



# TOP END WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICE INC.

FREE LEGAL ADVICE FOR WOMEN

*Advice | Information | Referral | Advocacy*

*Celebrating 22 years of providing legal  
services to women in the Top End*

## ANNUAL REPORT

### 2017/2018

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## Chairperson's Report

***“It will be a great day when our schools have all the money they need, and our air force has to have a bake-sale to buy a bomber.”***  
**- Robert Fulghum**

I feel a bit like this... there is so much pressure on a service like ours and we have such limited resources.

As a longstanding specialist legal service with expertise in addressing women's access to justice and equality before the law, we believe we provide maximum reach and improved outcomes for every funding dollar we are provided due to our specialisation, connectivity, and expertise.

The current level of legal sector funding, and particularly to specialist women's legal services like ours, is just not enough to meet even the critical legal needs of women in the Top End of the Northern Territory. This means our service is frequently put in the position of determining who has access to our service between those in crisis. We consider this under investment leads not only to a lack of justice to women but also to greater costs across the system in courts, prisons, health care, housing and child protection.

We are having to refuse representation to so many women; there is a significant delay in even getting an appointment on Wednesday evenings (a convenient

time for some women being out of business hours), and we can only outreach to a small number of high needs locations within existing service capacity. Of course, it is a never-ending cycle – you can always do more with more money – but we are such a small team and imagine the additional achievements if we could just have a couple more team members!

Our team maximises service quality and productivity to ensure we reach as many women as possible. It is really pleasing what we achieve with our funding envelope. Our dedicated volunteers keep the Wednesday clinic bubbling along and our staff provide advice and assistance in town and out in Palmerston, at adult migration English classes, on local Indigenous communities, at the prison at Royal Darwin Hospital, and most recently at Dawn House Women's Shelter. And, in their spare time, the team organises and manages fund-raising activities such as the Bunnings sausage sizzle and the very successful Quiz night, to extend service provision and produce much needed publications.

So, thanks to all; the volunteers, the Committee and the hardworking and committed staff. We have completed another great year of legal assistance to women in the Top End.

**Chris Osborne**  
**Chairperson**



## Managing Solicitor's Report

TEWLS is a community legal centre funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and the Prime Minister & Cabinet.

Established in 1996, following the Australian Law Reform Commission Inquiry into Equality before the Law, there continues to be a pressing need for specialist women's legal services, including by way of illustration, the 2014 Productivity Commission findings that:

***Women are more likely to experience unmet legal need than men; Indigenous women are more at risk; and, more legal need is unmet in rural, regional and remote areas.***

TEWLS continues to provide a vital role for women in the Top End. At an individual level, the service responds to and facilitates women's experiences and realities on a personal basis, with specialist holistic information, referral, advice, casework and community legal education services. At a systemic level, client's collective experiences establish a salient foundation and platform for informed service advocacy and systemic improvement via law reform submissions.

TEWLS' dedicated legal team of five staff, with over 30 years legal experience, have again this year provided proactive, high quality, legal and related services, with excellent outcomes, and particular concern for Indigenous and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse women.

The greatest demand for service continues to be in the areas of family law, domestic and family violence, victims of crime

applications, consumer law, credit and debt, and tenancy. Accordingly, these are also the topics imbedded within the services law reform submissions from the past year. Two service submissions, addressing incarcerated women and intimate image abuse in particular, are highlighted later in this report to demonstrate the benefit and outcomes of sustained law reform advocacy.

With almost all clients presenting with a complex matrix of interrelated legal matters that require, and receive, a dedicated focus, it is pleasing to be able to provide a holistic response whilst being respectful of often multiple presenting vulnerabilities that can include domestic and family violence indicators, financial disadvantage, homelessness and mental health and/or disability indicators. The snapshot of the service in action for clients detailed in this report, reflect the expertise of staff and the breadth of matter types that assistance has been provided on.

***A significant highlight this financial year was the provision of assistance to 2,500 women, and again, exceeding all contractual performance indicators, performance benchmarks and service delivery targets by up to 700%***

This year, a significant systemic achievement, following years of advocacy by the service and other key stakeholders, arrived with the commencement of legislation permitting the use of RU486 from 1 July 2017.

A more recent initiative is the commencement of TEWLS' pilot Health Justice Partnership with the Royal Darwin

Hospital, which aims to service women at a crucial juncture, to appropriately address both current legal and related needs, and to thereby promote improved health, well-being, engagement and participation.

***An ongoing area for advocacy is the inability to date to secure funding or in-kind assistance for a specialist domestic and family violence counsellor to attend incarcerated women, to address and progress emotional well-being and life paths, and to reduce recidivism rates.***

Led by TEWLS, with assistance from the National Association, and agreement from the Law Society and the Attorney-General, a forthcoming highlight to celebrate will be the commencement of a low cost CLC volunteer practicing certificate, which will expand pro-bono servicing and address unmet need.

TEWLS particularly acknowledges the Legal Practitioner Fidelity Funds from the Northern Territory Law Society that significantly extend service capacity and ensure an improved ability to address existing unmet need; and generous in-kind

assistance from the Northern Territory Government. Fundraising has supplemented available funds and provided much needed capacity to pursue important projects, i.e. our upcoming legal information booklet for women in prison.

Moving forward, we welcome the commencement of Modern Awards legislation regarding employee family and domestic violence leave; publication of TEWLS produced information sheets on Parenting, Property and Divorce; and rolling out a new website in conjunction with community legal education program to address intimate image abuse and safety online, community legal education presentations on flexible work hours, and, discrimination based on sex and or race affecting women in the Top End.

TEWLS is looking forward to a busy and productive 2018/2019 – so please join us in acknowledging this year’s achievements and contributions to future service provision.

**Vanessa Lethlean**  
**Managing Solicitor**

## TEWLS Clinics

### In-house advice clinics:

Darwin: Every Wednesday  
(evening)  
  
Every Thursday

### Women's Correctional Centres:

Darwin Correctional Centre: Every third Thursday

### Community outreach advice clinics:

Acacia: First Tuesday of every month  
  
Amangal: First Tuesday of every month  
  
Bagot: Every second Monday  
  
Belyuen: Last Wednesday of every month  
  
Knuckey's Lagoon: Every second Monday  
  
15 Mile / PIV: Every second Monday

### Outreach advice clinics:

Adult Migrant and English Program (AMEP): Once a semester during semester as requested  
  
Palmerston: Every second Wednesday  
  
Royal Darwin Hospital Pilot: Every Thursday  
  
Dawn House Women's Shelter Pilot: Every Thursday



*TEWLS Managing Solicitor's trip to Sydney for the NACLC National Advisory Council in October 2017*

# Strategic Plan 2016 – 2019

## Vision

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A community in which women enjoy and are entitled to legal and social justice.

## Purpose

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To advocate to achieve justice for women, to promote women's human rights, and to redress inequalities experienced by women.

## Values

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- Courage
- Connectivity
- Innovation
- Specialisation
- Respect
- Collaboration
- Excellence
- Inclusivity
- Integrity
- Accountability

## Goals and Strategies

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### ***Excellence in Service Standards***

To provide high quality civil law and related services through referral, information, advice, representation, community legal education and law reform submissions that are accessible, proactive, responsive, timely, of a high standard, and, culturally appropriate.

### ***Inclusivity and Respect***

To provide specialist and innovative services inclusive of the needs and interests of all women, including Indigenous and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse women, with particular focus for women with domestic violence indicators, older women, young women, women in prison, women at risk of homelessness, LGBTQI women, and women with disabilities.

### ***Connectivity and Collaboration with Organisations and Communities***

To partner with people, organisations and communities. To support and strengthen connectivity, collaboration, and coordination with pro-bono partnerships, key sector stakeholders, government, and peak bodies.

### ***Innovation for Change***

To identify obstacles to justice and options for reform, to contribute and respond to policy development, to provide community legal education, and to initiate policy change and law reform.

### ***Integrity and Accountability***

To apply best practice governance, management, service delivery, and employee engagement.



## Top End Women's Legal Service Inc: A Snapshot

In total, TEWLS assisted 2,500 women in the 2017/2018 financial year in providing legal information and referral, legal advice, case work and representation.

**2,500**  
women assisted in  
FY2017/2018

TEWLS provides free one-off legal advices on a range of civil and family law matters, as well as representation and casework services, with matter types including:

- Family law, such as divorce, parenting and property
- Consumer issues, such as credit and debt, and fines
- Domestic Violence and Personal Violence Restraining Orders
- Complaints, such as discrimination
- Injury compensations, such as victims of crime, motor accidents and workplace injuries
- Tenancy and housing matters
- Deceased estates and superannuation
- Employment law
- Sexual assault

**over 1,250**  
women assisted with  
information or referral  
services

**over 670**  
women received legal  
advice in over 1,000  
matter types

These services are provided in Darwin, Palmerston, at the Royal Darwin Hospital, Dawn House Women's Shelter; the local Adult Migration English Programs, the Darwin Correctional Centre, and the following Indigenous communities:

**over 500**  
women received legal  
casework assistance

TEWLS provided **advocacy and submissions** on issues of salient importance to women across the Top End TEWLS provided submissions independently, as a member of the Northern Territory Women's Legal Services coalition, and in collaboration with other key stakeholders.

**over 124**  
community outreach  
visits

The **Community Legal Education** program delivered sessions on frequently requested areas of law including domestic violence orders, consumer law, complaints, tenancy, and victims of crime financial assistance.

**over 25**  
Law reform  
submissions,  
Community Legal  
Education sessions and  
advocacy actions

**Over 25 legal volunteers**, as solicitors, interns and GDLP placement students volunteered their time to TEWLS.

## Legal Services

### Our clients

TEWLS clients often present with multifaceted legal and related matters with multiple foundational vulnerabilities.

- Over 60% of all clients have **domestic violence** indicators.
- Over 60 % of all clients were **financially disadvantaged**.
- Over 20% of all clients have **homelessness** indicators.
- Over 20% of all clients have **no income**.
- Over 20% of all clients have a **disability or mental health** indicators.
- Over 20% of all clients **speak a language other than English** at home.

### Our clients' feedback

Client feedback is an important element of service provision, strategic direction, and continuous improvement processes.

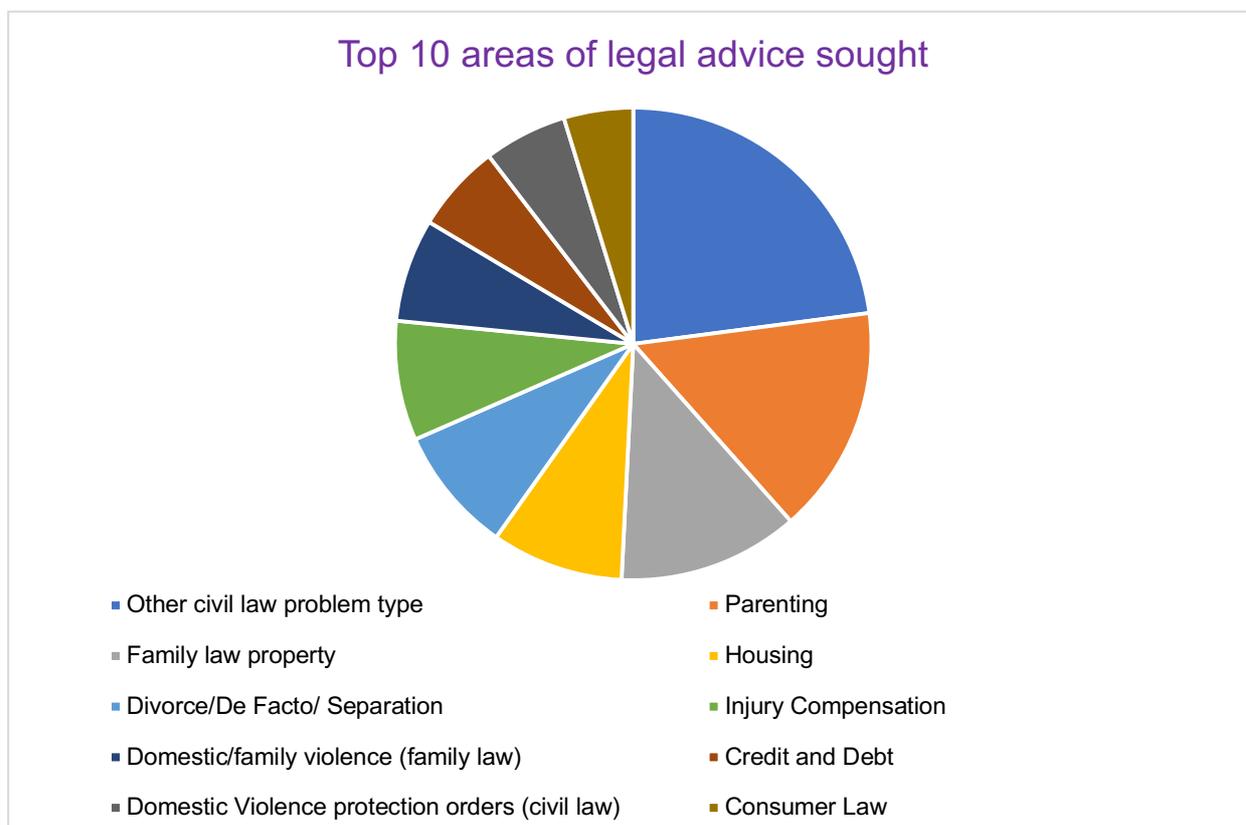
The most recent client survey records:

- 100% of clients report it was **easy to contact TEWLS** when they first needed help.
- 92% of clients say TEWLS **listened to their legal problem**.
- 91% of clients state TEWLS **helped them to understand** their legal problem.
- 96% of clients **know where to go** if they require legal assistance in the future.
- 95% of client **would recommend** TEWLS to other people.

## Legal advice

TEWLS provided legal advice to **over 670 women across 1,000 matter types** in 2017/2018 across a range of locations.

The graph below illustrates the top ten legal advice matter types this financial year.



## Legal Representation

**Over 500 women** in the Top End were provided legal casework assistance by TEWLS in 2017/2018, such as NTCAT appearances, in court appearances, family dispute resolutions, complaints etc.

The most frequently provided legal representative matter types this year included:

- housing and tenancy
- injury compensation
- consumer
- credit and debt
- parenting

## Advocating for clients

The following deidentified client stories reflect our work over 2017/2018 and illustrate the high-quality representative services provided by TEWLS as a specialist women's legal service –

### **Collaboration resolves consumer complaint**

In 2015, the ACCC initiated proceedings against a vendor who had allegedly pressured vulnerable and/or disadvantaged consumers into buying products that they could not afford. In response to the proceedings, the vendor was ordered to pay a large penalty and to offer refunds to all relevant customers who had purchased products prior to the proceedings.

Lisa\* attended TEWLS at one of our regular clinics at her community. An Aboriginal woman living on a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory with English as a second language, Lisa instructed TEWLS that she had purchased products from the vendor a long time ago but had never received the relevant goods. In advising Lisa, TEWLS found the orders sought by the ACCC and subsequently collaborated with the ACCC's Sydney office to liaise with the vendor. Working with the ACCC, TEWLS advocated on Lisa's behalf to the vendor and was successful in acquiring a full refund of the contract for Lisa of \$2,000.

### **Continuing access to FDR services producing positive results**

TEWLS continues to be able to access the lawyer-assisted Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) services at the NT Legal Aid Commission, where TEWLS is able to participate in mediation with a respective client regarding either parenting or property matters. Prior to making agreement with the NT Legal Aid Commission, TEWLS was unable to access lawyer-assisted FDR services in Darwin, where clients unable to access the Commission would be consequently unable to access this type of FDR.

TEWLS represented Christy\* in her FDR conference, where Christy was the protected person to a domestic violence order at the time of the conference. TEWLS advocated on Christy's behalf to ensure that the conference would be a safe and productive experience, with the FDR run by way of "shuttle" mediation – a type of mediation where the legal representatives for each party discuss the matter and the mediator moves from party to party to make agreement. The FDR resulted in a parenting plan for the parties and consistency for their young child, without needing to make an application to the Court.

### **An example of family law and Domestic & Family Violence**

**Janet\*** is the mother of a three-year-old child. Janet separated from her partner after significant periods of domestic & family violence. She is the protected person under a full non-contact Domestic Violence Order (DVO). Janet attended TEWLS after participating in Family Dispute Resolution where an interim agreement was made. Janet sought legal representation with domestic & family violence expertise.

TEWLS represented Janet in a further Family Dispute Resolution conference, with agreement reached regarding appropriate long-term arrangements. TEWLS also assisted Janet regarding property arrangements and is completing Consent Order paperwork that are consistent with her DVO. Janet instructs that she has felt supported and assisted by TEWLS throughout the process as a specialist service with domestic violence expertise.

### ***Raising awareness of rights under Discrimination legislation***

Tenille\* is an Aboriginal woman living on a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory. Tenille often journeys into Darwin to visit and spend time with family and is a member of a local sports club. During one of TEWLS' visits to Tenille's community, Tenille told TEWLS staff about her most recent attendance to the sports club, where she and her sister had been refused entry as a consequence of their living on their community. Tenille told TEWLS that she felt shamed by the sports club's conduct and asked TEWLS for help about what she could do.

TEWLS advised Tenille of her rights under the NT Anti-Discrimination legislation and assisted Tenille to contact the sports club to resolve the issue before moving through the legislation's conciliation processes. TEWLS was successful in seeking a prompt response from the sports club, and with discrimination being found to have occurred, the sports club offered Tenille and her sister an apology and compensation. Tenille instructs that she felt supported and culturally safe during the complaint process and now knows how to help herself and any family who experience the same discrimination.

Following TEWLS' advocacy on behalf of Tenille, TEWLS was contacted by the Board of the sports club for assistance in seeking training and education for staff so that Tenille's experience would not occur again. As a consequence of Tenille's complaint, the sports club have actively progressed their staff's understanding and practise of anti-discrimination legislation, leading to better outcomes for future patrons.

### ***Employment law at NT Civil and Administrative Tribunal***

Sophie\* is a young CALD woman on a student visa. She requires the assistance of an interpreter and lives with her extended family. While she was completing high school, Sophie undertook casual work for a local company, where she was employed as a sub-contractor. Sophie's contract provided that she was to issue invoices to the company after completing her work and that the company would pay Sophie directly according to the invoice. Sophie attended TEWLS after not being paid by the company for a significant amount of work.

TEWLS represented Sophie in her small claim application to the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal. The Tribunal found that the company was in breach of contract in not paying Sophie and made orders in Sophie's favour. After the company failed to comply with the Tribunal's orders, TEWLS advised Sophie regarding enforcement processes, where Sophie will now have to commence proceedings interstate. While the matter is yet to be finalised, Sophie instructs that she is glad that she stood up to the company with TEWLS assistance.

### ***Consumer contract advocacy***

Betty\* is an Aboriginal woman living on a remote Top End Aboriginal community. She speaks English as a second language and is in receipt of a Disability Support Pension. In early 2017, Betty obtained a smart phone from a telecommunications company on a high-paying plan. Betty approached TEWLS during our fortnightly attendance to her community requesting assistance about the phone plan; how much she had to pay, how long the loan would be for, etc.

She instructed TEWLS that she had requested a phone only to call and text message family. TEWLS advised her contract was for 48 months and that she would be liable to pay over \$3000 over the life of the contract. Betty instructed TEWLS that she could not afford and had not understood the contract at the time of getting the phone. TEWLS advocated on Betty's behalf to the telecommunications company. The contract and an outstanding debt of \$1,500 were waived.

### ***An example of family law, employment law, domestic violence advice at Royal Darwin Hospital***

TEWLS provided family law advice to a Grandmother who was regularly visiting her daughter who had been admitted for medical services, following a catastrophic accident. TEWLS assisted the Grandmother to navigate relevant legal and related matters, including parenting arrangement for the grandchildren.

TEWLS provided holistic legal and related advice to Alexia, who had been admitted for medical services, following well-being concerns directly linked to repeated work place abuse and harassment. TEWLS assisted Alexia, with the support of an appropriate family member, to navigate employment, housing, well-being, parenting and related matters.

TEWLS provided legal and related advice to Marcy, who was visiting from remote Indigenous community, so her daughter could receive required medical treatment. TEWLS assisted Marcy with domestic violence legal and related advice to ensure safety could be addressed whilst Marcy was in Darwin, and able to confidentially access an appropriate legal service.

### ***Discrimination in employment as a new mum***

Emily\* welcomed her first-born child about six months before a new and exciting promotional opportunity arose at her workplace. While still on maternity leave, Emily approached her employer about the opportunity, citing her positive work record, years of training experience, and passion for her work. In an interview with her employer, Emily was offered a different position that was at a lower-level than the advertised position. After asking her employer about the difference, Emily was told that she wouldn't be offered the advertised position because she was a "new-mum" and would not be able to handle the work.

Emily attended TEWLS for advice about her conversation with her employer, with TEWLS subsequently representing Emily in her discrimination complaint at the Anti-Discrimination Commission. With TEWLS' assistance, Emily was able to agree with her employer that their conduct was wrong and that the employer would pay Emily an amount of compensation. Unfortunately, the company did not agree to undertake anti-discrimination training, where Emily considered the different outcomes for herself and for future staff. Having been able to secure an amount of compensation in excess of what she would likely have received if the matter had been to hearing, Emily was able to seek alternative employment and support herself and her young child throughout the process.

### ***Tenancy advocacy for incarcerated women***

Abbey\* is an Aboriginal woman incarcerated in the Darwin Correctional Centre. During her incarceration, Abbey approached TEWLS during one of our regular clinics for advice and assistance regarding a housing debt. Abbey instructed that she had been a tenant of Government housing prior to her incarceration and that she had given up her house as a result of the length of her sentence, leaving behind a substantial debt.

TEWLS represented Abbey in her communications with Government, seeking information on her behalf and subsequently advising Abbey that the Government had incorrectly issued a substantial proportion of the debt. TEWLS then advocated on Abbey's behalf to have the incorrect proportion of the debt waived, where the Department agreed that around \$7,000 of the debt had been incorrectly issued.

Abbey instructs that she felt strongly supported and informed during the process, and that she likely would have had to pay off the debt if it had not been for TEWLS' assistance.

## Advocating for changes to law and systemic change

**TEWLS maintained a strong commitment to engagement in policy and law reform on salient legal issues and aspects of the law that impact significantly on women's lives.**

In 2017/2018, TEWLS made over 25 **advocacy actions, submissions and reviews** focused on housing and tenancy; vulnerable witness protections; victims of crime charter of rights; family law; domestic and family violence; anti-discrimination legislative provisions; and, incarcerated women among other pertinent issues.

TEWLS also attended and engaged in **formal and informal inquiries, forums and meetings**, including inquiry evidence regarding intimate image abuse.

### ***Successful advocacy in policy reform of non-consensual sharing of images***

TEWLS made a submission in the call for community consultation on the non-consensual sharing of intimate images updates to the Criminal Code Amendment (Intimate Images) Bill 2017, looking at the impacts that it would have for women in the Top End. TEWLS has also previously provided submissions in this area of law, in the 'Revenge Porn' Bill and private sexual material *Criminal Code Amendment* call for submissions.

TEWLS commented based on our knowledge of this occurring and it being a particularly sensitive and gendered occurrence for women. TEWLS considers it to be technology facilitated intimate and sexual violence.

TEWLS made submissions and gave evidence to the Social Policy Scrutiny Committee from the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory in this case around the importance of criminal sanctions for non-consensual sharing in recognizing how to denounce this type of behaviour in the community. The criminalization of it captures the legal wrong and responsibilities of the abusive conduct.

TEWLS engaged in ongoing continued advocacy in this space as the Bill was scrutinized. This has contributed to a system change whereby it is now against the law to share an image of someone without their consent or to threaten to send an image of someone. In early 2018, *Criminal Code Amendment Act 2018* was introduced, and new offences were introduced of 'non-consensual sharing of an intimate image and threatening to share an image' which is reinforced by an imprisonment term of up to 3 years.

TEWLS engaged with **media** including in relation to our law reform agenda regarding incarcerated women, and reform of the *Residential Tenancies Act 2018* (NT) to improve protections for tenants or occupiers who are victims of domestic and family violence. As a consequence publications also referenced TEWLS law reform agenda as the snap shot below illustrates.

## Submissions

TEWLS' **submissions**, individually, as part of the NT Women's Legal Services coalition, and collectively with other related key stakeholders as appropriate, included:

- Submission to the Residential Tenancies Amendment Bill 2018
- Submission to the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal Amendment Bill 2018
- Draft Guiding Principles for Protecting Vulnerable Witnesses
- Review of Domestic and Family Violence Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2017
- Submission to the Criminal Code Amendment (Intimate Images) Bill 2017
- Submission on the Adoption of Children Legislation Amendment (Equality) Bill 2017
- Review of Charter of Victim's Rights and accompanying issues Paper
- Submission to the Law Council of Australia's The Justice Project, 'A National Blueprint for Justice for All'
- Submission in Response to Public Consultation Paper and Exposure Draft: *Family Law Amendment (Family Violence and Cross Examination of Parties) Bill 2017* (Cth)
- Submission to the Modernisation of the *Anti-Discrimination Act* Discussion Paper
- Submission to the ALRC Discussion Paper in relation to Incarceration Rates
- of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
- A collective key stakeholder letter, led by the Domestic Violence Legal Service (DVLS), to the NT Government to request urgent changes to section 41 Domestic Violence Orders in the *Domestic and Family Violence Act* to ensure and protect victim safety
- Correspondence to the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory identifying and addressing gaps in service provision for women incarcerated in the Darwin Correctional Centre
- Endorsed the Submission to Treasury Joint Submission on Tax Deductible Gift Recipient Reform Opportunities August 201

### A snapshot from the **ALRC Discussion Paper – Incarceration Rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples – September 2017**

"...It is clear that current cycles of incarceration and violence are contributing to alarming levels of over representation of Indigenous Australians in the prison system, as well as a saturation of Indigenous children in the child protection system. TEWLS believes it is vital to invest in early intervention, prevention and diversion strategies to address the root of offending and reoffending in Indigenous communities and decrease rates of imprisonment. In addition, TEWLS strongly supports the national adoption of a justice reinvestment model, such that local communities are strengthened, and offending and imprisonment is reduced..."

## TEWLS' advocacy in action

### ***Improving health care systems at Darwin Prison for all prisoners***

Prisoners are entitled to the same standard of health care in prison as that expected in the general community. Whilst incarcerated, Sheila\* experienced difficulties in accessing health care. The health care provided failed to identify her pregnancy, and she was prescribed contraindicated medication. TEWLS represented Sheila in her complaint to the Health and Community Services Complaints Commission. Their investigation found systemic issues relating to the management of medical request forms; triage processes; waiting periods; communication with patients; access to specialist medical services; and medical follow-up and recall systems.

The Commission's recommendations to improve systems have been actioned. Ongoing implementation is also monitored. Recently, conciliation meaningfully respected and resolved Sheila's complaint. Sheila's motivation, to prevent other woman having the same experience, has led to improved prison health care.

### ***Clarifying the law regarding Victims of Crime Compensation***

TEWLS appealed a decision of the Crime Victims Service Unit. The decision found Yenni was not eligible for financial assistance for domestic violence injuries as her injuries were not more than 'transient or trifling'. The injuries included several bruises and scratches. The appeal tested the scope of injuries that would be considered 'transient or trifling', which had not been the subject of previous decisions. The original decision was confirmed.

### ***Divorces - Commonwealth Courts Portal providing ready access for domestic violence victims***

TEWLS has represented an increasing number of women with Applications for Divorce, particularly where additional barriers to access to justice exist. This can be as a consequence of being culturally and linguistically diverse, domestic violence victimisation and or requiring an interpreter.

Nahia's\* marriage was characterised by domestic violence. She held a bridging partner visa, was at risk of homelessness, had limited education, was financially disadvantaged and required an interpreter for legal appointments. Gianni's\* overseas marriage was characterised by domestic violence and post separation, resumptions of residence. Gianni relocated to the Northern Territory to secure safety. The husband returned to the parties' home country. The husband's uncooperative position and mobile work history complicated service.

The Commonwealth Courts Portal permitted Nahia's and Gianni's Divorces to be obtained via appointments at TEWLS office with a reduce application fee, and nil court attendance. The process was streamlined and stress free. For Nahia, fee savings permitted an increased ability to provide for herself and her children as they sought safe and secure housing.

## Working within our local community

### Community Outreach Program

TEWLS provides community outreach clinics in recognition of the vulnerabilities and barriers to access to justice that many women can face when seeking legal assistance.

This year, the service provided over **120 outreach clinic visits** and experienced a significant increase in the number of requests at community outreach locations for legal assistance, particularly at local Indigenous communities.

Whilst this reflects positive and ever strengthening connectivity, the service has insufficient capacity to meet all requests, noting that requests from both Darwin Correctional Centre, and incarcerated women, has outstripped demand over multiple years.

In addition to our in-house clinics and volunteer clinics, during this financial year regular outreach clinics were provided at the following eleven locations:

- Acacia Community
- Amangal Community
- Bagot Community
- Belyuen Community
- Knuckeyes Lagoon Community
- 15 Mile Community (also known as Palmerston Indigenous Village)
- Palmerston GP Superclinic
- Darwin Correctional Centre
- Royal Darwin Hospital
- Dawn House Women's Shelter
- Adult Migration English as a Second Language Program Classes

The outreach program ensures early preventative access and assistance at important junctures in the lives of women and their children, whilst also facilitating connectivity and holistic service provision. The services provided, increase women's awareness of the law, knowledge of their legal rights, and, crucially, their capacity to engage in the legal system.

#### **The Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH) Health Justice Partnership, established in late 2017, has commenced smoothly.**

Staff with both social work and legal qualifications attend RDH weekly to provide legal advice to women at the hospital, either as patients or as outpatients. Since commencing the outreach clinic during this reporting period, TEWLS has provided advice to patients, and female family members of patients, on a wide range of legal issues and delivered CLE to staff working at RDH.

## Community Legal Education

TEWLS' Community Legal Education (CLE) program aims to increase women in the Top End's awareness of the law, their legal rights and access to legal services through presentations, community workshops and stalls.

In 2018/19 we anticipate an increased CLE program that includes sessions on discrimination based on gender and race; e-safety and intimate image abuse; and work place accommodation of parenting.

In 2017/2018, our CLE program targeted our Indigenous community outreach clinic locations, the Royal Darwin Hospital and the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community.

We delivered sessions tailored to participants over the following topics:

- What TEWLS can help with;
- Domestic and family violence, and domestic violence orders;
- Family law, and the relationship between domestic and family violence & family law;
- Victims of crime compensation;
- Housing and tenancy; and
- Consumer law.

### ***Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Outreach Community Legal Education***

TEWLS attends Charles Darwin University (CDU) as part of our community outreach program. Since April 2017, we have received significant enquiries about domestic and family violence from the staff and students. As a result, TEWLS hosted two CLEs on domestic and family violence at the CDU Casuarina and Palmerston campus.

The CLE provided students with an understanding of Australia's law on domestic and family violence and domestic relationships, how to deal with domestic and family violence, how to get a domestic violence order, and tailoring orders sought to suit personal circumstances to ensure specific safety concerns are addressed. The CLE received positive feedback from the students and staff who found that it was interactive, culturally appropriate and informative.

## Community engagement and fundraising

TEWLS' community engagement further strengthened over 2017/2018 by broadening and building on existing longstanding relationships within serviced community and network partners and securing an Indigenous employee with excellent pre-existing community connectivity.

Community engagement occurs both informally at all community legal outreach attendances and via formal structures and public events that highlight issues of relevance to women in the Top End, such as International Women's Day, Law Week and market events.

In addition to personal attendances, TEWLS communicates with the **wider community through social media** such as Facebook, to raise our service profile and reach, to ensure regular updates are provided with respect to legislative changes, key reports in the media, and, to advertise and promote service fundraising events.



*TEWLS staff at the 2018 International Women's Day Celebrations in Darwin. The celebrations were attended to by a number of community and network partners.*



*In 2018, TEWLS held a BBQ fundraiser at our local Darwin Bunnings to raise ever-needed funds for the service. The BBQ was run by staff and volunteers on a Sunday morning, and was made possible by the generous time and donations from Parap Bakery and Holco Meat Wholesalers*

## Committees

Committees remain to be an integral part of the way that TEWLS operates in the legal community in the Northern Territory, as well as Australia wide.

TEWLS works strategically with others by participating in the NT Association of Community Legal Centres, at the National Association of Community Legal Centres and other external committees.

TEWLS staff members also sit as members of committees and boards such as the Crimes Victims Advisory Committee, the Public Housing Appeals Board and the Northern Territory Women's Lawyers Committee, to advance clients' needs in strategic collaboration with other service providers.

### **The inter-agencies, networks and other legal committees TEWLS is involved with are:**

- NT Community Legal Education Network
- NT Legal Assistance Forum
- NT Domestic and Family Violence Network
- NT Women's Legal Services Group
- NT Family Safety Framework Forum
- Making Justice Work Coalition
- Civil Court User's Forum
- Darwin Correctional Centre Services Providers Group
- NT Territory Families Legal Services Forum
- NT Family Law Pathways Network
- Sexual Assault Network Darwin
- NT Department of Housing and Community Development Legal Services Group
- Prime Minister & Cabinet Priority Network Group

## Treasurer's report

We are pleased to present the 2017-2018 audited Annual Report of Top End Women's Legal Service Incorporated, trading as Top End Women's Legal Service Inc.

During 2017-18, our core income for services was received from the Department of the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department for women in the Top End of the Northern Territory and the Prime Minister & Cabinet as part of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

In brief, TEWLS' funding income was made up of:

- Prime Minister & Cabinet - \$188,695.00 (Inc GST)
- Commonwealth Department Attorney General's Department - \$307,975.80 (Inc GST)

On behalf of TEWLS, I would like to acknowledge with thanks the continuing support provided by the Commonwealth Governments, and to extend our appreciation to the program officers who have worked with us during the year.

I would also like to acknowledge the Board's appreciation of the contribution of our staff during the last 12 months. Their professionalism and skill have been essential to effective Board management and to the strategic planning of the development of our service.

Rose Mills  
Treasurer

## Contact us

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