and Specialist Domestic Violence Unit and the workshops presented to a range of small groups in the community.



The success of our organisation is due in no small part to the efforts of its staff. All of CAWLS' work would not be possible without their dedication, professionalism and commitment to our mission. As Chair of the Management Board, I take this opportunity to thank staff members for their hard work throughout this past year, your patience with the relocation and acknowledge the positive impact of your work in many lives.

I would like to also thank the Board and acknowledge outgoing members Meg Donohoe and Brianna Sanderson. Volunteers are the backbone of our community and your time is valued very highly by the board, the MPS, the CAWLS Team and the community.

It is once again my pleasure to undertake the role of Chairperson and I look forward to working with and for the Women of Central Australia in forthcoming years.

Belinda Pearson

Management Committee

Vice Chair: *Linx Macpherson*



Linx has lived in Alice Springs for nearly 17 years and works in the Art and Mediation (Alternative Dispute Resolution) fields. She is passionate about mediation and how it can assist people and communities in solving their own disputes. Linx is delighted to be involved with CAWLS and provide any support she can. Linx is also on the Council of the NT Community Justice Centre.

Public Officer: *Marguerite Baptiste-Rooke*



Marguerite has lived and worked in Alice Springs for nearly 30 years and of this time she has been involved with the settlement of migrants and refugees for the last 28 years. Marguerite was chairperson of the Migrant Resource Centre which is now Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia (MCSCA) for 7 years and is now Manager of MCSCA. Marguerite served as a Councillor on Alice Springs Town Council for 4 years from 2004-2008 and was a member of CAWLS committee in the late 90's and early 2000. Marguerite is delighted to be involved again with CAWLS and continue to advocate for women in our community.

Secretary: *Sabine Wedemeyer*



Sabine has extensive experience in Aboriginal related health & community services across a range of roles in the private, public & NGO sectors. Previous to working at MHACA she was a Senior Project Manager at the NT Government Domestic and Family Violence Reduction Strategy; Safety is Everyone's Right project and has also worked at the Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Programs Unit, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and the Drug and Alcohol Service Association, Alice Springs.

Committee Member: *Jenny Hamilton*



Jen has been a member of the Northern Territory Police Force for the past 20 years all of which have been served in Central Australia. The last five years Jen spent working as a community engagement officer in communities in the western desert where she has family ties. Her time in the police force has given her extensive experience in the complexities of domestic violence in roles as a first responder and through community education. Jen has played a lead role in introducing the White ribbon and no more programs into Central Australian communities.



Treasurer: *Alison Phillis*

Alison is a proud Central Australian who grew up in Alice Springs. She is a Lawyer Director of Povey Stirk Lawyers. Alison specialises in civil litigation and she has a diverse client base across Central Australia. Alison has a post-graduate qualification in Health Law and is a member of the Northern Territory Board of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, and the Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee. Alison brings a wealth of practical experience and applied knowledge to the table.

Committee Member: *René Laan*



Rene is a local lawyer who also brings 20 years' experience in the community development field to the Board. Rene specialises in employment law and does legal and consulting work for the not-for-profit sector in the areas of governance, compliance and policy development. René moved to Alice Springs in 2008 after working in the community development field in South Africa, New Zealand and Victoria.

CAWLS Staff

Managing Principal Solicitor: *Janet Taylor*

During her 20+ years as a practitioner Janet has practised in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs in both legal aid and community sector. In 2017 Janet stepped down after serving 12 years as the Deputy Chair of the Northern Territory Public Housing Appeals Board. Having worked in frontline service delivery in the areas of family law, child protection and domestic and family violence Janet is a committed and passionate advocate around many social issues including access to justice for women.

Supervisor of Domestic Violence Section: *Anna Ryan*

Anna worked previously at the Crimes Victims Service Unit as a Case Manager and at CAALAS as a family lawyer. Anna commenced working at CAWLS in 2010. Main areas of practice: Domestic Violence, family law, child protection and civil law.

Business Manager: *Alice de Brenni*

I grew up in Alice Springs and have always enjoyed the lifestyle here. Prior to working at CAWLS my previous jobs mostly involved bookkeeping and administration in some form. I have 3 children who are now young adults. I enjoy theatre, art and attending many of the events that happen in Alice Springs every year.

Receptionist: *Amanda Perry*

I have worked for CAWLS for nearly 4 years and enjoy my job. In my spare time I enjoy spending time with my husband and fur baby along with gardening, sewing and meeting new people when promoting and selling LipSense in the Alice Springs Region.

Administration Support: *Lahni Shilton*

Lahni grew up in Alice Springs and attended St Philip's College. She graduated last year and is now in her gap year working at CAWLS as administration support. Next year she will move to Melbourne to study at Melbourne University.

Client Support Officer: *Marissa Klein*

Marissa was born & grew up in Alice Springs and is very knowledgeable about local issues. She has worked in a variety of jobs in the past and prior to working at CAWLS she worked in a private firm as a paralegal. At CAWLS Marissa has moved into the position of Client Support and is an important part of the team that is delivering wrap-around services for clients.

CLE Lawyer: *Julia Parkin*

Originally from Adelaide, Julia was admitted to practice as a lawyer in South Australia in February 2015. She initially practiced in a specialist family law firm before moving to Alice Springs in November 2015 to take up the position as Community Legal Education Solicitor. Julia has long standing interest in social justice and women's rights. As a student she volunteered with the Women's Legal Service SA and undertook a human rights internship with the Fiji Women's Rights Movement in Suva, Fiji. Julia is passionate about community legal education and its potential to empower women to manage and avoid legal problems.

Legal Practitioner: *Rashini Fernando*

Before moving to Alice Springs 6 months ago, I had never been to Central Australia. However, I knew that this was far too good an opportunity to pass up and I have certainly not been disappointed.

Working as a lawyer at CAWLS has been an absolute privilege and I have had the opportunity to engage in challenging and rewarding work, assisting Central Australian Women with various legal issues.

The adversities that many of our client's face often add another layer of complexities to our matters. As a CAWLS lawyer, I have learnt to consider these factors, that are often unique to Central Australia, to best advocate for our clients. My experience living and working in Alice have been a real adventure. I have had the opportunity to try new things that I would never have been able to do anywhere else. I have also been fortunate to build great friendships and Alice Springs now feels very much like home.

Health Justice Lawyer: *Rachael Pliner*

Rachael is CAWLS' health justice lawyer and is responsible for CAWLS' health justice partnerships. Rachael began practicing law in 2008 in NSW. Prior to moving to Alice Springs in January 2017, Rachael worked at Knowmore legal service which was set up alongside the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to assist victims of abuse, the Refugee Advice and Casework Service and at the corporate law firm, Herbert Smith Freehills. Rachael is strongly committed to improving social justice and equality for women through access to free legal services and meeting the holistic needs of clients through collaboration between legal and health sectors. Rachael has a Masters of Public Health from the University of New South Wales which complements her work as a lawyer in the health justice area.



Legal Practitioner: Michelle Alleman

Michelle began practicing law in 2010 working for a private law firm in South Australia. She then moved to the Northern Territory in 2013 and worked as a lawyer for the Central Land Council. Michelle commenced working with CAWLS in 2016. Her main areas of practice are domestic violence, family law, compensation, child protection and tenancy.

Legal Practitioner: Ashlea Begg

Ashlea began practising law in 2016 at a Community Legal Centre in New South Wales. Before studying law, Ashlea worked as an accountant in the public sector. Ashlea commenced working with CAWLS in 2017. Her main areas of practice are domestic violence, compensation, and family law.

Legal Practitioner:

Nadia Baldassi-Winderlich

Nadia only began practising law this year, but has been an active member of the community legal sector in Adelaide since 2014, predominately in the area of refugee law. This is her first job as a legal practitioner. Nadia's main areas of practice are domestic violence and compensation. She will also be working with the CAWLS Community Legal Education team.

Office/Project support: Annabel Blain

Annabel works part-time at CAWLS on a variety of projects as required. She is currently on maternity leave after the arrival of her beautiful baby Louis in June 2017.



Managing Principal Solicitor Report

It is amazing that a whole twelve months have flown by since our last AGM where Rosie Batty was our guest speaker! A key focus this past year was on delivering and improving specialist legal services to women in Central Australia and the Barkly region to better serve victims of domestic and family violence and to address gaps in service delivery in remote areas. Assisting women to keep themselves and their children safe is pivotal to the work at CAWLS. Legal Services for Women are a critical and in some instances a lifesaving service for many women trying to escape an abusive relationship.

We are currently witnessing a more complex and greater public conversation around family and domestic violence; and given that Central Australia and the Barkly Region have the highest rates per capita in the Northern Territory and indeed Australia, it is both timely and welcoming that a pilot specialist domestic violence court is to be rolled out later this year in Alice Springs. As a key stakeholder, CAWLS has already been invited to provide input around the proposed model, evaluation process and outcome measures.

During this reporting period I was fortunate enough to be able to take six months leave of absence. Penny Johnston our senior lawyer ably took over the helm. This period coincided with uncertainty around funding under our National Partnership Agreement (NPA) and whilst we were aware in late April 2017 that funding for CLC's would be reinstated and directed towards family law and domestic violence related services; CAWLS had not received confirmation of this at 30 June 2017. This caused considerable difficulty with forward planning for the service and staff. As I write this report however, I can now say that CAWLS' is relieved and excited to be able to share the news that we will receive our NPA new funding agreement in the near future.

In May 2017 CAWLS moved premises and after some initial disruption with internet and telephone connections the Service is up and running again. The new premises are spacious providing office space for both solicitors and admin staff with a safe waiting space for clients. This coincided with the migration from CLSIS to CLASS which is a new reporting system for clients, legal matters and other statistics required by the Attorney-General's Department in Canberra. Thanks to Alice de Brenni, CAWLS' Business Manager for her patience and time in navigating staff through this process! There are still ongoing teething issues around



reporting requirements and how this can be fine tuned to ensure we accurately report the work that CAWLS undertakes on a daily basis.

I wish to acknowledge and thank the Board, and in particular the Chair, Belinda Pearson, for their leadership and dedication. All of whom have made significant contributions during the past year which have included many strategic initiatives that required vision and commitment.

It has been an enormous privilege to serve as the Managing Principal Solicitor over these past seven years and I take the opportunity to say a huge thanks and goodbye to all staff who left the service during this last year. Their hard work and dedication was much appreciated and CAWLS wishes them well in their new endeavours.

And a big welcome to those new staff members who joined Team CAWLS. Speaking of welcoming new members, in June 2017 Annabel Blain our Project Administration Officer gave birth to a beautiful baby boy named Louis. We wish Annabel and her family great joy and lots of fun!

Most importantly I would like to give a huge thanks to all staff at CAWLS for their hard work, empathy and dedication in the delivery of services to clients. I still continue to be amazed and inspired. They are at the frontline, making a vital contribution to the most vulnerable and in some instances the most disadvantaged client group in the Northern Territory.

Janet Taylor

Business Manager Report

I joined the CAWLS team in late February 2017 in the role of Business Manager. My background is in finance and administration; skills which have been put to good use at CAWLS.

Not having worked in the legal sector before it has been a steep learning curve for me. I have quickly learnt about community legal services, what CAWLS does in the community and for our clients and our role in the legal sector. CAWLS is a very busy service and with 12 staff on the team providing a variety of legal services there is never a dull moment.

Some of the tasks that faced me when I started at CAWLS were a possible move to new premises, migrating to a new data collection program, staff vacancies to fill and potential funding cuts. Six months later we had navigated the bulk of these challenges and many more.

After much deliberation and negotiations at the end of May removalists came in and within a few days CAWLS had moved into new premises in the Westpoint building, behind Kmart Auto Service. There were many challenges in the process of moving including IT issues, security and keys to organise and offices to be arranged. Only a few weeks later and it feels like home!

A new database was rolled out to Community Legal Centres across Australia at the end of March which was another huge challenge for all our staff to navigate. The new system called CLASS is very different to the previous one and has generated a lot of discussion and ongoing training sessions. To date the reporting module for the new system is not yet operational which has made it difficult to reporting on statistics for the previous financial year.

Community Legal Centres across Australia were notified of possible funding cuts of up to 30% commencing in the 2017/18 financial year. The National Association of Community Legal Centres organised a national lobby group and pressure was



put on the Federal Government to re-consider this decision. Many letters and emails were written and gradually the cause gained media coverage across the nation. At CAWLS like all the other Community Legal Centres we joined in the lobbying and waited to see what the outcome would be. Budgeting for the new financial year was not easy without knowing how much funding we would receive. Eventually a decision was made by the Federal Government and to the relief of CLC's across Australia; the decision to cut funds was reversed.

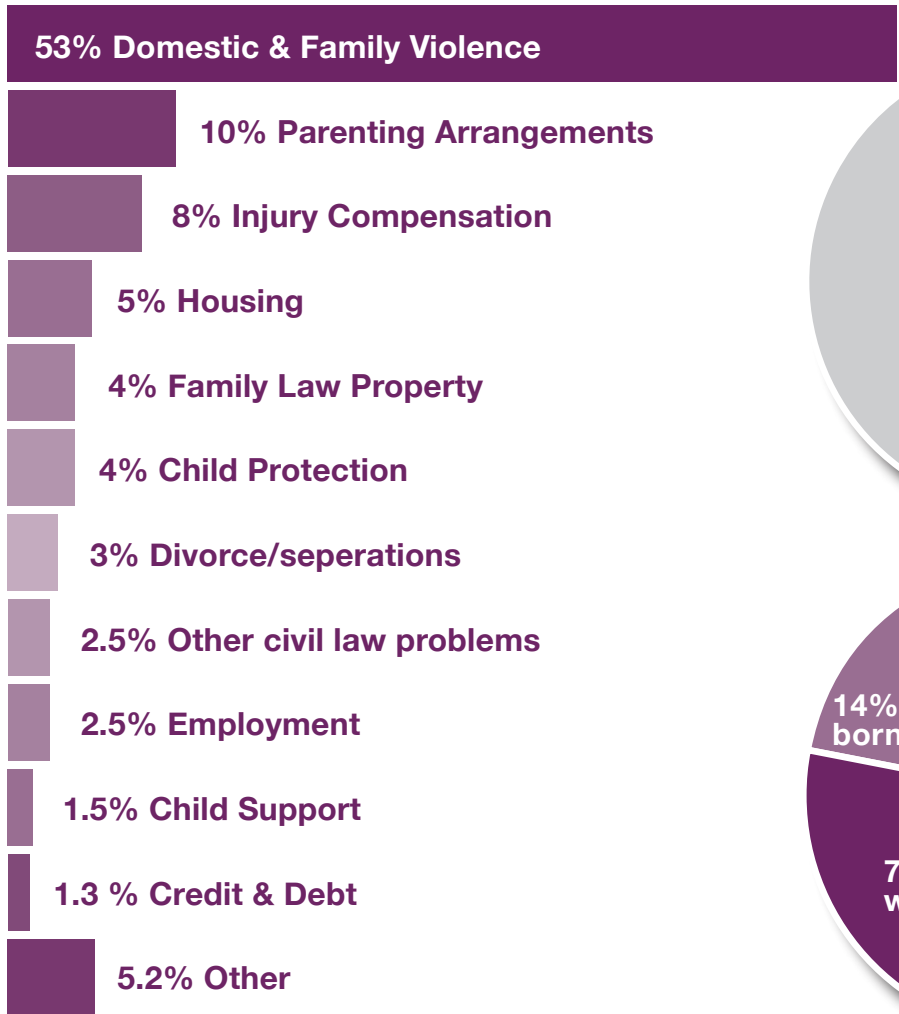
The end of the financial year saw most of the big challenges of the previous few months over and now we move into the reporting cycle with end of year reports expected by our funding bodies.

I have enjoyed my first few months at CAWLS. I believe CAWLS is a vital organisation within our community and we are always striving to improve our processes and provide the best service possible to our clients. We have a great team and I am looking forward to the next 12 months.

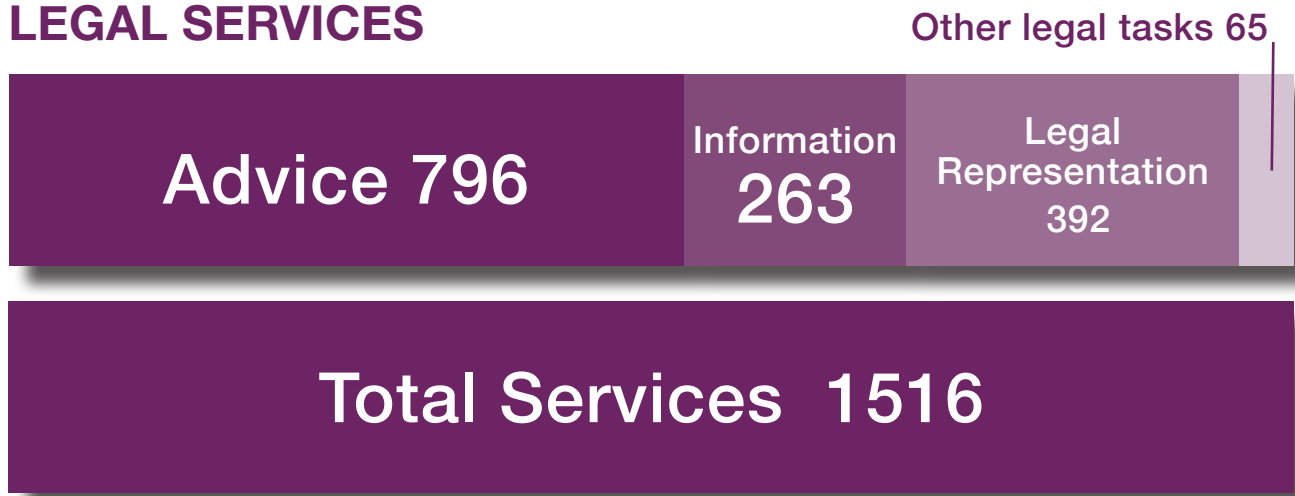
Alice de Brenni

We opened files for
272
new clients

PROBLEM TYPES



LEGAL SERVICES



Family Law

Family law matters remain one of the key priority areas of assistance at CAWLS.

Similar to last year CAWLS has experienced an increase in major and complex cases, and an increase in indigenous women and CALD women seeking Family Law assistance.

The types of family law matters that we have assisted have included:

- **Providing advice and assistance to women with respect to the arrangements for their children including:**
 - Supporting clients through the mediation process either at Relationships Australia or through Family Law conferencing
 - Assisting clients in negotiating with their ex-partners either directly where the other party is self-represented, or through their legal representative
 - Where a Family Law application has been filed, providing clients with legal representation in the Federal Circuit Court
 - Assisting client's with urgent recovery applications
- **Providing advice and assistance with respect to the division of matrimonial property;**
- **Assisting clients with divorce applications, especially where the client has presented with English as their second language and the client has required the use of an interpreter; and**
- **Assisting clients with negotiating and lodging consent applications for both property and children's matters.**

CAWLS, as a participant on the Women's Legal Service Australia Committee, has also been active this last reporting year around a number of campaigns in relation to family law and the interconnection with family violence. These included the campaign for a safer family law system, "Safety First in Family Law", which resulted in the Australian Government introducing legislation to amend the *Family Law Act 1975* to prohibit cross-examination of victims of violence in family law proceedings. Other campaigns CAWLS signed onto around this topic included "Our Watch" and the "Luke Batty Never Alone Campaign".

CAWLS continues to be on the steering committee for the Central Australian Family Pathways network.



Case study

Alexia*, a 24 year old Aboriginal woman, was referred to CAWLS by the Alice Springs Women's Shelter. The father of Alexia's two year old daughter, Sharon*, had taken Sharon to a remote community and refused to return her. Alexia was seeking assistance to recover her daughter. There was a history of coercive control and violence committed against Alexia by Sharon's father and his wife. The relationship between Alexia and Sharon's father had been non-consensual and Alexia had been sexually assaulted.

CAWLS prepared an urgent application for a recovery order in the Federal Circuit Court and agreed to represent Alexia on an ongoing basis.

Although a recovery application was not granted on the first occasion, Orders were made for Sharon to spend time with Alexia. As a result of this ongoing time, Sharon was ultimately returned to live with Alexia.

During the course of proceedings, CAWLS collaborated with the Alice Springs Women's Shelter, Children's Contact Centre as well as other counselling services to provide as much support to Alexia as possible.

94.83%
of our clients are
experiencing
financial
disadvantage

Health Justice Partnership

The Health Justice Partnership (HJP) is a collaborative practice model. It was initially developed for clients experiencing chronic illness and/or disability in the United States, referred to as medical-legal partnerships, following research which established that there was a link between clients with health concerns and associated legal needs. An integrated and collaborative practice model emerged between medical services and legal services. It focused on maximising client capacity by providing legal information and support whilst addressing and managing the client's social and emotional well-being. The practice model, although relatively new to Australia, has now fast evolved. It seeks to meet client's complex and interconnected legal and non-legal needs through partnership and collaboration between the health and legal sectors.

Family Violence in a Remote Location

Domestic violence is a leading contributor to preventable death, disability and illness in women. Domestic violence not only involves physical injury but also direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological abuse, economic control, damage to property, social isolation and other conduct which causes a person to live in fear. The ability to capture the needs of this vulnerable client group is challenging. Women experiencing domestic violence are often reluctant to report, fearful of repercussions and without alternative options. Women living in domestic violence circumstances may not identify their experiences as being family violence and face significant barriers in improving their underlying social and health concerns. Many women impacted by domestic violence need to access legal intervention whilst also securing other social supports.

Central Australia was identified as not only having high rates of domestic violence but also particularly high severity. Key factors specific to this region include geographical isolation, lack of stable housing options leading to homelessness and/or overcrowding; and specific cultural considerations. The absence of safe locations to secure support and seek legal advice is a key barrier for women experiencing domestic violence.

CAWLS' Health Justice Partnerships

On 16 October 2015, the Australian Federal Government introduced the Women's Safety Package (WSP). CAWLS has received funding under the WSP to establish and operate a specialist domestic violence unit and HJP. The WSP funding was for three years, but has now been extended to June 2019.

In 2016, as part of the WSP, CAWLS entered into formal partnerships with the Central Australia Health Service and the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress. Through CAWLS' HJP, CAWLS aims to provide a more holistic service to women who are experiencing or are at risk of domestic violence, through the collaboration between the legal and health sector. This model recognises that women will often disclose domestic violence to health professionals and that a health setting may be a safe place for women experiencing domestic violence to seek assistance from a lawyer.

Women in Alice Springs and Central Australia can benefit from the HJP, which aims to reduce barriers to seeking support and assistance. The program has complemented existing services and work that the Northern Territory Government is already providing to reduce domestic and family violence.

Legal advice at health services in 2016/17

Under CAWLS' HJP, on-site legal assistance is regularly provided at the Alice Springs Hospital and Congress health services to women affected by domestic violence in a range of legal areas, including domestic violence orders, victim's compensation, child protection, family law and housing. CAWLS' lawyers attended the Alice Springs Hospital every Monday on a weekly basis and were available on-call at other times. CAWLS' has appointments available every Wednesday morning at Congress' head office for Congress patients as part of the HJP and were also available 'on-call' at other times.

Through the HJPs, CAWLS' aims to deliver a flexible and response service and ensure lawyers are available to assist clients on-site at the health services at short notice given the need to respond rapidly in domestic violence situations. Our team works collaboratively with

health professionals to optimise a client's ability to provide instructions, improve outcomes and to deliver a more holistic service. Co-location, by way of the legal provider being situated on site and having a physical presence at the health facility, allows:

- **Relationship building for a multi-disciplinary practice;**
- **Referrals from health professionals to lawyer; and**
- **Secondary consultations between disciplines (for example between health professionals and social workers).**

Education

As part of the HJP, CAWLS provides community legal sessions to health professionals in relation to identifying and responding to domestic violence, mandatory reporting obligations, information on HJPs and referral pathways.

CAWLS has delivered a number of training sessions to staff at the Alice Springs Hospital and at Congress' health services and clinics. In 2016/17 CAWLS delivered two full-day Domestic Violence Education Seminars to health professionals in Alice Springs. There was no fee for attendees. The training was accredited by a number of medical colleges, including the Australian College of Nursing (ACN), Australian College of midwives (ACM) and the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW).

The first seminar was held on 8 December 2016, followed by a seminar on 6 April 2017. These training days were held at the Centre for Remote Health. The seminars had presenters from a range of services, including NPY Women's Council, CAWLS, the Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Alice Springs Women's Shelter, the NT Police Domestic Violence Prevention Group and the Mental Health Association of Central Australia. The topics included identifying domestic violence, mandatory reporting, patient warning signs, how to respond to domestic violence disclosures in a clinic environment, Q&A with the NT Police's Domestic Violence Unit and scenario/problem-solving group discussions.

Resources

As part of the WSP, CAWLS has developed a number of resources on identifying and responding to domestic violence, which is specifically tailored to professionals. CAWLS partnered with the Alice Springs Family Law Pathways Network (FLPN) to develop an online Service Directory for separating families, including for women affected by domestic violence. The online directory is available at: <https://www.alicesprings.familylaw.org.au/service-directory/>. In collaboration with the FLPN CAWLS

have also produced a pocket resource containing key services for separating families in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. The resource was updated in February 2017.

2016 saw the establishment of the HJPs, 2017 saw the strengthening and consolidation of our existing partnerships and 2018 will see continued expansion of the HJPs and awareness-raising for women impacted by domestic violence and health professionals.

Case study

This is an example of how women are empowered to seek legal advice through the HJP. Lucy* presented at the health service with her unwell baby. The health professional identified that Lucy had experienced domestic violence and asked whether she would wish to speak to a lawyer while at the health service. In the past, Lucy had been reluctant to engage with legal services due the long history of domestic violence she had experienced and resulting trauma. Lucy had only recently begun opening up about the domestic violence she had experienced for several years from her partner. Lucy was encouraged to speak to a lawyer with the knowledge that the lawyer would visit her in a safe and confidential setting at the hospital and at no cost.

With Lucy's consent, the health professional referred her to CAWLS through the HJP. A CAWLS' lawyer attended the health service immediately before Lucy was discharged. Lucy and the lawyer were able to discuss her legal issues in a setting that was comfortable for Lucy while she was also able to attend to her baby. CAWLS' assisted Lucy with a victim's compensation and housing application and provided advice about domestic violence orders. With Lucy's consent, the lawyer and health professional worked together to assist Lucy with safety planning.

The HJP referral pathway was critical in Lucy receiving access to legal support. There would have been significant barriers for Lucy to otherwise access a legal service as she was from a remote community where no legal services were available, she has no fixed address or phone and was constrained from travelling to a legal service due to her baby's ill-health. This was coupled with the difficulty for Lucy to engage with legal services due to her trauma which made the on-site legal assistance at the health service so valuable.

*Note: names have been changed.

Specialist Domestic Violence Unit

CAWLS has had an extremely busy year in the area of domestic violence, we have seen an increase to our weekly drop-in duty service. Women defendants is an area of law that has expanded throughout the year, we have provided advice and representation in these matters. CAWLS have also assisted women in remote areas with Domestic Violence advice and other legal problems which were intrinsically linked, for example, family law, territory housing and compensation. In an active week CAWLS can see up to 18 drop in clients. Many of our Domestic Violence clients come to us through referrals such as Women's Shelter, Police and other organisations. CAWLS continues to work with other services for a co-ordinated response to assist women with domestic violence advice and ongoing support. We offer a drop-in Domestic Violence advice clinic five days a week for women who are seeking legal advice or support in relation to domestic violence.

Case study 1

Wendy* attended an appointment at our office because she wanted a non-harm DVO against Peter*. Wendy was still living with Peter. During the appointment, Wendy disclosed to us domestic violence that had not been reported to police. As such we had to make a mandatory report. Wendy spoke to police about the domestic violence but did not want to press charges against Peter (but still wanted the non-harm DVO). Police would not assist her with the non-harm DVO and as such she returned to our office to make the application on her behalf.

During the proceedings, Peter moved interstate. Wendy then informed us that because he had moved she now wanted a full no contact DVO. Wendy was not comfortable asking for one when he lived with her as she was scared of what he would do to her. Wendy also decided she now wanted to press charges against Peter because she now felt safer to do so. The police were then contacted again. We amended our application from a non-harm DVO to a full no contact DVO. Peter consented to the DVO.

Police then contacted our service. They advised us that because Wendy had made the first disclosure of the domestic violence to us that it would assist to have a statement from the lawyer it was disclosed to, in order to charge Peter with the assault. We made a statement with our clients consent. We have not had to attend court yet.

Case study – Reciprocal DVOs

Jane* was a former client of CAWLS and sought assistance with domestic violence matters. She had been married to Bill* for a few years and had experienced

ongoing domestic violence throughout their relationship, often fuelled by Bill's drug and alcohol abuse. The police had been involved on many occasions and there had been 2 previous Domestic Violence Orders (DVOs). Jane had left Bill before but they always ended up resuming their relationship. This had previously happened when there was a non-contact DVO in place resulting in Bill being imprisoned for breach of the order. Jane and Bill had migrated to Australia a few years ago. Bill did not speak much English and relied on Jane considerably; she was the main breadwinner in their relationship. Jane felt responsible for Bill.

After the most recent domestic violence Jane sought our assistance. The police had been involved and had issued reciprocal full no contact DVOs against both herself and Bill. Jane instructed that any physical harm she inflicted on Bill was in self-defence. However the police believed that reciprocal orders were necessary for their protection. Jane wanted to downgrade the orders so that she could continue contact with Bill. She said that he required assistance with study and work and there was no one else that could help him, especially because he could not speak English. Jane said that she also intended to remain in a relationship with Bill.

We appeared in court on Jane's behalf and made submissions, seeking that the order against her be dismissed and the order against Bill be downgraded. The police agreed to the reciprocal orders being downgraded from a non-contact order. Although, they refused to dismiss their application for the order against Jane and stated that they believed that the reciprocal orders were necessary for both Jane and Bill's protection. The court stated that as there was no agreement, the matter would need to go to hearing to resolve.

On the instruction of the client, she did not want to go to hearing and was willing to accept the downgraded reciprocal orders. A non-intoxication/ non-harm DVO was confirmed against Bill and a non-harm order was confirmed against Jane.

Case study – PVRO

April* met Sam* online through a dating website. They exchanged a few short messages online. Sam messaged April and told her that he knew where she lived but he will not come over uninvited. He had also sent some very long messages outlining further personal details. April found these messages extremely overwhelming and did not respond. At that point they had only been conversing online through the dating website and had never met in person.

Sam eventually wrote April an abusive message and she responded, stating that she no longer wanted to communicate with him. Sam began harassing April and engaged in negative behaviour including: visiting her workplace, dropping off parcels at her work and home and sending her unsettling and insulting text messages to her work mobile. April was unsure how he had obtained any of these details as she had never divulged her name to Sam or met him in person.

April eventually reported Sam's behaviour to the police. They found out that Sam had lied on his dating profile and in fact was much older than she had thought. Police informed her that Sam had also engaged in similar behaviour with other women. Sam's behaviour continued. He began sending abusive and distressing emails and letters to April. He had made comments about her appearance and her whereabouts and April believed that Sam had been stalking her. The police finally spoke with Sam and he stopped harassing and contacting April for a while.

A few months later, Sam dropped a parcel by April's house. April decided to seek advice from CAWLS on how to obtain a Personal Violence Restraining Order (PVRO) against Sam. An application was made to the court for a full no-contact PVRO for period of 24 months. Sam appeared at court self-represented and contested the order, stating that the statements made by April in her supporting affidavit were false. In his responding affidavit, Sam made clear admissions to his actions. CAWLS made submissions that the order should be confirmed as soon as possible as the whole ordeal had been extremely distressing for April and she had felt very unsafe. The matter was adjourned on two occasions to allow Sam to obtain legal representation. The PVRO was eventually confirmed in the absence of Sam.

Case study

Background:

Julie* is a 33-year-old woman from Thailand*. She married Peter* in 2013. During their relationship Peter was verbally abusive, controlling, manipulative and degrading. In 2013, Julie separated from Peter. The marriage broke down largely due to Peter's behaviour towards Julie. During the relationship, Julie applied for a visa as a partner of an Australian citizen. After they separated, Julie sought to amend her visa application to apply under the domestic violence provisions. At around the same time, Julie sought the assistance of CAWLS for advice about her family law matter. During this advice, Julie disclosed the domestic violence to her CAWLS lawyer.

What Client needed:

In 2017, Julie came to CAWLS for assistance filing for a divorce from Peter. CAWLS gave Julie family law advice, and also assisted her with filling out her Application for Divorce.

During Julie's conversation with the CAWLS lawyer, she also instructed that her visa application had been rejected. This rejection was because the Department of Immigration had concluded that she was not the victim of domestic violence. This was in part due to a report from a psychologist that stated that Julie was not the victim of domestic violence. Julie instructed that the interview with the psychologist was conducted via video link, and the connection was poor. Furthermore, Julie's grasp and understanding of English at that time was not sufficient. The combined effect was that Julie did not understand many of the questions being asked, and was not able to communicate her story.

With Julie's permission, CAWLS spoke with her immigration lawyer, and it was ascertained that they had lodged an appeal with the Administrative Appeals Tribunal ("AAT"). However, at the time the likelihood of success was extremely low as they had no new evidence to introduce. To have any chance of success, they needed to provide additional evidence of the domestic violence.

How CAWLS helped:

CAWLS told Julie and her immigration lawyer that we would be willing to provide a letter of support for Julie. After reviewing the legislation, it was ascertained that only certain types of organisations/individuals can provide evidence for this type of matter. One of the categories was a 'family/domestic violence crisis centre'. As CAWLS receives Commonwealth funding as a "Specialist Domestic Violence Unit," and runs a domestic violence drop-in service, CAWLS submitted that this is sufficient to fall within the category of domestic violence crisis centre.

As such, CAWLS provided Julie with a 2-page letter of support on the organisation letterhead. This letter categorically stated that Julie was – and continues to be – the victim of domestic violence. It also detailed the previous services provided to Julie, and gave examples of the behaviour on which the conclusion was based.

Outcome:

This letter was presented to the AAT and was accepted as evidence. Furthermore, the CAWLS letter was strong enough to create doubt as to the accuracy of the original psychological assessment. Therefore, it was ordered that Julie must attend another interview with a psychologist, with that report to be binding. Julie was extremely happy with this outcome, and was grateful for the assistance that CAWLS was able to provide. Julie had already decided to attend the interview face-to-face, and felt confident that she could communicate her story better at the next interview.

*Note: Names and other identifying details have been changed to maintain Client confidentiality.

CAWLS

Women's Legal Service

**We made
984
referrals
to other
services**

**Management
Committee**

**Managing
Principal
Solicitor**

OTHER SERVICES

- AS Correctional Centre
- NT Police Domestic Violence Unit
- Crime Victims Register
 - Territory Families
 - NT Dept of Housing
- WESNET – Womens Services Network

REFERRALS SERVICES

- Alice Springs Women's Shelter
 - NPY Women's Council
 - Tangentyere Council
 - BRADAAG
- Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
 - NT Working Womens Centre
- Alice Springs Hospital • NT Housing • Police
 - Anglicare • Catholic Care
 - Relationships Australia
- Supportlink • Mission Australia
 - DASA • Centrelink
- Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group

OTHER NT COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES

- DCLS – Darwin Community Legal Service
- KWILS – Katherine Women's Information & Legal Service
- TEWLS – Top End Women's Legal Service

Legal Team

Junior Lawyer

HJP Lawyer

Lawyer

Junior Lawyer

Junior Lawyer

Senior Lawyer

CLE Lawyer



Management Committee

Managing Principal Solicitor

Management Team

Business Manager

Administration Team

Client Support

Receptionist

Admin Support

CAWLS STAKEHOLDERS

FUNDING

- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Commonwealth Attorney Generals Dept
 - Department of the Attorney-General and Justice Northern Territory Government

OTHER LEGAL AID SERVICES IN ALICE SPRINGS

- CAAFLU – Central Australian Aboriginal Family Law Unit
- CAALAS – Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service
 - NTLAC – NT Legal Aid Commission

NETWORK MEETINGS

- NACLCLC – National Association of Community Legal Centres
- NTACLCLC – NT Association of Community Legal Centres
- WLSA – Women’s Legal Service Australia
- SARC – Sexual Assault Referral Centre • Pathways
- CAFSVAN – Central Australian Family & Sexual Violence Assault Network
- Law Info NT Steering Committee • Women Lawyers Assoc
 - WSP network – Women’s Safety Package Network
- Queensland and NT Health Justice Partnership Network
- NPA forum – National Partnership Agreement Forum
- NT Community Legal Education Network
 - CVAC – Crimes Victim Advice Clinic
 - Dept of Housing Legal Services
 - NTLAF – NT Legal Assistance Forum

Community Legal Education (Indigenous Advancement Strategy)

Community Legal Education (CLE) is an important part of the service that CAWLS provides. We aim for our CLE program to help members of the community better understand the law, their rights within it and to improve knowledge about the services that are available to assist when things go wrong. Our CLE program comprises free legal education sessions and training, legal advice outreach visits, engagement in community events and the development of information and education resources.

We place a strong emphasis on engaging with the community and encouraging discussion so that we can keep abreast of the issues and challenges facing women in Central Australia.

We have continued to provide regular CLE sessions and outreach visits to services in Alice Springs including Alice Springs Correctional Centre, Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Programs Unit, Drug and Alcohol Advisory Group, Larapinta Valley Community Centre, Hidden Valley Community Centre, Karnte Camp Community Centre, and Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia.

The CLE program has also extended to professional

groups. The beginning of 2017 saw CAWLS collaborate with the Sexual Assault Referral Centre to provide training to NT Police in Alice Springs around referral pathways for sexual assault and domestic violence victims. In addition to this, the CLE solicitor has worked closely with our Health Justice Partnership team to support the provision of training to medical and health professionals in the area of domestic violence.

CAWLS is committed to providing a service to women in the Barkly region. The CLE solicitor has carried out monthly visits to Tennant Creek. In addition to providing legal advice and representation to clients, CLE sessions have been conducted with various community groups. CAWLS have provided regular CLE to service providers in Tennant Creek, including the Barkly Regional Alcohol and Drug Abuse Advisory Group, Anyinginyi Stronger Families Program and Corrections Family Violence Program.

In addition to regular Tennant Creek visits, CAWLS CLE program in the Barkly region has extended to Ali Curung Community. We carried out a number of visits to the Families as First Teachers program at Alekerenge School where we ran informal sessions on a range of legal issues with the mothers engaging in that program.





CLE and collaboration in the Barkly Region

In 2017 CAWLS saw an exciting new collaboration of CLE practitioners in Tennant Creek. CAWLS joined with Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission, Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service and Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit to provide CLE to students at the Tennant Creek High School. This collaboration enabled our services to provide legal education to a large number of students across the school. Topics covered have been “At what age can I?”, a quiz about the age at which young people are able to start doing a range of different things, and cyber safety.

A new resource

The pocket guide to Domestic Violence in Central Australia was designed to provide community members with basic information about domestic violence orders, mandatory reporting and the services which can support women in domestic violence relationships. It is a tri-fold brochure the size of a business card and has been distributed widely around services in Alice Springs.

International Women’s Day

CAWLS and Tangentyerre Family Safety Group were successful in securing a grant from Territory Families to celebrate International Women’s Day 2017. Thanks to this grant we were able to provide a free community screening of the film ‘Hidden Figures’ which celebrates the achievements of African American women working as mathematicians during the Cold War. We had a full house for the event and it was a great success.

2016/17 Outreach Visits

- Santa Teresa • Ti-Tree
- Ali Curung • Tennant Creek
- Larapinta Valley Town Camp
- Karnte Town Camp
- Hidden Valley Town Camp • CAAPU
- Alice Springs Correctional Centre
- St Mary’s Town Camp
- Drug & Alcohol Advisory Group
- CDU night patrol students
- Sadadeen Primary School

