

Fitzroy
Legal
Service

Community driven justice

Fitzroy Legal Service
2023-2024 Annual Report



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Fitzroy Legal Service acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation, who are the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present.



We recognise the importance of the areas in which we work to the community. We acknowledge the significance of Fitzroy as a meeting place for First Peoples, and the many First Peoples who reside in Yarra, Darebin and St Kilda. We thank First Peoples for their continued custodianship of this land, and we stand with them in their fight for self-determination and equality.



We are committed to providing safe and inclusive services for people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, disabilities and cultures.

About Fitzroy Legal Service

Our Vision

We work towards a **fairer Victorian community** where our legal and social systems support equality and justice for all.



Our Purpose

We provide **access to justice** for individuals and communities and drive positive systemic change.



Our Values



Integrity



Courage & Passion



Empowerment & Advocacy



Connection to Community

Our Structure



The Fitzroy Legal Service is an amalgamation of the Darebin Community Legal Centre and Fitzroy Legal Service, which took effect on 1 February 2019. The amalgamated entity draws on the significant histories and legal assistance services provided by the Darebin Community Legal Centre (established in 1988) and Fitzroy Legal Service (established in 1972).

Chair and CEO Summary

Fitzroy Legal Service's 2023-24 was characterised by increased service demand alongside substantial service growth and significant organisational change.

This annual report provides a snapshot of some of the many achievements of the last year, made possible by our dedicated staff and volunteers, as well as our valued members, supporters and funders. Together we continued to build on our fifty-two-year history of delivering community-driven justice through high-quality legal services and fearless advocacy, with and for those who need it most.

An undoubted highlight of the year was establishing Q+Law, a new, state-wide legal service for and by members of Victoria's LGBTIQ+SB communities. Q+Law is based at the Victorian Pride Centre in St Kilda and is funded by the Victorian Government in furtherance of its 10-year plan for LGBTIQ+ equality. In its first year, with the assistance of Queerspace and other partners, Q+Law developed policies and procedures and stakeholder relationships, assisted hundreds of queer, trans and gender diverse clients and community members, received a highly positive interim evaluation and quickly established itself as an integral component of both the community legal and LGBTIQ+ service sectors.

With funding from the VLSBC, we also established a new Migration Law Program to assist community members and sector partners with intersecting migration and community law issues. We also deepened our engagement and service delivery in the City of Darebin, establishing new outreaches and delivering further civil and family law clinics and appointments from our Reservoir office. Family violence formed a particular focus of our work this year, as we saw increased demand and a welcome increase in public focus on this shamefully persistent human rights issue.

Our communities continued to be affected by the cost-of-living crisis, and this was reflected in increased demand for our Night Service. We saw spikes in demand for assistance with tenancy, employment, credit and debt, fines and family violence matters in particular. Pleasingly, we were able to reintroduce drop-in services on some nights, which had been ceased during the Covid pandemic. We were also proud to continue our history in the activist rights space by urgently standing up an advice service for university students protesting the war in Palestine.

We continued our focus on lived experience projects, concluding our successful, sector-leading Work Without Barriers project – a direct-employment program for women with lived experience of barriers for employment, and supporting the work of Voices for Change, a self-advocacy group for people with acquired brain injuries and lived experience of the criminal justice system.

On the operational front, we undertook a staff wellbeing review, achieved phase three NACLC accreditation, conducted an inaugural partner survey, developed a new annual performance and development review process, strengthened our external communications, updated our budgeting and reporting framework, secured continued funding for Q+Law, the Law Handbook and our Women's Integrated Legal Outreach program, conducted an inaugural Night Service fundraising appeal and returned a healthy and improved financial result.

We had two senior staff leave the organisation over the year, Finance and Operations Manager, Brendan Kelly, and CEO, Kristine Olaris OAM. Both made outstanding contributions to FLS, overseeing significant organisational growth and improved financial sustainability, and we are extremely grateful for their service.

RIGHT: L-R Kristine Olaris, Claire Febey, and Monique MacRitchie



We also welcomed a new Service Director and Principal Lawyer of our Night Service, Rebecca Johnston-Ryan. In June we appointed Hamish McLachlan as our new CEO. Hamish was formerly Legal Director, Day Practice and was Interim CEO from January 2024. We are grateful to Gayathri Paramasivam and Shane Marr, who ensured a smooth leadership transition by assisting us as interim Legal Director and Chief Operating Officer, respectively.

Members of the FLS Board and the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee continued to contribute their skills, perspectives, time, and energy to the organisation, providing particular assistance with accreditation and CEO recruitment. This year the Board farewelled long-standing member Chanphyna Bou, and welcomed local resident and LGBTIQ+ community member, Gerard Brody, who brings strong legal and governance skills, and a deep knowledge of the CLC sector to his role, having been the CEO of the Consumer Action Law Centre and Chair of Community Legal Centres Australia.

After the conclusion of the financial year, but prior to the publication of this report, long-standing Board member Claire Febey stood down from her role as FLS Chair. The Board, the organisation and our communities are extremely fortunate to have benefited from Claire's astute leadership over the last five years, as she stewarded us through an amalgamation, the Covid pandemic, the development of a new strategic plan and two changes of CEO. We are immensely grateful.

We commend the FLS Annual Report 2023-24 to **you** and **thank you for your support.**

Mick Sheehy
Chair

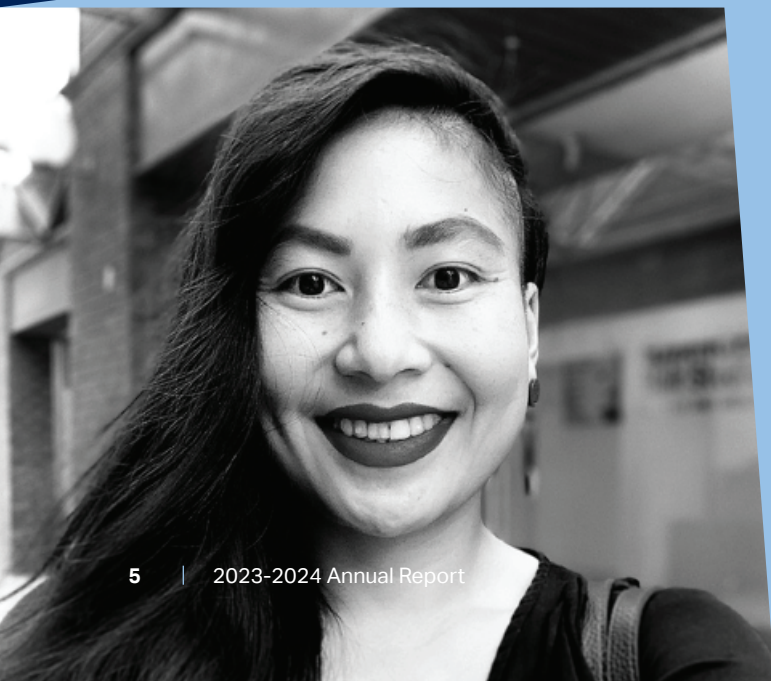


Hamish McLachlan
CEO



LEFT: Chanphyna Bou

RIGHT: Gerard Brody



Snapshot Of Our Year



4,301
clients assisted



Our clients:



3%

were Aboriginal or
Torres Strait Islander



7%

were children or
young people



8%

were trans or
gender diverse



19%

were experiencing or at
risk of homelessness



25%

spoke a language other
than English at home



34%

had a disability or
mental health issue



38%

were experiencing or at
risk of family violence



54%

were women

5,997

services delivered,
including:



3,815

legal
advices

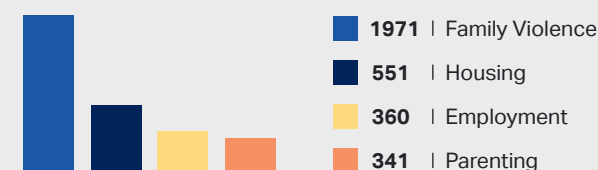
1,465

duty lawyer
services

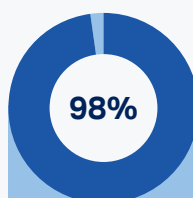
379

case work
services

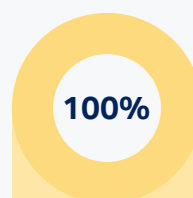
Our clients' top four problem types:



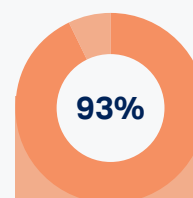
How our clients experienced our service:



felt welcome
and safe



felt our
service was
responsive to
their needs



felt more
confident to
seek legal help
in the future

Community services:

We provided

58

secondary
consultations

We engaged in

178

stakeholder
activities

We delivered

19

law reform
services

We delivered

18

community
legal education
sessions

We produced

17

community
legal education
resources

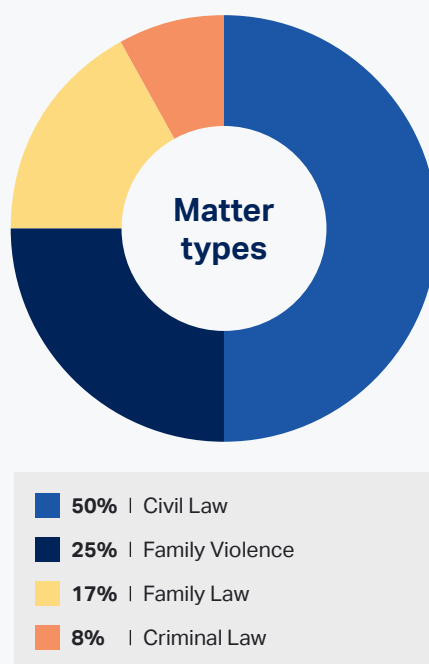
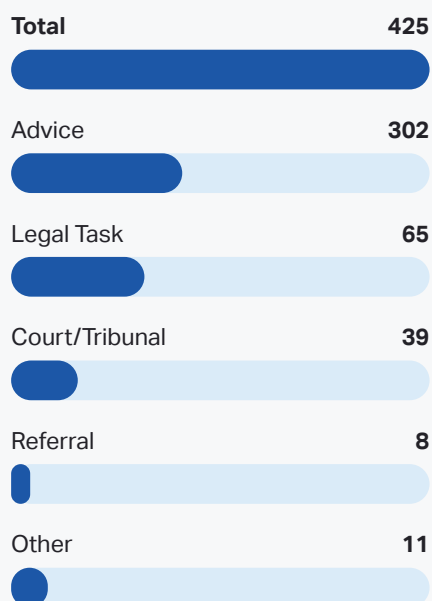
Q+Law

This year FLS proudly established Q+Law, in partnership with Queerspace. Q+Law is funded by the Victorian Government to provide a free, state-wide, safe entry point to the legal assistance sector for all LGBTIQ+SB Victorians. Q+Law is based at the Victorian Pride Centre in St Kilda with outreach locations at Queerspace in Carlton and Your Community Health in East Reservoir.

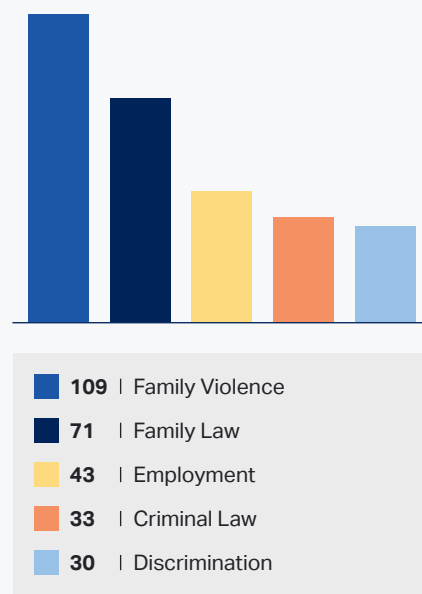
Legal Services Snapshot

In its first year, Q+Law delivered a remarkable **425 services** to **336 individual clients**.

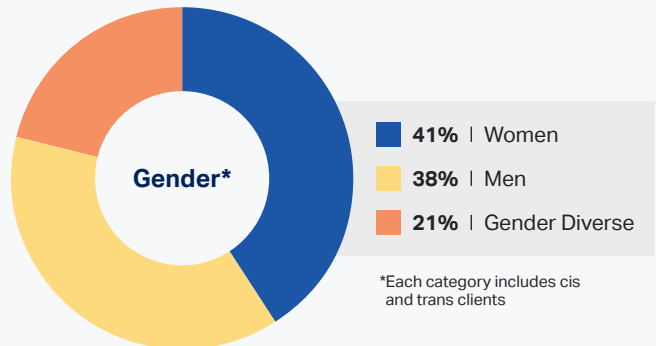
Service types



Top five problem types



Our Q+Law clients:



1 out of every 10
of our clients was trans



Community Legal Education

Q+Law had a significant focus on the delivery of community legal education to our partner organisations and to the broader LGBTIQ+SB communities. We worked with many of our stakeholder organisations to deliver workshops including:

- State Trustees – Wills and Powers of Attorney
- Melbourne Activist Legal Support – Protest Rights
- Tenants Victoria – Renters and Rooming House Residents' Rights
- Living Positive Victoria – Rights of People Living with HIV and Migration Law
- Gadens - Employment Law
- Allens – Name and ID Change
- The Victorian Bar - Name and ID Change

We also delivered many in-house workshops to upskill and improve the sector's understanding of issues impacting LGBTIQ+SB communities, to further develop awareness of sex, gender and sexuality, and how to support LGBTIQ+SB clients. Q+Law also provided secondary consultations and consulting services for other legal services to promote sector development.

Community Engagement

As a new service, this year we focussed on engaging extensively with our community stakeholders and partners, attending some 72 stakeholder meetings. We also attended 11 LGBTIQ+SB community events throughout the year, including the Midsumma Carnival and Drag EXPO. We also worked with two universities: Victoria University on their Queernival, and the University of Melbourne through their Street Law program. In addition, we attended the Pride event at Ravenhall Correctional Centre and have ongoing commitments to participate in the LGBTIQ+ Multicultural Fair Day in Merri-bek and to support the work of Living Positive Victoria through their workshops.

Interim evaluation confirms value of Q+Law

In October 2023 our independent evaluators completed an interim report which confirmed the value of Q+Law, finding that:

- Because of Q+Law more LGBTIQ+ Victorians know where they can go to access inclusive and respectful services to meet their legal and social support needs
- Clients can obtain quality, timely legal information, advice and representation from Q+Law
- Clients feel heard, respected and cared for by Q+Law staff



Case Study

Standing Up Against Homophobia

Tam* was an elderly gay man who lived in regional Victoria who had been subjected to relentless homophobic abuse by his neighbours. On one occasion Tam's neighbours stood outside his property and taunted him to come outside, while hurling homophobic insults at him. An altercation ensued and Tam was charged with serious assault offences, while his neighbours were charged with lesser offences.

Q+Law engaged in robust negotiations with the police and convinced them to downgrade Tam's charges to match the lesser charges received by his neighbours. At court, the Magistrate was very sympathetic to Tam's position, observing "it is not the 1960s anymore" and stating that it was unacceptable that our client had been subjected to homophobic abuse.

In sentencing, the Magistrate imposed a 'same day diversion' with the only condition being that Tam be of good behaviour. Because of our advocacy, Tam had no ongoing obligations or financial penalty, and nor was a conviction recorded.

██████████
*Name has been changed.

Case Study

Correcting Family Violence Misidentification In Queer Relationships

Kai* is a trans man who had been subjected to family violence by his partner Jessie*. Despite this, Jessie had been able to take out an interim Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO) against Kai, and reported three breaches of the order to police and police charged Kai with these breaches.

This fits a trend that Q+Law has been deeply concerned by, where police investigating family violence in queer relationships incorrectly identify the partner they perceive as being more 'masculine-presenting' as a person who uses violence in the relationship. This is an example of cisheteronormative stereotyping in the justice system.

Thankfully Q+Law was able to assist Kai by negotiating with Jessie's legal representative to replace the interim FVIO with a 12-month undertaking, and successfully negotiating with the police to withdraw all three criminal charges – in part on the grounds that Kai was the person subjected to family violence during the relationship. One of the charges proceeded as far as a contest mention where the Magistrate agreed with our position and recommended the police withdraw the charge.

██████████
* Names have been changed.



Drug Outreach Lawyer Program

Now over 23 years old, FLS's Drug Outreach Lawyer program provides legal services to people who use drugs, assisting with their rehabilitation process and promoting harm reduction by reducing the negative impact of their legal problems.

The legal support we offer varies depending on the needs of the client, ranging from one-off advice to extensive casework and court advocacy.

Outreach partners in the City of Yarra include YSAS (Youth Support and Advocacy Services), The Living Room (Youth Projects), Inner Space (cohealth), the Medically Supervised Injecting Room (North Richmond Community Health) and Odyssey House. Outreach partners in the City of Darebin include Uniting Care ReGen and YSAS (Youth Support and Advocacy Services).

This year the DOL program assisted **87 clients with 104 services**, of which **76 per cent were casework** and **11 per cent were advices**. Our lawyers appeared in court on more than **200 separate days at various courts** across Melbourne.

This year we were also busy in the community engagement space, with highlights including presenting at a Turning Point online seminar attended by more than 370 people working in the AOD sector, speaking at the Yarra Drug and Health Forum Overdose Awareness Day, and being invited to travel to the Philippines to attend a global convening of lawyers working with marginalised communities.

Our DOL clients:



15%

were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander



24%

were born overseas



42%

were experiencing or at risk of homelessness



71%

were in receipt of a Centrelink benefit



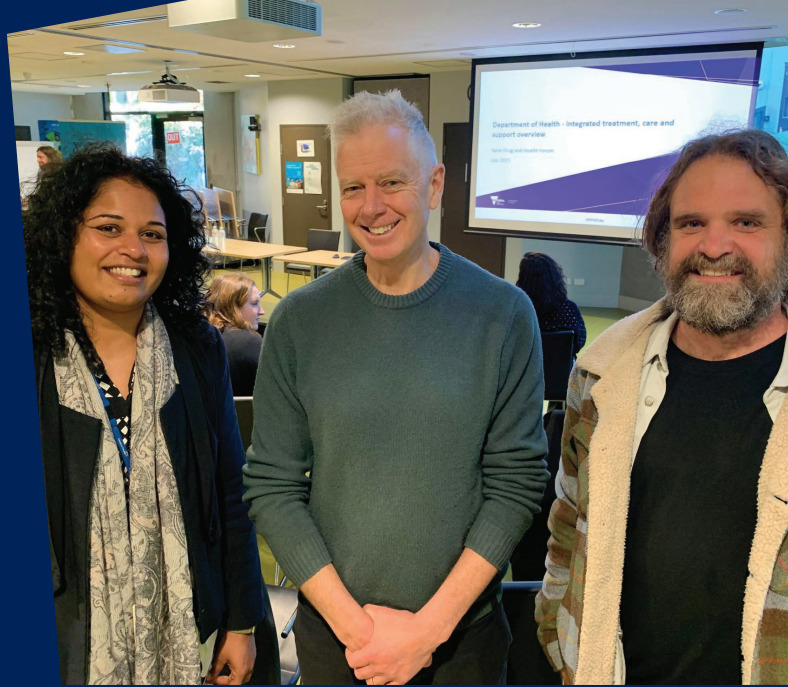
82%

had a disability or mental health issue



My experience in working with FLS particularly with Adam Willson, has been amazing. Adam is always available for consult, will follow up and if direct support can't be provided, referrals to relevant legal support will be made.

Staff member
at DOL partner Uniting ReGen



Case Study

Jeremy was referred to the program for assistance with a serious criminal charge of intentionally causing injury. Jeremy attended the MSIR daily and VLA wanted to refer him to a service that would ensure he was well supported, both while receiving advice and at court. Jeremy had significant cognitive impairment, was living with schizophrenia and drug dependence, had an extensive history of criminalisation, was unable to read and did not have a phone.*

Because of our intensive outreach model at the MSIR, notwithstanding Jeremy's complex life circumstances, our drug outreach lawyer was able to engage with him regularly. Our strong relationship with the MSIR meant we were able to easily access various support materials so that we could ensure the court was readily aware of Jeremy's circumstances. As Jeremy was Aboriginal, we arranged to have his matter heard on the Aboriginal Hearing Day at the NJC, where he could benefit from utilising cultural services. Following our advocacy, Jeremy's charge was downgraded to the less serious charge of unlawful assault, and, consistent with its model the court agreed to defer Jeremy's sentencing to allow him to engage further with services. This allowed Jeremy to continue benefiting from treatment, and he will have this engagement and improvement in his circumstances considered when his sentence is determined.

*Name has been changed.



FLS offers our clients an excellent responsive service and to have this connection means that clinicians can focus on primary addiction recovery goals and know that clients' legal needs are taken care of.

Staff member
at DOL partner Uniting ReGen



Women's Integrated Legal Outreach

Our WILO program provides holistic, gender-informed legal and social work services to criminalised women and trans and gender diverse people, drawing on our understanding of the common drivers of criminalisation, and the legal and social needs that women and trans and gender diverse people face, that either lead to or are a result of their criminalisation.

WILO's integrated practice model allows our social workers to engage with clients to address their support needs, while our lawyers work to achieve the best legal outcomes in their legal matters, across criminal, civil and family law.

This year WILO provided an incredible **88 legal** and **social services**, to help women and trans and gender diverse people to stay out of prison.



The combination of quality legal representation, and flexible and individualised social work supports, has meant that clients' legal and psychosocial needs are being met by the program.

WILO evaluation 2023

Our WILO clients:



21%

were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander



78%

were experiencing or at risk of family violence



64%

were experiencing or at risk of homelessness



94%

had a disability or mental health issue



100%

were women or gender diverse



Prior to (my court hearing) they helped me understand what is going to happen, feel less anxious about what is going to happen. Without their consistent reassurance I would not be able to get through this time.

WILO client



[WILO] helped me so much I cannot imagine how I would have survived [without them]. Especially [my social worker] helped me throughout the way, even the moral support, she would ask me if I was ok. I go for groceries to [a support service], it is an inconvenience to pick them up with my back issues. They went above and beyond, more than I could ever have imagined.

WILO client



Case Study

Holistic Support through WILO

Jan was a mother of three, whose partner Daniel* had a history of using family violence. Daniel had previously been removed from their family home and required to undergo counselling following child protection involvement. Daniel had previously obtained a family violence intervention order (FVIO) against Jan, which Jan had not contested as she feared that doing so would have angered Daniel, exposing her to more violence. Jan was also reluctant to engage with police as she was frightened of them due to negative childhood experiences.*

One day, while Jan was driving with her three children in the back seat, Daniel began verbally abusing their daughter. Jan responded physically. When she later attempted to call her mother for support, Daniel assaulted her and smashed her phone. Jan then left the family home for her mother's and called a family violence support line. The next day, she attended the police station to report the assault and was informed that Daniel had already reported the incident, naming Jan as the aggressor. The police then charged Jan with assault and obtained an interim FVIO against her.

With the help of the WILO team, Jan and her daughter were referred for family violence counselling. Our lawyer reminded police of their policies regarding prosecution of family violence matters. WILO then assisted Jan to take out a FVIO for her protection.

Daniel consented to this order, but the parties had a fight at court and he again attended police to report that Jan had assaulted him. WILO advised Jan of her rights at the police interview, and informed police about the history of family violence in the relationship, advocating for the police to investigate Daniel for making false reports.

We also provided Jan with specialist family law advice on separation. She was further assisted by a WILO social worker to create a safety plan and referred to parenting and play groups in her area to improve her social networks. Jan was supported to call police when Daniel continued to breach the FVIO.

After two adjournments and the threat of a costs application, the police agreed to withdraw the criminal charges against Jan. Similarly, after a directions hearing and two further adjournments, police withdrew their application for a FVIO. Ultimately, following advocacy from the WILO lawyer, the police moved to prosecute Daniel for a breach of the FVIO.

Through WILO's involvement Jan was able to develop trust in the support services available to her. Having integrated and consistent legal and non-legal supports, as well as specialist criminal law, family law and family violence legal assistance was critical in obtaining favourable legal outcomes for Jan, and thereby keeping her safe and out of prison.

*Names have been changed.

The Law Handbook

This year FLS published the 46th edition of The Law Handbook.

Updated every year by more than 80 legal specialists, our leading guide to the law covers more than 90 common legal topics. It includes detailed information about areas of the law that most affect people in their everyday lives and provides information on emerging legal issues and changes to the law.

The Law Handbook is a valuable resource for lawyers, teachers, students, community workers, activists and members of the community with a legal problem.

The areas of law covered in this edition of The Law Handbook are:

- Understanding our laws and courts
- Going to court and getting help with legal problems
- Fines, infringements and criminal law
- Relationships, families and young people
- Managing your money
- Houses, communities and the road
- Consumers, contracts, the internet and copyright
- Disability, mental illness and the law
- Health, wills, and legal issues affecting older people
- Accidents, insurance and compensation
- Rights, activism and fair treatment at work
- Privacy law, FOI and complaints against government bodies

The 46th edition included updates to the sections on disability law, sex work, sexual offences and prisoners' rights.



The idea of the Law Handbook was really about empowerment. It is one of the values of FLS, and it was one of our very early values. We had this metaphor where clients would come in with a problem and slide it over the desk and say fix it, and we'd slide it back to the middle of the table and say let's fix it together.

Julian Gardner

Founder, life member and co-editor of the first edition of the Law Handbook



Accessibility

Once again, this edition of The Law Handbook is highly accessible. It is available in a variety of formats, including hardcopy book, ebook, and as individual PDF chapters. Thanks to the Victorian Government, it is also available for free online at <https://fls.org.au/law-handbook>.

Thank you, contributors

Producing this book every year would not be possible without the generosity and expertise of our contributors. We very much value the outstanding contribution of each and every contributor. For the 2024 edition, magistrates, ombudsmen, commissioners, barristers, law lecturers, partners, principal lawyers and accredited specialists in a range of areas were among the contributors. Some contributors have been writing for the book for decades, while others are new recruits.

This year we farewelled a number of long-time contributors including barristers Paul Bingham, Ben Lindner and Noah Eidelson, and Magistrates Suzie Cameron and Simon Zebrowski.

Thank you, freelancers

We would like to thank the freelancers who have dedicated many hours to publishing this edition of the handbook: Erin O'Dwyer (editor), Sandy Cull (cover designer), Puddingburn (compiler of the index and the lists of cases and legislation), Kerry Cooke (typesetter) and Sunset Publishing (the developers of the ebook and online version). We also had a number of experienced freelance editors – thanks especially to Danielle Teutsch, Kerryn Burgess and Dr Teresa Goudie.



I recall, as a first-year law student, volunteering to scribble down the names and details of FLS clients who stepped down into the 'dungeon' that was the FLS office in the basement of the Town Hall. That was 1974. I volunteered (Wednesday nights) in the 1980s and have enjoyed maintaining contact with FLS over many years, via both contributing to the Handbook and touching base at the annual Tim McCoy Dinner. You have come such a long way since the early days, in particular with the magnificent achievement of the 46th edition of the Law Handbook.

W. Benjamin Linder

Barrister and Law Handbook contributor



BELOW: Law Handbook launch 2024



Night Service

Our iconic Night Service offers free legal advice and assistance to clients from all over Victoria on a wide range of community law issues. Powered by over 200 volunteers, our Night Service runs five nights a week in Fitzroy, and three nights a fortnight in Reservoir.

This year we saw an increase in service demand in the context of the cost-of-living crisis. We saw particular demand for assistance with housing, employment, fines and debt matters, and we also saw a significant increase in clients seeking family violence and family law advice.

Our LGBTQIA+ Advice Clinic has continued to operate this year thanks to the incredible support of our partner Hall & Wilcox. This year we assisted almost 40 clients with a range of issues including family violence, family law, employment, tenancies and general civil matters.

This year we provided **3209 services** to **2548 community members**.

Top four problem types:

	Housing	464
	Civil Matters	405
	Employment	313
	Family Violence	258

There has also been a return to our roots in our service offerings this year, with the return of drop-in services on Monday and Thursday nights at Fitzroy. Historically, the Night Service has operated as a drop-in advice service, but this was halted during the Covid pandemic. One of our most impactful drop-in client experiences this year has been assisting a client in resolving an ever-increasing fines debt of over \$30,000.

This year we also supported anti-war protest encampments across various universities in Victoria with a pop-up phone advice line run by Night Service volunteers during the on-campus protests against the war in Gaza. We received numerous calls from students on-campus seeking advice on their protest rights, and we also provided support to several students who were subject to university misconduct proceedings for their protest actions.

Our Night Service simply wouldn't exist without the dedication of our volunteers.

We remain very grateful for our volunteer administrative assistants, paralegals and lawyers who donate their evenings to assist members of our community to work through their legal issues.

TO REBECCA AND CHLOE
I WOULD LIKE TO SAY
THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR
YOUR PROMPT + PROFESSIONAL
SERVICE TO MY MATTER OF
RETURNED FUNDS FROM VIC
POLICE.
THE MONEY HAS TAKEN A
BIT OF PRESSURE OF ME
SO THANK YOU AGAIN FOR
JOB WELL DONE.
BEST WISHES FROM
PAT [REDACTED]

Family Violence Duty Lawyer Services

FLS provides, holistic and timely advice and duty lawyer services to victim survivors of family violence, four days per week at the Specialist Family Violence Court at Heidelberg Magistrates' Court and one day per week at the Neighbourhood Justice Centre.

In line with the SFVC model, we are committed to providing a holistic and safe duty lawyer service for our clients. We work collaboratively with the court, applicant and respondent support services, Victoria Legal Aid, and the police to advocate on behalf of, and to give a voice to, our clients.

This year we provided an incredible **1,192 family violence duty lawyer services** at the SFVC and **220 duty lawyer services** at the NJC.

Our SFVC clients:



11%

were experiencing or at risk of homelessness



21%

spoke a language other than English at home



33%

had a disability or mental health issue



84%

were female or gender diverse



Yarra Family Violence Health Justice Partnership

FLS provides a maternal and child-health-focussed family violence health justice partnership at the Connie Benn Centre in Fitzroy.

The Connie Benn Centre is an integrated Maternal and Child Health and Early Learning Centre, with a strong focus on children's rights, education, health and wellbeing. FLS has a lawyer co-located at the service, providing advice and casework on family violence-related matters, community legal education and secondary consultations.

Now in its second year in its current form, the service is building, with our lawyer's regular presence at the centre resulting in community members approaching her directly to seek advice. This year we also saw a significant influx in referrals for clients and requests for community legal education and secondary consults.

This year we provided **holistic, integrated, wraparound advice and legal support for 25 clients**, providing ongoing legal representation in seven matters, including complex family law litigation involving family violence.

In addition, we conducted **18 stakeholder engagement meetings** with City of Yarra workers, **three community legal education sessions** and **10 secondary consultations** with workers from Connie Benn and the City of Yarra.

Case Study

Johanna approached our outreach lawyer in the reception area of the Connie Benn Centre where the lawyer was conducting appointments. Our lawyer could see that Johanna was visibly upset and stressed. Johanna told our lawyer about a recent family violence incident involving her and her children. Our lawyer immediately assisted Johanna to apply for a family violence intervention order. The following week our lawyer attended court with Johanna and represented her in an application for an urgent interim family violence intervention order to protect her and her children while her case went through the court system.*

*Name has been changed.



[The FLS lawyer] was amazing. If she wasn't able to answer the phone she would call as soon as she could. She was always in communications. I don't have any complaints, all good things.

Client of Yarra Family Violence Health Justice Partnership



Family Law and Family Violence Advice and Outreach

We conduct several outreaches across the Cities of Yarra and Darebin, where we provide advice to clients on family violence and family law, as well as related legal issues, including at NEMA Orange Door, North Richmond Community Health and the Mercy Hospital.

This year there was considerable demand for our various family law and family violence advice and outreach appointments, with many clients having to wait for availability.

We assisted **144 clients** at our NEMA outreach alone.

We also conduct a monthly Divorce Clinic, where we assist disadvantaged community members to apply for divorce, and regular family law and family violence advice clinics at both Fitzroy and Reservoir.

This year we helped **30 people** apply for a divorce.



We love your service and find it so beneficial for clients and staff

Staff at Outreach Partner
North Richmond Community Health



RIGHT: Divorce Clinic at Fitzroy Town Hall



Family Law and Family Violence Casework

We understand how difficult navigating the family law legal system is, particularly for victim survivors of family violence.

We operate a well-regarded and substantial family law litigation practice focussed on victim survivors, for both parenting and property matters. We draw on our specialist understanding of family violence when assisting our clients, to ensure it is a safe place for the client to provide us instructions and to present these instructions to the court.

This year we opened **13 new family law litigation matters** and represented **five clients at contested hearings** for family violence intervention orders.



Dear team at Fitzroy Legal Service, I am writing to express my most sincere gratitude. Thank you, Madeleine, Sally and the team for the professionalism shown behind my legal representation. I am so very grateful for the countless hours and all the hard work that each of you have put into my case over the last eighteen months. My family and I are very pleased with the outcome of my proceedings and extremely grateful. Thank you all so much. I will be sure to recommend Fitzroy Legal Service to anyone that finds themselves in a difficult situation.

WILO evaluation 2023



Case Study

Fighting for financial security for victim survivors

We assisted Magda in a family law property dispute. Magda and Paul* had been together for 40 years and had separated several years ago. There was significant verbal, physical and financial abuse during the relationship. Over the years, Magda was aware that Paul was purchasing assets, potentially properties, but she had no details. Magda was living in her and Paul's former matrimonial home and wanted it transferred solely into her name. The home was the only property or asset that she had any details about.*

When FLS sought to negotiate with Paul, he refused to provide any information about his financial position. We initiated proceedings on behalf of Magda, seeking financial disclosure from Paul and for the property to be transferred into Magda's name. Paul refused to participate in the court proceedings and did not comply with court orders for disclosure.

We represented Magda at several court hearings, attempting to have the matter proceed in Paul's absence. The matter was eventually listed for a final hearing, and we argued that, considering the lack of full and frank disclosure or compliance on behalf of Paul, it was just and equitable for the property to be transferred into Magda's name. The court agreed and the property was transferred solely into Magda's name.

*Names have been changed.

St Vincent's Health Justice Partnership

Through our innovative partnership with St Vincent's ALERT team, we provide holistic legal services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and other systemic disadvantage, requiring intensive allied health support.

BELOW:
Photographer: John Corker



We have lawyers co-located at the hospital who attend care-team meetings and are on hand to receive referrals.

This HJP continues to be highly valued both by FLS and St Vincent's, with lawyers and clinicians working closely to support clients with complex needs across their legal and health matters.

This year we assisted St Vincent's clients with **40 services, including 20 casework files and 9 legal tasks**, across multiple problem types, including housing and personal safety matters.

Our clients:



85%

had a disability or mental health issue



38%

were experiencing or at risk of homelessness

Neighbourhood Justice Centre

The Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC) is Australia's only community justice centre. It is located in Collingwood and services the City of Yarra. The NJC is committed to resolving disputes by addressing the underlying causes of harmful behaviour and tackling social disadvantage.

FLS provides a range of services at the NJC including:

- Legal advice, duty lawyer services and representation in summary crime, family violence, personal safety, victims of crime orders, council prosecutions and tenancy infringement matters;
- Assisting with general legal advice for residents from the City of Yarra who attend the NJC; and
- and Contributing to the multi-agency leadership group participating in community engagement, community development, community legal education and systemic change initiatives.

This year our NJC team continued to work closely with VLA to provide duty lawyer and casework services in criminal law, as well as duty lawyer services in the areas of family violence and personal safety intervention orders.

We provided **364 services to 226 clients**. This included **84 casework services** and **270 duty lawyer services**.

Our NJC clients:



10% were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander



15% were experiencing or at risk of homelessness



43% had a disability or mental health issue



59% were in receipt of a Centrelink benefit



60% were experiencing or at risk of family violence

We also participated in community legal education and NJC stakeholder groups, meetings and events. We spoke at site visits from a range of community and government representatives, including the Commissioner for Youth Justice. We took part in group discussions with the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence and a multi-agency leadership group regarding how family violence-related proceedings are managed at the NJC. The team also worked together with VLA and Carringbush Adult Education to deliver community legal education on road licensing and road laws to women of refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Migrant Employment Law Clinic

Our Migrant Employment Law Clinic provides assistance to vulnerable migrant workers with claims regarding unpaid wages, workplace discrimination, sexual harassment, and unfair and unlawful dismissal.

In total, the MELC has recovered close to **\$1million in unpaid wages, entitlements, compensation and penalties** on behalf of our clients.

This year we continued to be a strong advocate for marginalised members of our community facing significant employment law issues, continuing our advocacy on behalf of clients to fight significant underpayment matters, and importantly, in seeking enforcement of orders made for our clients.

Migration Law Program

With the generous support of a three-year grant from the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner, we established a new Migration Law Program to deliver migration law advice, assistance and education to community members and CLC workers.

After commencing in March 2024, our Senior Migration Lawyer engaged in significant consultations and scoping to gauge community need and gaps in service provision. He met with community legal services, council groups and migrant groups to

better understand how this new service can best meet migration needs across our catchment areas and established relationships with private firms keen to offer pro bono support to clients.

Darebin Community Outreach

With the support of the City of Darebin, we provide community outreach legal services to marginalised community members in the City of Darebin.

This year we established a new outreach, which is a three-way partnership between FLS, Reservoir Neighbourhood House (RNH) and Darebin community support and outreach service DIVRS (Darebin Information Volunteer and Resource Service). Working closely with RNH staff and a social worker from DIVRS, the partnership proved so popular that we quickly increased outreaches from fortnightly to weekly.

Our outreach to the Northland Youth Hub continued fortnightly with plans to connect with further youth services across Darebin. This year we reestablished an outreach to support St Mary's House of Welcome in Fitzroy, which was made possible through a secondment arrangement with Gadens.

This year we assisted
34 clients with 40 services.



Generalist Advice and Casework


We provide generalist advice and casework to disadvantaged and marginalised clients in the Cities of Yarra and Darebin. We assist clients with criminal charges, tenancy matters, victims of crime compensation applications, fines and other matters as they arise. This year we were greatly assisted by Gadens, whose secondee support enabled us to extend our civil law services in Yarra.

This year we delivered **140 services**, including **67 casework files**, **17 legal tasks** and **50 advices**. The top problem types were **housing (25 per cent)** and **fines (21 per cent)**.

Our clients:

 **60%** had a disability or mental health issue

 **26%** spoke a language other than English at home

 **32%** were experiencing or at risk of homelessness

 **25%** were experiencing or at risk of family violence

Case Study

Preventing Homelessness

Sarah* contacted FLS after she was served with a VCAT application by her landlord seeking to evict her because her rent was \$10,000 in arrears. Sarah was an older, single woman who has difficulties reading and writing and whose sole income was the Disability Support Pension and whose core support network – including her parents and partner – had all passed away within the past five years. She had no savings or other means to pay this debt and was considering seeking a payday loan.

Our lawyer obtained \$6,000 in grants from housing support agencies, connected Sarah to a social worker and financial counsellor for ongoing support, and obtained support letters from the housing support services and the social worker, as well as a report from the financial counsellor. As a result, the rental provider agreed to a three-and-a-half-year repayment plan at an affordable rate of \$50 per fortnight, and VCAT made consent orders to that effect. Sarah was able to remain in her housing, with ongoing supports and an affordable repayment plan.

*Name has been changed.

Systemic Advocacy

We work towards creating a fairer Victorian community through our systemic advocacy and law reform work, which seeks to amend laws and policies to meet the needs of our communities. This year we engaged in 19 law reform and advocacy efforts, including participating in sector coalitions, submissions to parliamentary inquiries and signing on to open letters addressed to key decision makers.

Case Study

Extending anti-vilification protections to more Victorians

FLS contributed two submissions to the Victorian Government's consultation on implementing the legislative recommendations of the Victorian Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections. Our submissions called on the government to broaden anti-vilification protections to include members of the LGBTQIA+ community; sex workers; people experiencing homelessness; migrants; people who use drugs; and a broader definition of disability that is inclusive of people with all blood-borne viruses. We also argued that any anti-vilification provisions must require consideration of context (social, historical and political) and power dynamics (status and position of the speaker) in legal tests for vilification, to ensure that the protections are not inadvertently used to increase criminalisation of the very communities they are seeking to protect. We were pleased to see several of our recommendations reflected in the next stage of the reform process, and to see our other asks endorsed by organisations such as the Federation of Community Legal Centres in their ongoing work in this space.

Case Study

Standing up for NDIS participants

FLS was proud to support leading disability rights activists in writing, researching, and circulating an open letter calling on the federal NDIS Minister Bill Shorten to refrain from cutting access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme for people with disability who have criminal histories. The letter gathered 97 signatures from disability organisations, justice organisations, community legal centres, academics and leading lived experience advocates. The letter was successful in helping to facilitate a meeting with the Minister's office, where key signatories were able to raise their concerns directly.

We made a submission on the **Family Law Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2023**, expressing broad agreement with the proposed reforms, which include making **family violence a factor to be considered in family law property proceedings, codification of the test for wastage and requiring Children's Contact Centres** to be accredited.

Public Interest Litigation

Our strategic litigation program works within a community development framework to achieve high impact justice outcomes in the public interest.

We conduct strategic litigation to advance our strategic advocacy goals, to respond to systemic issues arising in FLS's practice areas, and as necessary to advance the rights of our clients and communities. This year we assisted clients with proceedings in the Yoorrook Justice Commission, fought against systems abuse in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity system and ran a successful County Court appeal involving the rights of First Nations people living on Aboriginal land.

Community Legal Education

We strive to increase community understanding of the law and how to access legal support through our community legal education program.

We deliver information sessions directly to the community and to other community service providers to help them identify legal issues their clients are facing, and to know where to refer them for legal assistance.

Case Study

Standing up for rights on Aboriginal Land

James had been charged with refusing to undergo a preliminary breath test while on his ancestral lands at Bung Yarnda ('Lake Tyers').*

James instructed that the police were trespassing on private property, and that they had not seen him driving, when they required him to undergo the breath test. James was found guilty by the Magistrates' Court, and we assisted him to appeal to the County Court, with pro bono representation from Sharon Lacy SC and John Blackley.

We argued that the police had not lawfully entered the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust, which is Aboriginal land and statutory private property governed by the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970, as they did not have permission to be there. Additionally, we argued that the police did not find James driving or in charge of a motor vehicle, and their request to him to undergo a breath test was unlawful on this basis.

The appeal was successful, with the County Court finding that there was no evidence that James was driving or in charge of a motor vehicle. Because of this, the Court did not go on to consider the nature of the Trust land, or the authority of police to enter the property without permission and to exercise coercive powers on it.

Over two and a half years after James was charged, the charge was dismissed and James was exonerated and was able to drive again and get back to Country.

**Name has been changed.*

This year we engaged in **18 community legal education activities**, including with partner organisations such as the Connie Benn Centre, Turning Point and Living Positive.

Voices for Change

Now in its fourth year, Voices for Change continued its critical work of self-advocacy and community education on the relationship between acquired brain injuries and the justice system.

The group has continued to go from strength to strength as the members grow their self-advocacy skills. This was a huge year for the group, with members speaking at two national conferences, continuing their consultation work with health and justice organisations that support people with acquired brain injuries and building strong professional and community networks.

In April the group celebrated four years of disability and justice self-advocacy at a hugely successful event held at Fitzroy Town Hall, facilitated entirely by the members themselves, a huge marker of their progress as leading self-advocates.

The members all shared powerful stories of their journeys to date. Michael spoke about how his journey through the criminal justice system started at an early age, and how positive Voices for Change has been in helping to change his life. Fran spoke alongside ABI self-advocate Peta Ferguson about how Peta's self-advocacy over many years helped Fran find her voice. And Jai shared what his life was like before Voices for Change, and how much it means to him to have his kids back in his life.

The event also included guest speeches, both live and via recorded video, from organisations from across the disability and justice sectors, including the Centre for Innovative Justice, the Self Advocacy Resource Unit (SARU) and the Office of the Public Advocate.

The event demonstrated not only the massive achievements of Voices for Change over the last four years, both as a group and for the members individually, but also how much of a vital role the group now plays in the health and justice sectors.

While this was the final year of the group's existing ILC grant, we are excited that the group was successful in receiving an additional grant for the 2024-25 financial year from the Department of Social Services, enabling the group to continue its crucial work for the ABI community.



[Voices for Change] is now an integral part of the justice system. You are a permanent part of the DNA of the legal landscape in this state. Congratulations, and thank you for the work you've done.

Rob Hulls AM

Director, Centre for Innovative Justice



“

To be able to have full custody of my kids and do the work that I'm doing spreading awareness, that's probably the biggest achievement I've got out of Voices for Change.

Jai

”



“

The self-advocacy journey has changed my life. If I hadn't become involved, I would hate to think where I would be today.

Fran

”

Work Without Barriers

This year saw the culmination of our sector-leading Work Without Barriers project. The project provided a safe, inclusive and meaningful direct employment and training program for women and gender diverse people who had experienced systemic barriers to employment, and used codesign methodologies to ensure that lived experience voices and expertise were centred throughout it.

The program hired three women for a period of 18 months to work in our admin and client intake team to support the vital backend work that keeps our organisation running smoothly. Through this employment the participants received on-the-job training and skill development in administrative, file management and computer skills that are easily transferable to a variety of industries and contexts. In addition, the women were provided with external career coaching and counselling support, participated in job-readiness training programs and completed certificate qualifications in their chosen fields of interest.

Throughout the program, the participants received ongoing job supervision from our admin and client intake team, and additional 1:1 mentoring and development sessions with the project coordinator. An independent evaluation of the program found that “the participants left the program with improved confidence, ‘hard skills’ in administrative work, and ‘soft skills’ such as being in a professional work environment, teamwork and communicating around the office. Participants were also supported to progress their job readiness parameters, including setting up their own working-from-home environment and accessing appropriate office attire.

Peer Work Job Expo

In May we hosted a Peer Work Job Expo at the Fitzroy Town Hall, bringing together a wide range of organisations supporting women and gender-diverse individuals to break down employment barriers and build careers using their lived and living experience. This was one of the first times that Victoria’s peer workforce was given the opportunity to gather together in one space.

Over 100 people attended, and participating organisations included leading family violence organisations, housing, mental health, AOD, and other advocacy and support services. Attendees could chat to peer workers from these organisations at their stalls and find out about employment opportunities and pathways or listen to the various speeches and panels exploring different topics relating to the peer workforce and how people can use their lived experience to make a difference in the community.

BELOW: Work Without Barriers Peer Work Job Expo



I’ve gained more confidence and it’s changed my life dramatically. I love coming to work in a really peaceful and pleasant environment.

WWB participant



Volunteer Program

Since 1972, our incredible volunteers have been the beating heart of FLS. Their dedication and skills are the backbone of the services provided by FLS, helping us support and uplift our community.

We welcome justice-oriented community members to join us, with recruitment taking place biannually at the beginning and middle of each year, along with specific roles available throughout. Throughout the year, we offer opportunities for our volunteers to connect and grow through events, training programs and networking opportunities.

This year, following our volunteer recruitment round in January, we welcomed **80 new volunteers** and now have over **160 dedicated individuals** volunteering for FLS who provided **14,755 hours of free legal advice** to our community this year.

Volunteer social events

Our volunteer social events provide an opportunity for volunteers and staff to connect in a relaxed and enjoyable setting. These moments of connection not only enhance our sense of community but also foster a supportive environment that benefits everyone involved in our vision of access to justice to all.

Volunteer Week 2024

To celebrate National Volunteer Week, we hosted a week-long online raffle where our volunteers could 'bid' each day on an array of generous prizes donated by local businesses. The week culminated in a social event at The Russian House, where volunteers and staff came together to celebrate and present the prizes.

Melbourne Law School Public Interest Law Fair

Each year we attend the PILF where FLS staff members spend the day talking to students about volunteer opportunities at FLS and careers in community law, providing an avenue to discuss social justice passions with attendees.



We acknowledge all the individuals below and any others who have contributed to Fitzroy Legal Service in a volunteer capacity in 2023–2024.

A	Annette De Guzman	K	Simon Moodie	Tian Steuart
Nouda Abdulhak	Phoebe Kay Dellosa	Jasminder Kaur	Danita Moshinsky	Jeremiah Stevens
Alex Ahn	Jeylan Deniz	Amanpreet Kaur Singh	Udai Muhtaseb	Tiana Sylvia
Margarita Ainsworth	Julio Di Gregorio	Abby Keenan	Elli Murphy	T
Edward Aitken	Mason Dimalanta	James Kempster	N	Matilda Taggart
Sarah Ajlouni	Harvey Duckett	Noah Khan	Linh Nguyen	Jared Talavera
Varun Alluri	Ella Duncan	Sam Kilpatrick	Michelle Nguyen	Gaby Terliatan
Carol Andrades	E	Maya Klaric	O	Nisha Thanabal
Rima Arakji	Nadia Endrinal	L	Isabel O'Connor	Lavanya Thavaraja
Paul Arnold	Bonnie Esposito	Vinay Lakshman	P	Alex Thomas
Tasmyn Askew	F	Miles Langkamp	Amber Paton	Genevieve Thomas-Walters
Rebecca Austin	Sam Farfoud	Alex Larocca	Etty Philosof	Lavinia Tjangdjaja
B	James Farrugia	Paul Latimer	Robert Ponsford	Benjamin Tria
Kim Bailey	Joan Feng	Megan Lazaro	Tamara Preuss	Cian Truong
Yingying Bao	Emily Forbes	Helen Le	R	U
James Beale	Ben Freeman	Simon Lee	Cate Read	Bill Unkles
Chloe Beare	Jethro Fries	Moniroth Leng	Sally Reid	V
Jordyn Bethune	Ripple Fu	Bill Leung	Dilhan Reznikas	Mary Vairawanathan
Ruby Bilson	G	Madeleine Lezon	Jessica Richardson-Brown	Isabella Varallo
Dominic Bilton	Alison Galbally	Jason Lianto	Lucy Roberts-Lovell	Jo Verity
Ella Bilton-Gough	Fiona Garton	Niamh Lingard	Gabriela Robledo	Zachary Vogrig
Carla Bonifacio	Susan Gatford	Raymond Lobo	Tom Rowan	W
Sonya Brennan	John Ginnane	Megan Lombardo	Aoife Ryall	Julia Walker
Sebastian Brydon	Jai Glennon	Peter Lynch	Sharon Ryan	Kym Wallace
C	Cathy Guo	M	S	Mary Wallace
Nguyet Tran Minh Cao	H	Khuwayla Mahamud	Grayson Sadler	Emma Walling
Ashley Chandler	Coel Healy	Danijel Malbasa	Simran Sandhu	Alan Wang
Milton Cheng	Winona Horton	Bruce McBain	Anisha Sarib	Joanne Wang
Isobel Christie	Michelle Huang	Aidan McCarthy	Karl Schaffarczyk	Franklin Ward
Max Chung	Max Huyton	Charlotte McDonald	Sam Schilling	Hugh Wetherill
Chloe Colfer	I	Hugh McLeish	Rebecca Sepsakos	Liz White
Jason Craig	Constance Iliadis	Hayley McLeod	Tal Septon	Meg Whittaker
Tiarne Crowther	Yujin Im	Danie Mellas	Tanya Shah	Joely Wilkinson-Hayes
Christina Cushen	J	Ruby Mher	Kiran Shanker- Butler	Marc Willcox
D	Ned Jackson	Kathryn Mifsud	Asheesh Shawel	Vanessa Wilson
Vu Dang	Gagandeep Jassal	Romilly Miller	Brendan Sheahan	Z
Aliza Danish	Justine Jawhar	Helena Mimigiannis	Bridget Sowersby	Tony Zakkour
	Kayden Johnson	Clement Mok	James Spencer	

Our People

Adam Willson

Managing Lawyer, CLDO
Senior Drug Outreach Lawyer
(until Jul 2023)

Amity Mara

Manager, Policy, Advocacy
& Projects
(from Mar 2024)

Amre Levy

Family Lawyer

Andy Kuoch

Drug Outreach Lawyer
(from May 2024)

Belinda Anderson

Social Worker, WILO
(Oct 2023 - May 2024)

Bess Smallwood

Senior Policy & Systemic
Advocacy Officer
Senior Community Lawyer, NJC
(until Dec 2023)

Elizabeth Griggs

Admin & Client Services Officer,
Q+Law

Beth King

Senior Community Lawyer, NJC

Brendan Kelly

Finance & Operations Manager
(until Nov 2023)

Candace Johnson

Finance Officer

Caroline Strum

Admin Officer, WWB
(until Mar 2024)

Cassandra Martin

Project Officer, Prisons Program
(until Aug 2023)

Charlie Brennan

Client Services & Admin Officer,
Fitzroy Office

Christina (Chrissy) Potts

Community Lawyer, FLFV
Paralegal, FLFV
(Jul 2023 - Sep 2023)

Dee Bennett-Spark

Trainee Lawyer
(until Feb 2024)

Deborah Brown

Front Office Administrator,
Reservoir Office

Elli Bicknell

Governance & Inclusion Coordinator,
Voices for Change
(until Aug 2023)

Em Collard

Admin Officer, Night Service

Emma Lang

Fundraising & Communications Lead

Eve Dickenson

Trainee Lawyer
Legal Secretary, Family Law
(until Feb 2024)

Felicity De Lang

Manager, People and Culture
(from Mar 2024)

Flick Ellis

Social Worker, WILO

Gabrella Bezabih

Community Legal Education Officer
(from Dec 2023)

Gatwech Wal

Community Lawyer, FLFV

Gayathri Paramasivam

Legal Director, Day Practice
(from Jan 2024)

Glen Ludbrook

Night Service Coordinator,
Reservoir Office

Hamish McLachlan

Chief Executive Officer
Legal Director, Day Practice
(until Jan 2024)
Interim CEO
(until Jun 2024)

Jade Lane

Lived Experience Practice Lead
(until Jul 2023)



James Kempster

Client Services & Admin Officer,
Fitzroy Office

Jess Ness

Volunteer Program Coordinator

Jia Kho

Project Coordinator, WWB

Jo Ferrari

Executive Assistant

Joe Ishow

Senior Lawyer, Q+Law

Julia Wallace

Community Outreach Lawyer,
St Vincents HJP
(from Oct 2023)

Kathleen O'Callaghan

Community Lawyer, FLFV

Kelly Cassidy

Principal Lawyer, Q+Law

Kelly Whitworth

Membership & Outreach
Coordinator, Voices for Change

Kevin Nguyen

Community Lawyer, NJC

Khoi Nguyen

Community Engagement & Legal
Education Officer, Q+Law
(from Jul 2023)

Kristine Olaris

Chief Executive Officer
(until Jan 2024)

Laura Gartland

Legal Practice Manager

Lauren Gordon

Managing Lawyer, GIST
Managing Lawyer, COGS
(until Jul 2023)

Linda Waters

Senior Family Violence Lawyer, FLFV

Madeleine Lynch

Managing Lawyer, FLFV
Senior Lawyer, FLFV
(until Jul 2023)

Meg Whittaker

Legal Secretary, Family Law
(from Feb 2024)

Mark Rawlings

Night Service Coordinator, Fitzroy

Meghan Fitzgerald

Managing Lawyer,
Strategic Litigation

Michelle Goldberg

Senior Lawyer, WILO
(from Jul 2023)

Morgan Nyland

Senior Employment Lawyer, MELC

Naomi Hanna

Client Services & Intake Assistant
(from Oct 2023)

Nicholas Newlands

Senior Migration Lawyer, GIST
(from Mar 2024)

Noah Khan

Client Services & Admin Officer,
Fitzroy Office
(from Nov 2023)

Peter Sublet

Senior Generalist Lawyer, GIST
(from Aug 2023)

Rafaella Lawrie

Specialist Family Violence
Admin Officer

Raphaelle Stewart

Community Lawyer, FLFV
(from Jan 2024)

Rebecca Johnston-Ryan

Service Director & Principal Lawyer,
Night Service
(from Oct 2023)

Rebecca Leighton

Community Outreach Lawyer, GIST

Ryan Hsu

Service Director, Q+Law

Sally Krutsch

Senior Lawyer, FLFV
(until Dec 2023)

Shane Marr

Chief Operating Officer
(from Nov 2023)

Sinead Tobin

Social Worker, WILO
(from Nov 2023)

Sophie Jest

Community Lawyer, FLFV
(from Feb 2024)

Sophie L'Estrange

Lawyer, Strategic Litigation
& Social Action

Tara Suamba

Community Lawyer, Q+Law

Tessa Di Paolo

Senior Community Lawyer, NJC
(from Nov 2023)

Tristan Brumby-Rendell

Drug Outreach Lawyer, CLDO
(until May 2024)

Tuvan Vuong

Finance Assistant

Verena Tan

Manager, Policy, Advocacy
& Projects

Yu Wang

Employment Lawyer, MELC

Zaynab Sherifdeen

Volunteer Program Coordinator
(from Apr 2024)



Board Members

Claire Febey

(Resigned as Chair, Sep 2024)

Mick Sheehy

(Chair from Sep 2024)

Chanphyna Bou

(resigned Feb 2024)

Gerard Brody

(appointed Apr 2024)

Jeremy Levine

Karri Walker

(Deputy Chair from Sep 2024)

Michelle Batsas

Monique MacRitchie

Tony Macvean

Finance, Risk & Audit Committee

Tony Macvean

Chair

Andrew Webster

Naomi Munga

(resigned Feb 2024)

Peter Loukas

Rebecca Middleton

Roslyn Aikmani

Michelle Batsas

Life Members

Brian Collingburn

Brian Wright

Bruce McBain

Henrik Lassen

John Finlayson

Julian Gardner AM

Michael Kingston

Robin Inglis

Sue Bothman

Tessa Hay

Trevor Williamson

Vu Dang



Funding and Support

Our core ongoing funding at FLS is provided by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments via Victoria Legal Aid. We thank them for their ongoing support.

Community fundraising

We are grateful for every individual donor, local business, foundation and company who generously supported our work this past year. This year, with the support of Maurice Blackburn, we conducted our highly successful inaugural Annual Night Service Appeal. The community response was overwhelming, helping us to raise \$34,241 in donations. This is an incredible amount which will enable us to assist 400 victim survivors to obtain legal protection from family violence, 400 low-paid workers to recover unpaid wages, or 400 renters to challenge unfair evictions.

If you would like to support FLS to break down barriers to access to justice, please consider donating at <https://fls.org.au/donate-to-support-community-access-to-justice/>.

Partnering for a fairer Victoria

We also saw increased support from values-aligned law firms including Barry Nilsson, Allens, Hall & Wilcox and Gadens with their commitment to second staff and assist at our legal clinics. This contribution of course includes FLS's longstanding Trainee Lawyer program, which has been made possible through the unwavering support and deep commitment of Allens over the past 26 years. We continue to see the growing legacy this program brings to our sector as it works to provide emerging lawyers with a diverse program in which to cut their teeth and build lasting careers in community law.

In addition, Gadens generously seconded a lawyer who worked across our Q+Law and Generalist and Integrated Services teams, and Barry Nilsson kindly provided a secondee to our Criminal Law and Drug Outreach team.

And, as well as providing lawyers for our LGBTQIA+ clinic, Hall & Wilcox partnered with FLS to launch the latest edition of The Law Handbook and Allens generously co-hosted a Human Rights Day event.

Leaving a legacy

We also thank Inner North Community Foundation for assisting us with the opportunity to offer our supporters a safe and secure avenue by which to leave bequests and/or make gifts of significance to sustain our work in the years ahead. If you would like information about making a gift or bequest, please contact info@innorthfoundation.org.au.



LEFT: Visit by the Hon Enver Erdogan MP

We would also like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their contributions.

Funders

- **Allens** for funding our trainee lawyer program.
- **City of Darebin** for contributing to funding for outreach services for young people and other people experiencing marginalisation in the City of Darebin.
- **City of Yarra** for contributing to funding for the Night Service.
- **Commonwealth Government** for funding our Work Without Barriers and Voices for Change projects.
- **Court Services Victoria** via the **Neighbourhood Justice Centre** for contributing to funding FLS services delivered at the NJC, provision of meeting facilities and support on a range of programs.
- **Ethical Jobs** for their matched funding support.
- **Gadens** for providing a secondeed lawyer.
- **Maurice Blackburn** for matched funding support.
- **Victorian Government** for specific grants that fund the Yarra Drug Outreach Lawyer Program, our Yarra Family Violence Health Justice Partnership, the Women's Integrated Legal Outreach Program, The Law Handbook, Q+Law, and via the Federation of Community Legal Centres, the Drug Outreach Lawyer Program, Darebin.
- **Victoria Law Foundation** for a grant to develop a legal information resource for incarcerated people.
- **Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner** for funding our Migration Law Program.

Substantial pro bono support

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| – Elizabeth Bennett, SC, Victorian Bar | – Tom Wood, Victorian Bar |
| – John Blackley, Victorian Bar | – Allens |
| – Julian McMahon AC SC, Victorian Bar | – Clayton Utz |
| – Julian Murphy, Victorian Bar | – DLA Piper |
| – Lauren Bull, Victorian Bar | – Dentons |
| – Megan Fitzgerald, Victorian Bar | – Gadens |
| – Simon Thomas, Victorian Bar | – Hall & Wilcox |
| – Ron Merkel KC, Victorian Bar | – Herbert Smith Freehills |
| – Sharon Lacy SC, Victorian Bar | – King & Wood Mallesons |
| | – Maddocks |
| | – Maurice Blackburn |
| | – Phi Finney McDonald |
| | – Studio Tate |
| | – The Old Bar |

Partners

- | | |
|--|--|
| – 3CR Done by Law / Breakfast Show | Legal Support |
| – Access Health & Community | – NEMA Orange Door |
| – Archer Magazine | – North Richmond Community Health Centre |
| – Better Place Australia | – NRCH Medically Supervised Injecting Room |
| – Brotherhood of St Laurence | – Northland Youth Hub |
| – Burnet Institute | – Odyssey House |
| – Cohealth | – PANDA |
| – Connie Benn Centre | – Philanthropy Australia |
| – Council to Homeless Persons | – Queerspace |
| – Darebin Emergency Relief Network | – Reservoir Neighbourhood House |
| – Disability Justice Australia | – RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice |
| – Darebin Information Volunteer & Resource Service | – Social Security Rights Victoria |
| – Fitzroy Learning Network | – Self Advocacy Resource Unit |
| – Flat Out | – St Mary's House of Welcome |
| – Grata Fund | – Southside Justice |
| – Harm Reduction Victoria | – St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne |
| – Heidelberg Magistrates' Court | – Tenants Victoria |
| – Health Justice Australia | – VAADA |
| – Human Rights Law Centre | – VALID |
| – Inner Melbourne Community Legal | – Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service |
| – International Commission for Jurists, Victoria | – Victoria Legal Aid |
| – JobWatch | – Victorian Pride Centre |
| – Justice Connect | – West Heidelberg Community Legal Service |
| – Law & Advocacy Centre for Women | – Voices for Change |
| – Lawyers for Animals | – Uniting Care ReGen |
| – Launch Housing | – Yarra City Council |
| – Liberty Victoria | – Yarra Drug and Health Forum |
| – The Living Room | – Your Community Health |
| – Mercy Hospital for Women | – Youth Projects |
| – Melbourne Activist | – YSAS |

Our Finances

Fitzroy Legal Service's finances are overseen by a subcommittee of the Board, the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee (FRAC).

The purpose of the FRAC as set out in its Charter is to:



assist the Board in fulfilling its corporate governance responsibilities by providing oversight and direction in relation to the [FLS] financial reports and other financial information produced by it, auditing and reporting processes generally, and management of ... risk.



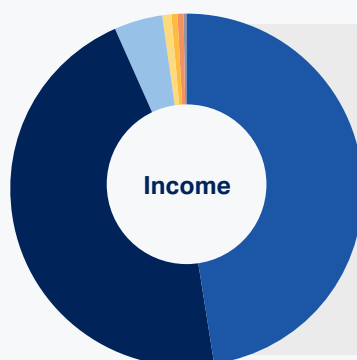
A primary function of the FRAC is to review the year-to-date (generally quarterly) profit and loss statement against budget, together with other financial and management reports including the balance sheet and cash flow statement.

From a financial sustainability perspective, FLS had a positive FY24. Increased revenue (generally project-based and grant funding) and prudent expense management led to FLS recording an FY24 surplus of \$108,244. This result builds on previous disciplined work to strengthen FLS's financial position.

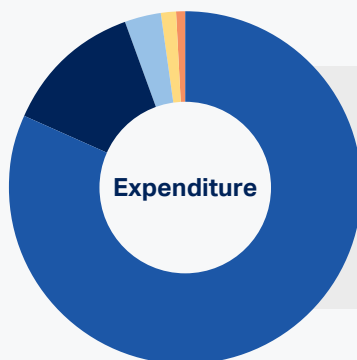
As at the end of FY24, FLS has healthy reserves of \$564,909. These reserves provide a reasonable buffer for any change that may occur within the organisation and its funding sources over the coming period. The FRAC proposes to develop a formal reserves policy next financial year.

Our auditors did not raise any issues of concern in their audit completion report.

We would like to thank all FRAC members for their volunteer commitment to FLS over FY24, including Naomi Munga, who resigned from the FRAC during FY24 after many years of service, and new member FLS Board member Michelle Batsas.



47%	Government Grants - Other
45%	Government Grant - VLA
4%	Practice Income
1%	Interest Income
1%	Miscellaneous Income
1%	Sales
1%	Membership Income



82%	Employee benefits
13%	Office administration
3%	Rental and premises
1%	Publication
1%	Depreciation & Amortisation

Tony Macvean

Chair

Finance, Risk & Audit Committee

The full audited Financial Statements are publicly available at www.fls.org.au.

Income And Expenditure Statement

For The Period Ended 30 June 2024

	2024	2023
	\$	\$
Income		
Government Grant - VLA	2,596,849	2,402,402
Grants	3,222,681	1,981,872
Practice Income	224,754	235,142
Sales	16,811	47,142
Interest Income	61,540	39,420
Membership Income	2,743	3,486
Miscellaneous Income	97,478	70,369
	6,222,856	4,779,833
Expenditure		
Employee benefits expense	5,024,580	3,825,926
Depreciation & Amortisation	54,541	28,489
Rental and premises expense	190,029	155,521
Office administration expenses	772,619	609,656
Publication expenses	72,843	73,689
	6,114,612	4,693,281
Surplus (Deficit) before income tax	108,244	86,552
Income tax expense	–	–
Surplus (Deficit) after income tax	108,244	86,552
Retained Earnings at the beginning of the financial year	456,665	370,113
Retained Earnings at the end of the financial year	564,909	456,665

Assets And Liabilities Statement

As At 30 June 2024

	2024	2023
	\$	\$
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,917,811	2,374,927
Trade and other receivables	185,663	277,997
Inventory	24,021	11,630
Total Current Assets	2,127,495	2,664,554
Non-Current Assets		
Security Bond	13,126	13,126
Property, plant and equipment	149,646	159,027
Total Non-Current Assets	162,772	172,153
Total Assets	2,290,267	2,836,707
Current Liabilities		
Trade and other payables	432,570	435,870
Amounts received in advance	898,084	1,561,594
Provisions	335,036	275,755
Total Current Liabilities	1,665,690	2,273,219
Non-Current Liabilities		
Provisions	59,668	106,823
Total Liabilities	1,725,358	2,380,042
Net Assets	564,909	456,665
Members' Funds		
Retained Earnings	564,909	456,665
Total members' funds	564,909	456,665

Our Offices

**279 Spring Street
Reservoir VIC 3073**
Ph: (03) 9484 7753

**Level 4, Fitzroy Town Hall
201 Napier Street
Fitzroy VIC 3065**
Ph: (03) 9419 3744

**Neighbourhood Justice Centre
241 Wellington Street
Collingwood VIC 3066**
Ph: (03) 9948 8698

**Victorian Pride Centre
Level 3 | 79-81 Fitzroy Street
St Kilda VIC 3182**
Ph: (03) 9968 1002