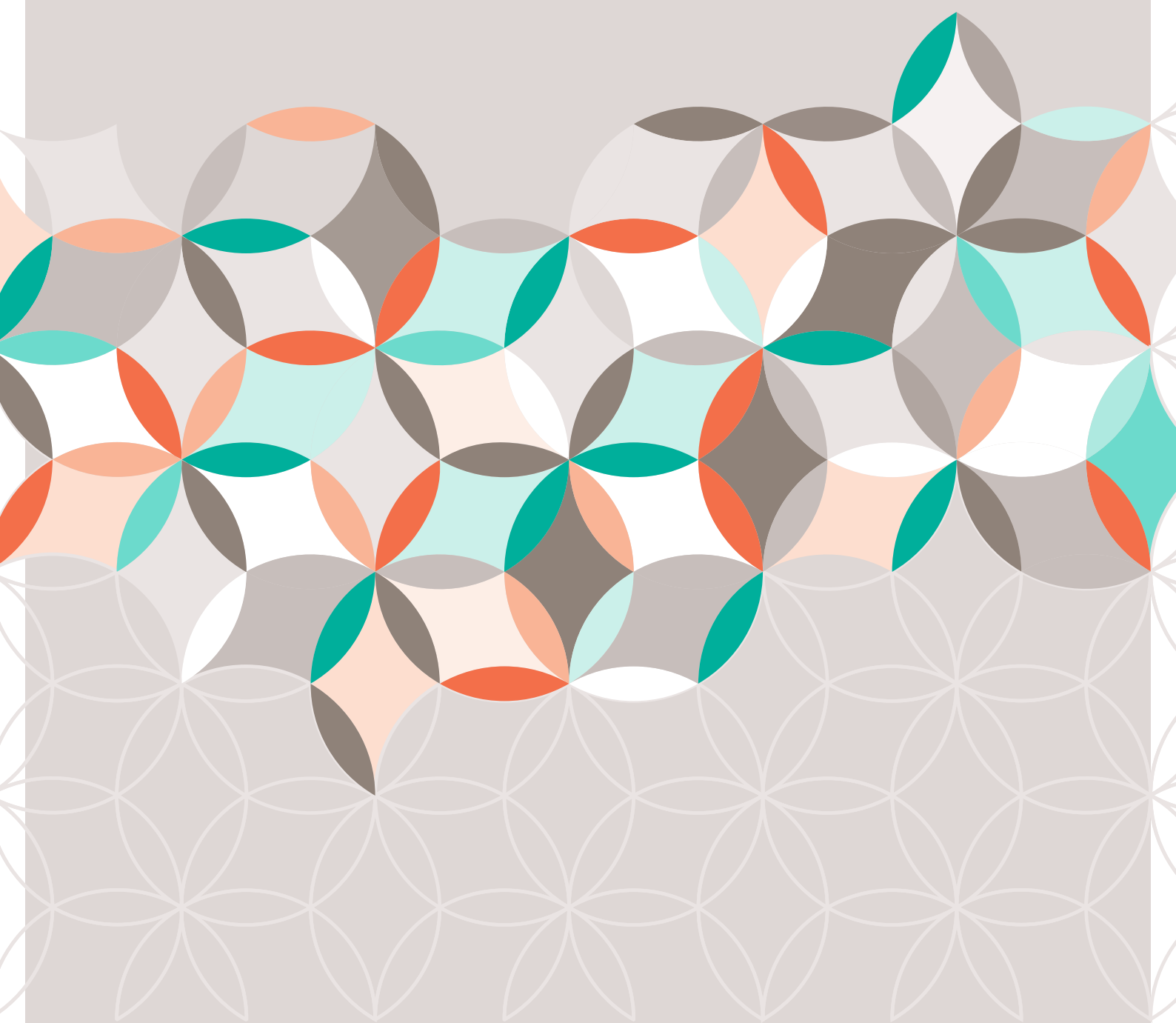
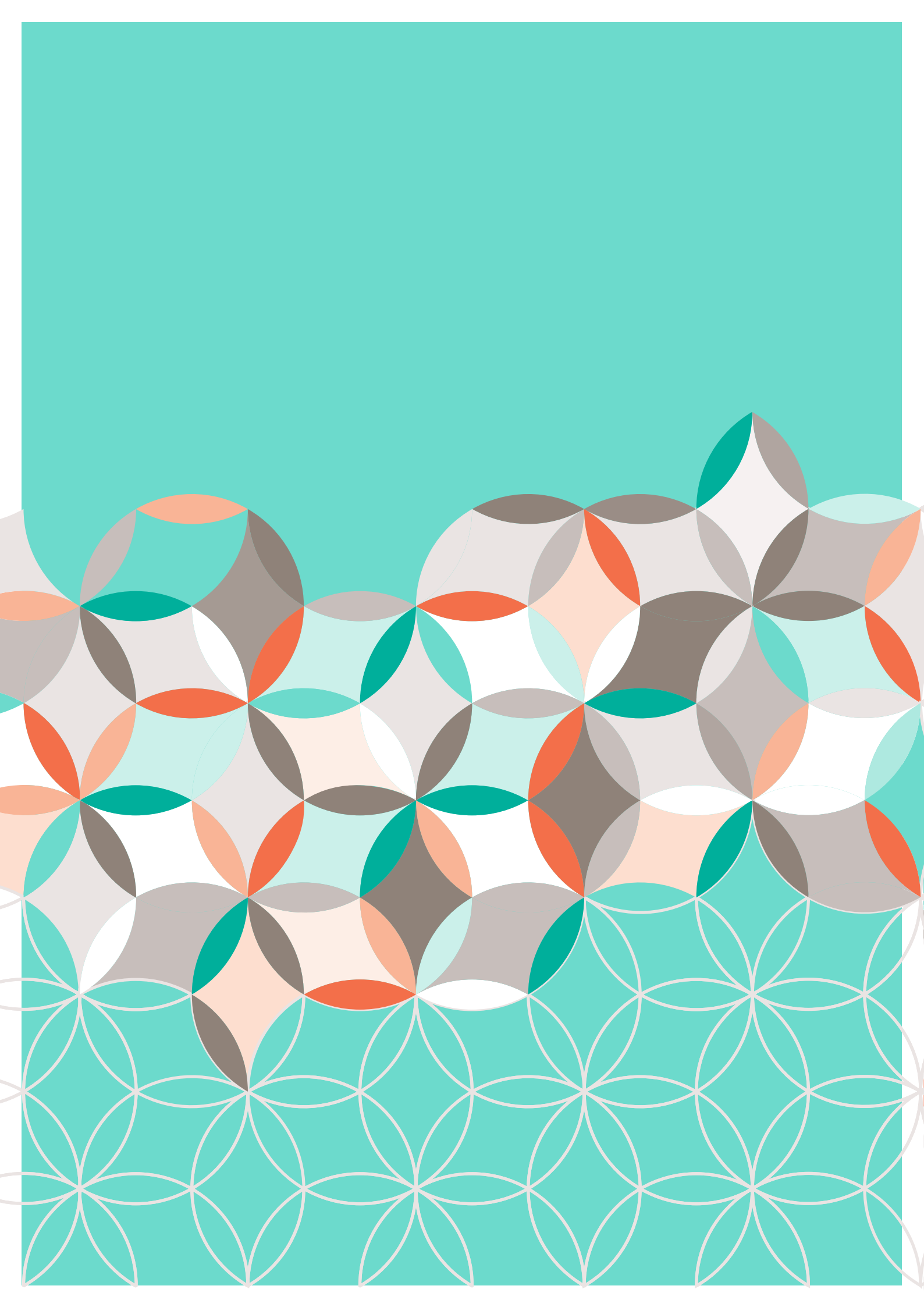


annual  
report  
2013.2014





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## vision

Justice, safety, empowerment  
for women and their children

## mission

Women's Legal Service Victoria (WLSV) works to improve access to justice and outcomes for women who have experienced relationship breakdown or violence. We do this by:

- providing quality legal services that are responsive to women's needs and to the needs of their children
- providing women, and people who work with women, with knowledge and skills to better navigate the legal system
- advocating for law and policy reform.

## values

- Progressive • Respectful • Collaborative
- Inclusive • Empowering

## funding

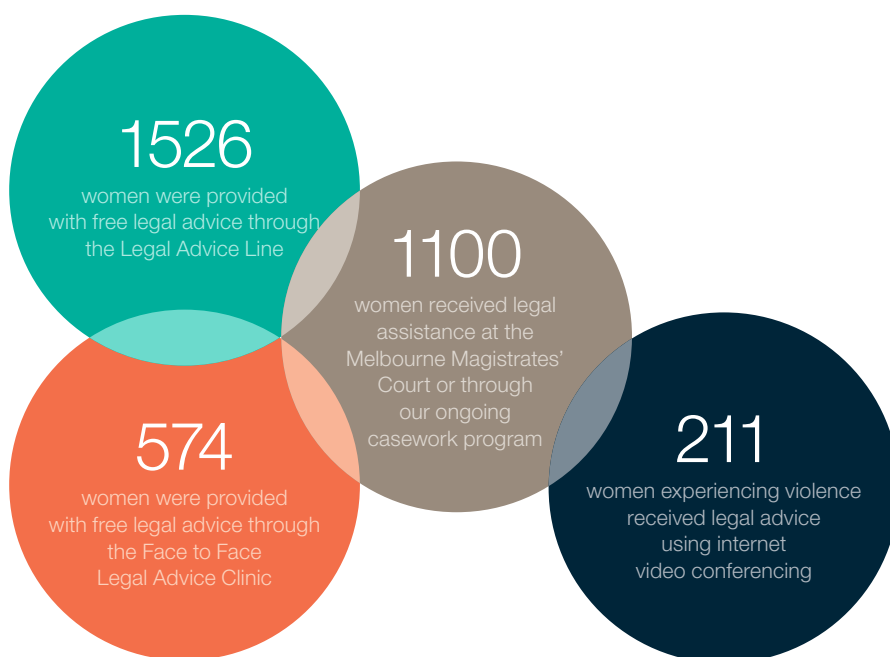
WLSV is funded to provide the core client services described on pages 4 and 5 by:

- The Indigenous Justice and Legal Assistance Division, Attorney General's Department, Canberra - **\$1,014,193**
  - Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) - **\$286,971**

In this financial year, WLSV also received the following funding:

- **\$52,121** from the Legal Services Board to support our Stepping Stones economic wellbeing program (see p17)
- **\$25,000** from the Legal Services Board and **\$29,167** from VLA to support our Link virtual outreach program (see p18)
- **\$100,000** from VLA to support our Safer Families professional development program (see p20)

## our services



### Legal Advice Line

Phone 03 8622 0600 (1800 133 302  
free call for country callers)

Monday	10:00am – 1:00pm
Tuesday	6:30pm – 8:30pm
Wednesday	2:00pm – 5:00pm
Thursday	6:30pm – 8:30pm

The Legal Advice Line is for women in Victoria who need legal advice, information or referral – irrespective of income or assets. Interpreter services are available.

Women should telephone the Legal Advice Line before attending WLSV's Face to Face Legal Advice Clinic as WLSV lawyers may be able to provide the appropriate legal information, advice or referral over the telephone.

### Face to Face Legal Advice Clinic

Level 10, 277 William Street  
Melbourne Vic 3000

Phone 03 8622 0600

Every Thursday 9:30am – 12:00pm

### Advice and Representation at Melbourne Magistrates' Court (duty lawyer service)

Level 6, 233 William Street  
Melbourne Vic 3000  
(cnr Lonsdale Street)

Phone 03 8622 0600

Monday to Friday 9.30am – 1.00pm



VIRTUAL  
OUTREACH  
PROGRAM

### LINK Virtual Outreach Program

By appointment only through  
our 15 partner agencies

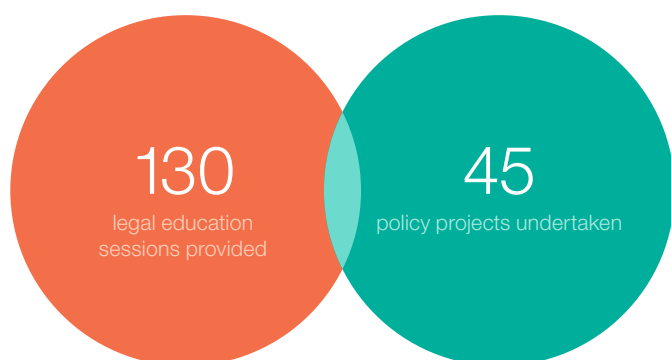
Every Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday

Legal advice for clients of partner organisations and secondary consultation for their workers.

### Casework Services

WLSV also provides ongoing casework assistance, focusing on issues arising from relationship breakdown and violence against women, including family law, de facto relationships, family violence, personal safety intervention orders and victims of crime assistance.

WLSV focuses on areas of law where women are, or could potentially be, disadvantaged and where women's access to justice and legal support is limited.



### Legal education

WLSV's team of educators is highly skilled at developing and delivering education, training and professional development, tailored to the needs of particular audiences. Our educators understand the law and its practical application, and use their experience as qualified lawyers and educators to inform all our training.

We provide training to a diverse range of audiences, including survivors of domestic violence, police, psychologists, lawyers, family violence and sexual assault workers, judicial officers and court staff. This broad range of training participants reflects the valuable position WLSV occupies across the legal and community sectors.

### Policy

As experts in the areas of family law and family violence law, WLSV is well positioned to provide advice to government and external stakeholders on the systemic issues in law and practice that adversely impact on women experiencing violence and relationship breakdown.

WLSV influences change by working closely with government and other stakeholders to improve the legal system, so that it is more responsive and provides better outcomes for women.

WLSV's policy work is underpinned by the direct experience of our clients and the 'on the ground' perspective of legal practice.

# chairperson and chief executive officer's report

## Family violence epidemic continues

Women's Legal Service Victoria (WLSV) is confronted on a daily basis by the epidemic of family violence in our community. Every year over 360,000 Australian women are subjected to violence. In Victoria alone, police callouts for domestic abuse have increased by 40 per cent in just two years.

The first three months of 2014 saw extraordinary media coverage of the often-hidden consequences of family violence across Victoria. The deaths of mother-of-four, Fiona Warzywoda (33), sisters Savannah (4) and Indianna (3), and 11-year-old Luke Batty shocked us all. They also drove home the awful truth that women and children are at greatest risk after separation, with all of these deaths occurring in the context of relationships that had broken down. We believe much of this tragedy could be avoided with a more effective legal response.

While there have been significant improvements over the last 10 years to the way police and courts respond to family violence, we still have a response marked by inconsistency and inadequate coordination. Women and children continue to fall through the gaps created by these failings in the system. If we are to avoid future tragedies, there is a pressing need for greater integration across the legal response as well as improved coordination and communication with the human services sector and with universal services such as hospitals and schools.

Specialist and timely legal advice and assistance for women experiencing family violence is an essential part of an effective legal response. Over the past year WLSV assisted over 3000 clients, 70% of whom have been victims of family violence. We have particular expertise working at the intersection of relationship breakdown and violence. WLSV helps women protect themselves from violence by providing free, simple and safe access to legal advice. We also support women in their recovery from violence by ensuring they have safe arrangements in place about the violent partner's contact with the children.

We do all of this in a way that is incredibly cost effective. Our on-the-spot legal help is provided at a cost of only \$60 per client and we provide ongoing representation for women facing significant barriers to accessing justice for only \$1055 per client. And we know that government investment in community legal centres like WLSV returns \$18 of value to the community for each \$1 expended.

See p9 for a visual explanation of the individual, social and economic costs of violence against women and their children and the work of WLSV in response.

## Our key achievements

Our Strategic Direction 2013-2016 (see p8) continues to guide the growth and development of services for the benefit of our clients and the community.

Key achievements this year include:

- Extending the reach of our innovative Link virtual outreach program to women in a further three regional areas: Barwon, Gippsland and Murray Mallee. Link now reaches clients of 15 partner agencies around the state (see p18)
- Building the capacity of our colleagues across the community legal sector to provide consistently high quality services to clients in the areas of family violence and family law by rolling out our Safer Families professional development program (see p20)
- Ensuring that our most intensive client services are focussed on women who face significant barriers to accessing justice and on matters where we can have the most impact, by overhauling our casework guidelines (see p15)
- Increasing our client service provision. We were able to assist 220 more clients this year than last (a 7% increase) and provided casework assistance on 240 more occasions (a 25% increase) see p28.



### A new year and a new space

We completed our long-awaited relocation to new premises in June 2014. Together with our related organisation, Family Law Legal Service, with which we are co-located, WLSV has doubled in size over the last eight years. This made a move to larger office space essential, so we can achieve our long range strategic objectives and even to ensure we can continue to effectively deliver our full range of current services. With a purpose-built fit-out, including four client interview rooms, double the space of our previous office and a central location in the courts district, the move has made a significant difference to both clients and staff.

### Thank you

The transition period into our new office was quite a challenge as it became necessary to move into temporary office space for three months. Our long-term partners really came to the fore to support us during this time. Particular thanks go to Victoria Legal Aid, Consumer Action Law Centre, the Federation of Community Legal Centres and Melbourne Family Relationship Centre. The assistance of these organisations ensured that we were able to continue all of our services during the transition, with over 750 Victorian women experiencing disadvantage benefiting from WLSV's services continuing uninterrupted. We would also like to acknowledge and thank our staff and volunteers, whose patience, flexibility and commitment to WLSV were particularly important during this time.

WLSV benefits from a committed and accomplished volunteer Board, which has worked particularly hard over the last two years in the context of the planned relocation. This required real vision about the organisation's long term needs and an even stronger focus on sound financial management.

We farewelled five long standing Board members at the 2013 Annual General Meeting (AGM): Leanne Miller, Tali Bernard, Libby Maynard and Dorothy Gibbs. WLSV benefited greatly from the mix of skills and industry experience of these Board members and we thank them for their contribution. The Board has continued its process of succession and renewal during 2013/14 and we are looking forward to welcoming new Board members at our upcoming AGM.

The Commonwealth Attorney General's Department (AGD) and Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) are our major funders. Their financial support is essential to the services we provide but we would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the commitment and non-financial support of the staff at AGD and VLA with whom we work directly to improve access to justice.

For a full list of contributors to WLSV please see p23–27.

### Your feedback

You will find more information about our work this year and about the year ahead in the pages that follow. We would appreciate any feedback from you about our past performance and plans for the future, and look forward to continuing to improve the way in which we serve the legal needs of women across Victoria.

Anne Lyon  
*Chair, Board WLSV*

Joanna Fletcher  
*Chief Executive Officer*



## strategic direction

### Effecting change

We actively contribute to the development of law and policy by

- challenging the law where it impacts unfairly on women
- informing and advancing policy initiatives that respect and promote the rights of women.

### Preventing violence

We build the community's capacity to reduce and prevent violence against women by

- delivering training programs that increase community understanding of legal rights and responsibilities
- sharing our expertise with other professionals regarding effective responses to violence against women and their children.

### Improving access

We provide a comprehensive legal service to women affected by relationship breakdown and violence. This includes

- providing legal information, advice and representation
- assisting women and the people who support them to better navigate the legal system
- building strong partnerships with other service providers, so that wherever women seek support, they can access our legal help.

### Responding to legal need

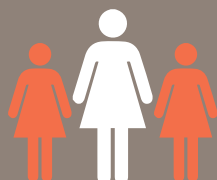
We ensure our services respond to the legal needs of women and their children by

- evaluating our service delivery and targeting programs to address priority legal issues
- strengthening our networks and diversifying our support base to better meet legal demand.

at what cost?

## Violence against women and their children

### THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

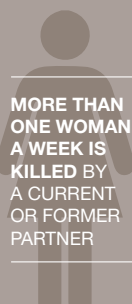


ONE IN THREE  
WOMEN HAS BEEN  
PHYSICALLY ABUSED

EVERY YEAR OVER  
**360,000**

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN  
ARE SUBJECTED  
TO VIOLENCE

MON  
TUES  
WED  
THUR  
FRI  
SAT  
SUN



MORE THAN  
ONE WOMAN  
A WEEK IS  
KILLED BY  
A CURRENT  
OR FORMER  
PARTNER

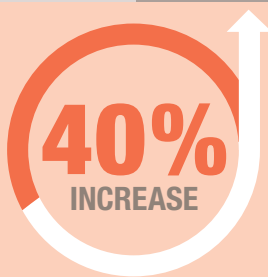
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
AND SEXUAL  
ASSAULT AGAINST  
WOMEN COSTS AUSTRALIA

**\$13.6**  
**BILLION**  
EACH YEAR

### IN VICTORIA

OVER  
**60,000**

FAMILY VIOLENCE INCIDENTS  
WERE REPORTED TO POLICE IN  
THE LAST 12 MONTHS



IN POLICE CALLOUTS FOR DOMESTIC  
ABUSE IN JUST TWO YEARS

FAMILY RELATED  
HOMICIDE ARRESTS  
JUMPED FROM

**13** **45**

2011-12

2012-13

### WHAT WE DO

WLSV ASSISTS NEARLY  
**3000**  
CLIENTS EVERY YEAR

WE WORK AT THE INTERSECTION  
OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AND  
RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN  
– THE POINT WHERE WOMEN  
AND CHILDREN ARE AT  
MOST SIGNIFICANT RISK



AT LEAST

**70%**

OF WLSV'S CLIENTS HAVE BEEN  
VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

### VALUE FOR MONEY

WE PROVIDE  
ON-THE-SPOT LEGAL HELP  
TO WOMEN AT A COST  
TO GOVERNMENT OF

ONLY  
**\$60**  
PER CLIENT

WE PROVIDE ONGOING  
REPRESENTATION FOR  
WOMEN AT A COST TO  
GOVERNMENT OF



ONLY  
**\$1055**  
PER CLIENT

FOR EVERY WOMAN WHOSE  
EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE  
CAN BE PREVENTED



**\$20,766**  
CAN BE SAVED

**\$1** = **\$18**  
INVESTED SAVED

COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES  
LIKE WLSV RETURN  
\$18 OF VALUE FOR EACH \$1  
GOVERNMENT INVESTS

## ally's story

### Two young children are reunited with their mother through a court ordered parenting arrangement

#### Issues

Ally was only 14 when she commenced a relationship with Sam, 13 years her senior. She was still a teenager when she moved in with him. Sam was well liked in the community but was violent and controlling at home.

Ally and Sam had two children, a boy age 5 and a girl age 3. When Ally fled the family home, unable to cope with Sam's persistent family violence, she left without the children, assuming she could pick them up in a day or two.

However, Sam prevented Ally from seeing the children at all for nearly 12 months. Ally had moved away from her home town to escape Sam's anger and reprisals. She would travel for hours to see the children only to have Sam change his mind and keep them from her.

Ally came to WLSV desperate for legal assistance because Sam had told her that she would "never see the kids again". Ally was not eligible for legal representation from Victoria Legal Aid and was unable to pay for a private lawyer.

#### Resolution

WLSV issued court proceedings late in 2012 seeking orders that the children live with Ally. At interim hearings in February and August 2013 Ally obtained orders which allowed her to spend increasing amounts of time with the children, but they still remained living with their father. Ally had to stretch her limited resources to relocate again to be close to her children. Reports were obtained through a court appointed family consultant confirming that, while Sam was providing for the children's broad needs, he was unable to foster a positive relationship between the children and their mother.

Finally, in the last weeks before the final court hearing, we managed to work out an agreement (with the assistance of a family lawyer acting for the father) for the children to live in a shared care arrangement, spending eight nights per fortnight with Ally and the other six nights with Sam. While Ally would have loved both children to live with her full time, she recognised that they have a good relationship with their father as well as with her and she is committed to making the shared care arrangement work. Ally now has the protection of court orders setting out the parenting arrangements and is no longer under Sam's control.

# preventing violence

WLSV plays a significant role in reducing and preventing violence against women in Victoria and across Australia. We intervene before violence occurs ('primary prevention') by advocating for law and policy changes that discourage violence and by undertaking community development work. We also intervene early in a woman's experience of violence to help prevent further violence occurring ('early intervention') by ensuring women have access to timely legal advice and that other professionals understand how the law can be used to avert further harm.

## Primary prevention

Our continued and increased work through the media in educating the community has contributed to a groundswell of support for zero tolerance of family violence. For more information on our media work see p12.

After delivering a successful program last year, we were thrilled to again be invited by Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre to provide the *Healthy Relationships in a New Culture* training program to the Sudanese community. We had the great privilege of engaging directly with leaders from the Sudanese community to discuss and explore gender equality, relationship issues and prevention of family violence. It was a truly mutual learning experience.

WLSV also contributed the Victorian content for a national website of legal resources for young women: Girls Gotta Know. The site, created by Women's Legal Service Tasmania, includes discussion of respectful relationships, right through to understanding of legal rights and responsibilities in the context of violence and relationship breakdown.

## Early intervention

WLSV's education programs provide professionals with the skill and knowledge to identify legal issues early and to support women to access legal advice.

Our team of educators trained:

- Women's Information & Referral Exchange (WIRE) telephone staff on recognising legal issues when callers do not identify they have a legal problem
- Seniors Rights pro bono lawyers about the law and elder abuse, particularly addressing situations where an older person might be reluctant to identify that they are in a violent relationship

We also presented at:

- The Australasian Women and Policing Conference on assisting traumatised people in the legal system
- Supporting Clients with Legal Problems Forum for community workers whose clients have drug, alcohol, mental health, homelessness and family violence issues.

## The year ahead

In 2014/15, we will be investigating how we can best contribute to the primary prevention of violence against women using a community development framework.

# effecting change

## Promoting the rights of women and children to live free from violence

A series of devastating deaths in Victoria caused by family violence has prompted much public discussion about how to improve family violence systems and responses.

## Changing our community's understanding of family violence

Through radio, print and social media WLSV has contributed to this public discussion, offering insights into our clients' experiences and sharing our solutions for how to improve the system to prevent more tragic deaths. Over the last twelve months we have raised our media profile, contributing to the public debate on a range of issues that impact the women we assist. Our media work included:

- Appearing on ABC Radio National's Law Report to discuss the experience of family violence victims being directly cross-examined in family law trials
- Writing an article published in New Matilda at the time of Luke Batty's death, discussing the links between gender inequality, men's violence against women and the systemic barriers for women and their children in achieving safety
- Contributing to an SBS documentary focussing on family violence, Indian women and the issues of dowry and family law.

## Sharing our expertise with law and policy makers

Addressing violence against women is a priority for the federal and state governments. The issue receives bipartisan support and now, more than ever, we are seeing public policy that is informed by the experiences of women who are victims of family violence. Working at the coal face on this issue means WLSV is uniquely placed to provide expertise in the development of public policy, with a particular focus on the legal issues and barriers in the justice system that impact on women.

## Making the elimination of violence against women a national priority

In 2013/14, we were invited to participate in consultations to develop priority areas for Australia's National Research Organisation

for Women's Safety (ANROWS) leading to a broad and comprehensive list of priorities.

## Protecting the privacy of victims fleeing violence

WLSV was invited to address the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters about a gap in the law not previously identified. The gap resulted in victims who are fleeing violent relationships not being able to protect their privacy, as their address continues to be displayed on the electoral role. The overwhelmingly positive response from Senators and MPs on the Committee reflects the growing commitment across Australia to protecting victims of violence.

## Improving access to justice in the family court

In May 2014, we were invited to participate in the Productivity Commission's public inquiry into access to justice arrangements. This was in response to our comprehensive submissions identifying a range of steps to streamline and improve access to the Family Court and Federal Circuit Court in family law cases. Our experience with women who experience disadvantage provided the Productivity Commission with a better understanding of the barriers within the family law system for disadvantaged women.

## The year ahead

In 2014/2015 WLSV will be:

- Shining a spotlight on economic abuse of women through our Stepping Stones project (see p17 for more information). Building on our initial work this year, the project report (to be launched in 2015) will identify strategies to assist the financial and legal sectors to better support women's economic recovery from family violence and relationship breakdown.
- Creating innovative responses, in collaboration with other non-government organisations and academics, to overcome the challenges for our clients in the family violence and family law systems.



Thank you for your  
assistance over the  
last couple of years.  
I have appreciated  
your help and support  
beyond words.

*WLSV client*



## improving access

We continue to build new partnerships with key agencies and communities to help improve women's access to legal services across Victoria.

### Link Program

We have extended our reach and increased our impact as a statewide service through our Link virtual outreach program. Link relies on partnerships with other community based agencies around Victoria and uses technology to provide legal advice. See p18 for more information.

### Safer Families Program

WLSV's Safer Families program provides training, mentoring and ongoing support for community legal centre lawyers who undertake family violence and family law work, with a view to ensuring consistent high quality services for clients. See p20 for more information.

### FMC Mediation and Counselling

WLSV has established a new relationship with FMC Mediation and Counselling Victoria (FMC). FMC provides services for people in conflict, including family dispute resolution, with multiple locations across the state. We are working with FMC to develop a model for legally assisted family dispute resolution, particularly with families impacted by family violence.

As part of this work, we have provided training to FMC's family dispute resolution practitioners and created a digital legal information session on parenting matters for FMC clients.

### Court Network

WLSV has also developed and delivered training to support a new initiative by Court Network to provide enhanced support to unrepresented litigants with final hearings in the family law courts.

This builds on a long history of working alongside Court Networkers who provide a point of contact and support, particularly for those attending court without a lawyer.

### Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

We have taken some small steps towards improving the accessibility of our service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) women. Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) staff welcomed us to their office and talked us through some of the biggest hurdles their clients face in accessing justice. Following this meeting we established a 'warm referrals' process for women being referred by VALS. This enables VALS staff to by-pass our normal intake processes and connect directly and quickly with a WLSV lawyer.

Our lawyers then assess whether we can assist and, if we can, prioritise making an appointment for the client. While a lot more work is required to make WLSV truly accessible for ATSI women, we are fortunate to have the guidance of VALS staff as we work on this critical issue.

### The year ahead

In 2014/15 WLSV will be:

- Working with the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC), Fitzroy Legal Service and Victoria Legal Aid to ensure that all people involved in intervention order matters at the NJC can get legal advice and assistance.
- Working with Women with Disabilities Victoria to deliver its *Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program* to enable organisations which work with women with disabilities to provide gender equitable and sensitive services.
- Developing its relationship with FMC to include ongoing training for family dispute resolution practitioners and delivery of parts of FMC's public-offering training packages. WLSV's related and co-located service, Family Law Legal Service will also be providing legal advice and legally assisted family dispute resolution for FMC clients.



# responding to legal need

## Family violence

The impact of family violence remains a dominating factor in our courts.

Changes to the Magistrates' Court of Victoria boundaries in November 2013 saw the Melbourne Magistrates' Court (MMC) catchment expand to take in considerable areas serviced previously by courts at Sunshine, Heidelberg and Ringwood.

The corresponding increase in demand for our daily duty lawyer service at MMC has been a significant challenge. We have responded to this through increased time at court and the assistance of pro bono partners, Mills Oakley Lawyers, providing advice and representation to women in family violence matters.

WLSV continues to work collaboratively with all stakeholders at MMC to bring about early resolution of family violence matters and improve the safety of women and children.

## New casework guidelines

Demand for representation in ongoing matters, particularly family law disputes, remains high.

This year WLSV introduced new casework guidelines designed to give effect to our organisational goals by:

- Targeting clients who experience the greatest barriers to access to justice
- Focussing on casework which has significant impact in individual cases and has the potential to have impact beyond the individual.

We continue to undertake cases in our areas of expertise, those resulting from violence against women and their children and relationship breakdown. However, by looking at the barriers faced by the women – language, literacy, mental health, and the daily impact of family violence on their lives – we find our lawyers consistently assisting those in the lowest income brackets and least able to navigate the legal system by themselves.

## Measuring outcomes

WLSV continues to play a leading role in the community legal sector in promoting outcomes based measurement.

Our 'theory of change' articulates how we believe our work contributes to

positive outcomes for individuals, at the level of the legal system and for society.

The initial stages of our monitoring targeted the effectiveness of our new casework guidelines and demonstrated that we have been able to take on more clients experiencing significant barriers to access to justice than previously and more cases where WLSV could make a significant impact. We also found that the new guidelines have led to a reduced 'turn away' rate – that is, it is now rare for us to have to turn away a woman who is eligible for casework assistance, due to our resource limitations.

## Prioritising legal need

WLSV has a long history of directing its services towards those in greatest need of legal assistance: women experiencing violence (one in three women) or relationship breakdown (over a third of relationships end in separation).

However the demand for our services far outstrips our capacity. So we need to develop more sophisticated ways of ensuring we reach the women who most need our help.

We are therefore pleased to have completed our first formal legal needs assessment which identifies geographic hotspots as well as issues facing client groups with particular barriers to accessing our service.

The legal needs assessment, which will be reviewed at least bi-annually, will be a vital part of our planning into the future and will help us make decisions about where and how we provide services. We can already say with confidence that a lot of the 'how' will be about partnerships with other service providers. The capacity of organisations in other sectors to reach women who may not find a legal organisation on their own and the power of inter-disciplinary approaches to complex social issues cannot be overstated.

## The year ahead

In 2014/15 we will be reviewing our service delivery model to ensure it is reaching and meeting the needs of women facing the most significant barriers to accessing justice and that it is achieving sustainable outcomes for women and their children.

## sabina's story

A mother is assisted to protect herself and her teenage son from a violent and controlling ex-partner.

### Issues

Sabina lived with Carl for five years, during which time Alex was born. Carl's violence and abuse towards Sabina escalated over the time they lived together. When the violence was witnessed by Alex, Sabina finally left the relationship to protect them both.

A series of intervention orders were obtained by the police on Sabina's behalf as Carl continued his threatening and abusive behaviour after they separated.

Despite her fears about Carl's behaviour, Sabina did facilitate Alex and Carl spending time together. This was interrupted at times for reasons such as Carl's incarceration for a number of criminal offences.

Twice in two years Sabina had to obtain a recovery order from the family courts when Carl took Alex and refused to return him. Carl was then only allowed to spend time with Alex at a supervised contact centre and Sabina was ordered to have sole parental responsibility for Alex.

Carl's criminal behaviour persisted and he was eventually charged with a serious criminal offence and sentenced to over 20 years in prison.

By this time Alex was an adolescent and was badly affected by the knowledge of Carl's crime.

Carl commenced Family Court proceedings seeking time with Alex to take place at the prison. Sabina needed to protect her traumatised child.

### Resolution

Initially, Sabina was assisted by Victoria Legal Aid (VLA). However the VLA guidelines did not permit them to continue to represent her at trial. This would have left Sabina to navigate the complexities of court proceedings by herself, including having to cross-examine Carl. As Carl was not going to be legally represented at the trial, it also left her at risk of being cross examined by the perpetrator of violence against her.

WLSV was able to take on Sabina's case, complete the necessary trial preparation and ensure Sabina was represented at trial, with an experienced barrister assisting her pro bono.

With representation Sabina was able to successfully defend Carl's application without the need for her to be cross examined by him. The court ordered no contact between Alex and Carl. She was able to secure further protection for Alex by obtaining orders permitting her to change his surname to her own, ensuring Carl was not to communicate with Alex by any means and enabling Alex to travel with Sabina without having to obtain Carl's agreement.

# stepping stones

## Family violence and the breakdown of a relationship are key social determinants of financial hardship and poverty for women and their children in Australia.

The legal and financial issues that contribute to financial hardship and poverty for women include unpaid credit card debt, mortgage default, rent arrears, unpaid child support, outstanding household bills and infringements. These issues can arise when relationships are breaking down but they can also result from sustained economic abuse and financial control.

We have developed the Stepping Stones project in response to these issues, which we see impacting on our clients every day at WLSV. The project aims to address systemic barriers to women's financial recovery from family violence and relationship breakdown. It commenced in early 2014 and is funded by a major grant from the Legal Services Board.

### Marrying legal and financial counselling assistance

As part of the project we have, for the first time at WLSV, created an integrated and holistic case management model involving our lawyers and an in-house financial counsellor. Our lawyers collaborate with the financial counsellor to provide women with legal and financial counselling advice and representation. Bringing financial counselling expertise into WLSV has provided a welcome platform for a cross-cultural exchange of knowledge and information, benefiting our clients by creating a service focussed on their recovery and empowerment.

Our financial counsellor has already been able to provide advice to and advocacy on behalf of women in relation to mortgage defaults, unpaid bills and credit card debt. Her presence has also strengthened WLSV's relationship with the financial counselling, banking and utilities sectors – creating new partnerships and potential opportunities for working together into the future.

### The year ahead

In 2014/15 we will be:

- Publishing the Stepping Stones report, to be developed through research, learning from our integrated model and consultation with women and other stakeholders. The report will:
  - document the overlapping and complex legal and financial issues for women experiencing family violence and relationship breakdown and
  - identify preventative strategies and recommend pathways to promote better outcomes for women navigating the system
- Working closely with financial institutions, utilities companies and law and policy makers, to achieve systemic change for women and their children, based on the findings of the Stepping Stones report.



VIRTUAL  
OUTREACH  
PROGRAM

WLSV assists women who have experienced family violence and other compounding forms of disadvantage to access legal advice via internet video conferencing.

### Improving access to justice

Now offering 12 appointment times per week, our Link virtual outreach program provides opportunities for hundreds of women experiencing family violence to access legal services despite geographic, cultural or economic disadvantage. In addition to providing effective one off advice and referrals, we also take on significant casework for those clients in greatest need of legal representation.

### Program extension and additional partners

With additional funding from the Legal Services Board and Victoria Legal Aid, WLSV has been able to continue providing timely legal advice to women who have experienced family violence through our partner agencies in the Melbourne metropolitan and Northern regions of Victoria. We have also expanded the Link virtual outreach program, adding a further six partner agencies from the Gippsland, Murray Mallee and Barwon regions and bringing our total number of partners to 15.

### Capacity building for community legal centres

The Link program now also includes two community legal centre (CLC) partners in areas facing particular challenges for access to justice: Murray Mallee Community Legal Service in the regional town of Mildura and Whittlesea Community Legal Service in the northern growth corridor of Melbourne. WLSV is working with these CLCs, through consultation and collaboration, to support and build their capacity to meet the legal needs of women requiring specialised family law advice. We also provide an alternative source of legal assistance when women are not able to access their local CLC due to a conflict of interest.

### Critical legal needs map

Our education team has developed a unique road map for family violence support workers to identify clients' critical legal needs by assisting them to:

- Ask specific questions at the right time
- Prioritise legal issues to prevent a legal crisis
- Make timely and appropriate referrals to lawyers and other services
- Prepare clients for court

We have trained rural and metropolitan Link partner agencies on using the map to ensure timely and appropriate legal outcomes for women.

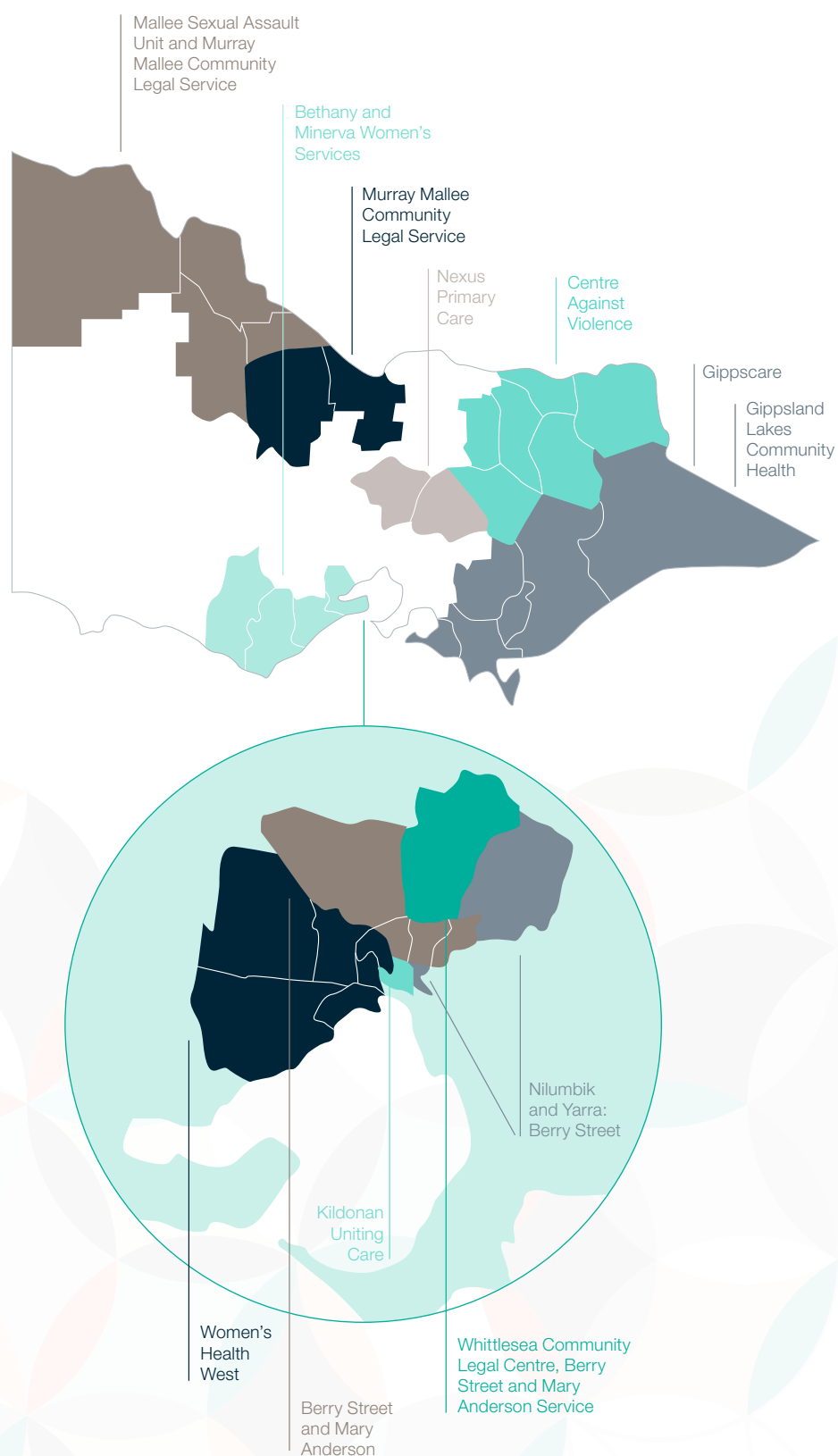
### The year ahead

In 2014/15, we will be:

- Investigating the benefits of converting the Link critical legal needs map into an online application
- Exploring resourcing options to expand Link into more high need areas and to ensure the service continues as a permanent program of WLSV.

## Our current partners

- Berry Street – *Eaglemont*
- Mary Anderson Family Violence Service – *Coburg*
- Georgina Martina Women's Refuge – *Statewide*
- Kildonan Uniting Care – *Epping*
- Nexus Primary Care – *Broadford, Kinglake, Wallan, Seymour*
- Centre Against Violence – *Wangaratta*
- Marian Community – *Shepparton*
- Women's Health West – *Footscray*
- Bethany Geelong– *Geelong*
- Minerva Women's Services – *Geelong*
- Gippscare – *Leongatha*
- Gippsland Lakes Community Health – *Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance, Bruthen and Metung*
- Mallee Sexual Assault Unit and Domestic Violence Service – *Mildura, Swan Hill*
- Whittlesea Community Legal Service – *Epping*
- Murray Mallee Community Legal Service – *Mildura*





# safer families

## WLSV's Safer Families program is a comprehensive professional development program for community legal centre lawyers on family violence and family law.

It has a strong focus on the family violence applicant lawyer role of providing on the spot (duty lawyer) assistance to clients at court. Funding for this program is provided by Victoria Legal Aid.

### The need

Increased attention to the issue of family violence by Victoria Police and successive state governments over the last 10 years has led to a significant increase in the number of intervention order applications being made. This is a welcome indicator that more women are reporting family violence and that reform efforts, to which WLSV has contributed, are succeeding. At the same time, this increase in intervention order applications has led to increased demand on community legal centres (CLCs) and more CLCs becoming involved in providing duty lawyer services, both funded and unfunded, in family violence matters. 20 CLCs now provide duty lawyer services for family violence matters at 29 courts around Victoria. With this range of service providers operating in a variety of court settings there was a real need for systematic practice support to ensure provision of consistent high quality services to clients.

### Our program

The Safer Families program includes competency based training and mentoring as well as psychological debriefing for CLC lawyers working with clients experiencing family violence. The program aims to contribute to families being safer by building the capacity of CLC lawyers to provide high quality, effective advice and representation.

In this first year, we conducted a thorough analysis to determine competency standards, and designed the program around those

competencies. All aspects of the training, mentoring and support have been informed by a strengths based approach which recognises and builds on the pre-existing skills and experience of the participants.

We delivered five full days of heavily skills based training, 76 hours of mentoring and four sessions of psychological debriefing.

### Our reach

Participants came to the program with a range of skills and experience and from a cross-section of CLCs including regional and remote centres. We had 20 participants from 14 CLCs, with 70% of CLCs providing duty lawyer services participating in this first program.

As a Melbourne based but statewide service, we have particularly valued the opportunity to understand more about the opportunities and challenges for our colleagues working in suburban and regional courts.

### Feedback

Participants overwhelmingly valued the training, and continue to report that they use the knowledge and skills in their practice to achieve safe outcomes for their clients. The formal external evaluation also found the program to be an effective way of improving the quality of family violence legal advice and representation to CLC clients.

### The year ahead

In 2014/15, we will be:

- Reviewing and enhancing the program with the benefit of insights from the external evaluation.
- Increasing the number of training sessions and adding new continuing professional development sessions.
- Strengthening the mentoring and psychological support components of the program.

## international connections

During this year we had the great privilege of connecting with truly inspiring people and organisations working in similar or related fields across Asia and the Middle East.

These opportunities were invaluable for sharing our experiences and learning from our overseas colleagues' experiences, including their unique and diverse insights into 'the way things work' in Australia.

We made connections with colleagues from:

- **Hong Kong:** WLSV participated in a comparative research study on enhancing legal and policy measures to combat domestic violence against immigrant and ethnic minority women in Australia, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. The study was conducted by Associate Professor Puja Kapai, Deputy Director of the Centre for Comparative and Public Law at the University of Hong Kong.
- **East Timor:** representatives of Women's & Children's Legal Aid in East Timor visited us to share ideas and approaches for direct client service delivery and community development/legal education.
- **Japan:** we welcomed to our offices Associate Professor Naoko Tateishi of Gifu University in Japan. Ms Tateishi came to Australia to study the impact of the 2012 family violence changes to the Family Law Act and to hear our views on the impact of those changes.
- **Iran:** at the invitation of Dr Rebecca Barlow from Melbourne University's Asia Institute we delivered six workshops as part of the Institute's *Iranian Women in Leadership* program. This specialised women's leadership training is designed for young female professionals from Iran and WLSV's workshops focused on the evolution of our organisation from a volunteer service to a professional and specialised legal service. We will deliver further workshops in 2014/15 and look forward to continuing this inspiring and exciting partnership.

## meagan's story

A woman receives a fair financial settlement from her estranged and violent ex-partner to support herself and her children.

### Issues

Meagan and Ron were married for 20 years. Ron had a drinking problem and this exacerbated his violence and abuse towards Meagan, leading to her eventually leaving him, with the four children remaining in her care.

During the marriage Ron was in sole control of the family's finances. Ron worked and Meagan had the full time care of the children and the household. Meagan was very young when their first child was born and had not undertaken any training or paid work. She had also suffered with depression since her teenage years. After they separated Ron opted out of regular employment and did not contribute any child support.

Meagan sought assistance from WLSV when she found herself struggling financially, six years after she separated from Ron. The only asset of the marriage was superannuation accumulated while Ron was working.

### Resolution

WLSV issued a court application in the Federal Circuit Court seeking an order that Ron provide us with information about his finances and that his superannuation be split. The superannuation split meant that a proportion of Ron's super was placed into a fund in Meagan's name. Meagan could then seek access to the superannuation funds prior to retirement age because of her financial hardship. A superannuation split can only be achieved with a court order or by an agreement that complies with the complete provisions of the Family Law Act.

Although there was no doubt about Meagan's entitlement to a share of the superannuation, Ron did not respond to requests to resolve the case. He refused to attend the first three court events but, under court order, he provided documents which established that his superannuation exceeded \$20,000. Ron's failure to comply with the court's directions continued and eventually the matter proceeded on an 'undefended' basis (without Ron being present). WLSV was able to secure pro bono assistance from a barrister who represented Meagan at the final hearing. An order was made for Meagan to receive approximately 70% of the available superannuation funds as well as a cash amount to assist with the children's medical expenses.



## acknowledging our volunteers

Volunteers have been supporting WLSV since 1981. We are committed to supporting volunteer involvement, to extend and enhance our services, and to provide meaningful work for women within the legal sector and associated fields.

### Legal Advice Line Volunteers

Volunteer lawyers holding a practising certificate or members of the Bar extend our service's capacity to assist women by providing legal information, advice and referrals to callers on our Legal Advice Line. Thank you to the following people who have assisted WLSV, and more importantly, the many women contacting the Advice Line, in the past 12 months:

Akane Kanai  
Alessandra Cavicchia  
Amanda Lee  
Amy Hall  
Astrid Zecena  
Bonnie Phillips  
Caitlin Tierney  
Caroline Paterson  
Cassandra Castillo  
Catherine Dow  
Celia Laragy  
Clair Walczak  
Claire Burchall  
Constantina Demetriou  
Dao Bui Nguyen  
Deborah Randa  
Elisa Carayannis  
Elisa Wai Leng Chew  
Ella Thompson  
Emeline Gaske  
Emma Heggie  
Emmalaura Messer

Felicity Francis  
Fiona Halloran  
Hannah Hodges  
Holly Renwick  
Jaclyn Tang  
Jan Motherwell  
Jana Homatopoulos  
Jennifer Powell  
Jenny Sharp  
Jessica Black  
Jessica Kerr  
Jessica Willard  
Jillian Williams  
Julie Andritsos  
Katerina Axiallis  
Katherine Francis  
Kathryn McMillan  
Katie-Elouise White-Spier  
Keleigh Robinson  
Liz Hall  
Louisa Travers  
Marquita Nolan

Meagan Grose  
Meg O'Brien  
Melanie Molloy  
Meribah Rose  
Miranda Brookes  
Natalie Fifield  
Natalie Goharpey  
Natalie Plumridge  
Natasha Cecic  
Niresha Mudalige  
Nonni Sdraulig  
Pamela Khoo  
Priscilla Wong  
Sandra Costanzo  
Sasha Earle  
Selina Nivelles  
Shani Williams  
Sharnee Moore  
Sophie Song  
Susan Hamilton-Green  
Susan McClellan  
Tanya Lavan

### Law student volunteers

Law students assist our lawyers with casework, research and duty lawyer work at the Melbourne Magistrates' Court. Thank you to the following students who have worked with us this year:

Adrienne Agg  
 Anna Farrant  
 Beth Griffith-Clarke  
 Brooke Cunningham  
 Cayla Edwards  
 Gemma Freeman  
 Heather McIntosh  
 Kamala Rangarajan  
 Kathryn Wright  
 Kinga Dezsi  
 Lauren Thomas  
 Nina Ulasowski  
 Rachel Dalton  
 Sara Minamikawa  
 Tori Stuchbery

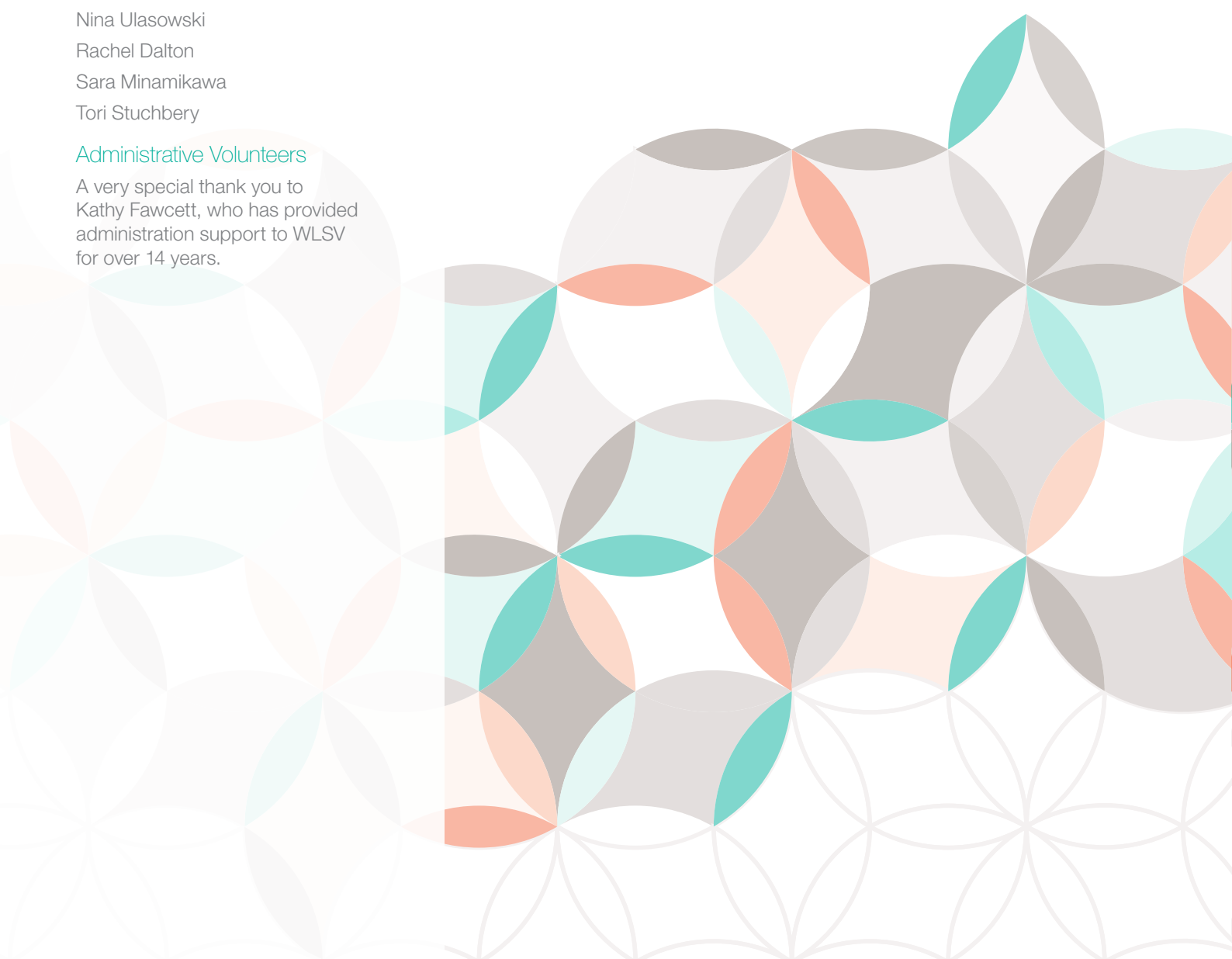
### Administrative Volunteers

A very special thank you to Kathy Fawcett, who has provided administration support to WLSV for over 14 years.

## impact of our volunteers

Over the past year volunteers have

- Assisted over **1000 clients**
- Contributed over **3500 hours**
- Provided over **\$530,000 worth of legal services**



## a volunteer's experience

The first day I walked into the Women's Legal Service Victoria (WLSV) office, as a final year student in a university placement program, I was as useless as most new graduates. Law school had taught me a lot about the law, but not much about being a lawyer. I hadn't even studied family law. By the end of my first two days I had observed the duty lawyer at both the Magistrates' Court and the Family Law Courts, I had also drafted affidavits, observed client interviews, compiled briefs to counsel and worked on a divorce file, under supervision.

By the time I had completed my placement, I was hooked and I stayed on as a volunteer. By the end of 2013 I was instructing counsel in final hearings, working directly with clients, and being given increasing amounts of responsibility. WLSV's team of passionate and committed lawyers are always willing to give generously of their

time, despite how little of it they have, to supervise and support the volunteers in working on complex and sensitive matters and encouraging us to stretch ourselves. I also relished being able to assist women through the often stressful family law process, and seeing the very real impact this work has on people's lives.

I could not have felt more supported and encouraged by the staff at WLSV. I have been trusted to work on matters that most new graduates could only dream of and not only increased my understanding of the law, but developed much greater confidence in my own abilities. I am really grateful to the staff at WLSV for the amazing opportunities I have been afforded, and for the knowledge, experience, trust and support I have been given.

Anna Farrant  
*Law Student*



## acknowledging other assistance

### Assistance with our relocation

The transition period into our new office was quite a challenge and it was only with the generous assistance of our friends and partners that we were able to continue our vital services to women without interruption. Thank you to the following organisations and firms for their support:

Victoria Legal Aid  
Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria  
Consumer Action Law Centre  
Melbourne Family Relationship Centre  
Kliger Partners Lawyers  
Victoria Law Foundation  
Victoria Legal Aid Roundtable Dispute Management  
Gelbert and Davies  
Geoff Dillon & Co  
Mills Oakley Lawyers

### Legal Assistance

Thank you to the following barristers and solicitors who have advised or represented WLSV clients pro bono or on a reduced fee basis:

Angie Wong  
Anna Goldthorp  
Chris Tesoriero  
Christopher Trim  
Dan Sweeney  
David Carn  
Deb Harris  
Emma Hill  
Glen Pauline  
Hilary Bonney  
Ivan Brewer  
Janine Garner  
Jennifer Howe  
Jenny Brennan  
Joye Elleray  
Marita Ham  
Michael Gregurek  
Patricia Byrnes  
Patrick O'Shannessy  
Paul Glass  
Renata Alexander  
Robin Smith  
Sharney Jenkinson  
Stephen Howe  
Susan Buchanan  
Zubin Menon

### Donations and in-kind contributions

Thank you to the following organisations and people who have assisted WLSV this year with pro bono advice, referrals, donations and in-kind contributions:

ANZ Bank  
The Age  
Justitia  
Lander & Rogers Lawyers  
Justice Connect  
Herbert Smith Freehills  
Farrar Gesini Dunn  
Amanda Smithwick  
Jane Bentley  
Liam Brown  
Charley Brumby-Rendell

### Student Placements

Thank you to the following students for completing university or practical legal training placements with WLSV over the past 12 months:

Brooke Cunningham  
Catalina Perez  
Claire Lindsay-Johns  
Jacinta Fox  
Jessica Bourke  
Josie Thomas  
Krisoula Mantzanidis  
Mary Maroud  
Mary (Shenika) Vairawanathan  
Tanya D'Souza



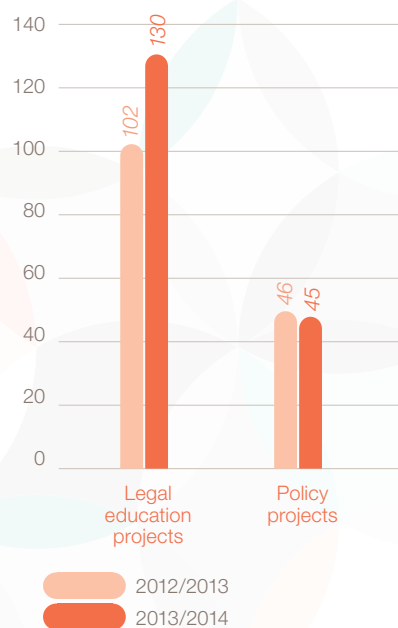
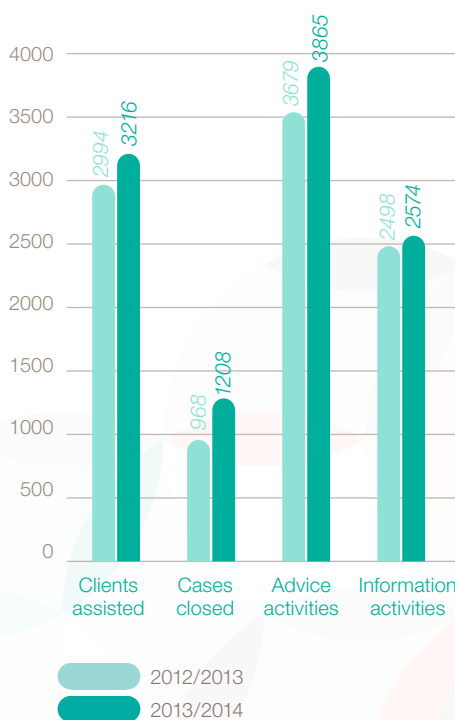
## service statistics

### Core service activities

Demand for WLSV's core services consistently outstrips our capacity to respond. However, we have been able to increase our core service delivery across all three of our programs: client services, legal education and policy. We assisted over 220 more clients this year (a 7% increase), providing casework assistance, including duty lawyer work, on 240 more occasions (a 25% increase). We also provided 27 more sessions of legal education (a 26% increase).

However, the most important aspect of our increased service delivery cannot be captured in numbers – we are undertaking bigger projects across

the organisation. In our client services area we are taking on more and more cases with a systemic impact. Our legal education team is taking on significant training contracts, while continuing to develop our public offering professional development program. In our policy area, the invitation to contribute to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Access to Justice Arrangements provided an ideal opportunity to undertake extensive research into women's experiences accessing the family law courts, which we documented in a 30 page submission. The policy team has also contributed significant in-kind support to our major Stepping Stones project in the form of leadership and management.



## Legal Problems

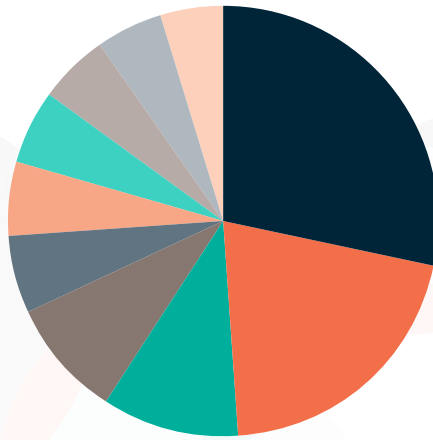
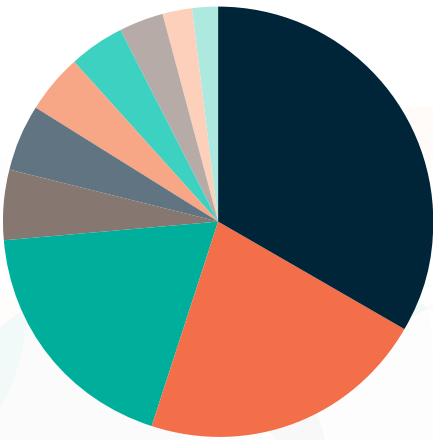
The most commonly occurring legal problems experienced by our clients in 2013/14 were:

- 1 Family or domestic violence 34%
- 2 Child contacts or contact orders 22%
- 3 Property in marriage 19%
- 4 Divorce 5%
- 5 Property de facto 5%
- 6 Separation 4%
- 7 Personal safety intervention orders 4%
- 8 Parenting plan 3%
- 9 Child residency 2%
- 10 Victims of crime assistance 2%

## Clients from non-English speaking countries

A significant proportion of WLSV's clients were born in non-English speaking countries (32%). Of those clients, the most common countries of birth were:

- 1 China 23%
- 2 India 21%
- 3 Vietnam 10%
- 4 Philippines 9%
- 5 Sri Lanka 6%
- 6 Thailand 5%
- 7 Ethiopia 6%
- 8 Malaysia 5%
- 9 Pakistan 5%
- 10 Iran 5%



## our people

### Board members

Anne Lyon	<i>Chair</i>
Libby Maynard	<i>Deputy Chair (until October 2013)</i>
Cheri Le Cornu	<i>Deputy Chair (from October 2013)</i>
Leanne Miller	<i>Secretary (until October 2013)</i>
Samantha Horsfield	<i>Secretary (from October 2013)</i>
Caroline Gowan	<i>Treasurer</i>
Dorothy Gibbs	<i>Member (until October 2013)</i>
Lisa McMeeken	<i>Member</i>
Tali Bernard	<i>Member (until October 2013)</i>
Joanna Fletcher	<i>Ex-officio member</i>

### WLSV staff

Joanna Fletcher	<i>Chief Executive Officer</i>
Helen Matthews	<i>Principal Lawyer</i>
Pasanna Mutha-Merrennege	<i>Senior Lawyer/Manager - Policy &amp; Projects</i>
Zione Walker-Nthenda	<i>Senior Lawyer/Manager - Legal Education (job share) (until March 2014)</i>
Eila Pourasgheri	<i>Senior Lawyer/Manager - Legal Education (job share)</i>
Abigail Sullivan	<i>Lawyer/Legal Educator (until March 2014) Acting Manager - Legal Education (from March 2014)</i>
Samantha Watson	<i>Operations Manager</i>
Elisa Whittaker	<i>Senior Lawyer/Outreach Coordinator</i>
Henrietta Barclay	<i>Senior Lawyer</i>
Emily Clark	<i>Senior Lawyer (from March 2014)</i>
Emma Smallwood	<i>Lawyer/Economic wellbeing project research coordinator</i>
Danielle Wisniak	<i>Lawyer/Legal Advice Line Supervisor</i>
Brenna Powney	<i>Lawyer</i>
Carol Mellords	<i>Lawyer</i>
Lara Guarino	<i>Lawyer</i>
Gwen Yeoh	<i>Lawyer</i>
Jane Bentley	<i>Lawyer (until January 2014)</i>
Nina Ulasowski	<i>Lawyer (from January 2014)</i>
Weng Lan Chong	<i>Finance Officer (until October 2013)</i>
Menaka Bandara	<i>Finance Officer (from October 2013)</i>
Angela Borg	<i>Office Administrator (until March 2014)</i>
Caitlin Watson	<i>Administrative Assistant (until March 2014) Office Administrator (from March 2014)</i>
Amber Harrington	<i>Administrative Assistant (from June 2014)</i>
Donna Letchford	<i>Financial Counsellor (from June 2014)</i>
Beth King	<i>Graduate Lawyer (from May 2014)</i>



Thank you for all your  
efforts through this  
difficult journey...  
I can't even begin to  
tell you what relief you  
have provided me.

*WLSV client*



# financials

*This is an extract of WLSV's audited financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2014. The full version can be found at [www.womenslegal.org.au](http://www.womenslegal.org.au).*

## Income and Expenditure Statement for the year ended 30 June 2014

	2014 \$	2013 \$
<strong>INCOME</strong>		
CLC Recurrent Grants	1,288,642	1,282,379
CLC Non-Recurrent Grants	139,963	0
Other Grants	119,964	50,000
Other Income	187,907	169,390
Interest Income	29,172	32,592
	<strong>1,765,648</strong>	<strong>1,534,361</strong>
<strong>EXPENDITURE</strong>		
Employee benefits expense	1,063,313	994,874
Depreciation expense	48,221	26,835
FLLS Costs	310,424	299,335
Rental expense	64,400	76,800
Make good provision	90,000	-
Other expenditure	135,044	109,621
	<strong>1,711,402</strong>	<strong>1,507,465</strong>
Surplus (Loss) before income tax	54,246	26,896
Income tax expense	-	-
Surplus (Loss) after income tax	54,246	26,896
Retained Surplus (Losses) at the beginning of the financial year	361,933	335,037
Retained Surplus (Losses) at the end of the financial year	<strong>416,179</strong>	<strong>361,933</strong>

Assets and Liabilities Statement  
for the year ended 30 June 2014

	2014 \$	2013 \$
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	361,782	411,650
Trade and other receivables	206,261	8,707
Financial assets	678,843	515,624
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>1,246,886</b>	<b>935,981</b>
<b>NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Property, plant and equipment	265,174	75,543
<b>TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>265,174</b>	<b>75,543</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>1,512,060</b>	<b>1,011,524</b>
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		
Trade and other payables	117,950	103,308
Provisions	77,430	51,279
Grants in advance	614,746	288,540
<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>810,126</b>	<b>443,127</b>
<b>NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		
Provisions	170,755	91,464
Future Contingency Fund	25,000	25,000
	195,755	116,464
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>1,005,881</b>	<b>559,591</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>506,179</b>	<b>451,933</b>
<b>MEMBERS' FUNDS</b>		
Capital Replacement Reserve	90,000	90,000
Retained Surplus	416,179	361,933
<b>TOTAL MEMBERS' FUNDS</b>	<b>506,179</b>	<b>451,933</b>

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[www.womenslegal.org.au](http://www.womenslegal.org.au)

