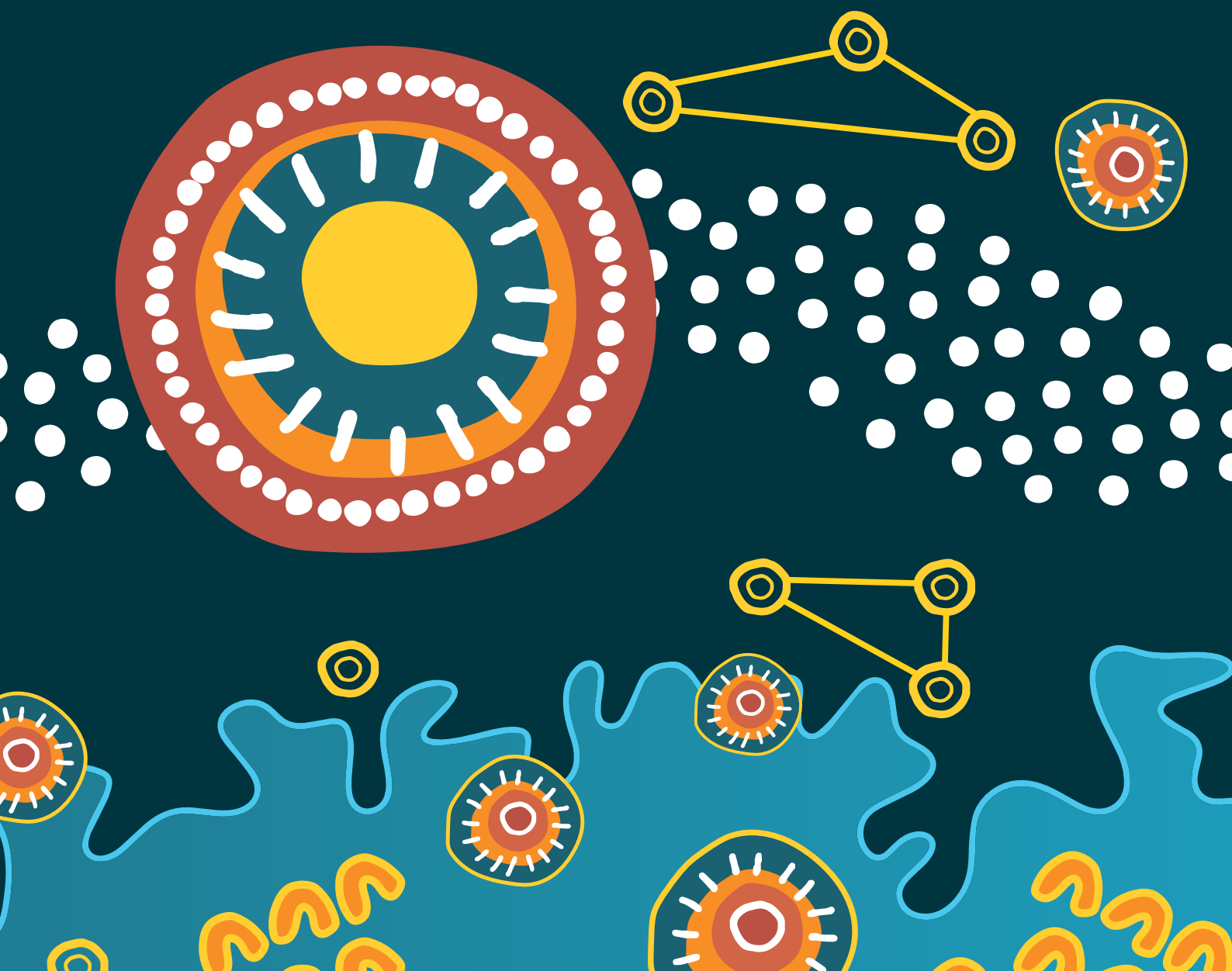




**Aboriginal
Legal Service**
(NSW/ACT) Limited

Aboriginal Legal Service
(NSW/ACT) Limited

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we live, work and travel. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present and acknowledge the contribution and sacrifices our Elders have made to better our community and future.

This publication contains names and faces of Aboriginal people who have passed. Names of some clients have been changed to protect their privacy. Stock images have been used on some pages to protect clients' privacy.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	
Message from the Chairperson	4
Message from the CEO	6
2023-24 at a glance	8
Who we are	10
How we make a difference	11
Governance and strategy	
Our strategic plan	13
Governance	14
Connecting and collaborating with our communities	
Community legal education	16
Community engagement and collaboration	17
Telling our story	
Our public profile and advocacy	18
Stories of 2023-24	20
Delivering high quality, culturally safe legal and support services	
Feedback from our clients	24
Criminal law	25
Child protection and family law	30
Family violence and safety	34
Civil law	36
Service innovation and reform	39
Cooperative Legal Service Delivery	40
Bugmy Bar Book	41
Advocating for justice and achieving community-led change	
Driving systems change through strategic partnerships and building power in communities	42
Strategic law reform and advocacy	47
Supporting families through coronial inquests	51
Auspice of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services	52
Laying strong future foundations	
Supporting our staff and services to maximise their impact	54
Funding our work	55
Financials	58
Contact us	61

Introduction

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

I am very pleased to present my first annual report as Chairperson of the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited.

Firstly, I would like to thank and acknowledge my predecessor, Jason Allan for his leadership as Chairperson during the reporting period.

I am a proud Wiradjuri and Ngunnawal man, father and grandfather. I have served as an ALS Director for seven years and was honoured to be elected by the board as Chairperson in July 2024, following an election that is held every three years in accordance with the ALS Constitution. I am committed to leading with the principles of unity, transparency and accountability.

It is a great privilege and responsibility to be chosen to serve our communities, and myself and my fellow directors take this role very seriously. My fellow directors are proud, as I know our communities are, of the ALS' role and legacy as one of Australia's first Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and the first free legal service in the country.

Funding provided by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, including through the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP), plus the NSW Government and the ACT Government is critical in delivering our services and we thank them for their investment. These services now include expanded programs, enabling the ALS to offer holistic and wrap-around support for our communities in more locations.

This year an independent review into the NLAP was undertaken by Dr Warren Mundy, presenting an opportunity for the ALS to

amplify our longstanding efforts to secure much-needed additional funding. Despite the demand for our services increasing each year, our current funding doesn't allow us to meet the legal needs of our communities. Dr Mundy found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience greater unmet legal need than any other group in the community and concluded that resourcing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) has been inadequate for well over a decade. He also found that government funding arrangements must deliver better justice outcomes for our peoples and embed Closing the Gap commitments.

Despite these resourcing challenges, the ALS has done an admirable job of delivering almost 141,000 services this year.

On behalf of the board, I commend Chief Executive Karly Warner and the entire ALS team for consistently growing and strengthening the ALS, increasing its profile and driving the fulfilment of our ambitious strategic plan.

I acknowledge the commendable work and dedication of ALS employees throughout another challenging year and extend our sincere thanks to everyone who continued to make our work possible in 2023-24, including our communities, funders, partners, pro bono supporters and donors.

Thank you for supporting our ongoing fight for justice.

Keith Morgan
Chairperson

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

It's been a year of significant growth for the ALS, with our team expanding from 275 to 375 staff members who are working tirelessly to provide a broader range of services than ever before.

In accordance with our strategic plan, we are working more holistically by incorporating social workers, mental health workers and youth workers into our teams to ensure that community have the support they need.

In programs such as our new Aboriginal Child and Family Advocacy and Support, family advocates are providing holistic, wraparound support and assistance to empower parents and carers in the earliest stages of contact with child protection authorities, ideally avoiding the need for more intensive legal support down the line by keeping children safe and strong in their homes.

For those families who do need legal support to keep their children or bring them back home, our care and protection legal service in the ACT has well and truly gotten off the ground after its launch last year. This important ACT service works alongside our pre-existing care and protection service in NSW.

We were very proud to launch the ALS Civil Law Practice in late 2023 with the introduction of our Employment Law Service, the first specialist sexual harassment and discrimination legal service in NSW that's for Aboriginal workers and run by an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation.

The bulk of ALS services continue to be in criminal law. Our criminal law practice in NSW and the ACT delivered more than 102,000 services this financial year, a 5% increase from the previous year despite being forced into freezing crime services at 13 NSW Local Courts from May 2023.

This increase is a demonstration of the high level of legal need in our communities and how hard the ALS is working to meet this need with limited resources. Advocating for increased and sustainable government funding formed a key focus for the ALS and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) this year, with both organisations preparing substantial submissions to the Independent Review into the National Legal Assistance Partnership.

We ran our biennial client survey this year and received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with 97% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they would recommend the ALS to others. All credit for this excellent result goes to our dedicated employees who consistently give their very best to shape a better future for our clients and communities.

I acknowledge and thank all ALS employees whose achievements, on the frontline and behind the scenes, make an incalculable difference in the lives of our clients. It was great to see ALS excellence recognised in the legal profession when Crystal Triggs, Legal and Program Manager for the Bugmy Bar Book, was awarded 2023 Regional Practitioner of the Year by the Law Society of NSW.

I also extend my thanks to our funders, donors and pro bono partners whose investment and solidarity provides the fuel to our fire. Our mission would not be possible without the principled support of many thousands of people who believe in justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Karly Warner
Chief Executive Officer

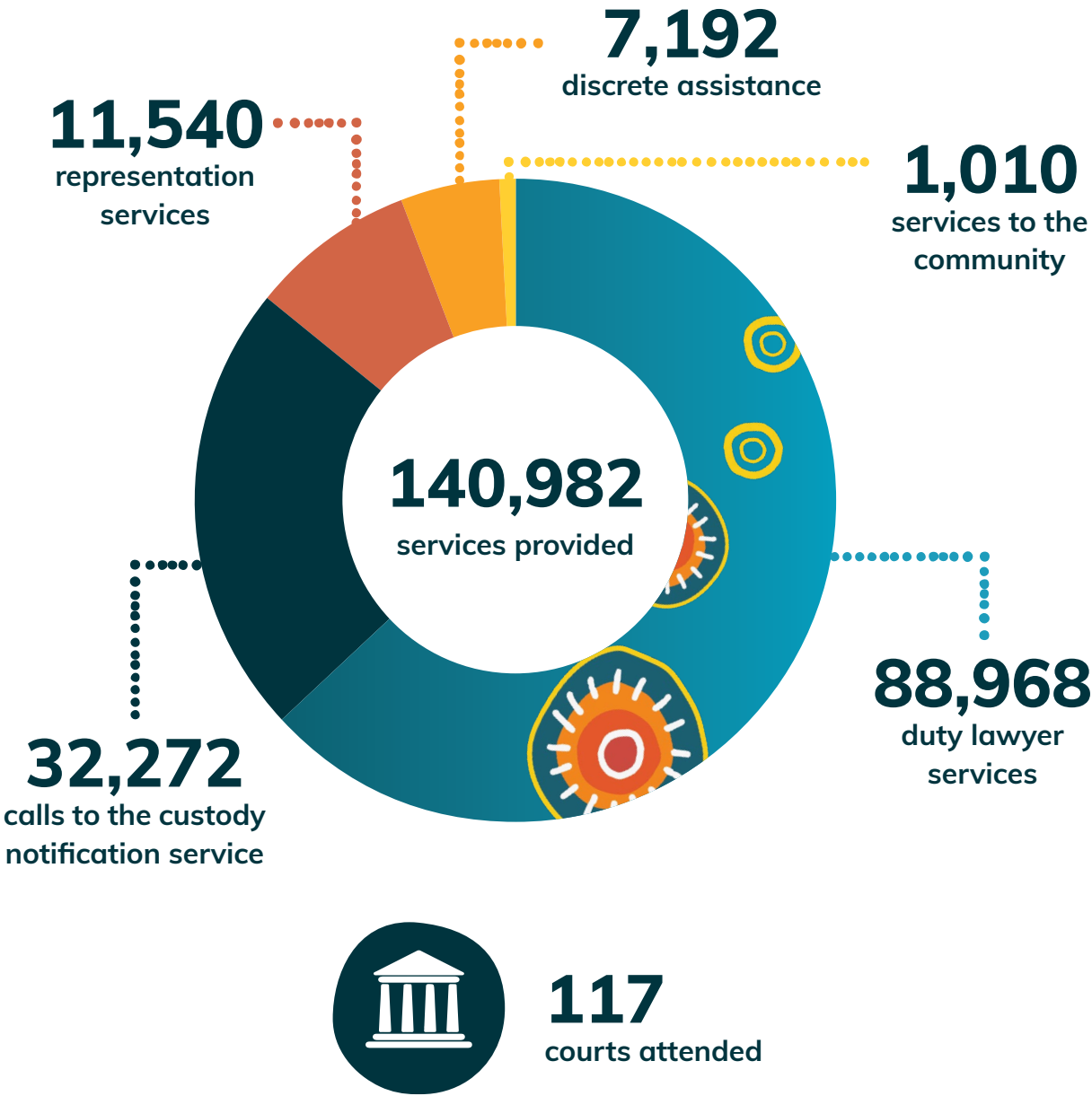


2023-24 AT A GLANCE

This year we:

- Opened the ALS Civil Law Practice, standing alongside our Criminal Law Practice and Care & Protection/ Family Law Practice
- Created the first employment law service run by an Aboriginal organisation for Aboriginal workers
- Expanded our coronial unit to provide more support to families following the death of a loved one in custody
- Established wraparound bail advocacy and support programs for children and women
- Amalgamated our freecall 1800 numbers, providing a single point of access for community
- Introduced a new service to streamline calls to the ALS from prisons
- Welcomed allied professional staff including disability and mental health workers
- Received overwhelmingly positive feedback in our client survey
- Started a new early support service in Moree and Dubbo to prevent child removals
- Grew our team size by over a third, providing more services for our people

OUR LEGAL PRACTICE IMPACT



WHO WE ARE

The Aboriginal Legal Service has been fighting for justice and equity for our peoples for more than 50 years.

Born out of a protest movement, we are the primary legal service for Aboriginal people in New South Wales and the ACT. We deliver free, culturally appropriate legal advice, representation, information and referrals for thousands of people each year.

We are more than a services provider. As a peak body and proud Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, we speak out to combat injustice, reform discriminatory laws, and demand accountability from public institutions. We are recognised nationally for our strong advocacy and law reform work.

Below: The ALS at NSW Aboriginal Land Council's Rock for Land Rights event in November 2023.

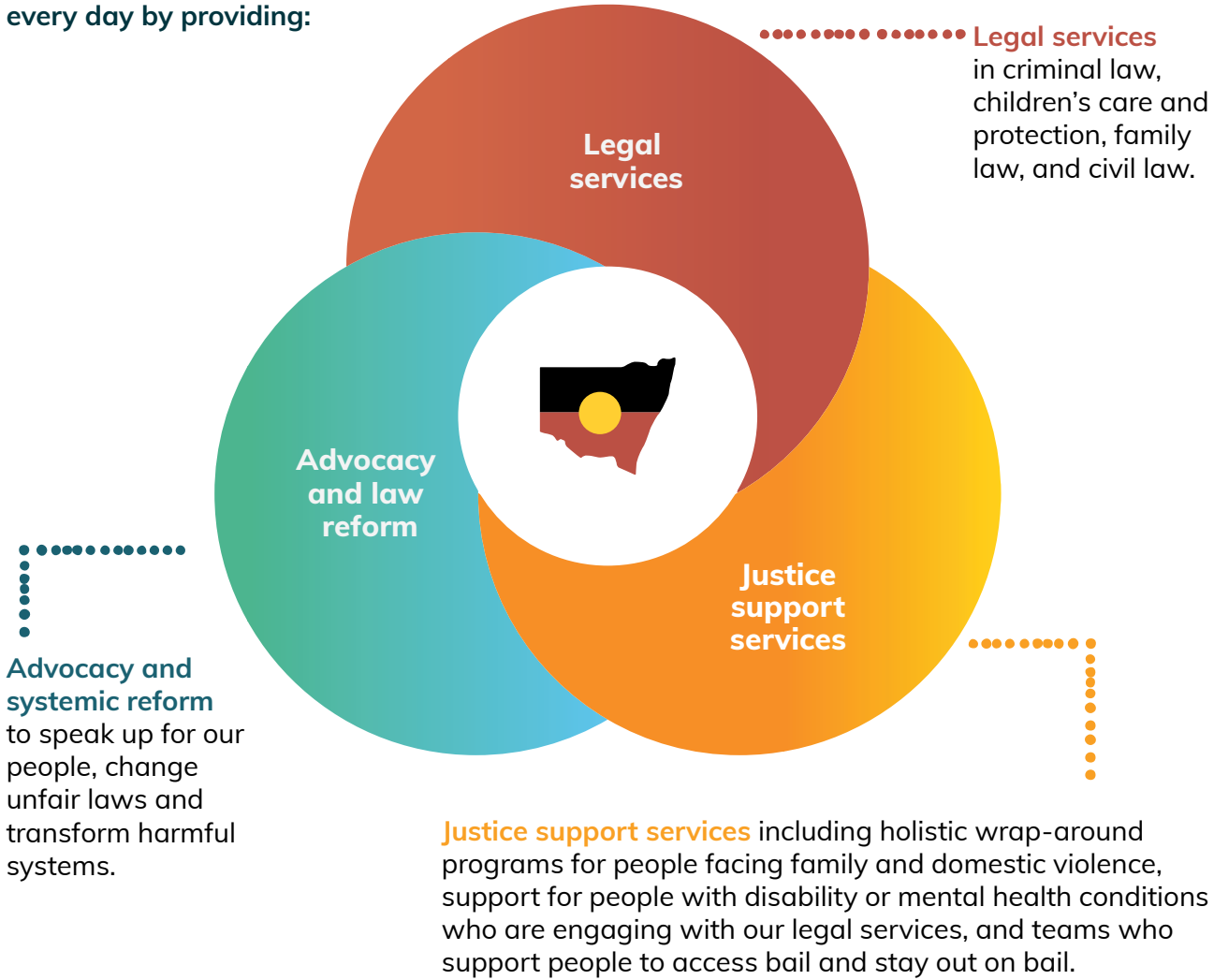


At 30 June 2024, we had **375 team members** working from offices in **21 cities and towns** across NSW and the ACT.



HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We support our mob every day by providing:



Our vision

Social justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities.

Our mission

To deliver quality and culturally appropriate legal services that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout NSW and the ACT and to be recognised as the leader in this field across Australia.

Our values

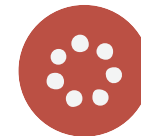
- We are proudly Aboriginal
- We are community focused
- We are fearless in our advocacy
- We are accountable
- We make a difference to create better futures
- We acknowledge and respect land, traditional values and cultural practices

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN



Connecting and collaborating with our communities

We are seen by community as the legal provider of choice, part of a strong and visible network of Aboriginal peak bodies working to holistically support our people.



Telling our story

We're celebrated as the first ALS and first free legal service in the country and clearly communicate the availability, value and impact of all our services.



Delivering high quality, culturally safe legal and support services

We have a culturally safe, professional and committed workforce who feel valued and uphold the ALS legacy, delivering sustainable impact with and for our communities.



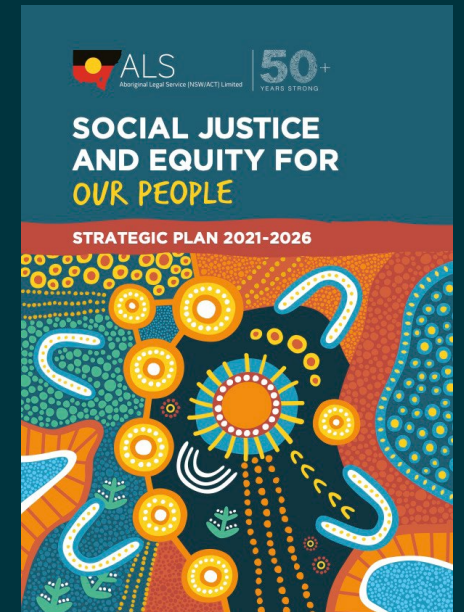
Advocating for justice and achieving community-led change

Community recognise the ALS as a fighter for our people and know we have their backs in the fight for justice. Together, we transform the justice system.



Laying strong future foundations

Through diversified and sustainable income streams, innovation and a pipeline of talent, ALS services keep people strong in community and culture.



View the ALS Strategic Plan 2021-2026 online:

www.alsnswact.org.au/strategy

GOVERNANCE

The ALS is a public company limited by guarantee, governed by an Aboriginal board. We are a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission and a tax-deductible gift recipient.



Ever since our founding in 1970, community control has been at the heart of the ALS. We were one of Australia's first Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and are proud to be owned, governed and led by the communities we serve.

Our membership comprises up to 30 Aboriginal people from NSW and the ACT. This includes 10 from each of three regions: Northern, Western, and Central South Eastern. Company members are elected by their communities for three-year terms. In turn, the members for each region appoint up to four people among their ranks to become directors and form the ALS Board. In addition to the directors elected from each region, up to two honorary directors can be appointed to the board under the ALS Constitution.

The ALS Board at 30 June 2024

Name	Role	Region
Jason Allan	Chair	Northern
Lorraine Wright	Deputy Chair	Western
Kelvin Allen	Director (elected 19 December 2023)	Northern
Robert Carroll	Director	Western
Mark Davies	Director (resigned 14 July 2023, re-elected 26 September 2023)	Northern
Cindy Fuller	Director	Central South Eastern
Antionette House	Director	Central South Eastern
Raymond Keed	Director	Western
Patricia Laurie	Director (elected 7 December 2023)	Northern
Keith Morgan	Director	Central South Eastern
Tamika Murphy	Director (elected 18 December 2023)	Central South Eastern
Hewitt Whyman	Director	Western
Peter Stapleton	Honorary Director	



The ALS Board pictured in September 2023. Standing, left to right: Uncle Hewitt Whyman, Keith Morgan, Jason Allan, Raymond Keed, Peter Stapleton, Robert Carroll. Seated, left to right: Avery Brown (former director), Cindy Fuller, Aunty Helen Brown OAM (former director), Antionette House, Aunty Lorraine Wright. Not pictured: Kelvin Allen, Mark Davies, Patricia Laurie, Tamika Murphy.

2024 Member Election

The ALS held an election on 25 May 2024 to elect company members for each region as required every three years under the ALS Constitution. Elections were held in Parkes, Tamworth and Queanbeyan.

We had an unprecedented level of interest in membership, with 282 requests for application packs received.

10 members were elected in each region as follows:

Central	Southern	Eastern	Northern	Western
Cindy Fuller	Jason Allan	Robert Carroll		
Antionette House	Errol Clarke	Keshia Keed		
Stuart Larkins	Janelle Clarke	Raymond Keed		
Keith Morgan	Glen Crump	Valda Keed		
Kiarra Morgan	Patricia Laurie	Maxine Kirby		
Shania Morgan	Charles Lynch	Fiona Mackay		
Mark Munnich	Paul Morris	Elaine Ohlsen		
Tamika Murphy	Julie Perkins	Dorothy Whyman		
Sherrin Murphy	Terrence Robinson	Hewitt Whyman		
Nicholas Riley	Ramona Walker	Lorraine Wright		

New members were elected for a three-year term to commence 1 July 2024 and they elected directors to the ALS Board.



Attendees at the member election in Parkes, 25 May 2024.

Connecting and collaborating with our communities

COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

We delivered over 100 community legal education (CLE) activities and resources this year, covering a broad range of topics, stakeholders, and locations.

Some examples included:

- Our NSW Criminal Law Practice delivered a community legal education session for young people in KARI's out-of-home care program. KARI is the largest Aboriginal permanency support provider in Australia.
- We presented at the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) 2024 Conference on supporting young people in criminal matters.
- We delivered a presentation to parents and teachers at Wilmot Public School about our Greater Sydney Aboriginal Tenants Service as part of Connecting Communities, a program which operates in schools to support parents in connecting with local support services.
- The ALS and other legal services from the NSW Mid North Coast, together with Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, held two CLE days at Dunghutti Elders Council in Kempsey. One day was for young people, with local high schools attending, and the other was for community. We ran employment law and fines education activities for the students and arranged for a local business to provide a lucky door prize for the community day.
- On the NSW South Coast, our Family Violence Prevention Unit presented CLE sessions on topics including the Victims Support Scheme, Apprehended Violence Orders, guardianship and power of attorney for young adults with a disability, introduction to civil law, and more.
- In the NSW Hunter region, our Legal Assistance for Women team delivered CLE on Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders, the cost of living crisis and related legal issues, tenancy law, parenting after separation, coercive control, using apps to keep records of domestic and family violence, and more.
- Our new care and protection team in the ACT teamed up with our Family Violence Prevention Unit to deliver a CLE series on child protection, family law, and family violence orders at the Jerra Wetlands Women's Group.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

During the past 12 months, the ALS has engaged with community at 55 events including Yabun Festival, NAIDOC events, the Koori Knockout, a Closing the Gap Services Day, Youth Week Fun Day, Aboriginal Women's Advisory Network Open Day, Bundaleer Saltwater Festival, Cooee Festival, Indigenous Round Football Day at Dubbo, and NSW Aboriginal Land Council's Rock for Land Rights event. These events are an important way for us to link in with community, provide information about our services, and make referrals for advice or support in a safe and stress-free community environment.

As a member of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO), we have also supported and participated in a number of consultations with Aboriginal communities focused on sharing information on the development of CAPO-led Priority Reform projects.

We also worked with communities to shape new pilot programs and services at the ALS. Our Women's Bail Advocacy Program team, working with Aboriginal consultancy Kowa Collaboration, held co-creation workshops in Redfern and Newcastle to hear from local community members, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) and other stakeholders about how our new pilot program supporting Aboriginal women can best meet the needs of our communities and effectively evidence the impact of the program.



Community members pose with the ALS photo frame at a NAIDOC event in Warrawong, September 2023

Telling our story

OUR PUBLIC PROFILE AND ADVOCACY

This year we continued to use our website, the media, and social media to grow awareness of our services and advocate on behalf of our communities.

Our website, www.alsnswact.org.au, received 102,000 visitors throughout the year. A number of iterative improvements were made to the website during the reporting period, including changes to simplify the homepage making it easier for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access help and find out about our programs.

Throughout the year we reached 117,700 accounts on Facebook (a 31% increase from the previous year) and 50,800 accounts on Instagram (a 168% increase). Our top-performing Facebook post of the year is an example of effective community legal education delivered through social media, reaching 32,100 accounts and being shared over 270 times.

-  www.alsnswact.org.au
102,000 visitors
-  Instagram reach
50,800 (up 168%)
-  Facebook reach
117,000 (up 31%)

We spoke out for our people and publicised our concerns about justice systems, distributing almost 30 media releases and alerts over the course of the year and receiving broad coverage in NSW and ACT media outlets.

We campaigned visibly and vocally in March 2024 against the NSW Government's proposed changes to youth bail laws, which the NSW Government admitted would lead to more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being incarcerated. While the laws did unfortunately pass through Parliament, the opposition of the ALS and our allies was influential in public discourse about the new laws and set the foundations for ongoing advocacy. See more about the campaign on page 50.



ABOVE: Our top-performing Facebook post of the year.



Bail laws a 'devastating betrayal' of Indigenous kids

By Rudi Maxwell
March 18, 2024

Chris Minns is accused of betraying Aboriginal children, with his proposal for tougher NSW bail laws labelled punitive and likely to increase the number of Indigenous youths behind bars.

The premier recently unveiled plans for tougher bail laws including a temporary, extra test for older children charged with certain serious offences while they are already before the courts.

Hundreds of legal practitioners, community workers, academics and Aboriginal organisations on Monday signed an open letter calling on the premier to ditch the plan, saying it will lead to more children in detention –



STORIES OF 2023-24

**Names have been changed to protect the privacy of our clients.*

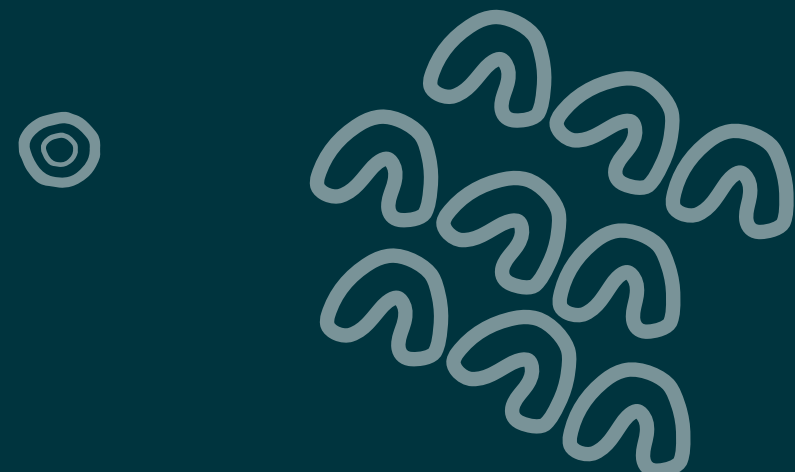
Defending a child against delayed police charges

We represented a 14-year-old girl who was facing a criminal charge for an alleged robbery that occurred when she was 12. We believed the almost two-year delay in bringing the charge against her was in breach of the Human Rights Act 2004 (ACT), which states that a child must be brought to trial as quickly as possible. We tried to convince the prosecution to abandon the charge, but they refused and instead proceeded to add two further back-up charges.

We brought the same argument to the ACT Children's Court, where it was revealed that the girl had become a suspect for the offence on the very same day it was alleged to have occurred, but police took no further action until nearly two years later. Police put forward no explanation other than a heavy workload as the reason for the delay.

The magistrate agreed that the unexplained delay was a clear breach of the Human Rights Act and ordered that the proceedings be permanently stayed. This meant the girl no longer had these charges hanging over her head. This was a win for our client and also set an important precedent for other matters in the ACT Children's Court, and for other kids in the future.

Read more about our criminal law services on pages 25-29.



Supporting a father to be in his child's life

We represented George*, an Aboriginal father with severe mental health challenges who was fighting for the right to be in his child's life. George's infant son was in the care of a non-Aboriginal grandparent. The NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) had tried to prohibit any contact at all between George and his son until he turned 18. We successfully opposed this, but DCJ tried to limit contact to just a handful of times a year.

We fought hard for George to build a real relationship with his son, successfully arguing he should get face-to-face visits, weekly video contact, and approval to attend all of his son's visits with his paternal aunty.

We supported George to play a major role in cultural planning for his son, ensuring that the boy's right to be connected to culture and community would be upheld. DCJ also agreed to George attending culturally significant events with his son up to three times a year.

The result brought the magistrate to tears. The magistrate made positive comments about George and his journey through the court process. We were proud to represent this strong Aboriginal father.

Read more about our care and protection and family law services on pages 30-33.



Helping a victim-survivor of family violence to keep her kids safe

At the ALS we see too many children removed from mothers who are victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

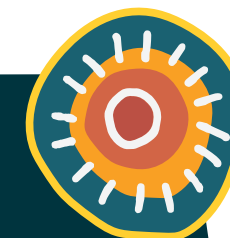
This was Tayla's* situation. Tayla grew up amid family violence and like many people who experience violence in childhood, it went on to follow her in her adult relationships. She turned to illicit substances as a way of coping with the abuse.

Tayla came to the attention of child protection authorities, who removed her daughter from her care. We represented Tayla in the Children's Court and helped her daughter to safely return home.

We also helped Tayla with a number of other legal issues, including child protection support, family law support, and assistance with successfully applying for victims' services compensation.

Tayla and her young family are now making a fresh start. She has her eyes set on the future and creating a better life for her kids. Her goal is to obtain a qualification and work with other victim-survivors of family and domestic violence.

Read more about our family violence and safety services on pages 34-35.



Advocating for a vulnerable woman in dangerous housing

Catherine* had lived in her rental property for 20 years and received no repairs or maintenance from the landlord in that entire time. When we became involved, the property was in a dangerous state: part of the ceiling was collapsing, there were no locks on the doors and windows, and mould was growing throughout. Catherine's health had suffered.

Catherine was in her late sixties and living alone. She had no means of transport and relied on family to assist her with grocery shopping, but she was sometimes left waiting for support.

Our tenant advocates stepped in, requesting the landlord to be present for a property visit and drawing up a list of urgent and non-urgent repairs to be completed. The repairs commenced the very next day. We also applied for reduced rent and compensation for Catherine and made warm referrals on her behalf to an Aboriginal chronic care program and aged care services, ensuring she would have medical support and transport and be less isolated in the future.

Read more about the Greater Sydney Aboriginal Tenants Service and our other civil law services on pages 36-38.

Delivering high quality,
culturally safe legal and
support services

FEEDBACK FROM OUR CLIENTS

In late 2023, we surveyed our clients on their satisfaction with our services, as required at least every two years under our National Legal Assistance Partnership funding contract.

We received 460 responses. Overall, 97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the ALS to others. Other responses included:

- 97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that we listened to their legal problem
- 97% agreed or strongly agreed they know where to get help if they have another legal problem in the future
- 95% agreed or strongly agreed the ALS helped them understand how to deal with their legal problem
- 93% agreed or strongly agreed it was easy to contact us when they first needed help

Positive comments included:

“ALS were excellent. It felt great knowing I was in good hands.”

“I think ALS is one of the best legal services available. They are all very culturally involved and so respectful. Very very compassionate group of people. I wouldn't want help from anybody but them.”

“The ALS managed mental health issues really well and listened to what was being said, instead of just being pushed away.”

“ALS made me feel like they cared about me and my problems.”

“The ALS is what we need in this town.”

The feedback also included some areas for improvement, with some clients saying it was difficult to reach their solicitor over the phone, and that we need more staff and less turnover.

CRIMINAL LAW

Our Criminal Law Practices in NSW and the ACT defend the rights of Aboriginal people and aim to minimise their contact with the legal system.

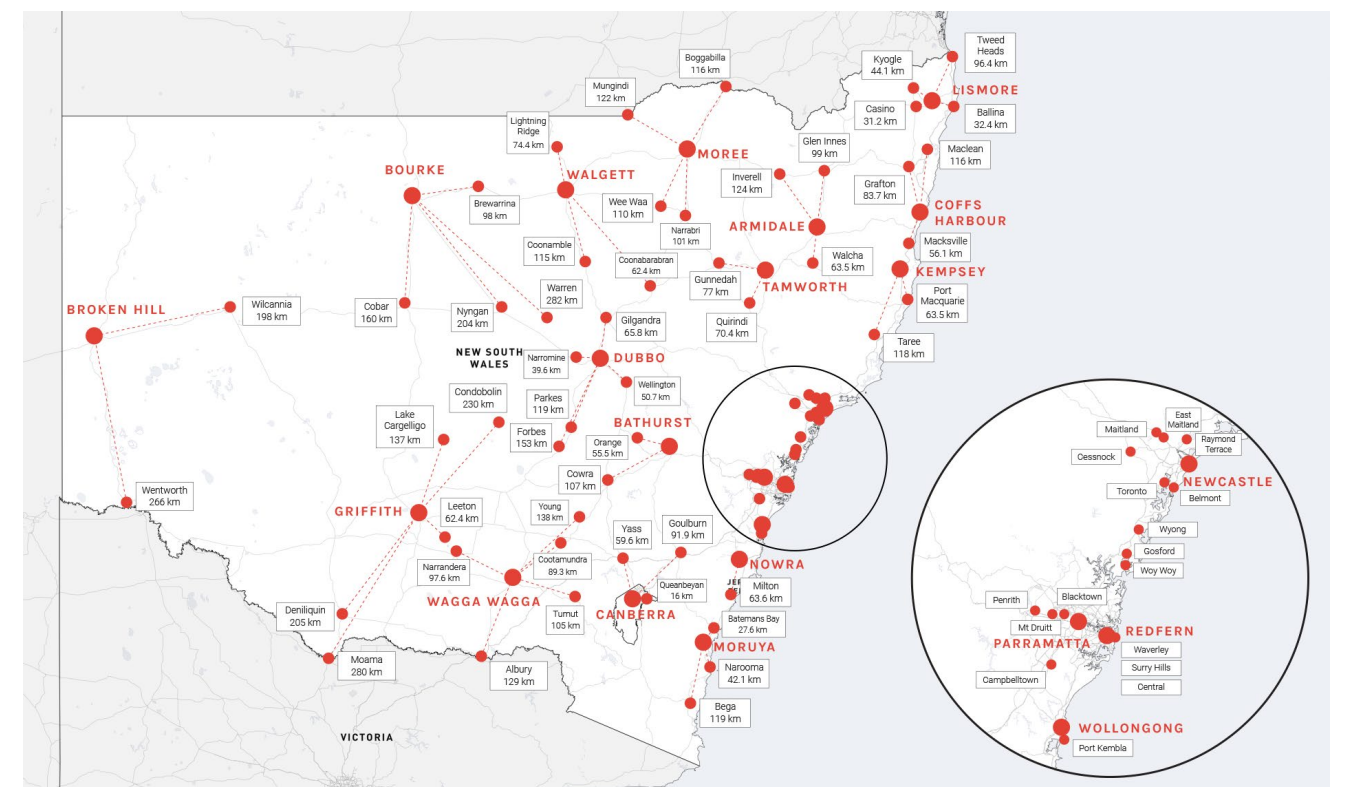
19,100
clients supported

102,336
services provided

Significant caseloads

Workloads remain high for staff across our Criminal Law Practices, with this year's total number of services provided being the highest on record. This is despite being forced to freeze our services to 13 Local Courts across NSW last year due to unsustainable caseloads. While we would like nothing more than to resume services to these courts, doing so remains impossible without a substantial increase to our government funding, which would enable us to hire more staff and relieve some of the pressure on our teams.

Recruiting solicitors into roles in remote and regional offices continues to present a challenge. The below map indicates ALS offices (larger red dots and red text) and the courts covered by staff in those offices, with some regional staff travelling up to 280 kilometres one-way to represent clients in court.





Improved system for prison phone calls

Using one off funding from the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department we established the Inmate Referral and Advice Service, a new team dedicated to taking phone calls from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison.

The team consists of a senior solicitor and four administration officers. Together they are helping to ensure that clients in custody are receiving prompt, effective support when they call us, including being directed to the right office quickly, and receiving advice and referrals on legal issues related to conditions in prison and civil law problems.

From commencement of the service on 25 March 2024 to the end of financial year on 30 June, the team answered 7,333 calls from people in prison.

Visiting Legal Service expansion

Our Visiting Legal Service, funded by NSW Youth Justice in the Department of Communities and Justice, provides face-to-face support to Aboriginal young people in youth detention centres.

Following its commencement as a structured program last financial year, the Visiting Legal Service continued and expanded. This year we made 679 visits to 270 young people across all six juvenile detention centres in NSW.

We now have Aboriginal Youth Officers visiting youth detention centres alongside solicitors, providing vital cultural support and family connection. This year we also developed and delivered community legal education (CLE) sessions for young people in custody, in addition to providing printed CLE materials like posters and guides.

Bail support programs

We offer a range of targeted programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access bail, ensure their bail conditions are appropriate and assist them to stick to these conditions.

The type of support provided to clients varies and may include preparing a bail plan; providing information and education about the legal system and the court process; making referrals to third-party service providers including access to housing, alcohol and other drug supports, mental health treatment, and services to address child protection concerns; attending meetings with the client in a support person capacity; providing transport for clients; and providing case management to support compliance with bail conditions.

These programs include:

- A **bail pilot program** between NSW Police and the ALS, which began in 2022 in Mt Druitt and Moree and was expanded in 2023 to Blacktown and Riverwood Police Stations, facilitating early legal advice to reduce breaches of police bail before the first mention in court.
- The **Ngurrambai Bail Support** program in the ACT, which is aimed at supporting people who would otherwise find it difficult to obtain bail and comply with their conditions. This year, program staff supported 299 bail applications and of these, 239 or 80% were successful.
- Our **Front-Up program** in the ACT, which supports people who have outstanding warrants or have breached bail conditions to appear before the court and have these matters resolved. One of the strengths of this program is that we can assist clients to appear before the court without having to hand themselves into police first, thanks to a memorandum of understanding between the ALS and the ACT Magistrates Court.
- A **bail advocacy program for Aboriginal children and young people** appearing before the Children's Court in Surry Hills, Wagga Wagga and Parramatta. The program is comprised of a multidisciplinary team that advocates for bail and provides responsive wrap-around support in attempts to reduce avoidable remand. The program provides specialised legal advocacy that aims to address a young person's bail needs at the point of police contact and subsequent court appearances. Our Aboriginal Youth Officers ensure that the young people have access to culturally responsive and holistic support, to help them remain in community and out of custody. Since the program became operational in September 2023, we have supported 197 children and young people.
- A **bail advocacy program for women** aiming to reduce avoidable remand for Aboriginal women at two pilot sites (Newcastle and Redfern). The program is delivered by multi-disciplinary teams including specialist social workers and women's advocacy officers who provide clients with wraparound, trauma-informed support, case management and referrals alongside culturally safe and timely legal advice and representation. This program commenced operations in Newcastle in February 2024 and Redfern in April 2024, assisting 75 clients up to the end of financial year. Clients in the program are receiving positive legal and social outcomes, with judicial officers regularly citing the availability of our high-quality casework and bail support as a deciding factor in granting bail.

Mental Health Advocacy and Referral Service

The Mental Health Advocacy and Referral Service was established in August 2023 in Redfern, Wagga Wagga and Parramatta.

Through this service, we aim to support clients of the ALS Criminal Law Practice who have mental health challenges and/or cognitive impairments. We help them to access successful diversionary applications, appropriate sentencing outcomes, and positive social and wellbeing outcomes based on a person-centred, trauma-informed approach.

We have mental health officers, who are co-located with our criminal law teams at pilot sites. They provide clients with referrals to third-party services, prioritising Aboriginal community-controlled services where available, as well as mental health support plans and court support letters. They also work with clients to address barriers to engagement with supports.

Since commencing this service, we have provided culturally safe, wrap-around support to 77 unique clients and achieved a 69% success rate in diversionary applications made for clients in the program.

Circle sentencing in the ACT Supreme Court

In our last annual report, we reported that the ACT Criminal Law Practice had been actively involved in the steering committee looking to establish circle sentencing in the ACT Supreme Court. A lot of work was put into developing the framework as to how circle sentencing would operate in the Supreme Court and the applicable Practice Direction.

We are pleased to report that as of March 2024, circle sentencing is up and running in the supreme court. It has commenced as a pilot program for six participants, five of those being clients of the ALS. We hope that the pilot program will continue and expand in a similar fashion to the Galambany Circle Sentencing Court in the ACT Magistrates Court.

Ongoing demand for the Custody Notification Service

The Custody Notification Service (CNS) is a lifesaving legal advice and 'R U OK' phone line that police in NSW and the ACT are legally required to contact whenever they take an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person into custody.

The CNS is a lifeline. It ensures that when any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is taken into police custody, they have access to prompt legal help, a wellbeing check, and practical assistance such as notifying their families. This service was a recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and it has played a critical role in protecting the rights and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in custody since its introduction.

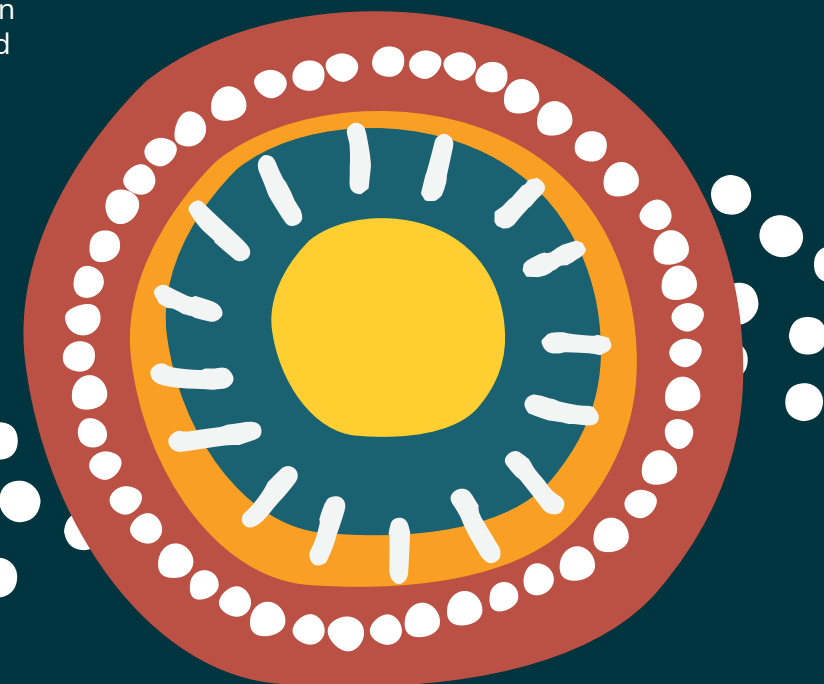
After reporting a significant rise in notifications to our Custody Notification Service (CNS) last year, demand has again risen in 2023-24, with 32,272 notifications received in total.

This year the CNS experienced 9% higher demand than in 2022-23, which corresponds to statistics indicating record numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research).

New paralegal roles

The ACT Criminal Law Practice now has funded paralegals for the first time, thanks to the support of the ACT Government. We are funded for two part-time roles. Both of these are identified for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and we are pleased to be offering a solid pathway into the legal profession for our people through these roles.

The paralegals are offering much-needed support to solicitors, particularly in relation to the preparation of briefs.



CHILD PROTECTION AND FAMILY LAW

Our Care and Protection/Family Law Practice supports Aboriginal families to keep themselves and their children safe while resolving family relationship matters. Our goal is to keep children safe at home and prevent removals into out-of-home care.

950
clients supported

1,512
services provided



NSW Care and Protection Practice

Our small but mighty care and protection team acts in 25 Children's Court locations across NSW in addition to the District Court and Supreme Court. Our aim is to be the legal provider of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families involved in the child protection system and to increase the size of our team and impact into the future.

In November 2023, new legislation came into effect requiring child protection caseworkers to take active efforts to ensure all options are explored to keep children safe and with family before bringing an application to remove them from family. This was a welcome reform that we had long advocated for, alongside other recommendations from the seminal 2019 Family Is Culture Review. Since the legislation came in, we have focused on developing our team's expertise in this area so that at each opportunity, we can hold the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) accountable to this requirement and ensure families get the best chance to keep their kids safe at home. We presented on active efforts requirements at a NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec) quarterly sector forum and from that presentation we have developed an active efforts roadshow, to be rolled out in the 2024-25 financial year.

ALS team members attended a rally to stop Aboriginal child removals outside NSW Parliament House on Sorry Day 2024. Pictured: Elder and advocate, Aunty Rhonda Dixon-Grovenor speaks at the rally.



Since launching the Legal Assistance for Families Partnership Agreement (LAFPA) with Legal Aid and DCJ last financial year, this early intervention partnership has now been rolled out statewide. This agreement stipulates that families will be referred for legal advice at their first point of contact with the child protection system – the result of another Family Is Culture Review recommendation. We have both jointly and solely delivered training to caseworkers in multiple locations including Moree, Dubbo, Lismore, Wollongong and Sydney, educating them on when and how to make a LAFPA referral. This focus on early intervention better enables us to advocate for alternative options to protect kids' safety which are less intrusive and harmful than child removal. Such alternative options include temporary care arrangements, family arrangements, section 38 care plans, and in some cases making applications to the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia.

A third reform resulting from the Family Is Culture Review is the Winha-Nga-Nha List pilot at the Children's Court in Dubbo, which is now well underway after launching last financial year. The ALS has remained a constant presence advocating for both parents and children in this more approachable and culturally appropriate court setting. We regularly attend working groups relating to the pilot project and look forward to being involved in an evaluation.

We have faced significant challenges in recruiting and retaining experienced staff in our Care and Protection/Family Law Practice; a challenge experienced throughout the jurisdiction. We have worked intensively to train up our dedicated junior and intermediate solicitors, and we now have four senior solicitors who are increasing our presence as an Independent Legal Representative and Direct Legal Representative acting on behalf of children in child protection matters. While we expect challenges to be ongoing due to the limited number of child protection legal representatives across the state, we will continue our efforts to attract experienced solicitors to our practice.

Right: Children's handprints adorn the wall at an AbSec quarterly forum on protection and support for Aboriginal children and families, reminding participants of the importance of our shared work.



ACT Care and Protection Legal Assistance Service

In 2023 we received funding for the first time to deliver care and protection services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the ACT, supporting them to keep their children safe at home within their own families and culture. The second year of operations for the ACT Care and Protection Legal Assistance Service saw the nascent service grow and support 72 clients and their families, providing a total of 80 services. We remain committed to continuing to build our presence in the ACT in 2024-25 and onwards.

Our ACT care and protection team has now been involved in a number of contested hearings, including one particular case which altered the interpretation of a legislative presumption that previously favoured the Director-General. Following our advocacy, the court found this legislation should be interpreted more generously towards parents, particularly where children have been shuffled through a series of out-of-home care placements (see *Director-General, Community Services Directorate v BQ and KQ* [2024] ACTCC 2).

In addition to providing legal information, advice and representation in the children's court, this year we provided information sessions to Indigenous detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (Canberra's prison). These sessions give participants an overview of the family law and care and protection systems, and are intended to empower detainees to maintain contact with their children while incarcerated (if safe to do so).

During the year we also presented an information session on the legal obligations of decision-makers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to an industry panel of agencies, lawyers, support workers and other interested parties.

Family Law Practice

This year we focused on front-line representation for parents and children litigating in the Specialist Indigenous Lists (SILs) in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (FCFCOA). The ALS attends the SILs in Sydney, Lismore, Coffs Harbour, and Port Macquarie – all SILs in NSW – sometimes in-person and sometimes through audio-visual link.

In May 2024, amendments to the Family Law Act came into effect, setting a high obligation for the Court to put culture front and centre of decisions about what is best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The court must consider the child's cultural connections, what those look like in the day-to-day life of the child, and seek out information about how to uphold and grow those connections for children who are involved in parenting disputes (no matter what decision is made over custody). This is a welcome reform and presents an important opportunity for the ALS to continue advocating on behalf of our clients in the FCFCOA into the 2024-25 financial year.



Above: A Smoking Ceremony takes place at the launch of the Specialist Indigenous List in Newcastle (November 2023).

Aboriginal Child and Family Advocacy and Support

For many years, the ALS has supported Aboriginal families whose children have been removed from their care. Now we are offering more support to prevent kids from being removed in the first place, avoiding the trauma of being torn from family.

This new initiative under Closing the Gap commenced in late 2023 in pilot sites of Dubbo and Moree. The Aboriginal Child and Family Advocacy and Support program (ACFAS) offers a multidisciplinary approach to support Aboriginal families whose children are at risk of being removed. The program has an advocacy arm to support non-legal needs of parents and carers at risk of DCJ intervention, as well as a legal arm offering legal advice, assistance and representation.

The team has built positive relationships with local organisations in Moree and Dubbo, providing solid referral pathways both into the ACFAS program and out to other support services. We are working to gain direct referrals from DCJ at the earliest stage so that we can provide effective, early advocacy for families. This advocacy is ideally client-led, where the client identifies the supports needed for their child and our role is to advocate for the client's view.

At June 2024, this program had supported 45 clients and their families, providing 276 services.

Below: ACFAS Dubbo team members Kristie Burge, Shari Gibbs, Annette Peachey and Collette Vincent at the 2024 Three Rivers Regional Assembly Aboriginal Women's Gathering.



FAMILY VIOLENCE AND SAFETY

We continued to grow two new programs which were launched last financial year: the Family Violence Prevention Unit and Legal Assistance for Women. These programs promote safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing domestic, family and/or sexual violence.

223
clients supported

1,428
services provided

Family Violence Prevention Unit

This program is now going two years strong, supporting 148 clients and families in 2023-24 and providing them with 894 services.

From two sites in Nowra and Canberra, we continued offering holistic services to address both the legal and non-legal needs of victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence located in the ACT and on the NSW South Coast.

The success of this program lies in our collaborations with local Aboriginal organisations, providing strong referral pathways into our program as well as options to refer our clients to partnering support services, ensuring they get the holistic help that best addresses their situation.

A strength of the Family Violence Prevention Unit (FVPU) is that the majority of our employees are long-term residents of the ACT and South Coast and have both experience with setting up services in these local government areas, and pre-existing connections with local services that have helped us to build solid partnerships.

Positive client feedback for the FVPU:

- “ I felt really safe and cared for and I will definitely come back if I ever need legal support in the future. ”
- “ My lawyer is down-to-earth and explains legal jargon to a level of understanding without making you feel silly. ”
- “ Overall it was a really positive experience, [my solicitor] was really helpful and made everything very clear for me. ”

Left: The exterior of the Nowra Family Violence Prevention Unit received a makeover this year.



Above: FVPU team member Elijah Ardler (left) with Michelle Elliott from the Moruya ALS office (right) at the 2023 Moruya Big Day Out.

Legal Assistance for Women

The Legal Assistance for Women program in the NSW Hunter region has now been running for 17 months. Clients are presenting with multifaceted legal and social issues which require extensive case management support from our multidisciplinary team. We provide legal and wrap-around services in a trauma-informed manner with legal staff working alongside social workers, reflecting a therapeutic approach.

In the reporting period we have assisted 75 clients and their families, providing 534 services. We are seeing positive qualitative outcomes for our clients, with increased mental wellbeing and great feedback such as:

- “ [My solicitor] has been wonderful, the intake staff were deadly too. [My solicitor] opened my eyes to the abuse I was experiencing. ”
- “ They’ve kept in touch the whole time, communication was great. ”

- “ First lawyer I’ve liked. ”
- “ Was mentally stuck in the house but [the ALS] really helped. Enrolled in a course, had a job interview and seeing my kids again. ”

In 2023-24 we have established partnerships with organisations including Thread Together, the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery program, DV Safe Phones Australia, and Escabags, resulting in generous donations of new clothing, grocery vouchers, mobile phones and escape bags for our clients.

From our office in Newcastle, we continue to cover the broader Hunter region with a monthly outreach circuit and AVO duty service, in addition to attending local events such as Raymond Terrace NAIDOC Day and a domestic violence awareness day at Kotara Westfield.

CIVIL LAW

In October 2023, we launched our new Civil Law Practice with the introduction of our Employment Law Service. Pre-existing ALS social justice programs including the Greater Sydney Aboriginal Tenants Service and Fines Clinic have been brought into the Civil Law Practice also, creating a cohesive team that is able to help Aboriginal people with diverse needs.

686
clients supported

2,053
services provided

At the end of 2023-24, the Civil Law Practice comprises 19 staff across six ALS offices, and offers the following services:

- Employment law (NSW state-wide advice, assistance and representation)
- Fines Clinic (NSW state-wide legal help for all kinds of fines and fine-related debts)
- Greater Sydney Aboriginal Tenants Service (supporting Greater Sydney, Blue Mountains and Central Coast residents with tenancy problems)
- Free birth certificates for eligible Aboriginal people across NSW
- Plus general civil law help for women and girls in the Illawarra and for clients of our bail advocacy programs.

Employment Law Service

Our Employment Law Service is the first specialist sexual harassment and discrimination legal service in NSW that's for Aboriginal workers and run by an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation. It is funded by the Commonwealth Government under the National Legal Assistance Program.

The service offers free and confidential legal help to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees working in any industry or profession in NSW. While our primary focus is on sexual harassment and discrimination, we also provide support in relation to other kinds of workplace problems.

The Employment Law Service team consists of a managing solicitor, two lawyers, two part-time paralegals and a community engagement officer. Despite being a newly formed team, we have already achieved some significant outcomes including:

- Representing five clients in the Fair Work Commission to achieve \$42,385 in compensation, as well as non-financial outcomes such as statements of service and dismissals being converted to resignations.
- Representing a client in a racial discrimination complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission which resulted in the employer undertaking specific cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness and anti-discrimination and harassment training for staff; revising its induction, training and workplace policies; developing a Reconciliation Action Plan; and making a financial payment to an Aboriginal community-controlled preschool.

The Employment Law Service has also provided ancillary civil law services to Aboriginal workers with employment and discrimination law problems, including obtaining toll and fine debt relief and access to counselling through the Victims Support Scheme.

Fines Clinic

Since the ALS began providing legal assistance with fines in 2020, we have achieved almost \$1.5 million worth of fines being written-off. We are grateful to receive funding for this program from community donations.

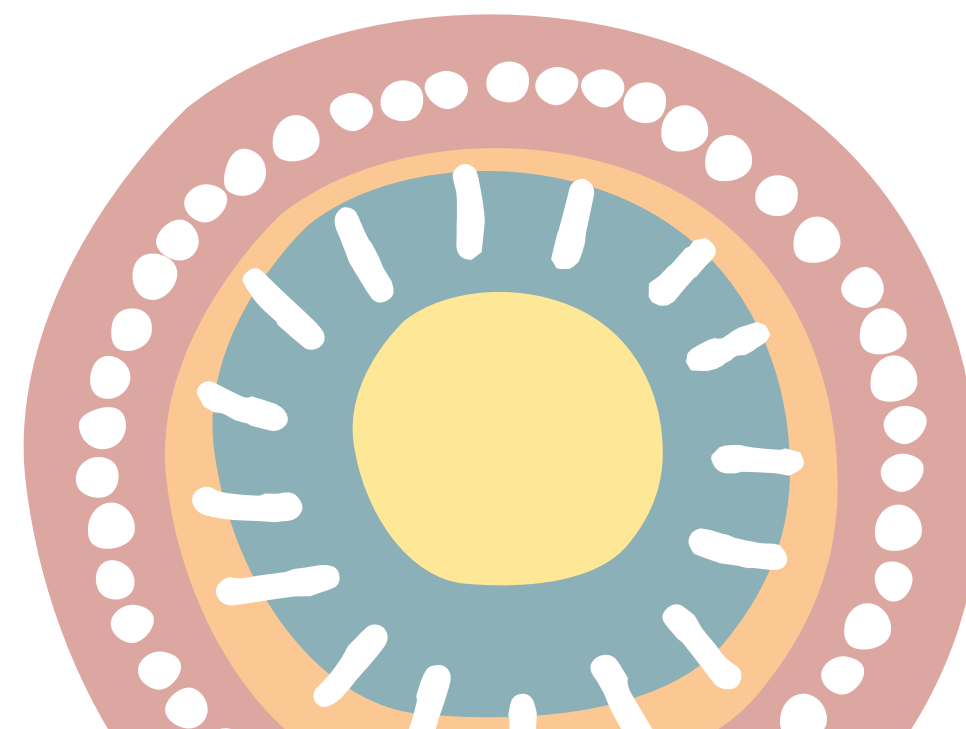
This financial year alone, we have:

- Assisted 551 clients (both adults and children)
- Resolved 4,149 fines
- Managed over \$630,000 of fines

Our management of fines can include write-offs as well as supporting clients to access payment plans, reductions and options for financial hardship. One particularly rewarding matter this year was our successful advocacy for a client to write off over \$35,000 worth of fines and fine-related debt, which were mainly for transport infringements and court fines. The client has a number of complex mental health and other challenges which contributed to their fine debt and meant it was crucial that we advocate for relief to ensure justice for them.

Our partnership with Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) in Walgett continued this year with mutual referral pathways, drop-in clinics, in-person and over-the-phone legal advice for locals, and training for DEG staff to support their community members with fines. This partnership demonstrates a highly localised, culturally safe and community-determined model for collaborative service provision. As a result of the partnership, DEG supported 85 clients to access legal advice from the ALS during the reporting period, leading to the resolution of almost \$190,000 of fine debt in Walgett. 23 of these clients were young people under the age of 25. (See page 46 for more on this collaboration.)

Alongside our provision of legal services, we continue to advocate for a fairer fines system for Aboriginal communities and the people of NSW. This year we have participated in the reform of work development order (WDO) guidelines, including that the guidelines be more trauma-informed and that enforcement action should never be taken for fines with an active WDO. A challenge faced by our team this year has been assisting clients in custody to manage fines, since many of these clients can't access WDOs due to long waitlists or some prisons simply not offering them.





Greater Sydney Aboriginal Tenants Service (GSATS)

We fight for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander renters in public, social and private housing.

This year we worked on 467 cases, an increase of 33% since last year. Almost 80% of clients said they had an improved understanding of tenancy law after receiving our help, and we successfully helped to prevent homelessness in 84 cases.

Since the commencement of the Aboriginal Tenancy List at the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT), our tenant advocates have provided a duty advocacy service every fortnight. We were also approached by DCJ to provide monthly training, commencing in March 2024, on the Aboriginal Tenancy List for Homes NSW staff who are delegated to attend the tribunal. Our training sessions go through the purpose of the list, how it works and the roles played by each stakeholder, plus ways Homes NSW can work through a cultural safety lens when working with Aboriginal tenants.

In 2024 we have also begun preliminary negotiations for two proposed pilot projects with Homes NSW and Bridge Housing. These projects are early intervention-based and involve regular monthly meetings with each organisation to discuss individual tenants' matters and arrange referrals to GSATS in order to prevent NCAT applications and most importantly, evictions. Once the project is underway, we will aim to undertake informal mediations between tenants and Homes NSW/Bridge Housing to prevent termination applications. We expect to enter into agreements with both organisations in the next financial year.

Civil law services for women and girls in the Illawarra region

In February 2024, we established a new civil law service for women and girls in the Illawarra. Between mid-February and the end of June 2024, we assisted 29 clients with 47 discrete legal problems. The most common legal problems we have helped clients with relate to housing, Apprehended Violence Orders, victims' compensation and police complaints.

Since the beginning of March 2024, we have established a weekly outreach to a women's group at the Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Service; and in May 2024 we established an outreach to the Shellharbour Women's Group run by Guwara Aboriginal Corporation, where we provide advice and community legal education.

Civil law help for clients of our bail advocacy programs

Our pilot bail advocacy programs support Aboriginal children and young people in Surry Hills, Wagga Wagga and Parramatta; and Aboriginal women in Newcastle and Redfern (see page 27 for more information). We began facilitating internal civil law referrals for clients of these programs in June 2024, assisting clients with police complaints, victims' compensation, temporary accommodation, housing, and fines matters.

SERVICE INNOVATION AND REFORM

In 2023-24, the Service Innovation and Reform team was established with four staff: Principal Solicitor, Senior Solicitor, Manager for Allied Professional Services, and Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator. This team is responsible for leading projects to improve service delivery, lead organisational change, collaborate across the organisation and ensure new services are embedded in the organisation in a consistent and sustainable way. The team is also responsible for discretely funded evaluation projects for our Closing the Gap programs.

Amalgamation of freecall numbers

Where previously the ALS had two separate freecall 1800 numbers for the Criminal Law Practice and Care and Protection/Family Law Practice, the Service Innovation and Reform team has overseen an amalgamation to just one number for all enquiries: 1800 765 767. This is just one example of the common-sense solutions this team is bringing to life, ensuring that as the ALS expands, our service to clients remains effective, holistic and accessible.

Allied professional support for a more holistic service

The network of allied professional service (APS) staff across the organisation has grown considerably this year, with social workers, mental health workers, youth workers, advocates and others now working

across various services including the Bail Advocacy Program for Women, Bail Advocacy Program for Young People, Legal Assistance for Women service in the Hunter, Aboriginal Child and Family Advocacy Support program in Moree and Dubbo, Coronial Unit, Ngurrumbai Bail Support and Front-Up programs in the ACT, and Mental Health Advocacy and Referral Service.

To enable this expansion, we appointed a Manager of Allied Professional Services, who is leading the establishment of our APS network, made up of 25 Aboriginal APS staff.

For example, as of February 2024, our Canberra office has a Disability Liaison Officer assisting clients who live with a disability or are suspected of having a disability. This is a broad and holistic role aimed at supporting people with disability to navigate the justice system including interventions as simple as providing transport to court, as well as connecting them with more complex legal advocacy and representation. Additionally, we connect clients with disability services and assist with NDIS applications and negotiations with NDIS providers.

Internal referrals app

The Service Innovation and Reform team worked with our data team to roll out an internal referrals app, which allows staff to easily refer clients of one ALS service to another – an important innovation as the organisation expands and offers more holistic supports.

Since the internal referrals app launched in March 2024, 147 referrals have been made with 61% of these being for care and protection, family or family violence matters; 22% being for housing, employment and fines support; and another 17% for other civil matters. 80% of the referrals came from criminal law teams.

COOPERATIVE LEGAL SERVICE DELIVERY

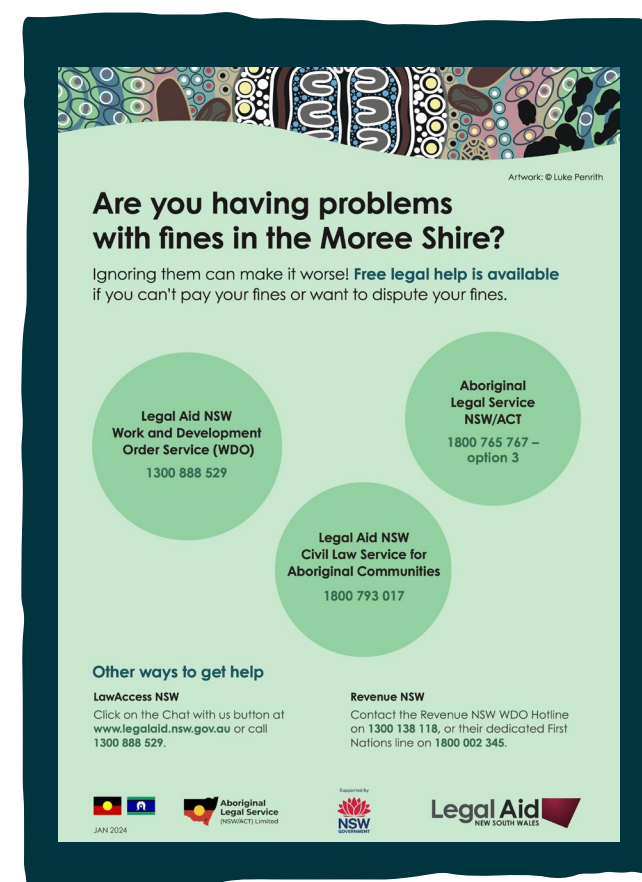
The Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) Program comprises a series of regional justice partnerships across NSW. Under the program, public service providers, community organisations and legal services work together to support people experiencing social and economic disadvantage.

apply for a waiver or participation in a work development order. Events were also held in Moree and Mungindi in December 2023 to assist people to apply for birth certificates and deal with fines. Other priorities for the Moree CLSD partnership include improving referral pathways; giving support to young people suspended or excluded from school; ensuring Aboriginal people in the region have wills; and advocating for more diversion pathways for local people involved in the criminal legal system. Several initiatives were undertaken to support these goals, including a week-long series of community legal education clinics for community-based groups on school exclusion and students' rights, and a wills clinic held in March 2024 with the support of Gilbert + Tobin.

In addition to participating in each of these groups, the ALS is funded by Legal Aid NSW to coordinate two of the 12 CLSD partnerships; in Dubbo and Moree.

In Dubbo, CLSD achievements this year included the creation of a local legal and community services online directory which has been provided to all CLSD partners and magistrates, helping to improve knowledge and coordination of local services for the benefit of clients. A number of events were held, including free training on bail obligations for out-of-home care providers and community organisations supporting young people in custody; a 'get to know you' session for community sector workers to meet representatives of Dubbo legal services and learn how to make referrals to their services; and training events on how to support young people at a police station.

In Moree, the CLSD partnership focused on addressing high fine debt experienced in the region and worked with Revenue NSW to pilot targeted communication with clients who have longstanding fine debt and suspended licenses, encouraging them to



This flyer was produced by the partnership and distributed to services in community.

BUGMY BAR BOOK

The Bugmy Bar Book is a free, online resource comprised of accessible summaries of research about the impacts of different forms of social and economic disadvantage, disability, health conditions and trauma, as well as commissioned research about the benefits of culturally safe, strengths-based support and rehabilitation. The key aim of the project is to support more just outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young people, and people from disadvantaged backgrounds in contact with the legal system.

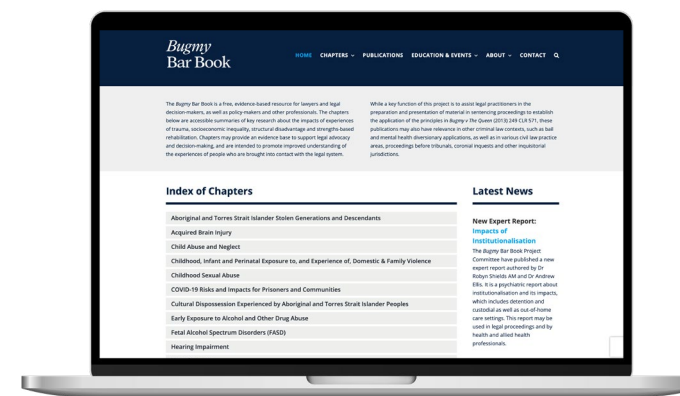
The project is auspiced by the ALS. It is steered by a multi-disciplinary committee of stakeholders from across the justice sector, including representatives from courts, Legal Aid, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Judicial Commission of NSW, the private profession and academia. Two full-time staff are employed: a Head of Project Strategy and Delivery, and a First Nations Senior Policy and Project Officer.

The project takes its name from the High Court of Australia case of Bugmy v The Queen (2013) 249 CLR 571, with the permission of Mr William Bugmy, the appellant in that case, who was represented by the ALS. One of the principles handed down by the High Court in Mr Bugmy's case is that sentencing courts in Australia must give "full weight" to a person's background in determining the appropriate sentence to impose.

The chapters of the Bugmy Bar Book provide an evidence base to support legal advocacy and decision-making, and are intended to promote improved understanding of the experiences of people who are brought into contact with the legal system. Some chapters focus on experiences specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, such as members and descendants of the Stolen Generations, while other chapters, such as exposure to domestic and family violence, are relevant to people of all cultural backgrounds.

In 2023-24, the Bugmy Bar Book published one new chapter and updated seven existing chapters.

There are 13 published court judgments which refer to the report 'Significance of Culture to Wellbeing, Healing and Rehabilitation' (commissioned in 2021) in granting bail and imposing more lenient sentences. In a recent case, DPP v Welsh (No 2) [2023] ACTSC 347, the ACT Supreme Court granted extended bail to a defendant to enable them to continue participating in a rehabilitation program prior to final sentencing.



Information online at www.bugmybarbook.org.au

Advocating for justice and achieving community-led change

This year, we continued to strengthen our Justice Projects, Policy and Practice division, with dedicated teams working across several legal policy and law reform priority areas, key Closing the Gap projects, and strategic community partnerships and engagement. Justice Projects, Policy & Practice teams work closely with other areas of the organisation to centre the experiences and voices of the clients and communities we serve in our advocacy, supported by data and evidence from our legal practice, along with our unparalleled community-controlled justice systems expertise.

DRIVING SYSTEMS CHANGE THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND BUILDING POWER IN COMMUNITIES

Closing the Gap

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap is a commitment by all Australian governments to a fundamentally new way of developing and implementing policies and programs that impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Under Closing the Gap, we strive to strengthen the Aboriginal community-controlled sector and transform the way governments work to build power in communities and support self-determination for Aboriginal people.

As the justice peak in the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO), the ALS works in partnership with other CAPO members, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) and the NSW Government to transform the NSW justice

system and to accelerate progress towards reducing incarceration, family violence and child removals.

To enhance our role in implementing Closing the Gap, this year we established a Closing the Gap Planning and Implementation team to coordinate internally across our various staff in practice and policy contributing to work to progress Closing the Gap Outcomes 10, 11, 12 and 13. The team also supports our role co-chairing the Aboriginal Justice Partnership Committee with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), and our participation in CAPO. This team will continue to support the role of the ALS and CAPO in shaping the refreshed NSW Closing the Gap governance in 2024-25.

CLOSING THE GAP SOCIO-ECONOMIC
OUTCOME 10: REDUCING ADULT
IMPRISONMENT

Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

Target: By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults held in incarceration by at least 15 per cent.

CLOSING THE GAP SOCIO-ECONOMIC
OUTCOME 11: REDUCING CHILDREN'S
IMPRISONMENT

Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

Target: By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention by at least 30 per cent.

CLOSING THE GAP SOCIO-ECONOMIC
OUTCOME 12: REDUCING THE NUMBER OF
CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system.

Target: By 2031, reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent.

CLOSING THE GAP SOCIO-ECONOMIC
OUTCOME 13: REDUCING VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe.

Target: By 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced by at least 50%, as progress towards zero.

NSW Aboriginal Justice Partnership

Under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, governments have committed to working in genuine partnership, through shared decision-making, with Aboriginal people represented by their peak organisations.

The Aboriginal Justice Partnership project is a key initiative of the *NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap 2022-24*, and is being delivered by the ALS in partnership with DCJ, CAPO and other ACCOs. We are working to design a framework for sharing decision-making on justice issues to guide action in local communities as well as at the regional and state-wide levels; to deliver a plan to grow the Aboriginal community-controlled justice sector to deliver more services based on local needs; and to enhance mechanisms to share locally relevant justice information and data, as well as support self-determination by giving communities greater control in determining the design of programs and responses to justice issues.

Therapeutic Pathways for Children and the Aboriginal Throughcare Strategy

Therapeutic Pathways for Children and the Aboriginal Throughcare Strategy are key initiatives of the *NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap 2022-24*. The projects were funded by NSW Treasury as part of the 2022-23 State Budget and are notable as being two of the earliest Closing the Gap partnership projects in the NSW justice sector. Both projects contribute to priority reforms 1 (shared decision-making), 2 (building the community-controlled sector) and 3 (transforming government organisations) under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap; and make progress towards socio-economic outcomes 10 and 11 (that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and adults are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system).

Therapeutic Pathways for Children is aimed at reducing the criminalisation of Aboriginal children by developing models for therapeutic approaches which better support the complex needs of children involved in offending behaviour. Our Justice Reform Projects team has been working with expert Aboriginal consultants to conduct a comprehensive review of existing support services and programs for children delivered by ACCOs and community organisations. Next financial year, we will hold co-design workshops to outline further models that can provide therapeutic pathways for Aboriginal children, and all children, to access alongside or as alternatives to the criminal justice system.

'Throughcare' refers to support for people's reintegration into the community following their release from prison, including pre- and post-release planning, services and programs delivered both by government and by community organisations, including ACCOs. The Aboriginal Throughcare Strategy will provide a blueprint for reducing the incarceration and re-incarceration of Aboriginal adults and children in NSW by increasing the availability of culturally safe supports for people leaving prison, and supporting improved outcomes in the community after release to prevent further contact with the system. The project has a particular focus on identifying opportunities to increase investment in ACCOs to deliver throughcare services, based on the recognition in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap of what Aboriginal people have always known: that ACCOs are better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are often preferred over mainstream services.

The final reports of Therapeutic Pathways for Children and the Aboriginal Throughcare Strategy will both be delivered before the end of 2024. The ALS will use its position as a key Closing the Gap partner to advocate for

commitments and resourcing from government to implement the recommendations of these projects and take long-overdue action to transform systems which cause harm to our clients and communities.

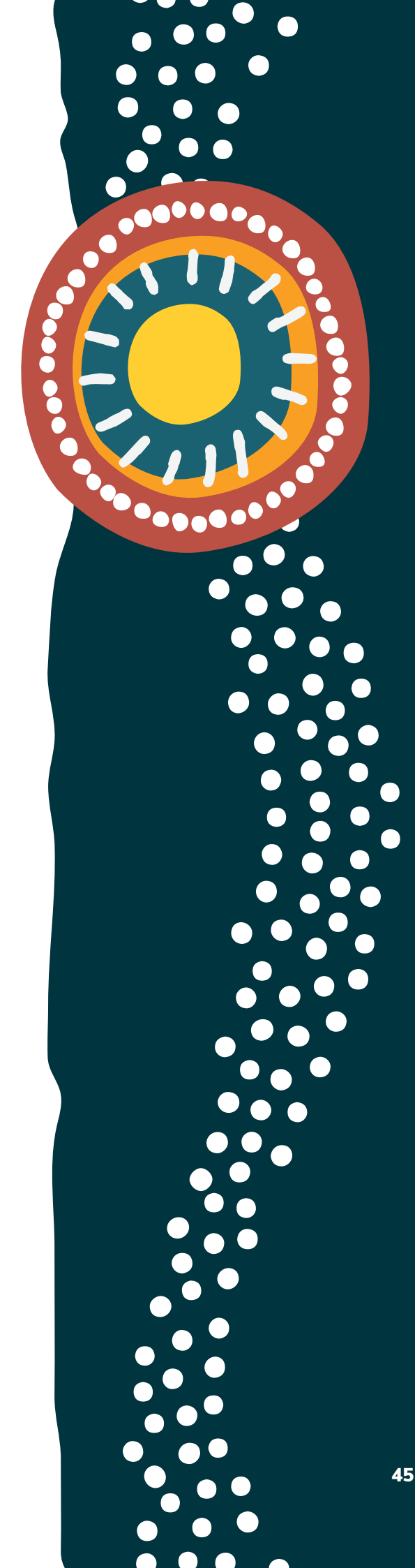
Justice reinvestment

Justice reinvestment is a data-driven, community-led approach to reducing interactions with the legal system. It aims to redirect funding away from policing and prisons and into place-based responses that are self-determined by communities and based on evidence, lived experience and expertise about what works to address the causes of contact with the legal system.

The ALS was a key driver behind the establishment of justice reinvestment in NSW, auspicing Just Reinvest NSW (JRNSW) and Maranguka until 2022. Since then, we have continued to actively promote justice reinvestment across NSW by working in collaboration with both organisations.

During 2023-24, we had a team of three regionally based staff working alongside their local communities and JRNSW backbone teams at Mount Druitt and Moree, and Maranguka in Bourke. These roles will take a new direction in 2024-25 to reflect the needs of communities and support our work exploring local justice plans under the Aboriginal Justice Partnership.

As an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation and the peak legal services provider to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW, the ALS holds deep, community-led expertise about the impacts of the justice system on Aboriginal people, and is uniquely placed to support lasting systemic change. We continue to work closely with JRNSW, local communities and government partners to support the expansion of justice reinvestment in NSW.





COLLABORATION CASE STUDY: YOUTH WELLBEING IN WALGETT

Strong partnerships between ACCOs are essential for developing place-based and community-led initiatives to reduce and prevent interactions with justice systems, and to leverage the collective knowledge of our organisations to advocate for systemic change. Strengthening the community-controlled sector is a key pillar of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Last year, the ALS was invited by local Walgett ACCOs, Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service (WAMS) and the Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG), to work together on developing a new way forward to achieve better wellbeing and justice outcomes through strengthening support and models of community care for children and young people in Walgett.

Building on what we learned through the earlier success of collaborative service models that respond directly to the needs and priorities of the local community – like our Fines Clinic’s collaboration with the DEG’s Dealing with Fines Program (see page 37) – throughout 2023 and 2024, our Community Partnerships team has worked at a strategic level with DEG and WAMS, supported by the Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership between DEG and the University of NSW, to co-design a Walgett Wellbeing Service that can tangibly improve the wellbeing of Walgett’s children and young people. This may include specialist staff based at the partner organisations who provide early support to young people to support their social and emotional wellbeing and keep them safe and connected to community, a youth accommodation model, and other culturally safe, community-based supports.

Over the next 12 months, we will continue to work together towards implementation, with the shared long-term aim of sustained Aboriginal community-controlled services to enable and support children and young people and their families in Walgett, and creating operating and impact models that can be learned from and adapted elsewhere.

STRATEGIC LAW REFORM AND ADVOCACY

Advocacy highlights in 2023-24

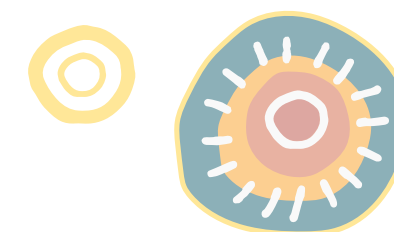
As the peak legal services provider to Aboriginal and Torres Strait people in NSW and the ACT, the ALS has unparalleled justice systems expertise and is uniquely placed to platform the voices and experiences of the clients and communities we serve in our advocacy. We are regularly called upon to provide our expert opinion on laws, policies and programs that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In 2023-24, a key focus for our policy team was contributing to the Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership (see also page 52). As well as endorsing National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS)’ submission to the review, we prepared our own submission expanding upon the recommendations and information provided by NATSILS and providing further context specific to NSW and the ACT. As a key mechanism for shaping recommendations for future funding of the ALS, the submission to the independent review was prioritised as potentially impacting everything we do. Our submission states that the ALS has “historically and systematically been under-valued, under-funded and under-resourced to meet the known demand for legal services in our jurisdictions” and makes seven recommendations in addition to those made by NATSILS.

An example of our effective systemic advocacy can be seen in our participation in the NSW Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC) investigation ‘Operation Mantus’. Among other issues, Operation Mantus investigated longstanding police practices of interviewing children and other vulnerable people in custody who had already told police they wished to exercise their right to silence.

We gave extensive input to the investigation through our public written submission (which included evidence from our Custody Notification Service, criminal law practice and experiences of our clients) and evidence from ALS solicitors in public and private hearings. Our evidence that these concerning policing practices are long-standing and widespread was reflected in the findings and recommendations of the LECC’s report, issued in December 2023, which found a “systemic problem” of police interviewing vulnerable people against their accepted legal advice.

Our evidence was vital in shaping the final recommendations made by the LECC. Importantly, this included a recommendation calling for the Attorney General to amend regulations to require police to assist vulnerable people to obtain further legal advice if they appear to change their mind about an interview in custody. We spoke out in the news media following the release of the LECC’s report, upholding the right to silence as a fundamental principle of Australian law and calling on NSW Police and the Attorney General to take urgent action in response to the report’s recommendations.





Giving expert advice to reviews and inquiries

This year, we made written submissions to and gave evidence in over 70 parliamentary inquiries, law reform processes and reviews, consultations and roundtables in NSW, the ACT and the federal jurisdiction.

Below is a list of public submissions to reviews and inquiries:

1. Australian Human Rights Commission Youth Justice and Child Wellbeing Reform Project
2. Review of the Coroner's Act 2009 (NSW)
3. Criminal Procedure Act (Child Sexual Offence Evidence) Bill 2023
4. Proposed Amendments to Day Bail in the ACT
5. Children and Young People Amendment Bill 2023 (ACT)
6. Review of s 58 Crimes Sentencing Procedure Act (NSW)
7. Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill (No 2) (NSW)
8. Family Is Culture Community Report Card 2023
9. United Nations Universal Periodic 3rd Cycle Review Mid-Term Report
10. Young Offenders Legislation Amendment (Review) Bill 2023 (NSW)
11. Statutory Review of the Inspector of Correctional Services Act 2017 (ACT)
12. Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2023 (No 1) (NSW)
13. Jury Amendment Bill (NSW)
14. Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2023 (No 2) (NSW)
15. Justice Health Safeguards (NSW)
16. Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 (No 2) (NSW)
17. Framework for Firearm Prohibition Order (ACT)
18. Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap
19. Statutory reviews of Part 4.6 of the Crimes (Sentencing) Act 2005 and sections 35A (2) and (3), and 35AA of the Crimes Act 1900 (NSW)
20. Submission on the Mandatory Disease Testing Act 2021 (NSW)
21. City of Sydney review of Alcohol Free Zones and Alcohol Prohibition Areas
22. Submission on the Children and Young People Amendment Bill 2 (2023) (ACT)
23. Revenue NSW Fairer Fines Program
24. Special Inquiry into Alternative Care Arrangements
25. ACT Board of Inquiry, Recommendations 5 and 8
26. Weapons Offences Sentencing Review (NSW)
27. Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 (ACT)
28. Costs Protection - Proposed Amendment to Australian Human Rights Bill
29. Inquiry into Jury Amendment Bill 2023 (NSW)
30. Consultation on section 20 of the Crimes Act 1900 (ACT) – recklessly inflicting grievous bodily harm (ACT)
31. Inquiry into the Administrative Review Tribunal Bill 2023
32. Good character for child sexual offences (ACT)
33. Sexual, Family and Personal Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 (NSW)
34. ACT Alternative Bail Reporting
35. Crimes Amendment (Strengthening the Criminal Justice Response to Sexual Violence) Bill 2024
36. Crimes (Sentence Administration) Amendment Bill 2024
37. Surveillance Devices Act 2007 (NSW) (Body worn camera amendments)
38. Independent review to reduce First Nations over representation in the ACT Justice System
39. Inquiry into the Administrative Review Tribunal Bill 2023
40. Serious Road Crimes Review (ACT)
41. Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020-25
42. Tolls & Revenue Review (NSW)
43. Consultation Paper on Dangerous Driving: Sentencing and Recidivism (ACT)
44. Inquiry into the Administration of Bail in the ACT
45. Inquiry on the Impact of the Regulatory Framework of Cannabis in NSW
46. Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Amendment Bill 2024
47. Amendment to Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1995
48. NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Community safety in regional and rural communities
49. NSW Law Reform Commission Review of Serious Racial and Religious Vilification s 93Z Crimes Act 1900
50. Improving outcomes for Children in Out-of-Home Care who interact with the criminal justice system
51. ALRC Inquiry into Justice Responses to Sexual Violence

Campaigning for our communities

In March 2024, the ALS and the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO) were blindsided by a NSW Government proposal to tighten bail laws for children, a decision intended to place more children in custody.

We launched a rapid response to the Government's proposed legislation, gathering the support of our CAPO partners as well as the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Redfern Legal Centre, and The Shopfront Youth Legal Centre denouncing the proposal, followed by media appearances, a press conference, multiple letters and meetings and a petition.

Despite the passage of the legislation in late March, we sounded a powerful warning that we will never remain silent in the face of injustice and built a groundswell of support for our cause. In the time since, we have continued to speak out to reiterate our message that locking up kids makes communities more dangerous and makes crime worse. This campaign set strong foundations to grow the ALS' campaigning capacity so that we can continue to speak out against punitive, regressive government policies and for sustainable, long-term investment in a strong ALS.



Above: ALS CEO Karly Warner speaks at a press conference against the NSW Government's bail laws. Pictured L-R: Kate Sinclair (Justice and Equity Centre), Sue Higginson (Greens MLC), Camilla Pandolfini (CEO of Redfern Legal Centre), Karly Warner, John Leha (CEO of AbSec), Geoff Scott (CEO of Just Reinvest NSW).



SUPPORTING FAMILIES THROUGH CORONIAL INQUESTS

The ALS provides legal representation and advice for Aboriginal families who have lost loved ones in custody or police operations, supporting them through the coronial inquest process.

This year we supported 92 family members in 31 matters. Given the complex and protracted nature of coronial inquests, and the high level of support that the ALS wishes to provide to families, we expanded our Coronial Unit to better meet these needs. The team now consists of a Managing Coronial Advocate (a new role); three Coronial and Trial Advocates; and two Community Coronial Advocates (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified roles).

Recently our advocacy has helped lead to criminal charges being brought against a corrections officer and a police officer in matters of Aboriginal deaths in custody and police operations.

In November 2023, 'Officer A' was found not guilty of murder over the 2019 death of 43-year-old Aboriginal man Dwayne Johnstone, who was shot in the back while attempting to escape custody after a hospital visit.

"There is nothing that can justify to us the way Dwayne died. No human should be gunned down and shot in the back... there are so many changes we would like to see, including policies to prohibit corrections officers from shooting anyone in the back, especially if they're unarmed," said Dwayne's partner, Kirsty Pepper, in response to the verdict. We continued to represent Kirsty and Dwayne's step-mother, Jenny through the coronial inquest into Dwayne's death, which resumed after the trial's conclusion.



Above: Dwayne Johnstone (front right) with his stepmother, father and partner.

In February 2024, a NSW Police officer was charged with dangerous driving occasioning death and negligent driving occasioning death in relation to the death of 16-year-old Dunghutti boy Jai Wright in 2022. At the time of writing, the trial is yet to commence. The ALS advocated strongly for the Director of Public Prosecutions to bring charges. We are representing Jai's family in the coronial inquest into his death, which is currently on hold while the criminal process unfolds.



Above: Jai Wright.

AUSPICE OF THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) is the peak body and national voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS). It advocates at the national level for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within justice systems, striving to ensure equitable access to justice for all communities. Upholding the principle of self-determination, NATSILS supports ATSILS in exercising their autonomy as they advocate for their communities.

The ALS began auspicings NATSILS in May 2023, following a transition from the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency Ltd. Over the past 12 months, NATSILS has focused on building up its core team and progressing key strategic priorities aimed at strengthening ATSILS, transforming justice systems and advocating for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

NATSILS is gratefully funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Myer Foundation and Reichstein Foundation.

Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership

The National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020-2025 (NLAP) is the instrument delivering Commonwealth Government baseline funding to the legal assistance sector, which is made up of ATSILS as well as Community Legal Centres, Legal Aid Commissions, Family Violence Prevention Legal Services and women's legal services. Funding is provided by the Commonwealth Government and administered by state and territory governments.

In 2023, Dr Warren Mundy was appointed to conduct an independent review of the NLAP ahead of the commencement of a new legal assistance funding agreement from 1 July 2025. In consultation with all ATSILS, NATSILS made a comprehensive submission to the review, stating that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country are not able to access high quality, culturally appropriate support and are crying out for greater access to ATSILS and to justice. NATSILS made 27 recommendations, including that the next funding arrangements should adopt a needs-based model which appropriately resources ATSILS to substantially increase access to effective, culturally appropriate, and comprehensive legal assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (The ALS also prepared a separate submission to the review – see page 47.)

Dr Mundy's findings were released in May 2024 and confirmed that current funding is insufficient to meet the legal needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; that ATSILS receive less funding and their

staff are paid substantially less than other legal assistance providers like Legal Aid Commissions; and that stronger government accountability for Closing the Gap should be embedded within the next funding agreement.

Over the coming year, NATSILS will continue to work with all governments and ATSILS to advocate for ATSILS to receive a fair allocation of funding under the successor agreement to the NLAP and for the implementation of other key recommendations of the independent review. This represents a critical opportunity to remove barriers to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and move towards fairer, more equitable justice systems.

Closing the Gap and the Justice Policy Partnership

Throughout the financial year, NATSILS maintained its collaboration with the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department as co-leads of the national Justice Policy Partnership (JPP). The JPP's purpose is to lead a nationally joined-up approach to transform law and justice systems through genuine partnerships between all levels of government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities. It aims to do this by:

- delivering ambitious, holistic and long-lasting structural actions to reduce rates of adult and youth incarceration;
- embedding the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms across the law and justice systems; and
- building on the strengths and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address the ongoing and unaddressed intersectional impacts of racism, colonisation and dispossession.

Over the past 12 months, the JPP has focused on advancing the objectives outlined in the Strategic Framework through tangible reform actions across four key focus areas:

1. **Transforming justice systems** – eliminating all forms of racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, embedding self-determination and ensuring policies and programs are culturally safe and designed in collaboration with local communities.
2. **Partnerships and accountability** – establishing formal partnerships and sharing decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and ensuring strong accountability over implementation of Closing the Gap justice targets and priority reforms.
3. **Community-led change** – building a strong, effective and properly resourced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled law and justice sector, by giving back power and resources to communities to deliver place-based solutions to local issues.
4. **Holistic and inclusive approaches** – delivering holistic, integrated and inclusive systems that meet the diverse needs, priorities and wellbeing of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.



NATSILS

National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

TRUE JUSTICE FOR OUR PEOPLE

Laying strong future foundations

SUPPORTING OUR STAFF AND SERVICES TO MAXIMISE THEIR IMPACT

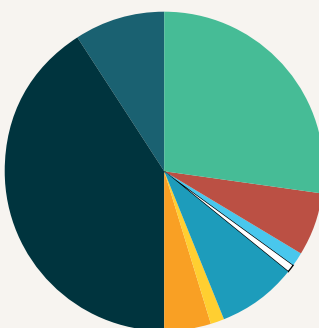
First Nations Network Conference

Our inaugural First Nations Network Conference was held in June 2024 on Gadigal and Eora land in Sydney. This conference brought together our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to learn, share knowledge, build strong connections, and discuss issues relevant to them and their communities in a culturally safe space.

We look forward to holding more gatherings of our teams.

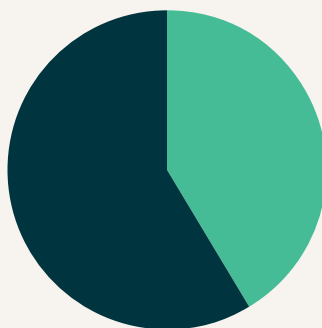
Our team at 30 June 2024

Employee Roles



- Administration Officers and Paralegals
- Allied Professional Services Staff
- Aboriginal Tenants Advice & Advocacy Service Staff
- Executive
- Field and Engagement Officers
- NATSILS Staff
- Policy, Project & Community Partnerships Staff
- Solicitors (including Principal Solicitors)
- Shared Services Staff

Aboriginality of employees



- Non-Aboriginal employees
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees

FUNDING OUR WORK

Funding under the National Legal Assistance Partnership

The majority of ALS funding is through the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP), funded by the Australian Government and administered by the NSW Government and ACT Government. The current agreement provides funding until 30 June 2025.

The NLAP agreement funds our core legal services in criminal law, care and protection and family law. Additionally, the funding supports the following programs that expand our impact:

- Justice Policy Partnership - to increase our data capability and capacity to participate in this Closing the Gap initiative;
- Coronial inquiries and expensive and complex cases - for the provision of legal assistance to families of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals in coronial inquiries, and the provision of legal assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients involved in complex and/or expensive cases;
- Supporting people with mental health conditions to access the justice system - funding for the Mental Health Advocacy and Referral Unit to provide advocacy and referrals for Aboriginal clients with mental health conditions who are in contact with the criminal justice system;
- Legal assistance for vulnerable women - funding for the delivery of a dedicated legal assistance service to women, with a focus on women experiencing, or at risk of, family violence;
- ALS Employment Law Service (ELS) - a branch of the Civil Law Practice that provides culturally appropriate legal support to Aboriginal people experiencing sexual harassment, discrimination, and other forms of mistreatment at work.

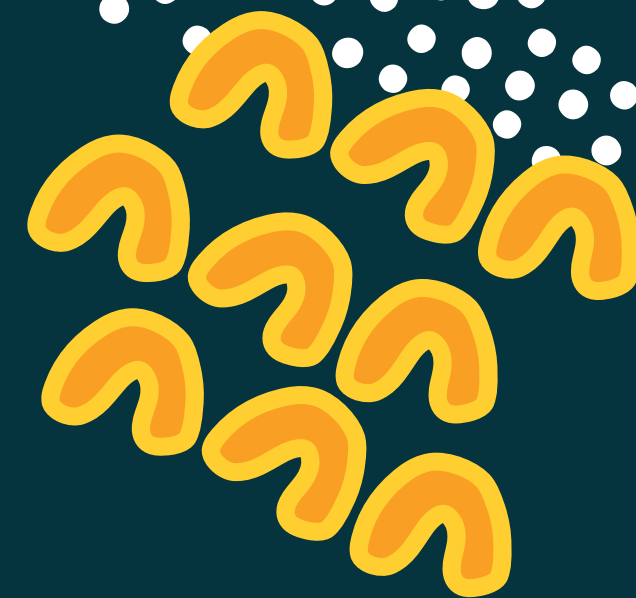
Other government and private funding

The ALS receives funding from other sources for a range of key legal service and support programs including:

- One-off funding from the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department in 2023-24 used to support work including baseline services and ALS services for the Walama List;
- Funding from the NSW Government through the Department of Communities and Justice to support:
 - » the **Visiting Legal Service and Youth Bail Advocacy Program**;
 - » ALS work at the **Youth Koori Courts** in Surry Hills, Parramatta and Dubbo; and
 - » the following Closing the Gap programs:
 - **Aboriginal Child and Family Advocacy and Support**
 - **Bail Advocacy Program for Women and Children**
 - **NSW Aboriginal Justice Partnership**
 - **Aboriginal Throughcare Strategy**
 - **Therapeutic Pathways for Children**
- Funding from the NSW Government through the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet (and auspiced via the NSW Aboriginal Land Council to allocate funding to members of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations) for work that includes the ALS' involvement in **Closing the Gap** meetings and working groups;
- Funding from the NSW Government through the Department of Fair Trading to support the activities of the **Greater Sydney Aboriginal Tenants Service (GSATS)**;
- ACT Government funding for the following programs: **Ngurrumbai Bail Support**,

Front-Up, Duty Lawyer, Frontline Service Delivery, Care & Protection Legal Advocacy Service and new in 2023-24, **Disability Liaison Officer and paralegal support**.

- Funding from Legal Aid NSW for ALS participation in the **Early Appropriate Guilty Plea scheme**; **care and protection services in regional locations**; and the **Cooperative Legal Service Delivery** program;
- Commonwealth funding through the National Indigenous Australians Agency for our **Custody Notification Service** and the **Family Violence Legal Service Program** based in Nowra and Canberra;
- Funding from the Paul Ramsay Foundation allowing the ALS to auspice the grant for the **Bugmy Bar Book Project**, and to support the ALS **Justice Reinvestment** program; and
- Funding from the Dharriwaa Elders Group to provide a staff member to support the **Walgett Wellbeing Collaboration**.



Fundraising

The ALS received \$1.6 million in community donations and foundation grants in 2023-24, representing 3% of our total income.

We are sincerely grateful to the many individuals, businesses and foundations who contribute to our work, including people who donate monthly in support of our mission.

These donations provide much-needed support for initiatives that do not receive enough government funding. In 2023-24, donations were crucial in funding a shortfall in resources for the Custody Notification Service and our legal services, enabling us to open our doors and our phone lines for people who otherwise may have been left without support. Donations also allow us to operate the Fines Clinic in our Civil Law Practice, supporting many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who would be left in severe financial stress due to the impact of fines, if not for our assistance.

Join the fight for justice with a monthly donation:

www.alsnswact.org.au/monthly

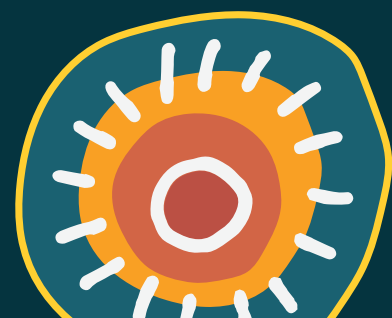
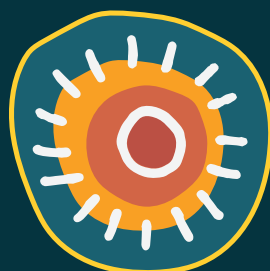
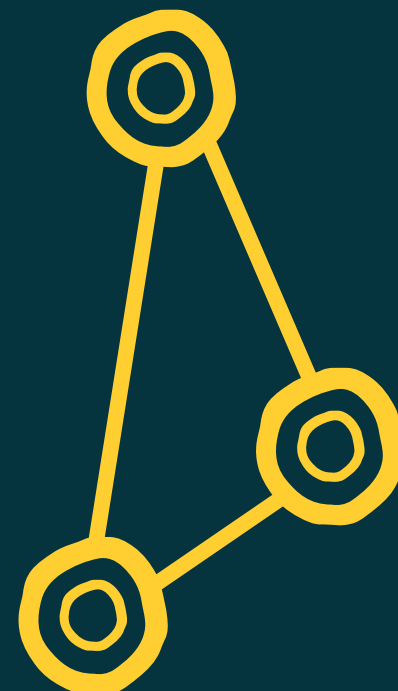
Thank you to every individual, business, foundation and government agency that funded our work in 2023-24.

Financials

We are pleased to present an overview of the ALS financial performance and financial position for 30 June 2024.

Notes to financial statements

1. The financial statements on pages 59-60 include transactions from the following auspiced service: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS).
2. The Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income and Statement of Financial Position are an extract from the full Financial Report for the year ended 30 June 2024. The extracted Statements should be read in conjunction with the notes to financial statements. The full Financial Statements are available upon request.



Aboriginal Legal Services (NSW/ACT) Limited Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income For the year ended 30 June 2024	2024 \$	2023 \$
Revenue and income		
Revenue from operations	46,320,514	32,742,391
Donations & charitable funding	807,808	3,986,247
Other income	1,408,619	561,465
	<u>48,536,941</u>	<u>37,290,103</u>
Expenses		
Employee benefit expense	(35,709,570)	(24,296,291)
Professional expenses	(2,643,409)	(1,519,192)
Occupancy expenses	(1,166,964)	(975,464)
IT & Telecommunications	(1,664,582)	(1,328,848)
Administration expense	(512,642)	(430,757)
Governance & finance expenses	(393,723)	(239,052)
Travel & accommodation expenses	(830,408)	(602,038)
Motor vehicle expenses	(579,708)	(388,021)
Depreciation and loss on disposal of assets	(1,796,614)	(1,756,682)
Interest expenses	(385,273)	(248,783)
Other expenses	(2,479,400)	(972,452)
	<u>(48,162,293)</u>	<u>(32,757,580)</u>
Surplus for the year	<u>374,648</u>	<u>4,532,523</u>
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	<u>374,648</u>	<u>4,532,523</u>

Aboriginal Legal Services (NSW/ACT) Limited Statement of financial position As at 30 June 2024	2024 \$	2023 \$
Assets		
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	20,385,415	18,019,531
Trade and other receivables	1,297,756	535,326
Other financial assets	25,609,135	24,839,291
Other current assets	688,111	603,609
	47,980,417	43,997,757
Non-current assets classified as held for sale	359,707	-
Total current assets	48,340,124	43,997,757
Non-current assets		
Property, plans and equipment	1,171,357	1,560,721
Right-of-use assets	4,956,308	5,139,533
Total non-current assets	6,127,665	6,700,254
Total assets	54,467,789	50,698,011
Liabilities		
Current liabilities		
Payables and accruals	2,597,678	2,696,621
Contract liabilities	26,215,631	23,991,177
Lease liabilities	1,440,914	1,435,088
Employee benefits	4,331,803	3,217,248
Provisions	863,000	863,000
Total current liabilities	35,449,026	32,203,134
Non-current liabilities		
Lease liabilities	3,769,729	3,805,160
Employee benefits	248,472	197,668
Provisions	486,119	352,254
Total non-current liabilities	4,504,320	4,355,082
Total liabilities	39,953,346	36,558,216
Net assets	14,514,443	14,139,795
Funds		
Initial contribution for members	1,280,271	1,280,271
Assets reserve	1,533,228	1,533,228
Accumulated funds	11,700,944	11,326,296
Total funds	14,514,443	14,139,795

CONTACT US

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www.alsnswact.org.au

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Aboriginal Legal Service

(NSW/ACT) Limited

