

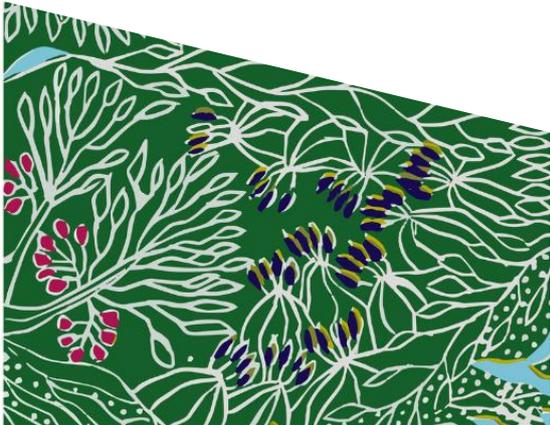
**ANNUAL
REPORT
2019/2020**



**TOP END WOMEN'S
LEGAL SERVICE INC.**

FREE LEGAL ADVICE FOR WOMEN

Advice | Information | Referral | Advocacy



CONTENTS

<u>A message from our Chairperson</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>A message from our Managing Solicitor</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>About TEWLS</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>TEWLS in 2019/2020: Service snapshot</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Our Clients</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Our Impact</u>	
<u><i>Advice and Advocacy</i></u>	<u>9</u>
<u><i>Law Reform and Submissions</i></u>	<u>13</u>
<u><i>Projects</i></u>	<u>17</u>
<u><i>Community Legal Education and Community Engagement</i></u>	<u>18</u>
<u><i>Committees</i></u>	<u>19</u>
<u>Our Supporters</u>	<u>20</u>
<u>Our People</u>	<u>21</u>
<u>Special recognition</u>	<u>22</u>
<u>Treasurer's Report</u>	<u>23</u>
<u>Financials</u>	<u>24</u>

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON

Are we there yet.... are we there yet... are we there yet?

TEWLS works towards an inclusive community in which women enjoy legal and social justice. In working to advance such gender equality we provide legal assistance to women experiencing disadvantage, we advocate for law and policy that promotes the rights of women, and we lead change to redress inequalities experienced by women.

In the 2019/2020 FY, over 75% of our clients were financially disadvantaged and over 75% of our clients presented with domestic and family violence indicators.



Throughout 2019/20, TEWLS continued its important and specialised work in advocating for clients individually on domestic and family violence, sexual offences, image abuse, family law, tenancy, consumer law, complaints (including police, medical and broader system-level complaints), credit and debt and other civil law matters. Family law remains the most requested advice

service, and credit and debt, housing and consumer law matters are the top three legal representation matter types.

In providing specialist, holistic, and trauma informed services TEWLS has achieved improved client outcomes. As one client said, “Thanks very much – that’s the first time anybody asked about me.”

At TEWLS we believe an informed community is an empowered one. TEWLS continued to provide family and civil law legal education to women in the Top End to ensure that they know their rights and know where and when to seek help. Priority groups this year were recently arrived culturally and linguistically diverse, Indigenous, and incarcerated women.

Integral to the work we do to ensure better outcomes for women in the Top End is our advocacy for improved policy, law, and system settings. In addition to family law and domestic violence provisions, this year TEWLS focus included advocating to permit attendance at therapeutic and rehabilitation programs to count towards ‘cutting out’ court fines; the successful #LetHerSpeak campaign; and the successful decriminalisation of sex work campaign.

TEWLS impact exceeds our small funding footprint. However, at the same time we have unfortunately had to suspend our legal clinic at the Royal Darwin Hospital due to insufficient capacity and this year we have been forced to turn away over 1,500 women seeking legal help. Those

declined assistance include mothers experiencing domestic and family violence with meritorious but complex family law matters that require representation. **In this area of family law, as with incarcerated women where funding has remained the same for over a decade, dedicated additional lawyers are urgently required.**

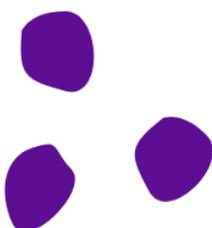
As reported in last year's Annual Report, this year TEWLS embarked on a legal health check project at the Darwin Correctional Centre following receipt of a small Territory Families Grant. The project was finalised within the 2019/2020 FY, with a precis of the published report included in this Annual Report providing the first ever statistical snapshot of the women incarcerated within sector 4 in the Darwin Correctional Centre.

This year, TEWLS also rose to the new challenge of COVID-19 with our advocacy services accommodating greater demand, and the Commonwealth Government providing much needed funding to ensure IT capacity to maintain service provision levels.



As always, this incredible work has been undertaken by our small and dedicated team and the TEWLS Management Committee recognizes the sterling work of our staff members.

Chris Osborne
Chair



A MESSAGE FROM OUR MANAGING SOLICITOR

As a small team, this year TEWLS has been highly productive with merriment, trophies, and the occasional martini.

In the 2019/2020 FY, service achievements included assisting 2,750 women, exceeding all targets by up to 950%, and receiving the Northern Territory Human Rights Justice Award.



Project highlights include finalisation of the Incarcerated Women’s Legal Health Report, and commencement of a holistic legal health check project with culturally and linguistically diverse women within the Greater Darwin Region. In collaboration with Melaleuca Refuge Centre, our new project will focus on addressing domestic and family violence and civil and family law needs within diverse communities and produce related factsheets.

Advocacy achievements include passage of the *Sexual Offences (Evidence and Procedure) Act 2019* (NT), also known as “Let her Speak” laws, and the *Sex Industry Act 2019* (NT) which decriminalises sex work in the Northern Territory. Welcome systems improvements include introduction of the Bill to remove the presumption of equal shared parental responsibility from

the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth), as recommended by the Australian Law Reform Commission, and a draft Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

As a consequence of COVID-19, service demand increased from all but Indigenous clients on community, where face-to-face service provision remain essential. TEWLS has risen to the challenging new environment, with service capacity having greatly benefited from much needed IT funding to adapt to changed service delivery to cover costs required to transition to online and virtual service provision.

At TEWLS, we focus on individual, service and systems empowerment and improvements.



For individuals, we continue to promote the essential requirements of holistic, specialist, trauma-informed and preventative service provision. At a service level, we continue to advocate for free

specialist legal assistance to be more widely available for women. We continue to seek funding to expand the scope and reach of service provision for women in the Top End and throughout the Northern Territory. At a systems level, we continue to advocate for law and policy reform to advance women's rights, and to challenge service and systems abuse.

Success in seeking appropriate responses to women experiencing violence, and in advancing and securing respect for women's rights, remains a challenge.



Incarcerated women are not able to access specialist domestic and family violence

counselling to address complex trauma that contributes to incarceration and recidivism. Over 1,500 requests for legal assistance could not be met due to insufficient service capacity. This includes women experiencing domestic and family violence with complex family law matters seeking representation, and women with meritorious legal matters facing additional barriers due to disability, discrimination, financial disadvantage, homelessness, and/or limited English. The longer-term goal to see governments prioritise specialist and holistic legal assistance for domestic violence remains out of reach.

We continue to rely on volunteers, pro-bono connectivity, short form grants, in-kind support and donations to enhance and extend our services – all of which are gratefully received and warmly welcomed.

Special thanks to all, particularly our fabulous Management Committee, with special note of grants received from both Territory Families and the Northern Territory Legal Practitioners Fidelity Fund.

Vanessa Lethlean
Managing Solicitor

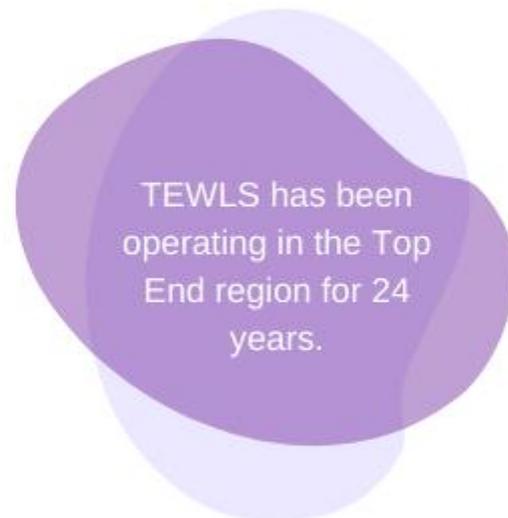


ABOUT TEWLS

The Top End Women’s Legal Service (TEWLS) has been operating in the Top End region for 24 years.

As a community legal centre focused on the advancement of women’s rights, we provide high quality, responsive, and culturally appropriate free legal advice, information, casework and representation services, community legal education and advocacy in civil and family law to women living in the Greater Darwin region.

TEWLS’ service area and targeted outreach services include Darwin, Palmerston, Dawn House Women’s Shelter, six Indigenous communities in the Greater Darwin region, at Adult Migrant English Programs across the Top End, and women incarcerated at the Darwin Correctional Centre (**DCC**).



Vision

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

Purpose

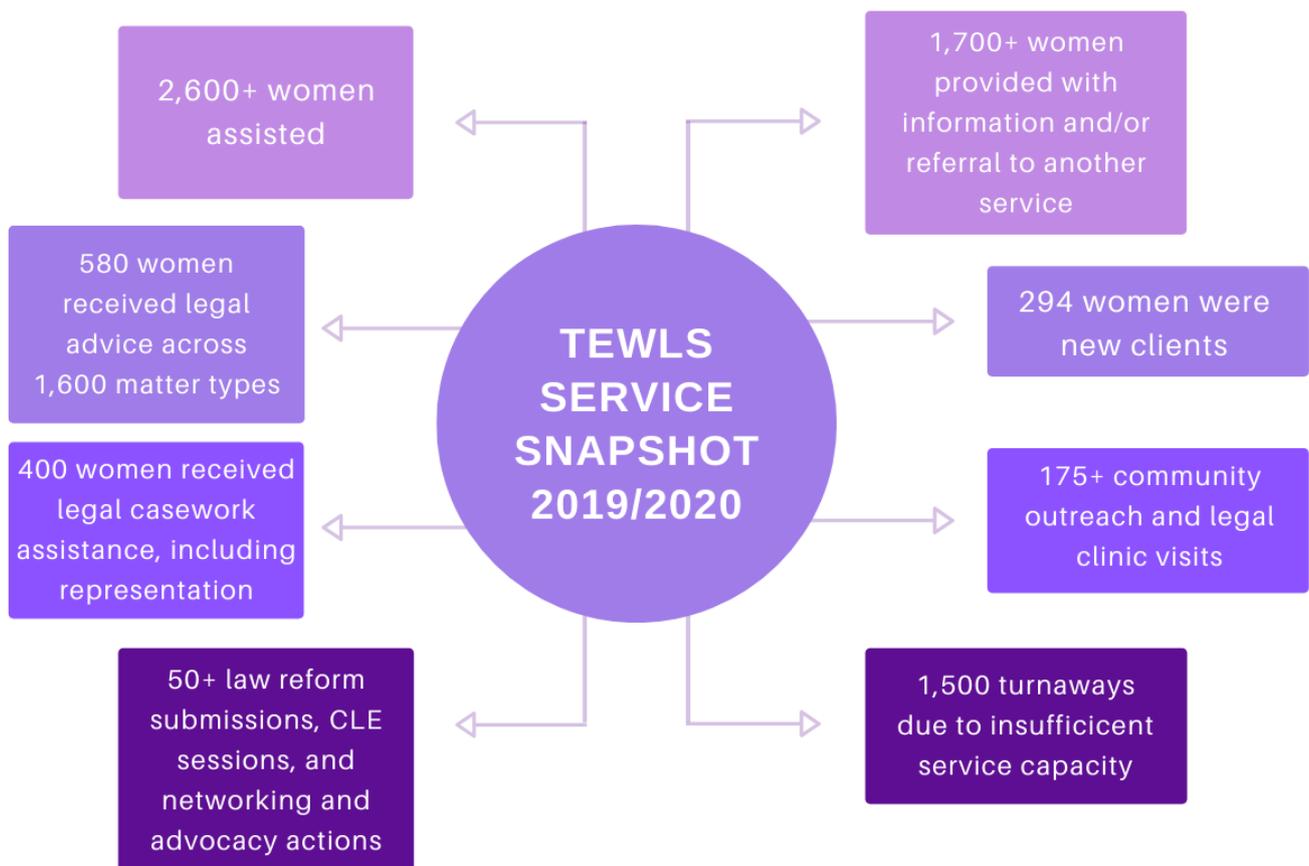
To advocate to achieve justice for women, to promote women’s human rights, and to redress inequalities experienced by women.

Values

Courage	Collaboration	Accountability	Connectivity	Excellence
Inclusivity	Innovation	Respect	Integrity	Specialisation

TEWLS IN 2019/2020: SERVICE SNAPSHOT

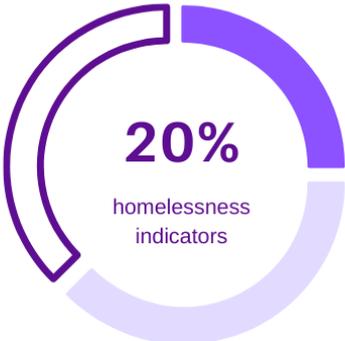
In total, TEWLS assisted over 2,600 women by providing legal information and referral, legal advice, casework, and representation services during the 2019/2020 FY.



TEWLS' services were provided in Darwin, Palmerston, at the Dawn House Women's Shelter, at local Adult Migrant English Programs (including STEPS), at the Darwin Correctional Centre, and the following Indigenous communities:

- Acacia Community
- Amangal Community
- Bagot Community
- Belyuen Community
- Knuckey Lagoon Community
- 15 Mile (PIV) Community

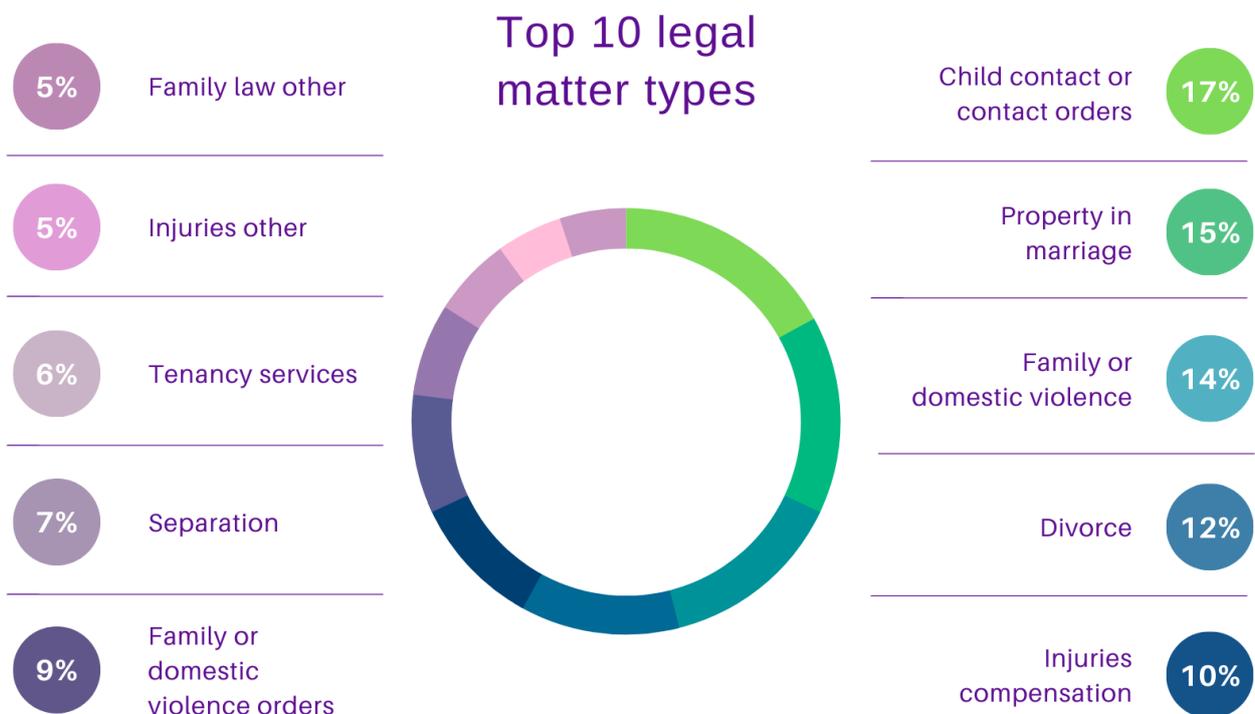
OUR CLIENTS



OUR IMPACT: *Advice and Advocacy*

In 2019/20, TEWLS assisted over 2,600 women by providing legal information and referrals, legal advices, case work and legal representation services. Additionally, TEWLS provided over 550 legal advices in over 1,600 matter types across different locations.

TEWLS continued to provide free one-off legal advices in-house on civil and family law matters, as well as representation and case work services. The top 10 legal matter types for advices in 2019/2020 FY were as follows:



The top three legal representation matters during the past year were credit and debt, housing, and consumer law matters, while the top three court/tribunal matters were family law, tenancy and credit and debt matters. Given that for the second half of this reporting year we were faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of these three areas is consistent with the pressures experienced by our client base.

Throughout 2019/20, TEWLS continued its important and specialised work in advocating for our clients. The breadth of matter types involved in this work increases year by year, where this year, there were new challenges as a result of COVID-19 and our advocacy services were stretched to accommodate the greater need. Achieving a positive outcome for our clients through our advocacy work is extremely satisfying and benefits not only the respective client but the broader community.

The following deidentified client stories reflect our work over the 2019/2020 FY, illustrating the high-quality representative services provided by TEWLS as a specialist women's legal service.

Domestic and Family Violence and Image-Based Abuse

Gigi* is a young woman residing in the Top End. Gigi and her peers use social media on a regular basis, including Facebook and Instagram.

Gigi attended TEWLS seeking legal assistance in respect of her ex-boyfriend's threats. Gigi told TEWLS that she had broken up with her ex-boyfriend about two years prior, and that since commencing a new relationship, her ex-boyfriend had been harassing her via social media and making threats to share intimate images of Gigi that he had consensually taken during their relationship.

TEWLS advised Gigi in respect of her domestic violence order and non-consensual sharing of intimate images (criminal and civil) options and acted on Gigi's instructions to write a warning letter to her ex-boyfriend in the first instance. After receiving the letter, Gigi's ex-boyfriend ceased the intimidatory and criminal conduct.



Passports issued in time for Christmas holidays – Advocacy with a Federal Government Agency

Claire* first attended TEWLS during our weekly volunteer clinic seeking help with her daughters' passports. She instructed the TEWLS volunteer solicitor that she had recently left a violent relationship along with her two young daughters, with a full non-contact DVO in place for four years protecting Claire and her daughters. Her ex-husband had taken all passports of their dual-citizenship daughters and Claire had a family holiday planned overseas.

Claire had managed to source replacement passports from her home country for her daughters, however, Australian authorities were proving more difficult as her ex-husband would not agree to renew the Australian passports. Claire was also faced with barriers in attempting to travel out of the country with her daughters on their foreign passports as Australian citizens. Claire was referred for an in-house appointment.

TEWLS assisted Claire to liaise with both the Department of Home Affairs and Australian Border Force and was successful in securing two separate solutions for Claire; the first being assistance with an application to allow for the lodgment of passport applications without both parents consent in exceptional circumstances (domestic and family violence), and the second being the preparation of a special permit application placed on the foreign passports to identify that the girls were Australian citizens and to permit travel and return to Australia.

Claire was able to obtain travel documents for both girls and she and her daughters were able to spend Christmas with her family overseas.

Protection from systems-based abuse - positive outcomes for mother and her children

Sophie* first attended TEWLS during our weekly volunteer clinic, instructing that she had been served with initiating documents for family law (parenting) proceedings by her ex-partner, who was represented by another free legal service provider. Sophie told TEWLS that there were two children of the relationship, the youngest being the biological child of her ex-partner, and that the children had not seen her ex-partner since his conviction and incarceration for sexual assault against the eldest child. The TEWLS volunteer solicitor referred Sophie to the TEWLS in-house service for further advice and representation.

TEWLS advised Sophie that her ex-partner's initiating application was without merit and commenced to act on her behalf. TEWLS drafted relevant response documents and successfully sought orders for a Family Report at the matter's first return date, as well as the appointment of an Independent Children's Lawyer. TEWLS advocated on Sophie and the children's behalf that usual processes should not be followed given the matter's history, and the Court made orders for the children not to have any time with the ex-partner until further Orders.

Around six months later, the Family Report was released to the parties, consistent with the advice of TEWLS and Sophie's belief that the children should not have any time or contact with the ex-partner. The parties prepared Consent Orders for the matter in line with the Family Report, which were subsequently approved by the Court. Following the conclusion of the matter, the Independent Children's Lawyer advised TEWLS that she would be making a systems-abuse complaint to the government funded legal service provider that represented Sophie's ex-partner.

Housing security in the context of women experiencing incarceration

Abbey* requested legal help whilst incarcerated regarding a substantial public housing debt. She had relinquished her housing as a consequence of the length of her sentence and would exit prison homeless. Legal representation identified Abbey was not liable for a significant proportion of the debt. \$7,000 was waived, and a repayment schedule agreed to post release.

Reducing debt post release is important for improved outcomes, as is holding Government to account, and providing holistic legal assistance. Advocacy at the Legal Services Group contributed to policy change, meaning a pre-existing debt no longer precludes public housing application or eligibility.

Chrystal* is the mother of four children, who has experienced short occasional periods of incarceration. Legal representation identified and secured caretaker provisions permitting Chrystal to retain her public housing and put arrangements in place for the care of her children.



...and successfully sought orders for a Family Report at the matter's first return date, as well as the appointment of an Independent Children's Lawyer.

Addressing health complaints

Edwina* is a student residing in Darwin, where she attends a local medical service for assistance as required. After noticing short-term changes in her body and menstrual cycle, Edwina attended the medical service instructing of her belief that she was pregnant. After returning a negative result, the medical service advised Edwina that she was not pregnant.

About one month later, Edwina reattended the medical service giving further instructions about bodily changes. The GP arranged for a suite of tests of Edwina, and about a week later, advised that the results for most of the tests, including pregnancy, were negative. Over the next five weeks, Edwina continued to present to her GP suffering from pregnancy-like symptomology, which the GP attributed to various other conditions. Five weeks after she received the results of the suite of tests, Edwina was contacted by the medical service on an urgent basis and advised that she was pregnant. After undertaking an urgent ultrasound, Edwina was advised that she was unable to access a termination in the NT because of the gestation and would have to self-fund an interstate termination.

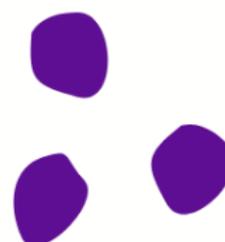
Edwina attended TEWLS seeking legal advice in respect of medical negligence. TEWLS advised Edwina of her options in respect of her matter and acted on her instructions to make complaint against the medical service and the GP in the first instance, with complaints and/or Tribunal processes to follow should the complaints be unsuccessful. In acting as Edwina's representative, TEWLS negotiated a settlement agreement benefitting Edwina, and sought procedural change in the medical practice to stop any future issues for other women.

Servicing our clients through multiple processes – Court and Victims of Crime

Dara* and Baden were in a relationship for seven years. Characterised by high level and frequent domestic, family and sexual violence, Dara endured multiple assaults and physical and psychological injuries before being able to leave Baden. Post-separation and with a safety plan and DVO in place, Baden's offending continued, with multiple offences that included charges of aggravated assault, sexual intercourse without consent, deprivation of liberty, and breach DVO. The imprisonment of Baden provided Dara and her children with respite, and an opportunity to engage with counselling.

Whilst a jury discharged Baden of the sexual intercourse without consent charge, throwing Dara into a dark place, Dara was empowered by the decision of the Crimes Victims Services Unit after the assessor found the alleged offences established and determined Dara would receive an award of financial assistance.

Dara intends to use the award to improve her children's access to education. She has a 5-year DVO in place, safety supports in place, continues with counselling as needed, and sees a better path for herself and her children moving forward.



OUR IMPACT: *Law reform and submissions*

Integral to our work to ensure better outcomes for women in the Top End is our work in contributing to law reform.

TEWLS welcomes the opportunity to make submissions and express our views on matters of importance to women within our service areas. TEWLS makes submissions individually but also as part of the Northern Territory Women's Legal Services (**NTWLS**) coalition. TEWLS also collaborates with stakeholders to make comment where appropriate.

A therapeutic approach to fine payment – Seeking amendment of the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act 2001 (NT)*

In 2019/2020 and based on our client's experiences, TEWLS made a submission to the Northern Territory Government seeking regulatory amendment of the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act 2001 (NT)*. To demonstrate the need for the proposed amendment, TEWLS provided the following deidentified case study:

Barbara is an Aboriginal woman with complex psychological trauma. She has never been employed, she cycles in and out of DCC, with extensive periods of homelessness in between.

Barbara owes the Fines Recovery Unit over \$30,000, an amount comprising 65 unpaid fines. Of the 65 fines, 33 fines are "public space offences", being fines for indecent language in a public area, stacking/storing goods in a public area, and consuming alcohol in restricted/ public areas.

Barbara's fines vary in cost; however, the average fine is \$277, including enforcement charges. The average weekly income of a person on Centrelink's Newstart Allowance is \$248.50. This means that a fine costs approximately

112% of Barbara's weekly income. Barbara's fines cause Barbara great stress and shame, which often compounds and results in criminal offences.

Barbara instructs she would like to access alcohol and trauma counselling to address the issues underlying her incarceration and recidivism. Access to such services, with attendance reducing unpayable debt, could assist with well-being, reduce recidivism, increase productivity and save on incarceration costs.

TEWLS is advocating to expand the operation of Community Work Orders to permit attendance at therapeutic and rehabilitation programs to count towards "cutting out" court fines. The aim is to promote therapeutic and counselling engagement, address otherwise unpayable debt, and to reduce incarceration rates.

#LetHerSpeak - Sexual Offences (Evidence and Procedure) Amendment Bill 2009 – NTWLS Submission

TEWLS was a strong supporter of the #LetHerSpeak campaign, and in January 2020, NTWLS made a joint submission in response to the above-mentioned bill. This was in addition to the individual submission by TEWLS in November 2019 in support of the campaign.

The NT remained the only jurisdiction with an act barring victim-survivors from speaking publicly about their experience even after the court process had completed. The proposed legislative amendment sought to bring the NT in line with all other Australian jurisdiction by providing victim-survivors with the opportunity to consent to publishing their identities and their experiences should they wish to do so.

The NTWLS supported the proposed reforms as a positive step in the direction of greater victim-survivor rights and autonomy over their experiences.

On 29 July 2020, the Sexual Offences (Evidence and Procedure) Amendment Act 2020 became law, allowing survivors to identify themselves and discuss their experiences provided: they consent in writing; are an adult; do not identify other victims without their consent and there are no proceedings pending before the courts.

Justice Legislation Amendment (Domestic and Family Violence) Bill 2019 – NTWLS Submission

In January 2020, NTWLS made an extensive joint submission in response to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Domestic and Family Violence) Bill 2019 – a bill that sought to make amendments across three distinct areas with the objective to improve responses to domestic and family violence.

The three distinct areas seeking to be captured by the bill were as follows:

1. The introduction of a new criminal offence of choking in a domestic relationship.
2. The ability to make orders in relation to tenancy agreements, as part of a domestic violence order (**DVO**).
3. The ability to make orders to attend rehabilitation programs, also as part of a DVO.

NTWLS supported the bill in principle but expressed evidence-based concern about aspects.

In relation to the introduction of a choking/strangulation offence, NTWLS noted that the intent in creating such an offence in the NT is to acknowledge the severity of such offending and to ensure greater recognition of this conduct in the investigation and prosecution of domestic violence related offending. However, NTWLS was disappointed to not receive the clarification it requested regarding the decision to limit the operation of the new offence of choking to circumstances where a domestic relationship existed. This was in contrast to the approach in NSW, the most recent amendments of its kind, which implemented a broad strangulation offence to protect not only those in a domestic relationship but the broader community.



At bill stage, NTWLS expressed concern that the proposed amendment regarding rehabilitation programs would facilitate men's participation in current alcohol and other drug services only, as opposed to participating in targeted behaviour change programs regarding domestic and family violence. The bill in this form would not provide adequate safe-guards, as guaranteed by the current *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007* (NT), for the women and children impacted by domestic and family violence as a consequence of the respective man failing to change their behaviour.

After further advocacy from the NTWLS, these concerns were addressed and implemented into the Act whereby the Minister may declare a program to be a rehabilitation program for the purposes of the act only if the primary objective of the program is to change the behaviour of a person who commits domestic violence. Further, where other programs, such as alcohol rehabilitation, are ordered by the Court as an additional program, this can only occur if a declared (domestic violence specific) program is also ordered.

The *Justice Legislation Amendment (Domestic and Family Violence) Act 2020* (NT) commenced on 29 July 2020.



In 2019/2020, TEWLS made law reform and advocacy submissions, as well as gave evidence to relevant enquiries as follows:

- Submission to the *Sex Industry Bill 2019* (NT) - NTWLS
- Appearance before the Economic Public Scrutiny Committee's Public Hearing regarding the *Sex Industry Bill 2019* (NT) - NTWLS
- Submission to the *Religious Freedom Bills* (Cth) - NTWLS
- Comments to the NT Government in relation to the confidential draft of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Domestic and Family Violence) Bill 2019 (NT) – TEWLS
- Signatory to joint statement regarding NT tenancy reform – TEWLS
- Submission sent to the NT Government seeking regulatory amendment of the *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act 2001* (NT) - TEWLS
- Submission to the NT Law Society regarding COAG key stakeholder consultation regarding options for improving domestic and family violence competency of legal practitioners
- Submission to the *Sexual Offences (Evidence and Procedure) Act 1983* (NT) (#Let Her Speak) – NTWLS
- Appearance before the Economic Public Scrutiny Committee's Public Hearing regarding the *Sexual Offences (Evidence and Procedure) Act 1983* (NT) (#Let Her Speak) – NTWLS
- Submission to the NT Consultation Paper on Review of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1999* (NT) - NTWLS
- Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Australia's Family Law System (Cth) – NTWLS
- Submission to the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Domestic and Family Violence) Bill 2019* (NT) – NTWLS
- Appearance before the Economic Public Scrutiny Committee's Public Hearing regarding the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Domestic and Family Violence) Bill 2019* (NT) – NTWLS
- Additional advocacy to the NT Attorney-General regarding the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Domestic and Family Violence) Bill 2019* (NT) – NTWLS in light of COVID-19
- Submission to the stakeholder consultation regarding the implementation of coronial findings for a new police power of entry in the *Police Administration Act 1978* (NT) - TEWLS
- Submission to the draft Aboriginal Justice Agreement NT – TEWLS
- Submission to the Mental Health Inquiry Productivity Commission (Cth) – TEWLS
- Various media releases by Women's Legal Services Australia (WLSA) regarding the family law system

OUR IMPACT: *Projects*

In 2019/2020, TEWLS undertook the Legal Health Check Project at the Darwin Correctional Centre (DCC).

As reported in last year's Annual Report, this year TEWLS embarked on a legal health check project at the DCC. The project was designed to identify and address the many complex legal issues experienced by incarcerated women. Unmet legal need can exacerbate incarcerated women's pre-existing vulnerabilities, many of which are underlying causes of their offending conduct, it can also have a detrimental effect on their mental health.

The Legal Health Check (**LHC**) is a legal screening tool adapted by TEWLS to "diagnose" precursors to incarceration and to identify the multiple legal needs of women incarcerated in the DCC. The LHC project commenced in March 2019 and was finalised in the first half of this reporting year, culminating in a report for publication. The project provided a vitally important statistical snapshot of the women incarcerated within sector 4 of the DCC.

The LHC was a great success with over 50 women taking part, the overwhelming take away from the project was the need for an external, specialist, trauma-informed, domestic and family violence visiting counsellor. The project demonstrated that women were unable to address their own trauma and mental health within DCC, meaning that upon their return to the community, they are consequently unable to break out of their own cycle of detention.

TEWLS believes that the provision of holistic servicing, including culturally safe and appropriate mental health services, is a critical step in breaking the cycle of recidivism. By denying the women such treatment, their mental health and wellbeing is continuously neglected resulting in the ongoing criminalisation of abuse victims.

Identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

76%

Had experienced domestic and family violence as a child or adult

76%

Had received an injury from a violent act

76%

Had issues with alcohol and/or other drugs

74%

Of those who chose to answer had a pre-existing mental health condition

53%

Were either receiving treatment or had medical concerns

52%

Were mothers, with 30% having had prior involvement with Child Welfare authorities

78%

OUR IMPACT: *Community Legal Education and Community Engagement*

In 2019/2020, TEWLS continued to provide Community Legal Education in the Top End and continued our commitment to community engagement.

Community Legal Education

At TEWLS, we believe that an informed community is an empowered one. We continue to identify opportunities to provide legal education to women in the Top End to ensure that they know their rights and know where and when to seek help.

In 2019/20, we delivered community legal education (CLE) workshops across our service locations to clients, service providers and stakeholders upon request. We continue to focus on Indigenous and CALD women, ensuring that each CLE is culturally safe.

Through our CLE program, we seek to ensure access to justice and promote an understanding of the Australian legal system. The Law Council of Australia's 2018 report on access to justice highlights that a limited knowledge of the Australian legal system and how to access legal help is a consistently cited barrier for many recent arrivals in accessing justice.

TEWLS hopes to continue to capacity build the communities we partner with in 2020/21.



Community Engagement

TEWLS' work in the community extends further than the provision of legal services. TEWLS recognises and appreciates the warm welcome it receives in attending our many outreach and clinic locations. Our legal and non-legal staff enjoyed spending time within the communities and sharing a story or two at our regular community barbeques, organised in collaboration with stakeholders.

TEWLS attended a variety of public events during the year in and around Darwin, including:

- International Women's Day
- Law Week
- NT Women of Westpac International Women's Day luncheon
- Attendance at the #globalclimatestrike
- International Women's Day March

In keeping with previous years, TEWLS remained a collection point for the "Share the Dignity", a charity that provides sanitary items to women in need.

TEWLS' stall at the International Women's Day celebrations 2020

OUR IMPACT: *Committees*

TEWLS is committed to its visibility within the legal community and the community services sector. In order to provide the highest level of service to our clients, including referral and information services, TEWLS believes it is crucial to work alongside stakeholders.

TEWLS' active work with various committees supports our vision to increase access to justice and equality before the law for all women in the Top End.

In particular, TEWLS' continued membership in the Northern Territory Association of Community Legal Centres, as part of the National Association of Community Legal Centres, ensures that our services are delivered efficiently and collaboratively with other free legal service providers in the Northern Territory.

In 2019/20, TEWLS played an active role with the following networks and committees:

- NT Legal Assistance Forum
- NT Women's Legal Services
- Women's Legal Services Australia
- NT Association of Community Legal Centres
- Domestic and Family Violence Court User's Forum, Darwin
- Palmerston Indigenous Network
- Domestic and Family Violence Network, Darwin
- Darwin Correctional Centre Services Providers Group
- Territory Families Legal Services Forum
- NT Family Law Pathways
- NT Sexual Assault Network
- NT Department of Housing and Community Development Legal Services Group
- NT Community Legal Education Network

TEWLS staff members hold membership and/or board positions individually on the Northern Territory Women's Lawyers Committee, Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development Appeals Board, Northern Territory Victims of Crime Advisory Committee, Northern Territory Young Lawyers, and the Hellenic Australian Lawyers - Northern Territory Chapter.



OUR SUPPORTERS

TEWLS' service provision is bolstered and expanded by support from volunteers, pro bono lawyers, donations and in-kind support. This enables TEWLS to work beyond the capacity provided by our funding.

TEWLS is funded by the Commonwealth Department of the Attorney-General and Justice and Commonwealth Department of the National Indigenous Australians Agency. We also received project funding this year from Territory Families and Northern Territory Legal Practitioners Fidelity Fund.

Our pro-bono partners enhanced our capacity to service our clients, providing specialist legal advice and support on many occasions during the reporting period. TEWLS would like to particularly acknowledge the support provided by Maurice Blackburn in relation to our LHC DCC Project. We look forward to working side by side in the year ahead.

In 2019/20, TEWLS' service provision was again supported and enhanced by a number of volunteer solicitors who staffed our Wednesday Evening Advice Clinic. We are lucky enough to have a number of senior specialist experts volunteering with the service, and each volunteer brings something different and valued to the service. TEWLS extends a very warm thank you to all volunteers who contribute their time so generously.

Pro bono partners

Ashurst
Clayton Utz
Maurice Blackburn
Minter Ellison

Volunteer Supervising Solicitors

Cathy Spurr
Chris Osborne
Julie Franz
Lindy Morgan
Peggy Cheong

Volunteer Solicitors

Alanna Grimster
Allison Clark
Amy Noble
Anne-Marie Chin

Briana Ganesharajah
Carmel Lohan
Daisy Kolt
Harita Sridhar
Isabel Roper
Jacqui Griffin
Jessica Holgersson
Karen Spitz
Kathryn Baumeister
Kendra Frew
Leanne Kerr
Lucy Hopkinson
Michelle Duggan
Nicola Leach
Nicole Festing
Tessa Mitchell
Tisha Tejaya
Thelma Gray
Ruby Rayner
Sam Hendry
Shannon Coetzee

OUR PEOPLE

Our Management Committee 2019/2020

TEWLS thanks the Management Committee members for their ongoing support of staff and overarching direction and management of the service.

Chris Osborne	Chairperson	Danielle Eveleigh	Board Member
Rose Mills	Treasurer	Emma Farnell	Board Member
Sim O'Callaghan	Secretary	Lucy Hopkinson	Board Member (from 13.09.2019)
Carol Cummins	Board Member		

Our Staff 2019/2020

TEWLS employs a team of legal and non-legal staff. As of 30 June 2020, our team consisted of:

Vanessa Lethlean	Managing Solicitor	Giselle Hutchins	Solicitor & Project Officer
Caitlin Weatherby-Fell	Senior Solicitor	Pamela Lasker	Indigenous Community & Project Officer
Carmel Lohan	Solicitor	Kara Mills	Administration Officer
Georgia Hagias	Solicitor		



TEWLS extends a special thanks to staff who have moved on during the 2019/2020 FY.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

During the 2019/2020 FY, TEWLS celebrated a number of achievements for the service and our staff.

2019 Fitzgerald Justice Award Winner

TEWLS was delighted to announce its success at the NT Human Rights Awards, where TEWLS was announced as the 2019 winner of the Fitzgerald Justice Award.

The NT Human Rights Awards, known as “The Fitzgeralds”, celebrate notable activities in the Northern Territory or by Territorians, which advance human rights. The Fitzgerald Justice Award is awarded to a person or organisation living or based in the NT who has contributed significantly to the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of human rights in the area of Law and Justice.



TEWLS staff and Management Committee celebrating the service's success at the NT Human Rights Awards 2019

“30 under 30” Finalist

TEWLS' Senior Solicitor, Caitlin Weatherby-Fell, was named a finalist for the second year running in the Lawyers Weekly “30 under 30” awards in the Community Legal Centre Lawyer category – a national celebration of achievement by legal practitioners across 30 categories. Congratulations, Caitlin!



TREASURER'S REPORT

TEWLS is funded by the Australian Government, via the National Partnership Agreement administered by the Attorney-General's Department, and the Safety and Wellbeing Programme administered by the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

We also received a grant this financial year from the Northern Territory Legal Practitioners Fidelity Fund. The grant permitted TEWLS to extend and improve service provision to vulnerable women who require legal assistance to overcome barriers and to obtain access to justice.

TEWLS completed our Legal Health Check Project funded by Territory Families under the Safe, Respected and Free from Violence Fund.

TEWLS' service provision is advanced and extended by volunteers, pro bono lawyers, donations, and in-kind support and sponsorship from the Northern Territory Government. This enables TEWLS to work beyond the capacity provided by our funding by approximately 20%.

Rose Mills
Treasurer



FINANCIALS



**TOP END WOMEN'S
LEGAL SERVICE INC.**

FREE LEGAL ADVICE FOR WOMEN

Advice | Information | Referral | Advocacy

www.tewls.org.au

 [@topendwomenslegalservice](https://www.facebook.com/topendwomenslegalservice)

