

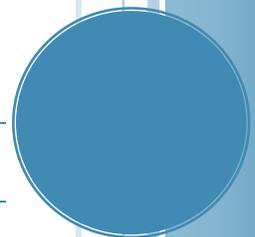


VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICE

Annual Report 2017-2018

IMPORTANT

*We acknowledge and pay our respects to the custodians of the lands on which we work,
collectively the Aboriginal communities of South-East Australia.*



VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICE

About Us

Welcome to the Annual Report of 2017-2018 of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS).

VALS continues to remain focused on ensuring all Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy and exercise their legal rights, are aware of their responsibilities under the law, and have access to appropriate legal representation in the legal system.

VALS is the only Victorian organisation funded by the Australian Government under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services program (known as the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program).

Understanding that an individual's legal problem is the result of a challenging set of individual issues, VALS seeks to provide supports that are not limited to legal services. As such, we support thousands of people within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Victoria with a range of services including:

- legal services such as advice, representation and case work in criminal, family (including child protection, and civil law);
- client support services in addition to legal services, aimed at providing the link between law and community;

- pre and post prison release support services to facilitate positive transition back into community;
- community legal education to ensure our mob know their legal rights and responsibilities and know who to turn to when in need;
- providing analysis and advice on the impact of law and other social factors on our community;
- advocating systemically for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when they interact with the legal system; and
- building awareness and understanding of the broader legal system, and the general public, of specific issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in legal system and beyond.

VALS looks for sustainable responses to legal problems. This means we support investigation and use of therapeutic and preventative approaches to reduce the interaction our clients and community have with the legal system and produce longer lasting outcomes for our clients.

Report from the Chairperson, Des Morgan

On behalf of the VALS' Board I am pleased to present to you our 2017-18 Annual Report.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge and pay tribute to long serving Board Director Aunty Bunta who sadly passed this year. She has been and will continue to be dearly missed by the VALS community.

In the VALS 2016-2017 Annual Report, it was noted that while staff were undertaking community workshops that there was a growing concern about our young people being able to access support from VALS. It was being noted by community that there were increasing amounts of young people often missed out on our service because of conflict of interest. To address this issue VALS was pleased and excited to establish the Balit Ngulu Legal Service.

Balit Ngulu was a dedicated legal service for our young people, between 10-17, that needed our support in the criminal, family law and child protection space. We were able to represent 110 children in 12 months to advance their interests and ensure they were kept safe and culturally strong. Unfortunately due to lack of ongoing funding, this service had to be closed. We will continue to advocate on behalf of this service and request funding to reestablish this vital service in the future.

Members of the VALS' Board continue to support VALS staff to achieve our organisational goals and to look to the communities in which they work for guidance on what their legal needs are at any particular point in time.

As an organisation we are always keen to receive feedback as to what is working and what is not so that we are ensuring that we working collectively reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people in Victorian justice system across all age groups.

The 2017-2018 year saw more positive changes in our service delivery model, using technology to support our staff to be more mobile at court and the office to meet the legal needs of our clients.

We acknowledge it has been difficult to service each court location due to the increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being incarcerated across the State. We hope to reevaluate our service delivery model in future to better meet the needs of our communities.

VALS Board of Directors, VALS Managers and Team leaders took part in an organisational review to ensure that our structure was meeting the needs of staff in ensuring clear lines of communication and managerial authority that would continue to support the growth and development of VALS into the future.

This piece of work was an important step in moving VALS forward and we look forward to seeing the positive benefits this change brings to our staff, our management team and our community.

As always, I thank the VALS staff members for their ongoing dedication to the work and their service to the Victorian community in an effort to ensure that Aboriginal people are treated equitably before the law in and out of the courtrooms.

In closing, I thank my fellow Board members for their commitment to ensuring that VALS continues to take a leading role in Aboriginal justice in Victoria and look forward to the work that awaits us in the upcoming year.



VALS Board of Directors

Des Morgan - Chairperson

Des is a Yorta Yorta man from the Murray/Goulburn river area of Victoria/NSW. He has been an active member of the Aboriginal community since 1984, having served on various local and state organisations, Boards of Management Inc, Legal Service, Aborigines Advancement League, VACSAL and VAEAL. He also served a six-year period as an ATSIC Regional Councillor and past Chair of NJERNDA (Echuca) for several years and a member of Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal

Lorraine (Bunta) Patten: Secretary

Lorraine is a Gunditjmara woman. She has been involved in Koori affairs for many years. She has been a VALS Board member in the past and was the Manager of the Gladys Nicholls Hostel in Northcote. She is the Chair of the Weeroona Aboriginal Cemetery in Greenvale. She was also an ATSIC Regional Councillor for 5 years.

Larry Kanoa: Treasurer

Larry is a Gunditjmara man born in Mooroopna. He has been actively involved in Aboriginal affairs since 1983 with a strong background in Koori education and as a client service officer with VALS. He has represented the Aboriginal community at local, state and national forums including the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee, the Aboriginal Justice Forum, VAEAL and ATSIC. Larry's current role is as an Indigenous Community Development Broker with the Victorian Office of Aboriginal Affairs.

Amanda Dunstall: Director

Amanda is a Gunditjmara woman with a variety of working experience in our community. Amanda has previously worked VALS, VACSAL and Victoria Police. Amanda is currently employed at VACCA. Amanda has, through her tireless work, shown she is passionate about social justice for Koori people.

Irene Morris: Director

Irene is a Wurundjeri Elder who has worked in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations for nearly 30 years. Irene has worked with many Aboriginal community organisations, co-ops and sporting groups across the state of Victoria to provide support and education on corporate governance structures and corporate responsibilities.

Lionel Bamblett: Director

Lionel is a Yorta Yorta man who has worked in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations for many years. Lionel works in the area of youth and education.

Leigh Saunders: Director

Leigh Saunders is a proud Bangerang and Yorta man. He grew up in Mooroopna, later moving to Melbourne to complete VCE. Leigh worked for a number of years with VACCA as the Koorie Cultural Placement and Support Worker before moving over to VACSAL as the project officer for Aboriginal Gambling Awareness Service.

We Remember: Aunty Lorraine (Bunta) Patten

In October 2017 VALS and the Victorian Community mourned the passing of Aunty Bunta Patten.

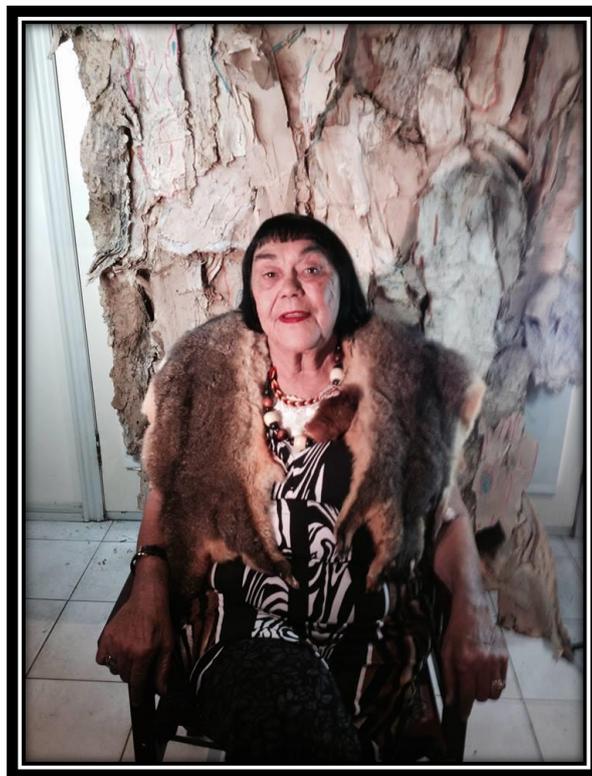
Aunty Bunta had served on the VALS Board of Directors for many years, and since 2007 as the organisations Secretary.

In recognition of Aunty Bunta's tireless dedication to VALS, in 2015 the decision was made to name the main community room at the Preston office in her honor, now forever known as the Aunty Bunta Community Room.

She brought to VALS her wealth of life experience and knowledge in working within Aboriginal Affairs since the 1950s.

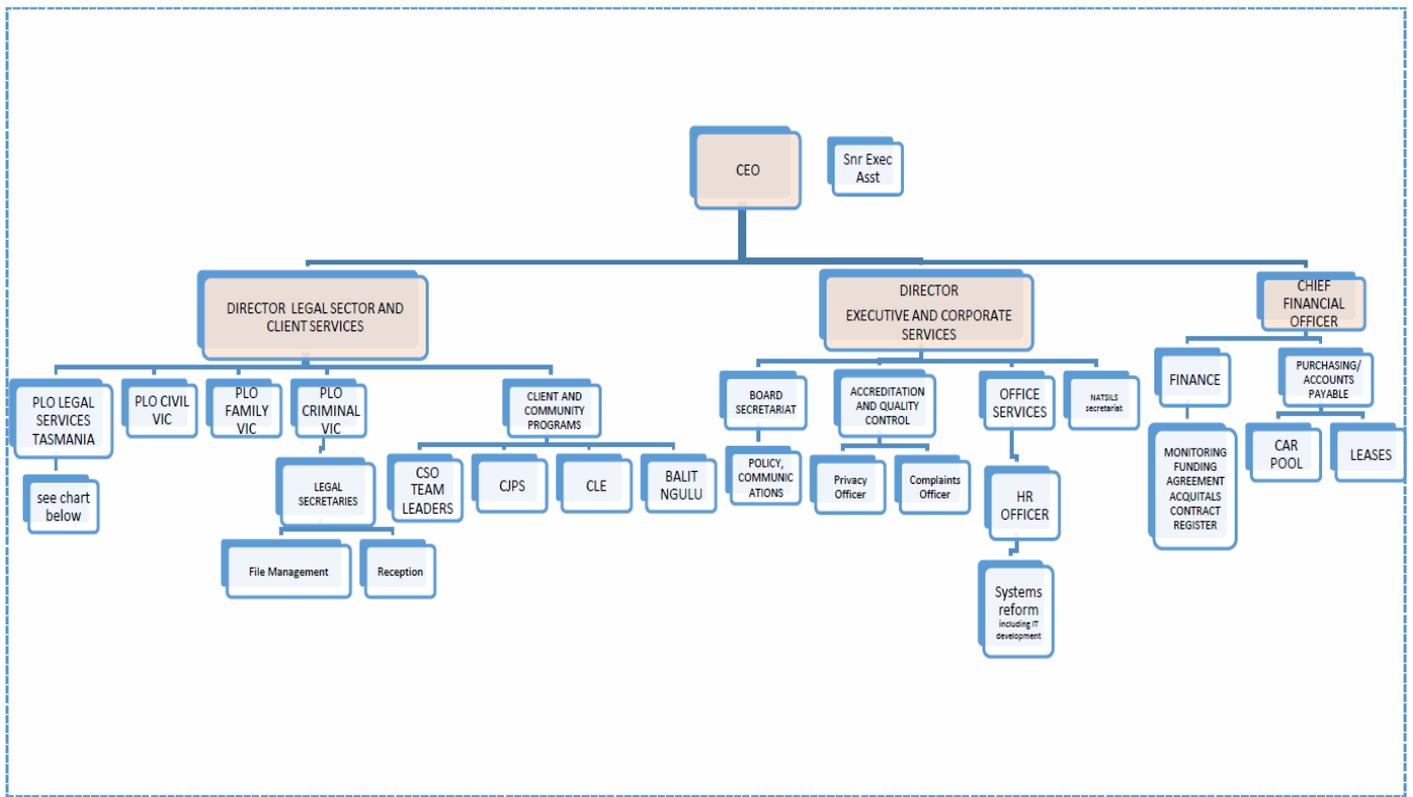
Aunty Bunta lived for her community and was a fierce advocate.

She was greatly loved and will be greatly missed by the VALS Board, Managers and staff.

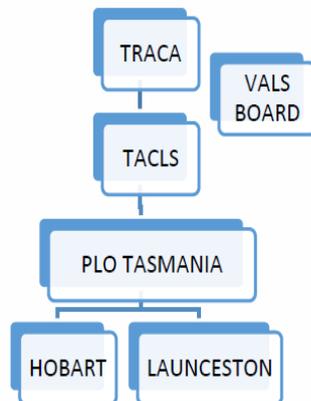


VALS/TACLS ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICE



TASMANIAN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE



On July 1, 2017 VALS and TACLS were required through the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department to implement new data collection points in relation to the work undertaken by our staff.

Due to technical difficulties in establishing and implementing the new data collection points and system, we believe that there is an under reporting in the below data tables.

VALS BY NUMBERS

<i>Assistance Type</i>	<i>Civil</i>	<i>Criminal</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Grand Total</i>
<i>Court/Tribunal</i>	91	1935	182	2208
<i>Dispute Resolution</i>	32	0	0	32
<i>Duty</i>	1	51	3	55
<i>Information Service</i>	19	0	33	52
<i>Legal Advice</i>	379	0	86	465
<i>Legal Task</i>	17	0	4	21
<i>Non-Legal Support</i>	4	0	0	4
<i>Other Representation</i>	126	0	1	127
<i>Referral</i>	10+	0	175	281
<i>Grand Total</i>	779	1986	484	3249

TACLS BY NUMBERS

<i>Assistance Type</i>	<i>Civil</i>	<i>Criminal</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Grand Total</i>
<i>Court/Tribunal</i>	56	667	149	872
<i>Dispute Resolution</i>	7		27	34
<i>Duty</i>	5	40	3	48
<i>Information Service</i>	18	24	42	84
<i>Legal Advice</i>	40	50	65	155
<i>Legal Task</i>	19	5	1	25
<i>Non-Legal Support</i>	2	1		3
<i>Other Representation</i>	39	1	17	57
<i>Referral</i>	5	2	2	9
<i>Grand Total</i>	191	790	306	1287

VALS Legal Practice

Family Law

Through the 2017-18 period the Family Law team faced many challenges in supporting clients due to multiple positions within the small team becoming vacant at the beginning of the reporting year.

However, at the same time a new funding stream came online to support the expansion of the family law team to support client experiencing family violence through funding secured from the Department of Justice and Regulation for the roll out of Recommendation 136 from the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

The new funding stream allowed for 2 Family Law lawyers, 2 Senior Child Protection lawyers, 1 Paralegal, and 1 Legal Secretary to be employed throughout the reporting period which greatly increased the number of community members that could be offered assistance at court throughout the State in the second half of the year.

VALS acknowledges the continuing support of Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) in supporting the VALS Family Law team by providing senior practicing secondee lawyers to our service to support service delivery, especially in times of challenge.

A key concern and focus that continues to persist in the Family Law space is having staff available to attend emergency hearings relating to emergency Child Protections applications listed by the Department of Human Services. At this time Victoria has the highest rates of child removal and protections orders being sought in Australia and we are often having families seek out services support to attend a hearing with only 24-48 hours' notice.

Case Study

A great victory was taken by the Family Law team over DHHS who wanted to remove a four month old baby from the Mother, our client. The Mother had recently been diagnosed with post natal depression. Extensive submissions were made by the VALS lawyer at a regional Children's Court and the court ordered the baby to stay on an order with the Mother.

Criminal Law

During 2017-18, the Criminal Law team continued their tireless work to assist as many community members as possible to address their criminal law matters across the State with limited staffing numbers.

Some service delivery adjustments continued to be implementing to increase capacity of matters that staff could take on, while ensuring safe working practices including the implementing of new supporting technologies. Service delivery changes also included the re-allocating of staff to regional court circuits, doing our best to minimise and manage the changes to create as little disruption as possible to the community and the courts.

Criminal Law staff members actively participated in the bail reform committees to attempt to have a positive impact on discussion surrounding the implementation of amendments to the Bail Act.

It was noted by staff at these meetings that any changes to the Bail Act will have a substantial impact on our people and VALS must closely monitor, and where appropriate, oppose any amendments that will more than likely cause our clients to serve longer terms of incarceration than is necessary.

The Criminal Law space continued to face new challenges through the Bail Reform Acts passed by the State government, including the introduction of the new Night Court hearings located at the Melbourne Magistrates court to deal with remand and bail matters at occur after 3pm.

In the short time of this reporting period that the that this court has been operating, we have seen a drastic increase in the demand for our Criminal Lawyers to be available nightly at the Melbourne Magistrates between 3pm and 9pm to attend to remand and bail applications for our clients.

By staff members staying on to attend to the matter and ensure the legal rights of our clients are being protected, the downstream effect is the requirement of last-minute rescheduling of staff attending the various courts across the state to ensure that VALS is meeting their workplace health and safety obligation to staff and are getting the require break between their work days.

VALS will continue to lobby the Victorian State Government to provide VALS with additional funding resources to assist in the service delivery of these night courts.

Case Study

A VALS senior solicitor was successful in obtaining bail for a client from the Supreme Court whose applications for bail were refused in the Magistrates' Court after two attempts. The Magistrate at first and second instance refused the client bail, despite having significant supports in the community including the support of the Court Integrating Support Program, stable housing, demonstrated commitment to ongoing rehabilitation and sole custody of his children. Our Senior Solicitor quickly lodged a bail application in the Supreme Court and was successful in obtaining bail for a client to be home in time for Christmas.

Civil Law

2017 -18 continued to be a productive year for the Civil Law team.

The VALS Civil team continues to explore pro-bono partnerships opportunities to expand service delivery to VALS clients. In particular, a focus has been on finding partnerships that would provide additional support to the increasing enquires in employment law and complaints against police officers. Legal Firms that provide support and pro-bono legal service that support service delivery include: Smith Freehills, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Allens Linklaters, KWM, Holding Redlich, Hall and Wilcox, Ashurst, Gilbert & Tobin.

During the reporting period VALS were successful in obtaining Legal Services Board funding to undertake a project in partnership with the Office of Public Advocate. Through this project, VALS Civil Law team was able to deliver guardianship, power of attorney and wills in conjunction with the

Community Legal Education program, and utilise pro bono support to provide legal services in relation to those legal issues.

VALS conducted 14 regional workshops and six metro workshops. The Office of the Public Advocate, OPA, is another organisation VALS has been developing a relationship with over five years, and this project is the first step of many such activities together.

In February 2018, VALS and OPA held an official launch of the report and resources materials related to their project "Your Life, Your Choice". This event was well attended by local community organisations, legal services and media. As a result of earlier project between VALS and the OPA, the VALS Civil Law team has received an increased number of enquiries in relation to wills, powers of attorney, and medical authorities. With the helpful resources developed through the OPA project, along with useful contacts within the OPA, we have been well placed to provide the community and clients with legal information, advice, and material to address their legal issue. We have also been able to leverage our strong relationship with Gilbert and Tobin, who are experts in this area, to arrange pro bono referrals for the creation of several wills and powers of attorney for people without the means to pay a private lawyer for this service.

The VALS Civil Law team was also able to benefit of an additional Civil Lawyer through the new funding acquired from the Department Justice to support clients being affected by family violence to address civil law legal issues such as consumer debt.

2017-18 saw the ramping up of the dedicated Infringement Clinic to support community to deal with their infringements from toll ways. This clinic provides the time a space for VALS clients to work with staff to collect the required supporting documents and report to go before court to have the infringement amounts owing reduced or if possible, wiped away in their entirety. The Civil Law team and Infringement team await to see the impacts that might occur in the future with the introduction of the new Victorian infringements system implemented by the Fines Reform Act.

The VALS Civil team continues to maintain strong relationships with many commercial firms doing pro bono work, and often refers work across all its key practice areas where a conflict of interest has arisen, or the VALS Civil team is at capacity and cannot assist.

Case Study

A client approached VALS requesting assistance in saving her tenancy in a house managed by a private agent. The client had fallen in arrears due to illness, and the theft of rental money by a family member. VALS connected the client to the Aboriginal Tenancies At Risk program run by Ngwala Willumbong. Ngwala assisted the client in paying the arrears prior to the scheduled VCAT hearing. The landlord agreed to cease pursuing the possession order, and is assisting the client in looking for a new property with a more manageable rent.

Community Justice Programs



Regional Client Service Officer (CSO) Program

The regional CSO staffing has remained constant during this period with staff working out of the following locations:

- Bairnsdale: Lyn Morgan
- Morwell: Naomi Murphy
- Shepparton: Brad Boon
- Swan Hill: Cain Chaplin
- Mildura: Andrew Arden & Michael Harradine
- Heywood: Troy Lovett

Our regional CSOs provide essential services in connecting our lawyer to their clients and the local communities that they provide legal provisions.

Our Regional CSO spend the majority of their days traveling across the state to various regional courts, supporting people prior to, at and after court. The Regional CSOs also provide important follow up appointments with clients to assist lawyers in progressing legal matters and identifying appropriate support service to link with client with.

Our CSOs main focus is the health and wellbeing of people in custody, and then to ensure that everyone going to court feels supported. Finally, they also do a lot of work in community legal education, making sure people living in their region have access to legal information when they need it, and can talk to a lawyer if they need that too.

Metropolitan CSO Program

Staff:

- Gary Bamblett
- Emily Lovett
- Jaime Carter-Maggs
- Jaiden Graham
- Rotation of 7 Casual Weekend CSOs

The Metropolitan and Casual Weekend CSOs are key to the operating of the States Custody Notification System. The Custody Notification system runs on a 24/7 basis with the Metropolitan and Casual CSO being the first contact point in relation between a community member in custody at local police station, the police officers investigating the matter and a VALS Criminal Lawyer

The Metro CSOs work on a rotating 24 hour roster, personally checking in on the health and wellbeing of people in custody, liaising with police and contacting out of hours legal advice from our lawyers when they need to. They manage relationships with 332 police stations across the State.

Between 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018, the notification team processed over 11,100 individual notifications from police stations regarding Aboriginal people in custody. On average each notification would generate about five additional calls at a minimum ensuring the client's wellbeing is being monitored, liaising with police, provision of legal advice, notifying family or friends, locating other appropriate supports services, etc. the Metropolitan CSO Program would have made or received in excess of 55,500 phone calls during this period.

The Metropolitan CSO Program is also instrumental in providing employment pathways for our people. Through our Casual Weekend CSO section several Aboriginal people have gained full time employment at VALS as Lawyers, Client Service Officers, Paralegals, Local Justice Workers, and Admin Support.

Family Violence CSO Program

Staff:

- Majella McGrath
- Bridgett Linares
- Lindsay Bryant

2017-18 saw the introduction of new Community Justice Program, the Family Violence Client Support Officers, FVCSOs.

The Family Violence Client Support Officers are a dedicated team of case workers that are assisting clients throughout their legal matter with their Family or Civil Lawyer, providing holistic support to limit the amount of re-traumatisation to the client where possible and provide appropriate referrals to access local community support programs and emergency relief monies.

The Family Violence Client Support Officers come to VALS with a variety of social work and case work experience from across the health and community service sectors. This has meant that in the short time since the teams' establishment, the FVCSOs have been able to have a large impact on the management of cases and the range of supports provide to our clients because of the wealth of knowledge and stakeholder connections that they bring with them from their previous roles.

Local Justice Worker (LJW) Program

LJW Staff:

- Northern Metropolitan: Tenisha Ellis
- Northern Metropolitan: Luke Edwards
- Northern Metropolitan: Darah Morris,
- Western Metropolitan: Carol Weldon

The Local Justice Workers continue to support community members to complete community-based orders. In particular, they have been participating in an intensive client management committee in partnership with the Department of Justice. This committee convenes when someone is at risk of breaching their order, and the client requests more support. The committee draws resources from community and Government together to identify what further supports can be provided, and then puts a plan in place to make sure the client receives what they need. VALS Local Justice Workers make sure the client is heard, and their needs are addressed.

ReConnect Post Release Support Program

Staff

- Darren Lovett
- Russell Williams
- Jan Muir

VALS ReConnect program is a voluntary statewide program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners being released from prison. The program aims to provide a culturally-specific response to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women to prepare for their release and their transition to life in the community.

VALS has been delivering the Reconnect Program to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities for a number of years and has continuously delivered on the following objectives:

- Implementation of individual transition plans for exiting prisoners;
- Ensuring culturally responsive services and supports are in place for exiting prisoners;
- Providing assertive outreach and practical assistance
- Assisting offenders to address issues relating to the underlying causes of their offending and achieve positive outcomes in key intervention areas.

In a trying environment, our staff have dedicated themselves to their clients and supported their transition back into their chosen community.

Aboriginal Community Justice Panels (ACJP) Program

The ACJP Program is a volunteer-based community initiative supporting communities and individuals needing assistance in justice or legal related matters. The Panels take a diversionary approach in supporting preventative initiatives for community and individual participation as well as providing direct support through a 'Call-Out' service to individuals held in Police custody.

The primary roles of the ACJP Panels include:

- liaise with legal and welfare agencies to assist in the delivery of services to Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system;
- assist to minimise contact of Aboriginal persons with the criminal justice system throughout Victoria by working with the Police and other agencies on appropriate diversionary programs; and
- assist Police in assuring the safety of Aboriginal persons in custody.

There are currently thirteen ACJPs across Victoria in the following localities:

- Shepparton
- Echuca
- Swan Hill/Robinvale
- Mildura
- Horsham
- Portland/Heywood
- Warrnambool
- Geelong
- Bendigo
- Ballarat
- Northern Metropolitan
- Dandenong

Although the initial contact point when Aboriginal people are arrested continues to remain a vital component, ACJPs have been involved in a range of other activities including:

- Follow up support with families and persons who may have contact with Police
- School holiday program support, positive alcohol, drug and violence free children's activities
- Crisis and emergency/welfare relief.
- Support for drug and alcohol-free sporting events including football, netball, and basketball.
- Attending various community justice related bodies and meetings, including: LAJAC, IFVRAG, LAECG, Aboriginal Health and Well-Being, Drug and Alcohol, Corrections, Sheriffs' and Police.

VPeR

Staff

- Jane Britten

In July 2017, VALS and Victoria Police commenced a trial of the Victoria Police Electronic Referral Program ("VPeR").

The program allows any police station across the State to email VALS through our central intake any referral for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that have been in Police attendance and that require ongoing support to address areas of concern such as; mental health, disability support, housing, counselling, drug and alcohol, finance, etc.

These referrals include; family violence incidents, non-family violence incidents and non-crisis situations.

VALS currently employs one VPeR Support Officer to action these referrals within 48 hours by contacting the identified person and making appropriate service specific referrals to services in their local area.

VALS Community Legal Education Program

The VALS Community Legal Education (CLE) Program continues to undertake an important role in the services of delivery VALS. Under the steady guidance of Loretta O’Neill, the CLE program delivers a range of activities and forums that provide educational information to the community and address person, social and community legal issues.

2017-18 saw VALS trial the locating of the CLE Project Officer position from one of our regional offices, Shepparton, in an effort to increase engagement opportunities with stakeholders located in regional areas of Victoria.

In the second half of the reporting year the major project of the CLE was the finalising the fit out and launching of the VALS Justice Bus. The fit out of the bus was completed by March 2018 in time got it to attend a state-wide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sporting carnival held in Shepparton. The Bus was well received by the community and was visited by many over the course of the weekend to pick up VALS merchandise and legal information packs.

VALS CLE hosted a community Legal Health Check day in April in the regional town of Echuca utilising the Justice Bus. The bus provided a mobile office for the legal staff that attended to provide private legal advice to community member that attended the event, while providing ample space to promote our information packs.



A continuing challenge to the VALS CLE program is that the program has only one dedicated staff member with many projects in progress at any one time. VALS continues to try and identify additional income streams that could provide additional staff member support to the CLE program, and community engagement in the CLE program.

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
Office of the Public Advocate presents

Your LIFE Your CHOICE

BALLARAT (BDAC) FREE INFORMATION SESSIONS FOR ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND WORKERS

POWERS OF ATTORNEY AND GUARDIANSHIP Find out what it all means for you to select a person to carry out your decisions about your financial, medical or personal matters that could affect you if you become incapacitated through an accident or illness

A FREE WILLS DAY (Conditions apply)
Wills are drafted on the day by Gilbert and Tobin Lawyers and can be up picked the next day

Where - The Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative
5 Market St, Ballarat Central

When - Monday June 19th

Time - 11.00 am to 2.00pm **FREE LUNCH Provided**

Balit Ngulu Legal Service

Balit Ngulu translates to 'Strong Voice' in the language of the Wurundjeri people.



VALS had identified that we were unable to take on youth matters due to conflicts of interest and the number of matters that had to be referred were continually increasing. VALS recognised that this was placing our vulnerable youth clients at risk and brought forward the establishment of the service to ensure that our vulnerable youth had access to a culturally appropriate and holistic service.

The establishment of the Balit Ngulu Legal Service has provided VALS, and the wider legal sector, with an important culturally appropriate and safe referral point for children and youth clients that we are not able to assist at VALS.

Because of the staff at Balit Ngulu, VALS could be assured that the child and youth matters being referred are receiving a culturally safe and holistic service that will be able to address the ever-increasing incidents of interaction our youth have with the justice and child protection systems.

The small but tenacious team consisted of:

- 1 Managing Lawyer (Child Protection & Youth Justice)
- 1 Senior Child Protection Lawyer,
- 1 Child Protection Lawyer
- 2 Youth Justice Lawyers
- 1 Civil Lawyer
- 2 Client Service Officers (1 Male, 1 Female)
- 2 Support Staff (1 Paralegal, 1 Admin)

From the outset the service had a steady uptake of clients and saw staff members travelling across the State to meet the demand of our young clients.

In the 12 months of service, Balit Ngulu Legal Service provided case support in:

- 11 Civil Law matter,
- 60 Family Law and Child Protection matters, and
- Over 180 Criminal Law matters.

Unfortunately Balit Ngulu Legal Service had to be closed due to lack of ongoing funding for the service. VALS has continued to support the service and made repeated calls and submissions to funding bodies to secure its future.

TACLS Report

TACLS has now reached its third year in operation under the auspice of VALS and continues to growth.

The 2017-18 was a time to reflect which structures and system where working well, and one that need to be adjusted to assist in streamlining services delivery for the staff and for the community members.

During the reporting year saw the re-allocating of staff to establish a central reception point. When TACLS first formed, the Launceston office would take its own calls, as would Hobart. However, this meant that when community where contacting TACLS is could lead to confusion as to the location of the staff member they were wishing to speak to and had the possibility of leading to a greater chance errors could be made.

TACLS have re-routed the phone system so that incoming calls now go to a central receptionist, located in Launceston office, and calls can internally be put through to the relevant person. This change has resulted in a smoother intake process, with custody notifications and enquiries coming through one location.

The Hobart office continues to provide legal services across the area of criminal, civil and family law with the support of 3 lawyers, a CSO and 2 administrative support officers.

The Launceston office continues to grow in staffing numbers to meet the increasing demand of the northern areas of the State. Staff within the Launceston office provide legal services across the area of criminal, civil and family law with the support of 5 lawyers, a CSO and 4 administrative support officers.

TACLS signed on to another 12-month MOU with the LACT, agreeing to collaborate where ever possible. It is intended that TACLS and the LACT continue to share professional knowledge, expertise and resources, identify opportunities for joint training, share statistical information and promote each other's services with the legal services sector, government and the community.

TACLS was made aware towards the end of the reporting period that the LACT reported the number of LACT duty lawyer services provided to Aboriginal people are coming down over time.

During the reporting period The Department of Justice within Tasmania conducted a review into the Tasmanian Legal Assistance Sector in which TACLS actively participated. While TACLS does not receive any State funding, a reduction in funding to the CLC sector in Tasmania would have a very negative impact on Aboriginal people in Tasmania and likely see a significant strain placed on our service.

TACLS continues to be an ex officio member of the Tasmanian Regional Aboriginal Communities Alliance (TRACA) and to take cultural advice from TRACA. In August 2017 TACLS signed an MOU with TRACA to formalise the relationship between the two organisations.

The MOU expresses its objectives to be:

- To create a partnership to improve the access and equity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to high quality and culturally appropriate legal assistance services.
- To foster professional cooperation through personal contact points and regular stakeholder meetings.
- To deal with Tasmanian matters whilst dealing with Aboriginal people's dignity and rights whilst accessing legal assistance services.
- To improve the health and justice outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- To work together to identify law reform and advocacy issues facing Aboriginal communities in Tasmania and work together on solutions to those issues.

An exciting moment of the 2017-18 year was the arrival and set-up of a video-teleconferencing system that will allow lawyers to hold legal advice clinics and community legal education workshop via the tele-conferencing system to remote areas of Tasmania through local community service with the capabilities.

A point of pride for the TACLS legal service is that their service provision operates on a model that maximises the skills of the legal team members, only briefing counsel in particularly complex matters, such as for trial. Each lawyer takes their matter from its beginning to its conclusion.

Where a matter is set down for trial the lawyer may brief but is required to junior on the trial. In this way we can become less reliant upon briefing the private bar and develop our lawyers and be more cost effective. This also provide ample opportunity for staff to provide internal mentoring and learning opportunities to support their co-worker is new types and levels of legal matters.

TACLS staff members continue to explore opportunities within the community to participate in providing Community Legal Education workshops. Through this reporting year TACLS provided CLE workshops at;

- Risdon Prison,
- Leprena,
- Karadi,
- Six Rivers, and
- Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation (CHAC)

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

Free call: 1800 064 865

Melbourne Office:
273 High Street, Preston, 3072



Regional Offices:

Ballarat - 403 Main Road, Ballarat, 3350

Bairnsdale - Shop 13, Riviera Plaza 80 Main Street, Bairnsdale, 3875

Heywood - 22 Hunter Street, Heywood, 3304

Mildura - 118-120 Madden Avenue Mildura, 3502

Morwell - 16 George Street, Morwell, 3840

Shepparton - Suite 1, 98 Nixon Street, Shepparton, 3875

Swan Hill - 139A Campbell Street Swan Hill, 3585

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Tasmanian Aboriginal Community Legal Service



Free call: 1800 064 865

Hobart Office:

Suite 402, Level 4, 152 Macquarie Street, Hobart

Launceston Office:

Level 1, Office 1A, 67-69 Brisbane Street, Launceston

<http://tacls.org.au/>

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