

**NAAFLS**  
NORTH AUSTRALIAN  
ABORIGINAL FAMILY  
LEGAL SERVICE

# ANNUAL REPORT 2024





## ANNUAL REPORT

North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation.  
ICN 4641

## REPORTING PERIOD

1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024

## DARWIN

32 Dripstone Road, Casuarina, Darwin NT 0811

## KATHERINE

Level 1, Randazzo Plaza, 16 Katherine Terrace, Katherine NT 0850

## NHULUNBUY

7/30 Arnhem Road, Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation Business Centre, Nhulunbuy NT 0881



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# Acknowledgement of Country

The North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation acknowledges the traditional owners of the beautiful lands on which we work and live in Northern Territory's Top End.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Chief Executive Officer  
**Cindy Torrens**

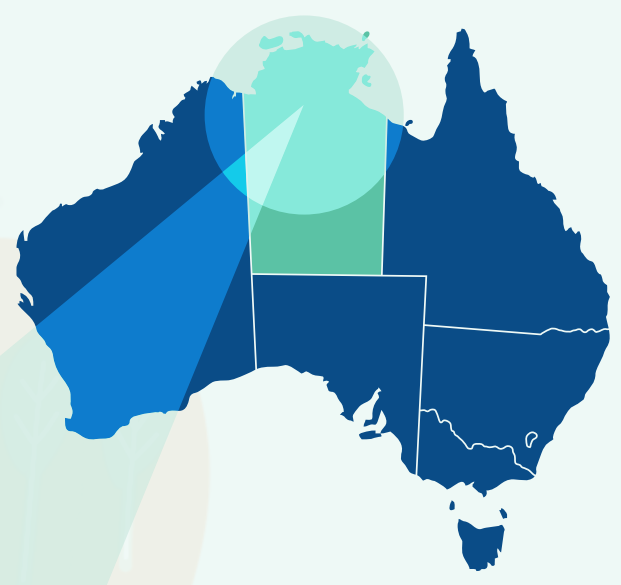
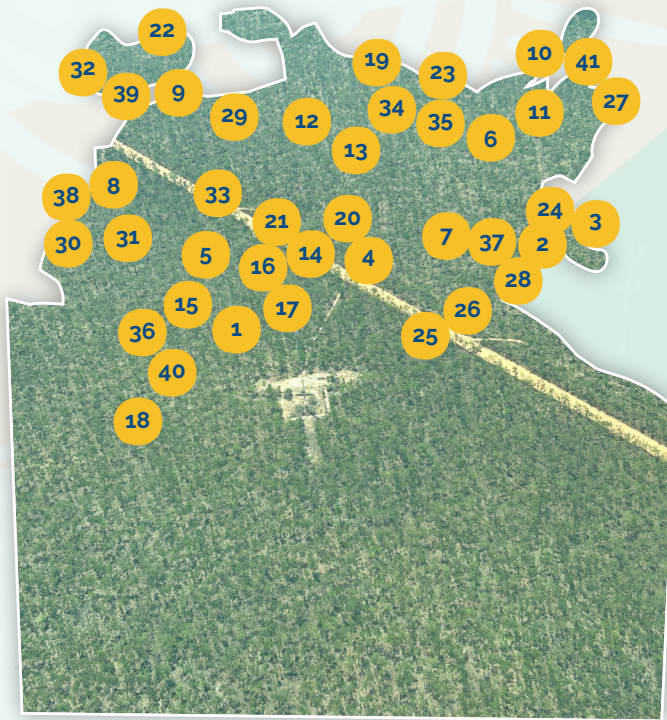
Our offices are in Darwin, Katherine and Nhulunbuy in the Gove Peninsula. We serve more than 45 communities in the Top End of the Northern Territory.

## Photo credit

Kristine Mulholland NAAFLS Senior Caseworker.  
Picture taken while flying to support clients in Ramingining, East Arnhem. 580 kilometres east of Darwin and 435 kilometres by road, west of Nhulunbuy.



# Our Community Footprint



Our staff have visited more than 41 remote Aboriginal communities across our coverage area. These long distances are undertaken by 4WD when weather permits, or by commercial or light aircraft, to reach some of the most remote and isolated communities in the NT.

1	Adelaide River	15	Kalkarindji (Dagaragu)	29	Palmerston
2	Alyangula	<b>16</b>	<b>Katherine</b>	30	Palumpa
3	Angurugu	17	Katherine surrounds	31	Peppimenarti
4	Barunga	18	Lajamanu	32	Pilangimpi (Melville Island)
5	Batchelor	19	Maningrida	33	Pine Creek
6	Borroloola	20	Manyallaluk	34	Ramingining
7	Bulman	21	Mataranka	35	Robinson River
8	Daly River	22	Milikapiti (Melville Island)	36	Timber Creek
<b>9</b>	<b>Darwin</b>	23	Milingimbi	37	Urapunga
10	Galiwinku (Elcho Island)	24	Milyakburra (Bikerton Island)	38	Wadeye
11	Gapuwiyak	25	Minyerri	39	Wurrumiyanga (Bathurst Island)
12	Gunbalanya (Oenpelli)	26	Ngukurr	40	Yarralin
13	Jabiru	<b>27</b>	<b>Nhulunbuy (Gove)</b>	41	Yirrkala
14	Jilkminggan	28	Numbulwar		

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

*Cindy*  
**Torrens**

**BOARD CHAIR**

*Mark*  
**Munnich**



# LEADERSHIP

# CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW

Ngaji gurrjin. Hello everybody.

On behalf of the Board of the North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation (NAAFLS), I am pleased to present the Annual Report for the year ending 30 June 2024.

I want to take this time to acknowledge the NAAFLS Board of Directors for their guidance and contributions throughout the year as NAAFLS went through a period of change.

I would also like to acknowledge all NAAFLS staff past and present who during this time continued to provide critical legal services and dedicated support to our clients.

## Appointment of new CEO

This year, there were significant changes within the NAAFLS Executive Team with the departure of our former CEO Cassandra Carolin in October 2023, and the recent appointment of our new CEO, Cindy Torrens at the end of April this year.

Cassandra was the first appointment of an Aboriginal woman to the top role in many years and a proud moment for NAAFLS. Cassandra is a Bunitj/Wuthathi woman who was with NAAFLS for 12 years in various roles across the organisation.

As a Board, we're delighted to announce the appointment of our new Chief Executive Officer Cindy Torrens. Cindy is a Warlmanpa/Wambaya woman from the Barkly region. She has hit the ground running with a firm focus on policy and workforce development, and ensuring our voice is at the forefront of conversations around domestic, family and sexual violence and its impact on Aboriginal families in the NT.

We welcome Cindy's leadership, energy and passion at this pivotal time in our sector. Cindy brings significant sector expertise with 30 years working in the criminal justice sector starting at Corrections and her most recent role at NAAJA managing the Throughcare Program which supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people transitioning from prison back into the community.

For eight months prior to Cindy's appointment, NAAFLS Chief Operating Officer Wendy Jennings acted in the CEO role. NAAFLS Board of Directors would like to acknowledge Wendy's outstanding contribution during this period.

## Pivotal Time

NAAFLS plays a holistic and pivotal role as an Aboriginal-Community-Controlled Organisation (ACCO), delivering independent Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVPLS) for victim-survivors in the Top End. As an ACCO, our legal services must work with our caseworkers to support clients, to ensure a culturally safe and appropriate experience for victim-survivors. We are one of only three FVPLS services in the Northern Territory.

## NAAFLS Strategic Plan 2025-2028

One of the key roles of the NAAFLS Board is ensuring that we have in place a clear strategic direction. The current NAAFLS strategic plan has been outdated for some time and the Board have worked collaboratively with NAAFLS staff to ensure everyone had a voice in this process. We aim to finalise this by the end of the year and hope to share this plan with our members and stakeholders.

## Coronial Inquest

The start of this financial year in Darwin has also marked the second week of the Northern Territory Coronial public hearings into the deaths of four Aboriginal women – Ngeygo Ragurk, Miss Yunupinju, Kumanjayi Haywood and Kumarn Rubuntja. NAAFLS has represented two of the families in this Inquest.

As I sign off on my final report as Chairperson, I look forward to continue working collectively and collaboratively with the NAAFLS Board and Executive Team to ensure we continue to meet the needs of our clients and our organisation.

Gala Mabu and Galiya. Thank you and goodbye.

**Mark Munnich**

Board Chairman

NAAFLS Aboriginal Corporation

# CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

As a first time Chief Executive Officer, I commenced with the North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service in April 2024. During my transition into the role, and as an older Aboriginal woman, I found my passion in holistic and strength-based service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and workforce development. Specifically, growing our next generation of young leaders to support our people as they continue to fight for equality.

My grandfather was a Bungalow Boy and, at the time of his passing, at 100 years of age was the oldest member of the Stolen Generations. My family connections are in the Carpentaria Gulf and the Barkly Tablelands, and my surname was that of the station manager at Alexandria Station where my father was born.

The North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service (NAAFLS) is one of three Aboriginal community-controlled Family Violence Prevention Legal Services in the Northern Territory. We sit together with 14 other sister services across Australia under our National Peak-body, the First Nations Advocates against Family Violence (FNAAFV).

Our organisation provides both legal and non-legal support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 45+ remote, and very remote Aboriginal communities across our 350,000sq/km service area. In addition to our Darwin and Katherine Offices, this year we have formally opened our Nhulunbuy Office, to strengthen our direct service provision to the communities and homelands of the Northeast Arnhem region, the Groote Archipelago and the Gove Peninsula.

As we continue to prepare our organisation for future growth, work commenced this year to review the structure of the organisation and its capacity to adequately meet the needs of the people we support, in the provision of both legal and holistic non-legal support.

An Executive Leadership Team was confirmed, with appropriate representation from the Katherine Region; we have also included an Executive Policy Officer position which will increase our organisational capacity to

contribute to high-level policy reform and development across the sector. These important changes will ensure practice cohesion across our sites, and that all regions are appropriately considered and represented, both in our policy work and in strategic planning and decision-making.

Alongside the overall review of the organisations structure, was the review of all internal processes, policies and procedures, and work is well underway to finalise both strategic and operational plans for 2025-2028. NAAFLS is also working to finalise a strong Employee Value Proposition to target applicants whose values are aligned with those of our organisation.

Another key priority this year has been our work in progressing the development of a Child Protection Notification and Referral Service. Funded by the Paul Ramsay Foundation – Just Futures, the program design is aligned with Closing the Gap Targets 11, 12 and 13 and to our existing expertise as an FVPLS. The project will ensure we also strengthen our own strategies for providing early intervention and preventative support and assistance to families who engage with our services.

As of 30 June 2024, our organisation had a capacity of 35 full time employees; of those positions, 6 are vacant. We are exceptionally proud to have retained an outstanding team of Aboriginal women, who walk alongside our people throughout their engagement with the legal system. These amazing women represent 58% of our current workforce.

This year we also started work to refine the skills capacity of our workforce with the introduction of 'core training requirements', with appropriate priority given to key areas such as Cultural Awareness and Trauma Training. Redeveloping our staff support structures through 1:1 Supervision and Annual Performance Reviews that focus on career development is also well underway.

In addition to building capacity within our workforce, the development of a bi-cultural model of support will empower our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to lead the organisations engagement with our client



group. This will ensure that victim survivors of DFSV are supported and empowered by other Aboriginal women to lead lives free from the impacts of violence through access to culturally safe legal and holistic non-legal support.

In February, NAAFLS hosted our annual Ochre Ribbon breakfast which brought together more than 150 people from across the sector to network and share information. The Ochre Ribbon Breakfast allowed us to showcase the important work of our organisation, with the success of the forum resulting in various requests for community legal education sessions from other services.

Alongside of sessions delivered to medical students visiting from the Flinders University at the Royal Darwin Hospital, we also continued to deliver legal education to the Northern Territory Police as part of their induction processes. Significantly, our organisation was the only ACCO in attendance dedicated to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are applied when engaging with our people in their communities.

Our involvement ensured there was consideration of how issues such as kinship relationships, cultural obligations, distance, weather and isolation can impact on the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal women and children.



As a member of the First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV), this year we also engaged with the NLAP review consultations, providing specialist insights and feedback to the Commonwealth Attorney General and the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) in anticipation of our transition to the National Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP) in 2025.

Since June 2023, our organisation has represented the families of Ngeygo Ragurk and Miss Yunupingu in the inquest into the deaths of Kumanjayi Haywood, Kumarn Rubuntja, Ngeygo Ragurk, Miss Yunupingu before her Honour Coroner Armitage in the Northern Territory Local Court. NAAFLS is in the process of preparing Final Submissions to the Coroner regarding recommendations sought to reduce the prevalence of domestic and family violence in remote Aboriginal communities of the Northern Territory.

### Looking Forward

This year we have engaged with various stakeholders within the sector to strengthen our profile, reestablish key partnerships and refine referral pathways. The most significant work for NAAFLS has been in reaching out to FVPLSs including our sister organisation Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit (CAAFLU).

CAAFLU have provided a session to our team about the valuable service they provide to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children in Central Australia. We followed up to consider our collaborative approach to future policy, advocacy and law reform. Continuing to build and consolidate this important relationship remains a priority for NAAFLS both now and well into the future.

#### **Cindy Torrens**

Chief Executive Officer  
NAAFLS Aboriginal Corporation

# Our Vision

Safe and empowered communities where everyone understands their rights and has access to justice.

# Our Values



Professionalism



Honesty



Integrity



Multi Cultural  
Respect



Leadership



Innovation

# Our Objectives

## NAAFLS Aboriginal Corporation Objectives



The North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation has been established to provide relief to the distress caused to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who are victims of family violence.

### **The objectives of the corporation are to:**

- Provide holistic support to families that are victims of family violence.
- Provide legal assistance in family matters to women, men and children in specified communities.
- Reduce the incidence of violence and abuse in communities through community legal education, early intervention, prevention and advocacy.
- Increase the recognition of the problem of violence and abuse in communities through community legal education, early intervention, prevention and advocacy.
- Facilitate long-term solutions to violence and abuse in communities through community education.
- To operate and maintain a gift fund to be known as 'The North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service - Aboriginal Corporation Gift Fund' in accordance with the requirements of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997.

**The North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation will seek to advance these objectives by:**

- Upholding and respecting the individuality of clients and building relationships with them that are based on an honest and information sharing approach.
- Ensuring that all services reflect the needs of women, men and children in the delivery of Family Violence Prevention Programs.
- Addressing the causal effects of family violence and the extreme disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Working towards the elimination of family violence and the extreme disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Promoting awareness, understanding and acknowledgment of the issues of family violence.
- Providing legal advice, representation, referral and other related support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of family violence.
- Working cooperatively with all of the corporation's stakeholders.
- Coordinating with, seeking to improve the accessibility of, and increasing the effectiveness of, other legal and related support services working to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of family violence.
- Liaising and coordinating with key agencies, including State and Commonwealth agencies, to ensure the availability of culturally appropriate service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of family violence.



# Guiding Principles

## Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Operational Framework

As per Rule 3.1 of the Rule Book, the North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation will, in all its dealings, strive to adhere to the guiding principles of the Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Operational Framework, being

- (i) to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples who are victims and survivors of family violence or sexual assault;
- (ii) to make its services accessible and appropriate for all victims and survivors of family violence or sexual assault, regardless of gender or age; and
- (iii) to be mindful of the principles that underpin the Family Violence Prevention Legal Service, which include, but are not limited to, acknowledging that:
  - all individuals have the right to be free from violence;
  - family violence is unacceptable;
  - the community has a responsibility to work towards the prevention of family violence; and
  - community engagement and education is a key element in family violence prevention.

### Working Together

As per Rule 3.2 of the Rule Book, the members and directors of the corporation will work together in a transparent, courteous and respectful way to ensure the staff of the corporation are given every opportunity to deliver the highest possible standards of service for the corporation's clients.

The members and directors will commit to work together in an open and transparent way to ensure that the corporation is governed in accordance with the requirements of the CATSI Act, other applicable Commonwealth and State laws and these rules.



## Members

At the end of this financial year, there are 17 registered members of the Corporation. They are based in Darwin's suburbs such as Larrakeyah, Stuart Park, Karama, Middle Point, Wulagi, Leanyer, Tiwi and Anula, as well as Katherine, Arnhem Land and the Tiwi Islands.

NAAFLS is looking to encourage more membership across the Top End in the new financial year.

Members must be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, aged at least 18 years old, not have been convicted of an offence in the last five years that involved an act of family violence and normally and permanently reside in one of the communities in Darwin and Katherine Wards.

## Acknowledgement to Professional Director Sue Wainwright

We wish to acknowledge the professionalism, dedication and service of our outgoing professional director Sue Wainwright. The NAAFLS Board extends its heartfelt thanks to Sue for her dedicated service as a professional director for over six years. Sue resigned from the NAAFLS Board in 2024. Her legacy as a director has been significant including strengthening the capacity and integrity of the organisation's governance.

NAAFLS Directors and staff deeply appreciated Sue's expertise, passion, and unwavering commitment to the organisation. Her experience, sharp sense of humour, and practical, no-nonsense approach will be greatly missed.

# Governance

The Board of the North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation comprises up to seven directors. Up to four of the directors are member directors. Member directors may appoint up to a maximum of three professional directors to the Board.

We wish to acknowledge the long service of professional director Sue Wainwright who ceased as director on 19 January 2024.



*ORIC staff conducted Governance Training for NAAFLS Board of Directors and Executive in 2024.*

Board Chair Mark Munnich	Director since 18 November 2022
Deputy Chair Peter Thomsen	Director since 6 November 2020
Member Director Ada Parry	Director since 29 June 2012
Member Director Therese Puruntatameri	Director since 29 June 2012
Member Director Deborah (Debby) Mauger.	Director since 18 November 2022
Professional Director Sue Wainwright	Appointed 1 November 2016
	Ceased as Director on the 19 January 2024

# Bios for Board of Directors



## BOARD CHAIR

Mark Munnich LLB,  
B.Acc, GAICD, PMIIA

Mark was appointed to the NAAFLS Board of Directors on 18 November 2022. He is a proud Yawuru, Gunggandji, and Yued man, who was born and raised on Larrakia Country.

Mark holds a Bachelor of Laws, a Bachelor of Accounting, a Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice, a Graduate Certificate of Internal Auditing and a Master of Laws. He is admitted to the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory and the High Court of Australia as a Barrister and Solicitor.

Mark is employed as a Legal Counsel within the Legal, Risk, and Compliance Team at the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP). Prior to this appointment, Mark worked for more than 10 years within the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations sector. Mark brings a depth of experience in management and executive, legal, finance and governance. He is Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors an Associate Member with CPA Australia and a Professional Member of the Institute of Internal Auditors.



## DEPUTY CHAIR. MEMBER DIRECTOR

Peter Thomsen

Peter Thomsen is a Gunabdjji man from Maningrida who grew up on the floodplains of the Adelaide River and has connections to family in Kakadu and across to Wyndham in Western Australia.

Peter has a broad range of industry experience from mining, oil and gas to Aboriginal Health. He works as the Regional Manager for the Joint Colleges Training Services.





### MEMBER DIRECTOR

## Ada Parry

Ada is one of the longest serving member directors for NAAFLS since her appointment on the 29 June 2012. Ada was born on the banks of the Daly River in 1955 and delivered by her grandmothers. Her country is Woodygupildiyerre, situated among the wetlands and floodplains west of the Daly River Aboriginal Reserve and 300 kilometres south-west of Darwin. On her father's side, Ada is Brinkin and her language is Marrithiyel. On her mother's side, she is Ngangikurrungurr. Her mother taught her language.

Ada works as the Cultural and Education Advisor with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, a role the College first hired her in 1996. At the time, she was the first and only Aboriginal educator. She is a renowned artist who paints acrylics on canvas and she has exhibited her work in Darwin. Since 1985, Ada has lived in Darwin with her husband, three children, 11 grandchildren and three dogs.



### MEMBER DIRECTOR

## Therese Puruntatameri

Therese Puruntatameri has been a valued board member of NAAFLS since her appointment on the 29 June 2012. She is a respected Tiwi woman from one of the prominent families on Melville Island. Therese is a qualified teacher and holds the position of Literacy and Numeracy Teacher/Trainer at the Tiwi Island Training and Education Board (TITEB), Wurrumiyanga. Therese's extensive cultural knowledge plays a crucial role in shaping NAAFLS's strategic direction, thereby enhancing the organisation's capacity to deliver optimal services to our clients and communities.



### MEMBER DIRECTOR

## Debby Mauger

Debby proudly descends from the Worimi and Biripi peoples of the Central North Coast of New South Wales and although she was raised in Canberra, she has called Larrakia Country home since 2004.

Debby was appointed to the NAAFLS Board in November 2022, and brings with her extensive experience across the health, adult education, government and non-government organisations. She holds postgraduate degrees in Business Administration, Health Promotion, and Public Health in addition to diplomas in counselling, mentoring and human resource management. Currently, Debby is a Project Officer at Flinders University, where her work focuses on building medical training and workforce capacity in rural and remote communities across the Northern Territory.

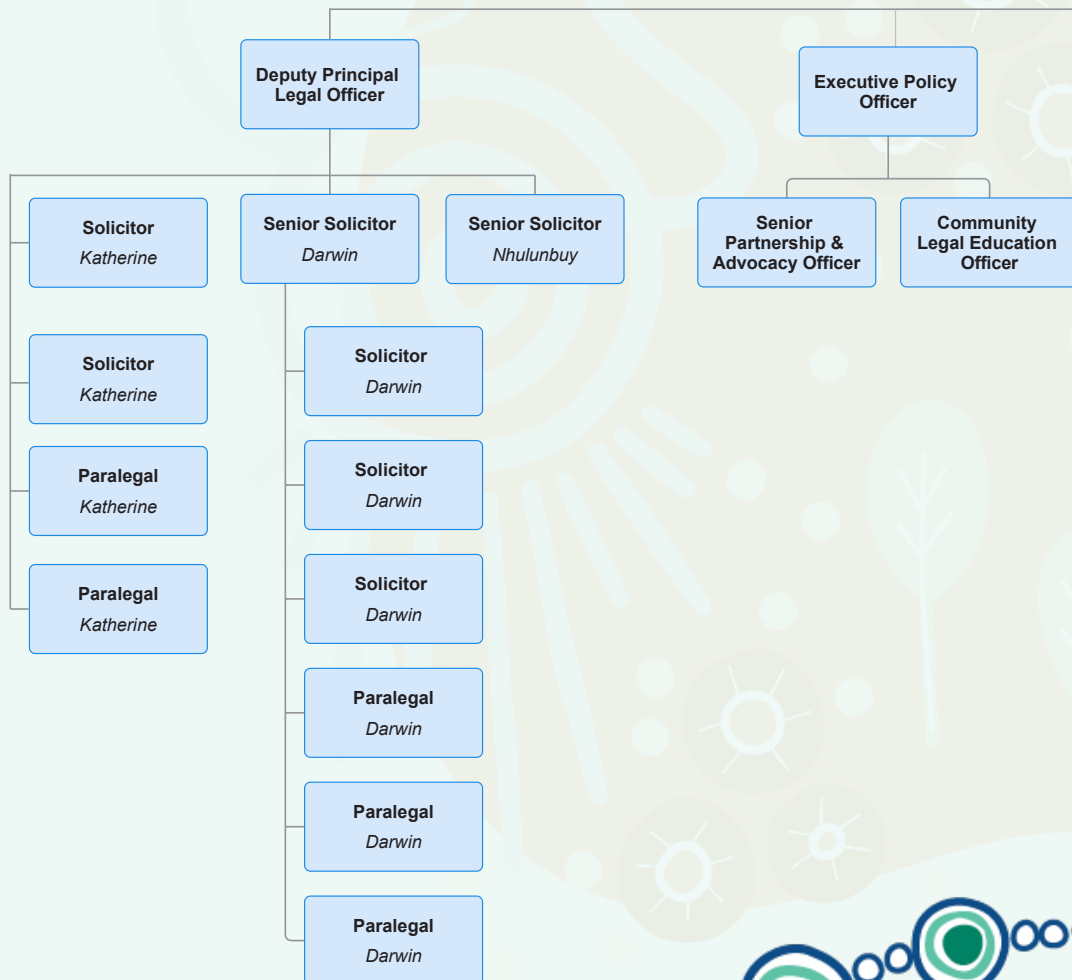
Debby is deeply committed to supporting her communities and champions strength-based and whole of system approaches in her work.

# Operational Team

As at the end of June 2024, there were 29 staff employed at the North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service.



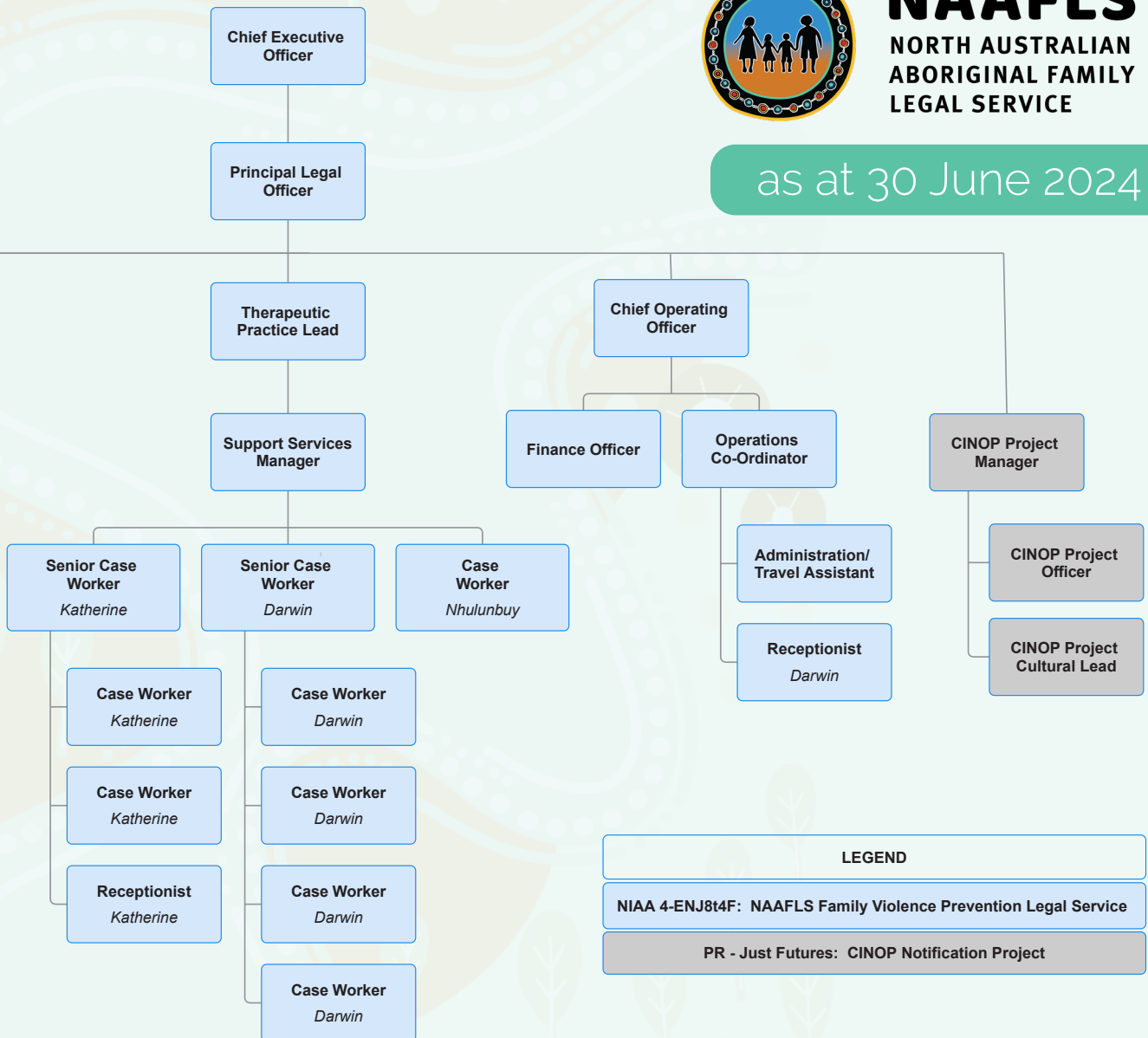
# Organisational Chart





**NAAFLS**  
NORTH AUSTRALIAN  
ABORIGINAL FAMILY  
LEGAL SERVICE

as at 30 June 2024



LEGEND
NIAA 4-ENJ8t4F: NAAFLS Family Violence Prevention Legal Service
PR - Just Futures: CINOP Notification Project



# Our Core Services

For the last 19 years, NAAFLS has been providing free and confidential services to help victims of DFSV living in remote communities in the Top End.

We do this through the provision of the following core services:

- Legal Services
- Non-legal Services
- Community Legal Education
- Policy and Advocacy

NAAFLS helps Aboriginal victims of domestic, family and sexual violence with domestic violence orders, family law, child protection and victims of crime compensation applications.

We have legal and non-legal caseworker support teams who work closely together. Effective legal services cannot be delivered in remote Aboriginal communities without our Aboriginal caseworkers providing that support. Our Aboriginal caseworkers ensure our legal team provides assistance that is culturally sensitive, culturally safe, holistic and practical.



**Groote Eylandt courthouse. Our teams visiting remote Aboriginal communities in the Top End to deliver Community Legal Education.**

# Our Work at a Glance By Numbers



## CASES

**629**

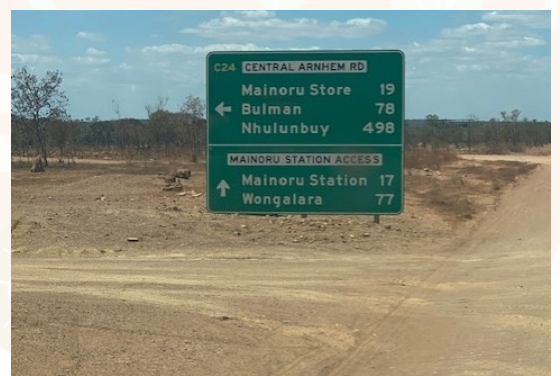
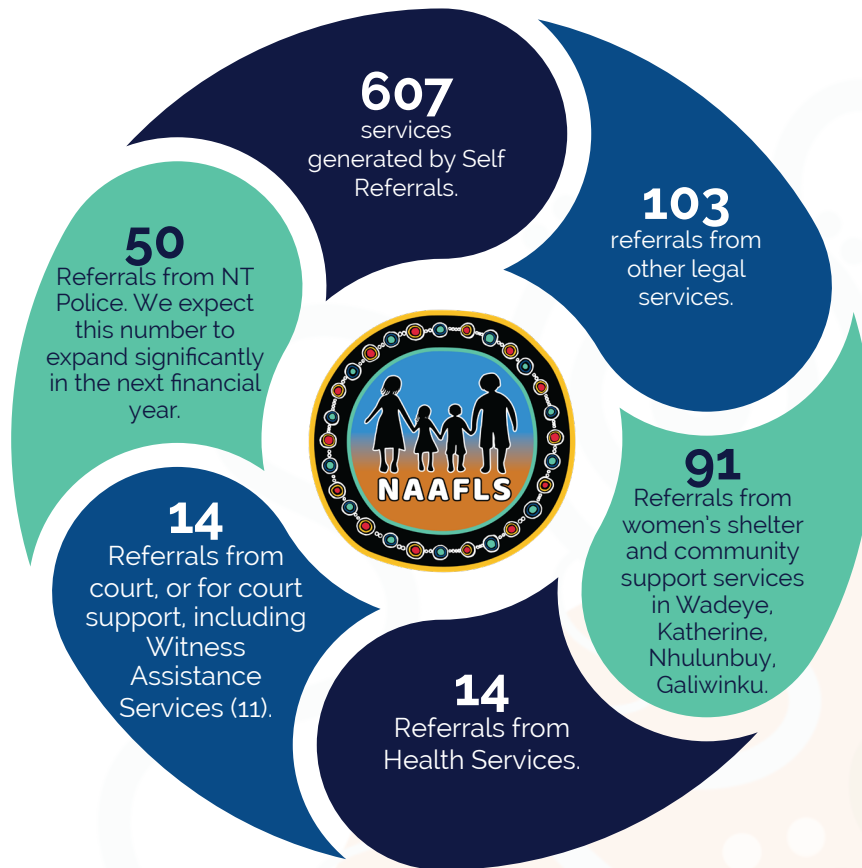
## SERVICES PROVIDED BY OFFICES



## SERVICES PROVIDED



# Main Referral Points to NAAFLS



## Key Events and Activities

This year has been significant for NAAFLS supporting and advocating on behalf of the people and families affected by family, domestic and sexual violence in the Northern Territory. We commend our teams for the support provided to victims that often goes beyond legal representation.

### Northern Territory Coronial Hearing 2023-2024

The Inquests into the deaths of Miss Yunupingu, Ngeygo Ragurk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumanjayi Haywood [2024] NTLC 14.

- NAAFLS represented members of the families of both Ms Yunupingu and Ngeygo Ragurk in the landmark Coronial Inquests into the deaths of four Aboriginal women killed by their domestic partners.
- This Inquest captured national attention and was held over 12 months.
- The support provided by NAAFLS to our families extended beyond legal representation in the courtroom during the Coronial inquest proceedings.
- Our teams provided substantial support to families in the weeks leading up to the Inquest and provided support for families to be present in court.



**JULY 4, 2023: DARWIN, NT.** Family, friends and attendees of the coronial inquest take part in a ceremony for Ngeygo Ragurk at Mindil Beach in Darwin, Northern Territory. Ngeygo was killed by her partner. Many of NAAFLS caseworkers and lawyers attended to support Ngeygo's family. Front: on the left, Principal Legal Officer James Lowrey next to one of Ngeygo's sisters. On the right of the sister is NAAFLS Senior Caseworker Renee Sarmardin (Photo by Pema Tamang Pakhrin / Newspix)



**July 4, 2023 NT Coroner Elisabeth Armitage personally returns missing items belonging to Ngeygo to her family. This was made possible by NAAFLS and NAAJA who facilitated with the families on behalf of the Coroner. (Photo by Pema Tamang Pakhrin/Newspix).**

## Non-Legal Support

NAAFLS, along with NAAJA, also supported the Coroner with making sure that personal items belonging to the victims were returned to their families.

The support from our staff to the families throughout this Inquest was publicly acknowledged by the Coroner in her findings as follows:

*729. The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) and NAAFLS provided enormous assistance in facilitating family members involvement in this process.*

*730. In particular I wish to note that for Miss Yunupinju's family, it was not until they were working with NAAFLS to prepare for this Inquest that they came to know the story of what Mr Nawirridj had done to Ngeygo.*

In the weeks leading up to the Inquest, NAAFLS workers and a Kunwinjku AIS Interpreter travelled to Gunbalanya and sat down with families.

In Gunbalanya, "for the first time, they heard the story Justice Blokland had told about what

Mr Nawirridj did to Ngeygo. None of the family had known the full story and it was very sad for them to hear".

One of the Ngeygo's sisters was present in the criminal court, but the lack of an interpreter meant that she had not understood what happened until the meeting with NAAFLS in Gunbalanya.

Three years following Ngeygo's death, her family invited our staff, the Coroner, Police, media and other interested people to take part in a sacred ceremony on Mindil Beach, the final place where Ngeygo was killed by her partner. This took place before Court that morning.

This allowed Ngeygo's family to visit the place of Ngeygo's sad passing. When they attended, Ngeygo's grandmother called out to her to follow the family on her journey. Her sister and young father did the same.

"I heard that this was important for Ngeygo's spirit to be able to rest in peace. During this ceremony, I returned Ngeygo's belongings to her family members, which I understand will be returned to her country, to allow for her spirit to pass over. I am told that this was an



important ceremony for Ngeygo's family and it was moving for those of us who were present to witness it"

Attribution NT Coroner Elisabeth Armitage. (Source: 736, p.230. Findings of Territory Coroner Elisabeth Armitage of the Northern Territory, 25 November 2024)

This example highlights the support, advocacy and leadership NAAFLS provides in the DFSV jurisdiction in the Top End.

### Legal Submission

On behalf of the families, NAAFLS submitted a final 48-page submission with nine recommendations in the areas of:

- Community and victim safety
- Community Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms for DFSV matters; and
- Community-led responses to DFSV.

We urged the Coroner to adopt key recommendations to improve the safety and protection of domestic family violence victims in remote communities and throughout the NT. To this end, we highlighted the under-resourcing of the NT Victims Registry in serving the safety needs of victims. We made recommendations to the registry including:

- Improvements in the parole decision-making process
- Victims and families to be notified when the person who has harmed them is being released from prison.
- Changing the Victims Registry from an opt-in to an opt-out system.
- Addressing the sentencing requirement in which a victim may not be recorded as such if the perpetrator is in remand or not sentenced.

Secondly, we proposed to the Coroner, on behalf of the Yunupingu and Ragurk families, that the NT Charter of Victims Rights be updated, expanded and embedded as a new Part 5A of the Victims of Crime Rights and Services Act 2006 (NT).

We submitted that the rights in the Charter, if fulfilled, may save the lives of domestic family violence victims, and accordingly should be given legislative primary. The legislation states that the Charter is to 'establish principles about the way in which victims are to be treated in the justice system'.

The Coroner accepted five of our recommendations and these were featured in her findings. The remaining four were acknowledged and/or supported by the Coroner.



# NAAFLS full list of recommendations submitted to Inquest:

## Arming Communities with Information They Need to Keep Victims Safe

1. The NT Victims Register must be updated, expanded and reformulated as an opt-out system of registration; to better enable ACCOs to keep victims and families safe in remote NT communities.
2. The NT Charter of Victims' Right must be updated, expanded and embedded as a new Part 5A of the Victims of Crime Rights and Services Act 2006 (NT).
3. In accordance with the general principle of accountability for government information, the institutions must promptly make available to the public such government information as is reasonably possible about the implementation (or otherwise) of the Coroner's recommendations.
4. The rights of interested persons in section 40(3) of the Coroner's Act 1993 (NT) be added to the NT Charter of Victims Rights, and that the means to exercise this right be included in the information to be given to persons on the NT Victims Register.

## Recognising and Empowering Community Leaders to Resolve Disputes Safely and Appropriately

5. Community-led mediation and peacemaker groups operating in remote NT communities must be recognised, regulated, and funded by the NT Government as Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) service providers.



6. That the Local Court must be empowered to refer Applications for Domestic Violence Orders (DVOs) to ADR service providers if appropriate, safe, and consented to by the victim.
7. That Law and Justice Groups and Community Groups operating in remote NT communities must be empowered and enabled to consider the operative period and terms of DVOs to be confirmed by the Local Court.

## Preventing Future Tragedies In Partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

8. That the NT Police must partner with ACCOs to develop a community-led co-responder model to incidents of domestic and family violence (DFV) in remote NT communities.
9. That the Department of Children and Families (formerly the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities) must partner with ACCOs to develop community-based responses to child welfare notifications including DFV, such as Mikan.

## Senate Hearing Into Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children

After initial delays in 2021, the Senate of the Commonwealth Parliament re-referred an inquiry into missing and murdered women and children to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee on the 4 August 2022.

In April 2024, NAAFLS presented its 2022 written submission at the committee's only public hearing in Darwin. Principal Legal Officer James Lowrey presented alongside Senior Partnership and Advocacy Officer Rachael Hill.

## NAAFLS Submission

In the previous financial year on 12 December 2022, we prepared a 29 page submission to the Senate committee titled: Response to the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children.

We made seven recommendations to the Senate committee as follows:

1. That significant investment be made into consulting and listening to Aboriginal Elders and Aboriginal women in leadership in respect of violence in their communities.
2. That the government undertake a full review of the Northern Territory police force and implement policies and procedures to ensure the consistent, proper and culturally safe response to DFSV in remote communities.
3. That improving financial security across Aboriginal communities would directly reduce the rates of DFSV.
4. That improving housing conditions and availability would directly reduce the rates of DFSV in remote Aboriginal communities.
5. That any response is based on the government adequately funding the Aboriginal Community Controlled and designed responses to DFSV.
6. That the government significantly increase culturally appropriate crisis housing in remote Aboriginal communities for both victim-survivors and perpetrators.
7. Significant investment in behavioural change programs for perpetrators, particularly those designed and delivered by Aboriginal organisations and in remote communities.

We advocated for community-led and community-controlled solutions. Prioritising the recommendations of Aboriginal women in leadership is critical if we want to effectively address DFSV. That the experiences of non-Indigenous women experiencing DFSV cannot be used as a valid point of consultation; the experiences of both groups are significantly different. That there are already Top End leaders in our communities working towards DFSV solutions.

## NT Committee Hearing in Malak Darwin

NAAFLS presented our written submission with the recommendations at the Senate committee hearing in Malak Darwin on Thursday 18 April 2024.

Senior Partnerships and Advocacy Officer Rachael Hill, a proud Larrakia woman, gave the oral presentation together with Principal Legal Officer James Lowrey. NAAFLS advocated for improved funding and resourcing to support safe housing, men's behavioural change services, family dispute resolution and for interpreter services to support the 49 communities in the Top End.

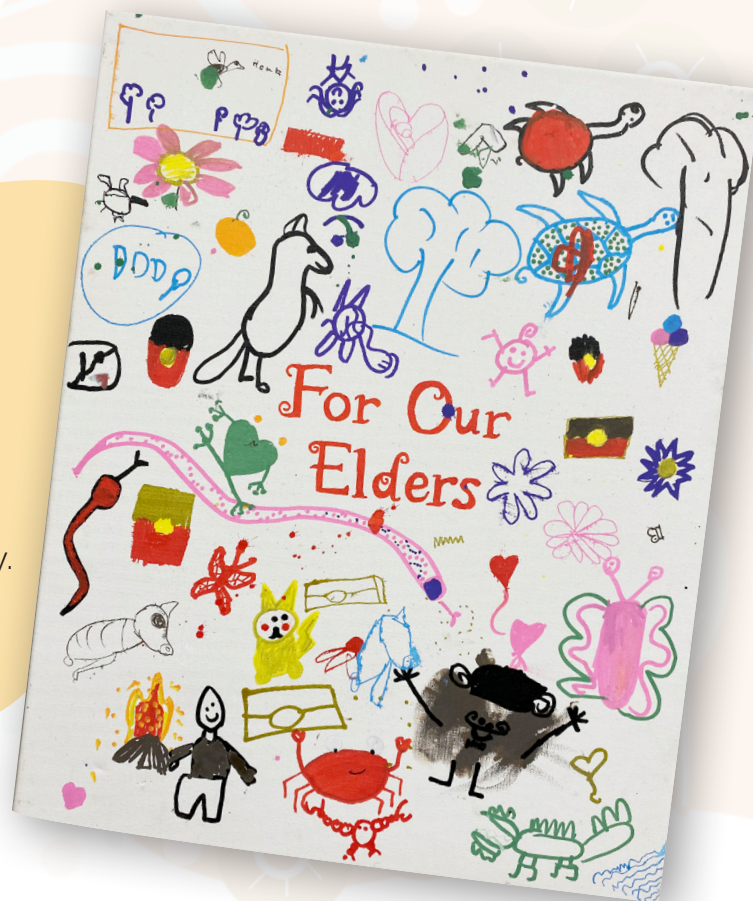
The importance of independent interpreter services cannot be underscored. Our 49 communities comprise no less than 17 different language groups. However, interpreters are often monopolised by the criminal courts. That often creates a conflict for interpreters being

unable to assist NAAFLS's clients. The other issue is understanding the terms of a domestic violence order (DVO). It is well established that unless a fellow language speaker can explain that DVO to men and women in their own language, it is ineffective as a DV prevention or protection instrument. NAAFLS concluded its oral submission stressing the importance of Aboriginal-led and Aboriginal-controlled services so that remote Aboriginal communities are empowered to take ownership for them.

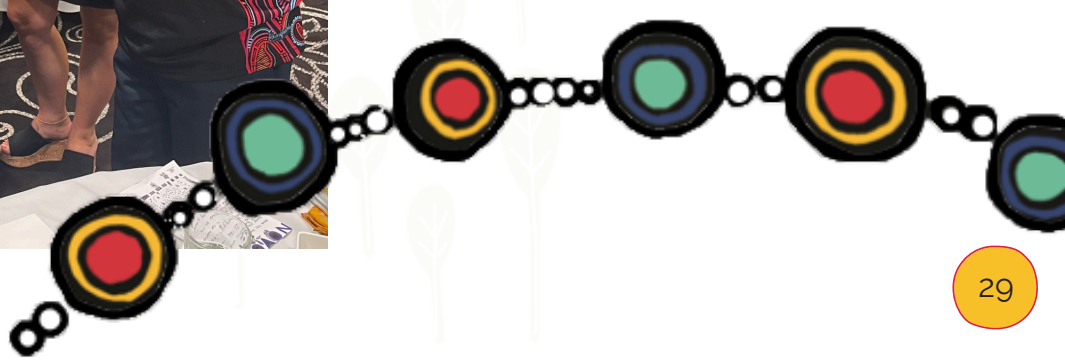
NAAFLS also highlighted that we have worked alongside many people in remote Aboriginal communities whose leadership, wisdom and fortitude have risen to the occasion to serve their communities. A copy of the full transcript of the Senate Committee hearing at Malak can be found on our website at [naafls.com.au](http://naafls.com.au)

### NAIDOC Week 2023

A small team of Aboriginal staff attended NAIDOC March in July.



# Attendance at FVPLS Forum Annual Members Conference



## Child in Need of Protection (CINOP) Project Funding

NAAFLS successfully applied for funding through the Paul Ramsay Foundation to develop the Northern Territory Aboriginal Child Protection Notification and Referral Program (The Program). The Paul Ramsay Foundation granted NAAFLS funding over two years to develop the Program, with in principle support from the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (TFHC) to work with NAAFLS to develop the Program.

The Program will enable the relevant service to receive early notification if a child will/has been removed from their family, leading to a reduction in the number of Aboriginal children coming into contact with the child protection system in the NT.

We have advocated that the child protection and criminal justice systems need to do better for Aboriginal children and families in the Northern Territory. We also know that the importance of front-end support for keeping families together. Our Program is the way forward for an effective child protection system in the NT, said Rachael Hill, NAAFLS Senior Partnership and Advocacy Officer.

## The Importance of the NT Victims Register

While in Wurrumiyanga in August, our paralegal, Simon Wood, and case worker, Katie Young, sat down with Rex Wild AO KC, NT Parole Board Chairman (and former NAAFLS Board Director), to discuss protection protocols for vulnerable victims of family and domestic violence when offenders are released.

Rex explained the Northern Territory's Victims Register process and advocated for Top End legal services to further utilise the initiative, as some 90% of vulnerable victims who could benefit from it the most are not currently registered.

Through the Victims Register, the Crime Victims Services Unit can provide victims of violent and sexual crimes, or other concerned persons, with certain information about the offender(s) and allows victims to make written submissions to the Parole Board in relation to the offender.



NAAFLS paralegal Simon Wood, case worker Katie Young and NT Parole Board Chairman Rex Wild at Wurrumiyanga.

## Funding to Develop Videos with Aboriginal Interpreters Service

In October 2023, the Law Society Public Purposes Trust assisted NAAFLS in our work with the Aboriginal Interpreters Service by developing a range of videos to provide legal education to individuals and groups about the work we do.

## No More Walk Against Domestic and Family Violence

In December 2023 NAAFLS staff joined the sector for the annual No More Walk Against Domestic and Family Violence. Each year over the Christmas period there is a spike in family violence and this year the message was clear: enough is enough!

On 1 December 2023, NAAFLS staff joined Charlie King AM and hundreds of attendees of mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters at Casuarina Square for the NO MORE Walk, part of an international 16-days of activism against gender-based violence.

Domestic violence rates in the Territory are seven times higher than the national average. Since 2000, 83 Territory women, of which 94 percent were Indigenous, have lost their lives at the hands of their partners.



***NAAFLS Solicitor Shefali Atwal standing in solidarity with award-winning anti-family violence campaigner Charlie King, AM, against domestic and family violence at the 2023 NO MORE walk.***



***NAAFLS staff joining the 2023 NO MORE walk against domestic and family violence at Casuarina Square. (Left to Right) NAAFLS Solicitors Shefali Atwal and Jorja Costello, Caseworker Tiffany Philpott and NAAFLS receptionist Christine Whiting.***

## OCHRE RIBBON BREAKFAST

On 16 February 2024, NAAFLS was proud to host the Ochre Ribbon Week Breakfast at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel at the Esplanade in Darwin.

NAAFLS extended thanks and gratitude to all those who attended and took part in the conversation, with a special mention to the Hon Kate Worden, MLA, and Shane Kerinauia, Catholic Care NT Wurrumiyanga, for sharing their impactful personal experiences with domestic and family violence.

NAAFLS Principal Legal Officer Mr James Lowrey addressed the audience, stating,

“NAAFLS mandate is to provide legal and non-legal support to remote Aboriginal Territorians who have suffered domestic and family violence. That includes assistance with Family Law applications, Child Protection applications, Domestic Violence Order applications, and applications for Victims of Crime Compensations”.

OCHRE Ribbon Week is an Indigenous-led campaign held from 12 to 19 February 2024, supported by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and run by our Western Australian sister organisation, Ochre Ribbon Week raises awareness of the impacts of domestic and family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience disproportionately high levels of violence compared to non-Indigenous women, and violence is often more severe in its impact on families: Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander adults are 32 times more likely to be hospitalised from family violence than non-Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 3.4 times more likely to experience sexual assault, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 11 times more likely to die due to assault.

Discrimination, racism and intergenerational trauma are significant drivers of the violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. These drivers are exacerbated by factors including alcohol and substance abuse, mental health, inadequate housing and overcrowding, unemployment and poor access to culturally competent services.

Breaking this cycle of violence requires community-driven, trauma-informed approaches to family violence that prioritise cultural healing, family restoration and the strength of Indigenous families. Solutions must support frontline and prevention services, as well as the structural drivers of violence.

Principal Legal Officer James Lowrey said:

“Our services also include non-legal assistance to work with services on issues such as repatriations away from violence; housing and improving the safety of housing; drug and alcohol counselling and support, or residential rehabilitation to name a few. That includes travelling to 45 remote Territory Communities. For context, the NT Local Court circuits to just 16 communities in that same region.

*In fulfilling this mandate, our lawyers and case workers enjoy the privilege of hearing our clients' personal stories. It is a privilege, because often our lawyers and case workers are often the first people to hear*





*those stories; which are deeply personal. It is a privilege, because they are stories not only of incredible hardship, but also of deep resilience, and in many cases, of resilience based in community.*

*I can think of no better example of this than our next speaker. I met our next speaker last November in Wurrumiyanga on Bathurst Island in the Tiwi's.*

*We had just concluded two weeks of proceedings in the Coroner's Court, examining the casual factors of domestic violence in remote aboriginal communities.*

*To me, our next speaker was one of many names on a list of people to visit.*

*Yet when we met our next speaker at his beautiful home in his Island community, he like most all other victims, was kind, courteous, patient, and respectful. And when he shared his story, he spoke with not only frankness; but determination and resoluteness that a solution to this issue in his community can be found in his community".*

*Mr Kerinauia's story is not a NAAFLS success story. In fact, we've had limited to do with it. Rather, Mr Kerinauia's story is a story about Ochre Ribbon. It is a story about finding practical, community-based solutions to this problem.*

## Appointment of Principal Legal Officer

In early February 2024, NAAFLS announced the appointment of lawyer James Lowrey permanently to the position of Principal Legal Officer (PLO).

Since August 2023, James has been acting PLO during which time he has been involved in a Coronial Inquest, shared his time across all of NAAFLS' offices, and regularly travelled to remote communities to ensure the needs of the clients are being met. James has also been instrumental in working internally within NAAFLS to develop and improve processes and data acquisition and management to ensure NAAFLS' statutory obligations and compliance requirements are being met.

James first joined NAAFLS in early 2023 as Deputy Principal Legal Officer after being drawn to what he describes as the "distinctly unique model of service" in line with his firm belief in NAAFLS' mission and purpose to provide legal assistance alongside case workers in remote communities including when members of remote communities travel to Darwin as well as transient members of remote communities during their time in Darwin.

*"I look forward to continuing to develop the symbiotic relationship between our team of lawyers and case workers as it is integral to our success and key in amplifying the genuine voices of victims across all proceedings and in looking for community-based solutions to domestic and family violence in communities."*  
James Lowrey, NAAFLS Principal Legal Officer



**James Lowrey presenting at the recent NAAFLS Ochre Ribbon Breakfast held in Darwin on 15 February 2024.**

## Appointment of New Chief Executive Officer

NAAFLS new Chief Executive Officer, Cindy Torrens, has hit the ground running since taking up the position in late April 2024.

With a firm focus on policy and workforce development, and ensuring NAAFLS is at the forefront of conversations surrounding issues impacting domestic, family and sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, Cindy is not wasting any time.

Cindy is a Warlmanpa/Wambaya woman with over 30 years of knowledge and experience across the social services, health and criminal justice sectors of the Northern Territory.

Cindy comes to NAAFLS from the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), Indigenous Prisoner Throughcare Programs which specialise in the delivery of transitional support to Aboriginal men, women and young people as they navigate the complexities of the NT Criminal Justice System.

In her new role as CEO for NAAFLS, Cindy brings her strong belief in a holistic approach to strengthening families to promote safety and wellbeing for women and children in remote areas.

*"With much of my life growing up in Tennant Creek and Katherine, I am familiar with the context in which we live and work, and I remain deeply passionate about strengthening families to ensure that Aboriginal children are born healthy and strong, grow up safe and happy, and they are afforded every opportunity to thrive.*

*Furthermore, much work is yet to be done to Close the Gap on inequality for Aboriginal people, but to achieve this, priority must be given to building a sustainable workforce with particular focus on succession management and leadership development of Aboriginal staff to ensure that well into the future, Aboriginal people continue to be supported by Aboriginal people.*

*I am humbled to have been chosen as the Chief Executive Officer of NAAFLS, an organisation that is primed for substantial growth. It is an exciting time to join this amazing team and I look forward to continuing to build on the achievements of those who have come before me."*

**NAAFLS new CEO  
Cindy Torrens**





# Directors' Audited Financial Statements Report 30 June 2024

North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation

## Directors' Report 30 June 2024

The directors present their report on North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation for the financial year ended 30 June 2024.

### 1. General information

#### Information on directors

The names, qualifications, experience and special responsibilities of each person who has been a director during the year and to the date of this report are:

Mark Munnich	Chairperson for full year
Peter Thomsen	Deputy Chair for full year
Ada Parry	Director for full year
Sue Wainwright	Director, resigned 19 January 2024
Therese Puruntatameri	Director for full year
Debby Mauger	Director for full year

Directors have been in office since the start of the financial year to the date of this report unless otherwise stated.

#### Principal activities

The principal activity of North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation during the financial year were to:

- provide holistic support to families that are victims of family violence,
- provide legal assistance in family matters to women, men and children in specified communities,
- reduce the incidence of violence and abuse in communities through community legal education, early intervention and prevention and advocacy,
- increase the recognition of the problem of violence and abuse in communities through community education,
- to operate and maintain a gift fund to be known as "The North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service - Aboriginal Corporation Gift Fund" in accordance with the requirements of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*.

No significant changes in the nature of the Corporation's activity occurred during the financial year.

### 2. Operating results and review of operations for the year

#### Operating results

The surplus of the Corporation amounted to \$ 683,318 (2023: \$ 473,736).

### 3. Other items

#### Significant changes in state of affairs

There have been no significant changes in the state of affairs of the Corporation during the year.





# Auditor's Independence Declaration



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Email: [admin@tdhnt.com.au](mailto:admin@tdhnt.com.au)

212/12 Salonika St  
Parap NT 0820

GPO Box 4587  
Darwin NT 0801

## Auditor's Independence Declaration under Section 339-50 of the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006 To the Directors of North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation

I declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, during the year ended 30 June 2024, there have been:

- (i) no contraventions of the auditor independence requirements as set out in the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* in relation to the audit; and
- (ii) no contraventions of any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.

Adam Dohnt (FCA)  
*Registered Company Auditor*  
Darwin  
Dated: 30 September 2024

# Statement of Profit and Loss

North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation

## Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income For the Year Ended 30 June 2024

		2024	2023
	Note	\$	\$
Grant income	4	4,949,095	4,284,061
Interest income	5	33,978	15,627
Other income		26,138	11,649
Employee benefits expense		(2,905,166)	(2,457,630)
Depreciation and amortisation expense		(272,605)	(369,407)
Consultancy fees		(16,165)	(102,100)
Travel		(412,507)	(338,489)
Other expenses		(703,136)	(563,945)
Finance expenses	5	(16,314)	(6,030)
<b>Surplus for the year</b>		<b>683,318</b>	<b>473,736</b>
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>		<b>683,318</b>	<b>473,736</b>



# Statement of Financial Position

North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation

## Statement of Financial Position

As At 30 June 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>ASSETS</b>			
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	6	2,135,602	1,789,276
Trade and other receivables	7	68,350	6,871
Other assets	8	159,920	76,924
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		<u>2,363,872</u>	<u>1,873,071</u>
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Property, plant and equipment	9	400,982	335,408
Right-of-use assets	10	302,013	138,013
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		<u>702,995</u>	<u>473,421</u>
TOTAL ASSETS		<u><u>3,066,867</u></u>	<u><u>2,346,492</u></u>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>			
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade and other payables	11	147,597	177,602
Borrowings	12	-	2,994
Lease liabilities	10	123,128	136,514
Employee benefits	13	207,780	70,738
Grants received in advance	14	-	196,375
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>478,505</u>	<u>584,223</u>
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Lease liabilities	10	191,610	2,884
Employee benefits	13	-	45,951
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>191,610</u>	<u>48,835</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES		<u>670,115</u>	<u>633,058</u>
NET ASSETS		<u><u>2,396,752</u></u>	<u><u>1,713,434</u></u>
<b>EQUITY</b>			
Retained earnings		<u>2,396,752</u>	<u>1,713,434</u>
TOTAL EQUITY		<u><u>2,396,752</u></u>	<u><u>1,713,434</u></u>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.





