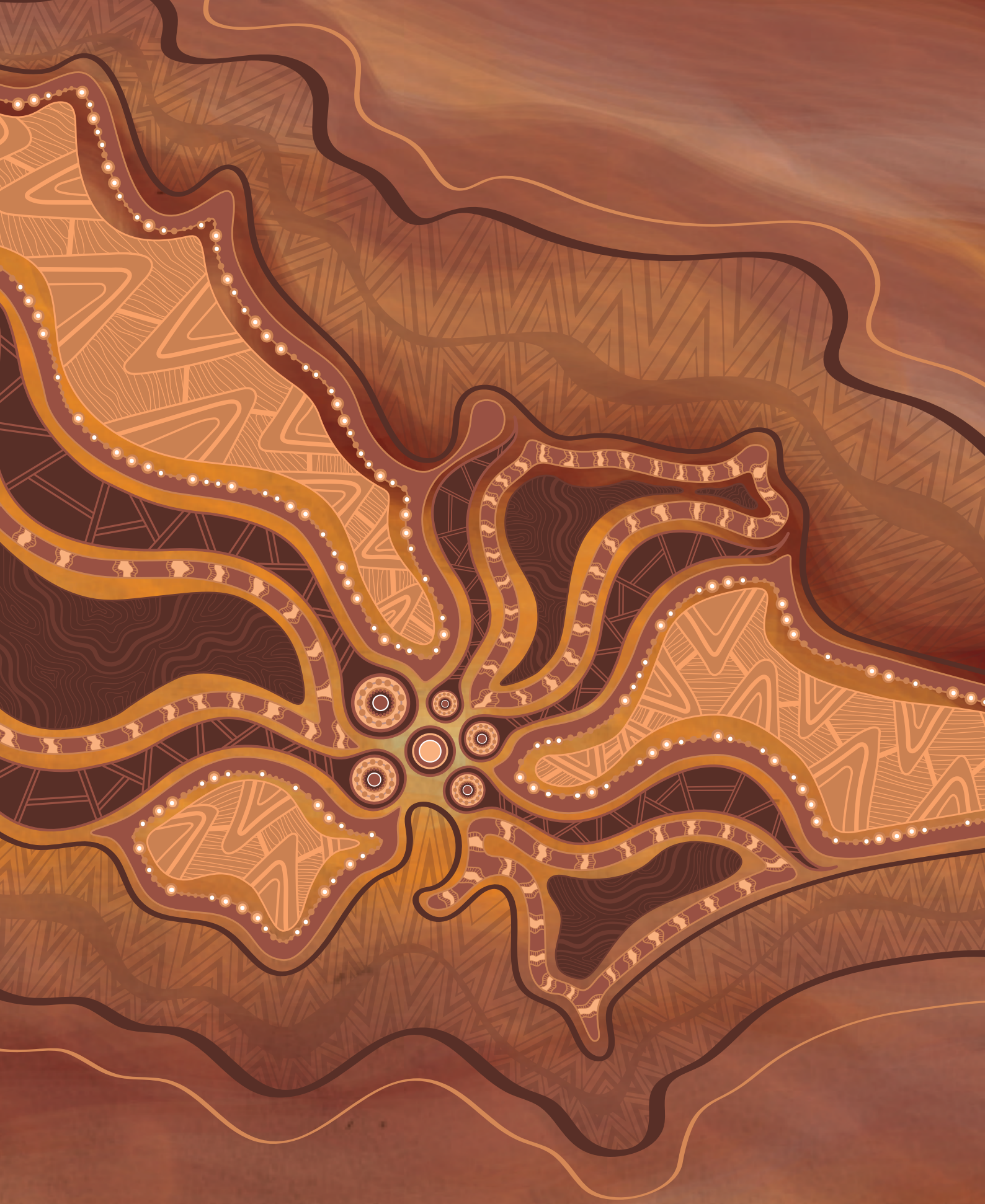


Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

ANNUAL REPORT

2025 - 2026

Victorian Aboriginal
Legal Service

Acknowledgement of Country

VALS pays our deepest respects to the Traditional Owners of the lands, seas and skies across Victoria. We acknowledge our Elders both past and present as our storytellers, knowledge holders and cultural teachers. We also acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria and pay respect to the ongoing resistance, strength and connection to the oldest continuing culture on earth.

We pay respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and people who have maintained the struggle to achieve justice.

Across Australia, we live on unceded land. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.

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About Us

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) with over 50 years of experience providing high quality, culturally capable legal and community justice services to our people across Victoria.

Our organisation supports Aboriginal people of all ages and genders in the areas of criminal, family and civil law. We also have our dedicated youth practice; Balit Ngulu and our Wirraway practice, supporting clients who experience harms due to the actions of police or prison authorities. VALS' Community Justice Programs team is staffed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who provide culturally safe services including; transitional housing for women through Baggarrook, support when people first enter custody through the Custody Notification Service, culturally appropriate sentencing through our Aboriginal Community Justice Reports and a therapeutic wraparound service for the whole family; Ngang Gak.

We are funded through the National Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP) and the Victorian Government, with some additional funding made available through our partners Victorian Legal Services Board + Commission, Victoria Legal Aid, Oak Foundation, and many individuals who want to see improved justice and equity outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

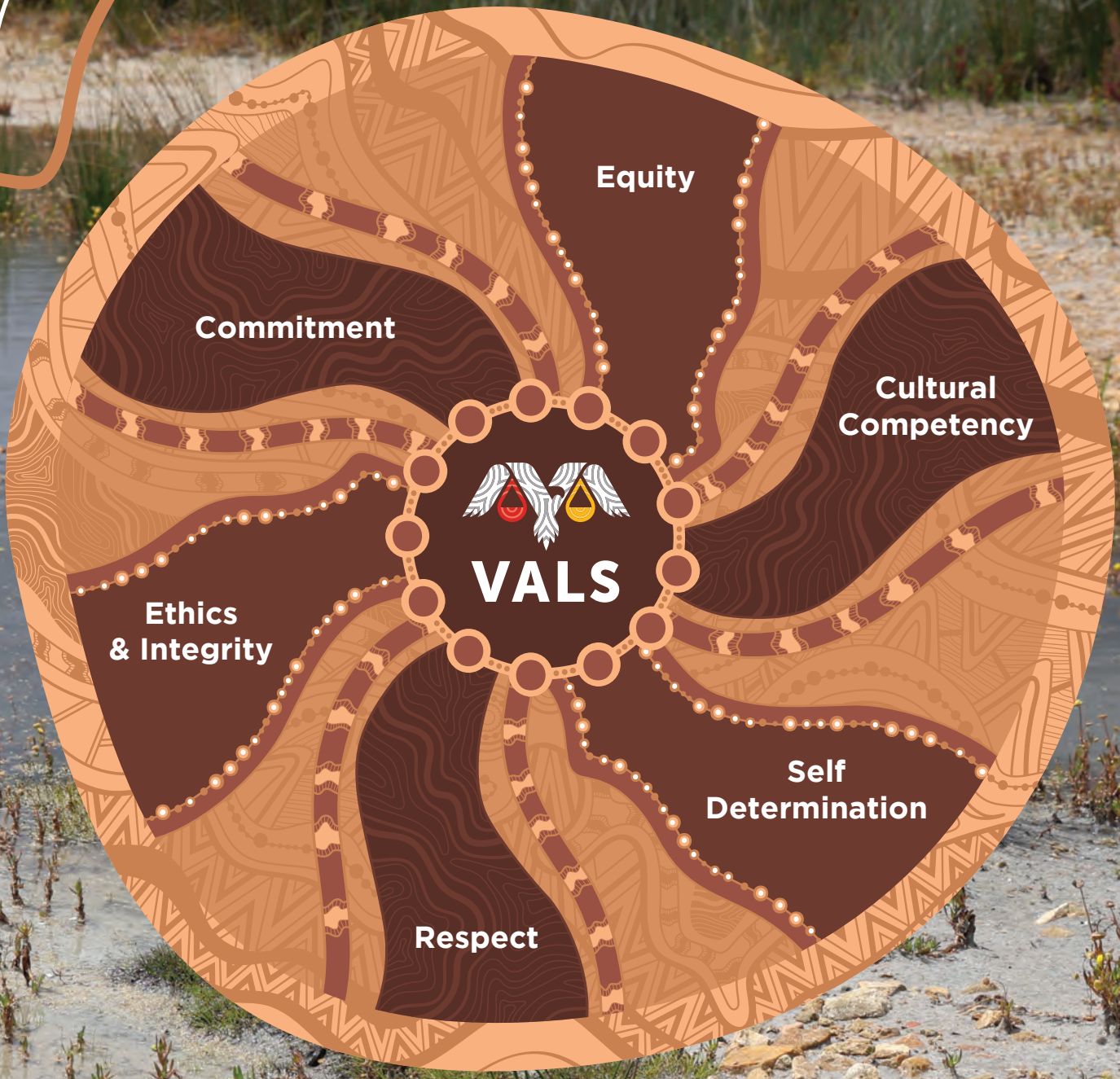
Over time, VALS has expanded its services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait people. Our practice areas include criminal law, family law, civil and human rights law, a dedicated youth legal service - Balit Ngulu, and Wirraway, our Police and Prison Accountability service. This is a unique service offering amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services nationally.

As part of delivering high quality, culturally capable and accessible legal assistance, VALS provides a range of Community Justice Programs which provide key supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Victoria. This includes a 24/7 Custody Notification Service, Baggarrook - our transitional housing support program for women with complex needs leaving custody. We also have client service support officers which sit within our legal teams and provide community legal education across Victoria to equip Aboriginal people with the knowledge and skills to confidently self-advocate for their rights. We have a staunch and respected voice in policy and advocacy and are building our Research and Evidence Development Unit.

Please note, the names of clients whose stories are included in this report have been changed to protect their identities.



Our Values



Bung Yarnda, Gunaikurnai Country

Chairperson Statement



I am proud of what VALS has achieved this year in what has been a very challenging political environment, resulting in harmful policy and laws impacting Aboriginal people all across the state. We have remained staunch in our advocacy, clear in our asks for reforms and unwavering in our support for our clients and community members across the state. It continues to be a great honour to serve as Chairperson, now in my third year. I, alongside all our Board Members and VALS Executive Team are united in our commitment to provide high quality, Aboriginal led legal assistance and community justice programs to our people.

Our unique self-determined service model, developed over the past 53 years by and for our community, is something that we should all be proud of. Our model has grown and developed over time to meet our communities' needs, both legal and non-legal. It is challenging to balance the strength that comes from expanding our services, especially our dedicated youth legal practice Balit Ngulu, our new specialised Family Violence Practice, growing our Disaster Rights Practice, alongside the knowledge that this service need reflects the ongoing criminalisation of our people and children. This is why our advocacy as an Aboriginal Legal Service is so critical, that we continue to fight for the rights of our people to be protected and upheld.

As we launch our new three year Strategic Plan, VALS has a vision for a transformed legal system, grounded in cultural lore, shaped by truth, and delivering intergenerational justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is a vision we are all committed to achieve.

I want to extend my sincere and heartfelt thanks to everyone at VALS, from our Client Service Officers, to our broad team of lawyers, paralegals, volunteers, Community Engagement team, Policy and Communications, Research and Evidence

Development teams, and everyone in back of house. Every single one of you plays such an integral role at this organisation.

To my fellow Board members, thank you for expertise, dedicated work and staunch support. Thank you to Apryl Day, Sarina Gentile, Holly Charles, Tiana Koehrer, Uncle Bobby Nicholls, Tarneen Onus Browne and Travis Lovett. It is a significant commitment to be on the VALS Board, and I acknowledge the time and effort you have all made over the past year to contribute to strengthening VALS' service offerings to ensure we meet the needs of our people.

To our CEO, Nerita Waight, you lead VALS with such integrity and courage. Nerita is unwavering in her approach in striving to achieve VALS' vision and her determination to achieve a more just justice system. For the majority of this reporting period Nerita balanced two significant roles as both VALS CEO and as elected member of the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria and the nominated Treaty Co-Convenor and key Negotiator. Last November this country's first Treaty was signed between First Peoples and the State. This is a significant milestone and something we should all be proud of.

Nerita is supported by our Deputy CEO, Amanda Dunstall, who exemplifies her resolute commitment to VALS through her diligent and unwavering dedication to advancing VALS' vision and supporting our people.

With the upcoming state election, this state's leadership may change, but the staunch advocacy of VALS and other ACCOs, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and Aboriginal governance structures will remain steadfast in our commitment to uphold our rights, advocate for systems reforms and hold government to account. I know immense challenges are ahead of us as we try and secure ongoing funding for our life saving Regional Justice Hub model, to meet the increase of demand for legal assistance following the introduction of regressive bail laws, youth sentencing laws and the expansion of police powers that will see more of our people incarcerated and their rights denied.

I want to recognise some of the recent wins including legislating a cumulative 14 day legal limit for the number of days someone can remain in police cell custody, this will mean Victoria Police, as of August 2027 will no longer be able to move our people between police stations to override the 14 day legal limit. We know this doesn't go far enough in terms of police cell conditions, as outlined in our Open Letter but this is still a significant win to be celebrated. We have also seen the decriminalisation of begging which was a recommendation as part of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which delivered its final report 35 years ago. I want to recognise the work that our Wirraway Police and Prison Accountability practice in supporting families who have lost loved ones in custody.

I look forward to supporting VALS to continue to meet our strategic vision and achieving justice for our people.

Associate Professor
Crystal McKinnon

CEO Statement



Justice for our people is not just a statement of commitment for VALS, it is an unwavering cultural obligation that we carry every day, that I am proud to uphold and strive for as CEO.

This year I reflect on those who have been most impacted by the regressive, harmful and punitive laws that the Victorian government have enacted, in particular our children and young people. We are seeing the mass incarceration of our people, the winding back of a long held commitment to close the gap, and the erosion of protected human rights.

Despite this, Treaty provides hope. It provides the framework and opportunity for transformational change, a redistribution of power. Treaty is about who decides, who governs, who is accountable, and most importantly — Treaty is about recognising that Aboriginal people have the right to make decisions about their own lives.

The first statewide Treaty, of which I helped to negotiate, enshrines Gellung Warl, Nginma Ngainga Wara, and Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna — mechanisms for representation, accountability, and permanent truth telling. Treaty embeds our right to self determination within Victoria's political system. It creates the political space for Traditional Owner Treaties and future statewide agreements. It provides a framework for transforming the colonial systems that continue to oppress our people.

The first statewide Treaty also provides a framework for the negotiation of future Treaties, and I am hopeful that in the near future, we will be able to build upon this and negotiate Treaties that enable structural transformation to the systems that cause harm to our people, including the colonial legal system.

Treaty can and should enable:

- Aboriginal-led justice processes
- community-designed, culturally safe responses to harm
- accountability mechanisms that apply to government
- structural shifts in who holds authority and power

Importantly it allows us to scale up what we know already works for our communities.

We already have examples of successful, Aboriginal-led approaches here: Koori Courts, Aboriginal Community Justice Reports, restorative justice approaches, therapeutic residential models, culturally safe AOD supports and so on. Frustratingly, these currently exist at the margins of the criminal legal system but now Treaty allows them to move to the centre.

We deserve a government that upholds and protects Treaty, that invests in Aboriginal led response that support our people and listens to what our communities have to say. In an election year, VALS' calls to action are clear, and our pathway to justice is achievable.

I want to thank our Board, especially our Chairperson Associate Professor Crystal McKinnon, our Executive Team and all VALS staff and volunteers for their unwavering support, tireless efforts in advocating for our clients and for the Aboriginal community.

Your strength and perseverance have been inspiring. I know that VALS will continue to be unrelenting in our pursuit for a more just justice system in this new Treaty era. I could not do this work without you, and I thank each and every one of you.

I want to touch on some of the highlights of this past year which include:

- Raising the age of criminal responsibility to 12
- Our Wirraway Practice supporting families who have lost loved ones in custody
- Delivering custody packs to community being held in police cells so they have a change of clothes
- Our NAIDOC Family Day – bringing together children and families to celebrate our culture
- Our advocacy in response to bad bail laws, youth sentencing reforms, limiting access to open air in custody and police cell rights

To the ACCOs we walk alongside, the Aboriginal governance forums who continually hold this government to account, to the First Peoples' Assembly who are enacting this state's first Treaty, to the Community Legal Centres sector and our allies and to our funders and supporters, thank you and I look forward to continuing to strive for justice for our people.

Nerita Waight, CEO.



Merri Merri, Wurundjeri Country

Board of Directors



Crystal McKinnon

Associate Professor in History, Law and Justice at the University of Melbourne

Chairperson

Dr Crystal McKinnon is a Yamatji person and is an Associate Professor in History, Law and Justice at the University of Melbourne. Crystal is an extensively published academic and expert speaker and presenter on subjects related to critical Indigenous studies, Indigenous People's histories, social movements, sovereignty and justice. Crystal is a member of various academic bodies and is involved in academic administration, university governance and wider participation in the Boards and steering committees of various not-for-profit and community organisations.



Apryl Day

Executive Director and Founder of Dhadjowa Foundation

Secretary

Apryl Day is a proud Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba and Barapa Barapa woman. She is a community organiser and campaigner, and a member of both Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance Victoria and Pay the Rent. She is the daughter of Tanya Day – a proud Yorta Yorta woman who died in custody in 2017.

Apryl and her family successfully led the campaign to end the criminalisation of public drunkenness in Victoria and is at the forefront of the fight for police accountability and justice matters. Apryl is the Executive Director and Founder of the Dhadjowa Foundation which provides culturally safe and strategic guidance and support to families whose loved ones have died in custody in hopes to amplify the campaigning of families and end Aboriginal deaths in custody.



Sarina Gentile

Treasurer

Sarina Gentile is a proud Aboriginal woman from the Wollithiga clan of the Yorta Yorta Nation. She brings over two decades of leadership and advocacy experience across government and community sectors. Her career has been grounded in a strong commitment to justice reform, culturally informed practice, and the empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Sarina has held senior roles in both government and community-led organisations, where she has led initiatives focused on improving justice outcomes, building culturally safe systems, and strengthening accountability to Aboriginal communities.

Her work spans policy development, program design, and strategic leadership — all with a focus on addressing the systemic challenges faced by Aboriginal people within the justice system.

With a proven ability to influence change at both operational and strategic levels, Sarina is deeply committed to building partnerships, embedding cultural integrity, and promoting long-term, community-led solutions. Her appointment to the Board of VALS reflects her enduring dedication to equity, justice, and self-determination.



Holly Charles

Member

Holly Charles is a Yorta Yorta and Gunai woman who grew up on Waddawurrung country and spent several years living in Geelong and Melbourne before recently returning to Yorta Yorta country. She is a Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne and has worked across government, education and community advocacy roles. Holly previously worked as a lawyer in Commonwealth agencies and now focusses on community-led research and justice reform. Her work centres on race and the law, and the role of First Nations knowledges in challenging colonial systems and creating self-determined futures.



Tiana Koehrer

Member

Tiana is a proud Yorta Yorta and Wurundjeri woman. Born and raised in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Tiana has actively contributed to her community through volunteer work and advocacy.

Tiana has worked for several years in a number of high-level roles across the health, Treaty and justice spaces.

She also has a wealth of governance experience though past and current board member opportunities.

Currently working as a Manager in the Justice sector, Tiana is passion about ensuring all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Victorian's have access to culturally space supports and services, especially those in contact with the justice system. She is passionate about working with young, incarcerated mob to build tools with them to ensure they do not return to custody.



Bobby Nicholls

Member

Bobby Nicholls is a proud Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, and Wadjabalok man and the nephew of Sir Douglas Nicholls.

He is the Chairperson of Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Corporation YYNAC. Bobby was a Director of VACCA for 10 years, first joining in 1981. Bobby has worked in community run organisations such as the Aborigines Advancement League, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, and the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria.

Bobby is one of the founding members of Yarnin' Pictures, formed by his passion to document Elders stories whilst training Aboriginal youth in the art of filmmaking. To this end, he helped create an App called "Yalinguth" a Woi-wurrung word meaning 'yesterday' which echoes the sentiments of many Elders that "we need to go back, before we can go forwards".



Tarneen Onus Browne

Member

Tarneen Onus Browne is a proud Gunditjmara, Yorta Yorta person through their mother and Bindal and Meriam person through their father. Tarneen is living on the unceded land of the Wurundjeri peoples.

Tarneen is a community organising lead at Australian Progress, previously VALS community legal educator, a community organiser for Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance working on Invasion Day, Black Deaths in Custody and Black Lives Matter. They're also a writer and filmmaker that has been published in IndigenousX, The Urban List, Crikey, NITV and RightNow. Tarneen's film "young mob questioning treaty" has been screened internationally at ImagineNATIVE in Toronto and Tampere Film Festival in Finland.



Travis Lovett

Member

Travis Lovett is a Kerrupmara, Gunditjmara and Boandik man. He is the Executive Director of the Centre for Truth Telling and Dialogue at the University of Melbourne, leading transformative work to embed truth telling, cultural authority, and systemic reform across institutions.

Travis previously served as Deputy Chair and Commissioner at the Yoorrook Justice Commission, where he helped deliver Australia's first formal truth telling inquiry. His leadership enabled and influenced landmark reports that shaped Treaty negotiations and advanced justice reform. He has also held senior roles across government, including in First Peoples State Relations, Aboriginal Victoria, and the Department of Justice, where he lead reform of the Koori Courts, water law, and built cultural safety frameworks.

Travis led the historic Walk for Truth from Portland to Parliament, a 513 kilometre journey that carried the voices and authority of First Peoples across Country and into the heart of political power. Recognised internationally as a keynote speaker and advisor, Travis continues to mentor Aboriginal leaders and guide institutions to embed First Peoples' priorities into governance and strategy.

VALS New Strategic Plan



Smoking on Wurundjeri Country

This year, VALS started building the roadmap that will guide our next five years, one shaped by our own people and community. Drafting is well underway, and the final plan will be presented to the Board for approval early in the new financial year.

Getting this right matters. The plan was developed over numerous conversations and yarning sessions with VALS staff, Board members, community members, and external partners across the legal, community justice and government sectors. Their voices are shaping a plan grounded in self-determination and community control, one that names the truth of what our people continue to face: the ongoing harms of colonisation, systemic racism, over-policing and over-incarceration, and chronic underfunding of Aboriginal-led legal support.

The plan will sharpen VALS' focus across five priorities: delivering Aboriginal-led, holistic legal services wherever they're needed; making louder the truths of our history and centring our people's stories; driving systemic and transformational reform; strengthening our partnerships and growing the sector's capability; and investing in our own organisation, workforce and infrastructure so our impact lasts.

With a Victorian state election at the end of 2026 and continued uncertainty at the Federal level, the political and funding landscape ahead is far from settled. That's exactly why this plan matters. It gives VALS a clear, deliberate direction to hold to, so that whatever changes around us, we keep serving our clients and community, and keep fighting for a safer, fairer legal system for our people.

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

Strategic Plan 2026 - 2029

August 2026

Vision

A transformed legal system, grounded in cultural lore, shaped by truth, and delivering intergenerational justice for First Nations peoples.

Purpose

The leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice in the Victorian justice system, delivering holistic, high quality legal and community services. We drive transformational change in the legal system through staunch, evidence-based advocacy, reform and leadership.

Values

- **Self-Determination:** We uphold the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations to lead decisions that affect their lives, grounded in culture, community control and self-determined futures.
- **Truth-Telling & Justice:** We have the courage to advocate fiercely for truth and justice by calling out colonial systems of harm, holding the government to account, and agitating to advance reform that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and self-governance.
- **Cultural Authority & Integrity:** We honour our cultural obligations to represent and provide Aboriginal-led support to our communities, clients and staff, while holding ourselves and others in the legal system accountable for acting with integrity, transparency, and trust.
- **Respect:** We treat our communities, clients and each other with respect and empathy, leading with integrity, and ensuring everyone's voices are valued and heard. We respect the diversity of experiences and perspectives of those we work with and for, and strive to reflect this within in our work.
- **Innovation:** We staunchly pursue new self-determined approaches, solutions and technologies, and continuously improve how we work, to deliver better justice outcomes and embed a stronger foundation for the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria.

	1 We are strong in purpose	2 We stand with our communities	3 We centre truth for impact	4 We lead and transform	5 We grow justice capability
Objective	**To be a self-determined, trusted organisation, clear in our purpose to deliver justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and communities across Victoria.**	**To stand with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at every point of the justice system – defending and protecting rights dignity and delivering holistic legal support.**	**To build and use evidence, story and truth telling to change the narrative, demonstrate value, drive reform and hold systems accountable.**	**To mobilise and strengthen the sector, build the public awareness and will for change, and enable Aboriginal- led reform of the systems that shape justice outcomes.**	**To grow the capability and sustainability of the justice workforce and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership who carry this work now and into the future.**
Outcome Areas	***Identity • Impact • Governance • Accountability • Sustainability*** Strengthen organisational capacity, legitimacy, community trust and impact.	***Rights based • Holistic support • Accessibility • Co-design*** Increase access to rights-based holistic justice services across Victorian communities.	***Research • Evidence • Decision-making • Accountability • Continuous Improvement*** Build a robust evidence base to drive decision-making, accountability, advocacy, and funding allocations.	***Leadership • Coordination • Partnership • Influence • Reform • Systems transformation • Narrative*** Strengthen sector coordination, collective leadership and capacity for influence.	***Workforce • Sustainability • Leadership • Wellbeing • Capability*** Grow a sector workforce and strengthen capability to drive justice outcomes.
Strategic Focus	• Grow the capacity, trusted leadership and influence of VALS as an ACCO. • Support a high performing, adaptable, culturally capable and connected workforce. • Enhance internal systems and technologies to strengthen data collection and improve operational efficiency. • Strengthen internal governance and accountability mechanisms.	• Expand Aboriginal-led legal and community justice services. • Centre service delivery in the needs, strengths, rights and aspirations of local communities. • Embed strategic service delivery partnerships to improve continuity of care across legal and other services to support the client journey. • Build trust across communities by strengthening local presence and engagement.	• Better understand community justice and legal needs for service planning and advocacy. • Strengthen data capability and quality to inform service planning and performance monitoring. • Build a robust evidence base to inform future-focused reform, hold the system to account and advocate for demand-based, proportional funding. • Privilege lived experience, community voice and cultural knowledge as essential forms of evidence.	• Advance structural justice reform and Closing the Gap priorities through leading advocacy, action, and learning, grounded in community voice. • Lead advocacy for sustainable and equitable funding for Aboriginal justice services aligned to community need. • Grow partnerships with purpose across governments, the legal profession, and the broader justice ecosystem. • Amplify VALS's public voice to shift community, media and political narratives on Aboriginal justice.	• Develop lawyers, advocates and leaders with the knowledge, skills, and capability to defend communities, protect and uphold Aboriginal rights, and challenge systems. • Strengthen interdisciplinary practice across legal, community service, policy and advocacy domains. • Build the next generation of Aboriginal justice leaders through mentoring and opportunities for growth.
What this enables	• VALS is respected, influential, financially sustainable, and Aboriginal-led • VALS operates efficiently to effectively drive and implement strategic priorities • VALS has a strong workplace culture and staff are connected • VALS attracts, develops and retains a skilled and culturally capable workforce	• Strong and effective referral processes and collaboration with other stakeholders • Improved community engagement, visibility, trust, respect and impact • Increased service reach and improved accessibility	• Informed and fair decisions about service design, planning and investment (including resourcing) • A robust evidence base to support increased funding allocations and financial stability • Strengthened accountability to community, funders and stakeholders • Early identification of emerging legal and community needs • Strong advocacy for systemic reform and policy change	• The sector shares knowledge and is connected, informed, and works collectively to drive influence through alignment on key issues • VALS shapes the justice agenda at the local, statewide and national level • Governments and institutions embed Aboriginal -led justice reform • Funding and commissioning of funding better serves VALS and reflects community needs • VALS is recognised as a leading voice shaping the narrative on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice	• The workforce has the legal and cultural skills and confidence to deliver justice outcomes. • Broader understanding and capability to provide holistic defence. • Supporting broader system transformation through building Aboriginal leadership capability. • A culturally capable and responsive sector.

JUSTICE
for our people



Djirra Djirra Dance Group, Invasion Day Rally 2026

We are now in a treaty era, and reflecting on the year that was I know our people deserved more. Our people deserved justice. Yet again the Victorian government has chosen to ignore our warnings and calls for action and continue to implement regressive legislative reforms that have harmed and will continue to harm our people. We have seen our rights continually limited and breached, the dismantling of the foundational tenants of the legal system, particularly for our children. The consequence of decades of governments approaching justice with a carceral approach continues to deeply impact Aboriginal people, making us the most incarcerated population of people on the planet. We deserve a more just justice system and proper investment in self-determined solutions for our people. VALS has continued to staunchly advocate for justice and to hold this government to account.

What does justice for our people look like? VALS' Pathway to a Just Justice System clearly outlines VALS' key reform asks alongside funding asks for the upcoming Victorian state election.



Naarm, NAIDOC March 2026

VALS will continue to call for the transfer of decision-making power, authority, control and resources to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to determine the solutions for our people. We will fight for fair, long-term and sustainable funding; advocate for early intervention, prevention, rehabilitation and place-based services; and work with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, the broader legal sector, academics and other allies to drive the systems transformation that our communities deserve.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria deserve better justice outcomes. Our community should be able to access VALS' services no matter where they live in Victoria.



"Aboriginal people know what's best for our communities. Guided by our Elders, ancestors and thousands of years of cultural knowledge. We know that self-determined models that are led, designed and delivered by Aboriginal people are the only way to ensure our safety - remaining connected to Country, culture, family and community."

Nerita Waight, CEO of VALS.

Investing in self-determined solutions must be a priority for governments. Successive governments have failed to sustainably invest in VALS and the ACCO sector, instead pouring funds into punitive approaches; prisons and policing that end up causing further harm and costing more in the long-term.

Over the years to come VALS will continue to walk with our communities, to defend and uphold our rights, reduce harm, improve access to justice, and hold government and systems accountable.

With adequate and sustained funding, VALS could:

- Give our people the supports they need when exiting prison to prevent reoffending, through expansion of our Baggarrook Program
- Stop preventable deaths in custody through continued funding for our Wirraway police and prison accountability practice
- Give our kids the best chance at a safe future where they can thrive, through expansion of our Balit Ngulu service model across the state



Naarm, NAIDOC March 2026

Legal Practices





Bung Yarnda, Gunaikurnai Country



Legal Practices Overview

During 2025–26, VALS' Legal Services expanded access to representation while responding to increasingly restrictive laws and growing pressures on First Nations people in the justice system. Across our practices, our teams managed complex matters requiring sustained advocacy, specialist expertise and close collaboration between legal and non-legal staff.

A significant development was the expansion of our Bail and Remand Court service, providing representation on weekday nights and weekends. This strengthened our ability to assist clients at a critical point, advocating for their liberty and ensuring their circumstances and available supports were properly put before the court.

Our teams brought urgent Supreme Court proceedings challenging prolonged detention and inadequate conditions in police cells, including habeas corpus applications, judicial reviews and applications for urgent injunctive relief. Working alongside our Custody Notification Service and policy colleagues, this work connected immediate concerns for clients' welfare with broader advocacy for systemic change. We also continued to represent families in coronial inquests and pursue civil proceedings seeking accountability for police and prison harms.

Beyond this litigation, our teams supported families facing child protection intervention, challenged financial and housing barriers affecting clients' stability, and strengthened early intervention for children and young people. We also progressed the establishment of a dedicated Family Violence Service, with a focus on responding to the serious consequences of victim-survivor misidentification.

I am truly proud of our teams and the skill, determination and care they bring to this demanding work. Their commitment is evident in their persistence through lengthy proceedings, their responsiveness when urgent assistance is needed, and the relationships they build with clients and communities. I thank them, our volunteers and our partners for their contribution to protecting rights and pursuing First Nations justice.

Ali Besiroglu, Director of Legal Services

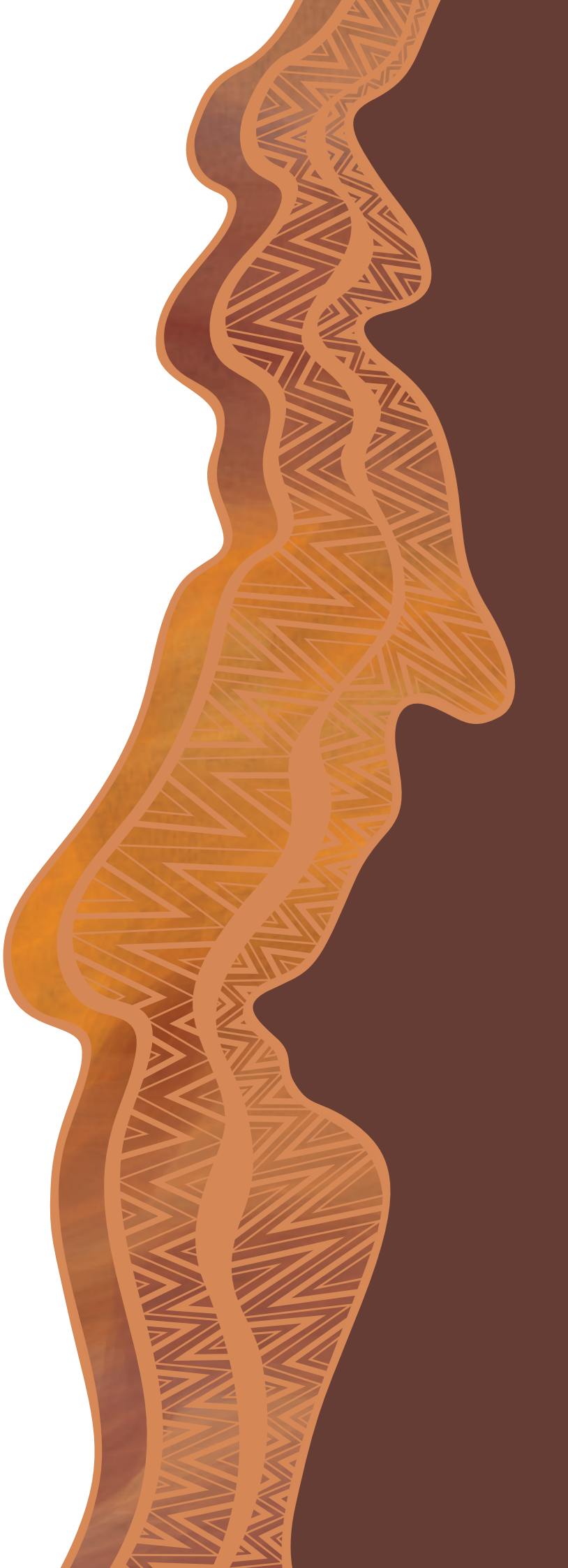
Aboriginal Families Practice

Our Aboriginal Families Practice provides legal information, advice, and litigation representation in the areas of family law, child protection, and family violence matters. We provide child and family focused assistance, supporting people through the trauma of legal proceedings or State intervention in a culturally capable and respectful way. We have a dedicated team of lawyers and family law CSOs across Preston, Warrnambool, West Melbourne, Bendigo and Mildura. Our integrated service response supports our community with litigated matters, formal negotiations and structured dispute resolution. Family violence remains a factor in the overwhelming majority of child protection and family law matters for our clients and made up a significant portion of work as a standalone issue.

Our Practice also represents children and young people (around 10% of our clients). By working together, our lawyers and CSOs have provided a brighter future for 424 children this year.

Key Achievements:

Our Practice has expanded its service reach across VALS' Regional Justice Hub sites which ensures holistic legal assistance and a reliable 'on the ground presence' that brings together both legal and non-legal assistance, and links clients, service providers and the courts together in a way no other legal service is capable of doing. Our regional lawyers and CSOs are all from the communities they serve, and this establishes a trusted presence that can't otherwise be achieved.



Case Study

Unborn Report Notification

VALS supported an Aboriginal mother of two young children, and who was pregnant with her third. She was transferred from regional Victoria to a hospital in Melbourne in her third trimester because of complications in her pregnancy which required higher levels of medical care.

Her partner, the father of her children had a history of abuse and AOD issues, so the children were removed from his care (whilst she was in hospital) and placed with the paternal grandmother on an interim arrangement.

At the same time, Child Protection progressed an unborn notification.

Our client was alone in a hospital hundreds of kilometres away from her family and community, and could do nothing to protect her children. She agreed to receive legal advice and that was when VALS was brought in to support the mother.

The father had a long history of violence and abuse towards the mother. VALS brought a family violence application to protect the mother and have him removed from the home. We were successful in obtaining the family violence order, but not a condition that the father leave the house. In the meantime, the new baby was removed from the mother whilst she was still in hospital.

In alignment with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and the right of Aboriginal families to be involved in decisions about their kin, VALS engaged directly with the mother's extended family to try and find suitable accommodation for mum, while we continued to advocate for reunification to occur. We were able to find suitable housing as well as link our client into counselling and other supports. We were also able to maintain regular visitations with her children during this critical period.

VALS assisted with transport to appointments and to court. Our client was present and engaged at every court event.

In the end we were able to prove to the court that with these critical supports engaged, and without the father's involvement in their lives, our client was able to care for her children. A less intrusive order was granted, which expires shortly and all three children remain in the mother's care.

This example shows the kinds of wrap around holistic supports that we're able to provide as soon as a notification is made to support families to stay together. Our role went beyond simply meeting the legal needs of our clients but ensuring she had a safe home for her children. This is in stark contrast to Child Protection which was focussed on removing the children and finding them a suitable placement rather than working with mum.


Merri Merri, Wurundjeri Country

Balit Ngulu Practice

Balit Ngulu provides holistic legal support and case management for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people that come into contact with the legal system.

During the 2025-2026 financial year, Balit Ngulu experienced a steady increase in service demand across metropolitan Melbourne and Greater Shepparton, with the program supporting 269 children and young people with criminal law matters. Alongside their criminal matters Balit Ngulu also supported 28 of these young people with Family Violence Intervention Orders (FVIVO); 16 of these young people with Personal Safety Intervention Orders (PSIVO); three who had a criminal matter, a FVIVO and a PSIVO as well; six young people who had both a criminal and a CAYPINS (fines that get referred to the Children's Court); six young people who had crime and child protection and one young person had a crime, child protection and family violence matters. Balit Ngulu also supported some young people in the Children's Court who did not have a criminal matter: 4 young people with CAYPINS matters, 17 with FVIVOs, and 6 with PSIVOs; 12 with child protection, including one with family violence and child protection matters.

The recruitment of additional Aboriginal Community Engagement (ACE) workers strengthened Balit Ngulu's capacity to provide culturally safe, in-house support to young people. This uplift in ACE workers delivered significant benefits to Balit clients, particularly through case management and advocacy to secure appropriate housing and rehabilitation options for clients. In the context of increasingly restrictive bail laws, this wraparound support was instrumental in securing bail for some young people who may otherwise have remained on remand for extended periods.

These outcomes highlight the critical role of culturally informed, holistic support alongside legal representation in addressing the broader needs of young people and achieving outcomes that may not be possible through legal advocacy alone.

Expansion of Balit Ngulu's model and approach

In line with our ongoing commitment to expanding culturally safe and community-led legal and support services, Balit Ngulu commenced delivery of two key pilot extensions of the core practice.

In addition to legal assistance, our Aboriginal Community Engagement (ACE) Worker team provided holistic case management, supporting young people with non-legal needs such as:

- Strengthening cultural and community connections and supports
- Social and emotional wellbeing
- Targeted referrals for AOD and mental health supports
- Housing and Homelessness referrals and advocacy
- Applying for Centrelink and navigating Service Australia
- Applying for Birth Certificate and obtaining ID
- Assistance to obtain Confirmation of Aboriginality
- Transportation and support to necessary appointments and/or court dates

This wraparound model remains central to the Balit Ngulu approach, recognising that legal issues are often intertwined with broader systemic and social challenges.



Balit Ngulu team members

1. Strong Voice for Early Intervention - Child Protection and Family Violence Legal Services and Support – Darebin LGA

As part of the pilot, Balit Ngulu commenced providing specialist legal representation, advocacy and support to Aboriginal children and young people with a connection to the Darebin LGA who are involved in child protection and family violence matters. The pilot provides an integrated response through specialist lawyers and an Aboriginal Community Engagement (ACE) worker across key stages of a child protection matter, from the initial investigation and engagement with statutory services, through to court proceedings and ongoing support following the making of final child protection orders.

A key strength of the pilot has been its focus on early intervention. During the investigation stage, lawyers have been able to engage directly with children and young people, explain what is happening to them and their family, and advocate for their views and interests. This has included liaising with DFFH and VACCA's Nugel Program to improve communication and provide children and young people with greater certainty and understanding about the child protection process. Early legal intervention has, in some matters, supported the resolution of concerns before proceedings have needed to progress to court.

The pilot has also provided an important avenue for ongoing advocacy and support after final child protection orders have been made. Support is targeted and tailored to the individual circumstances and needs of each child/young person and may include advocating for meaningful and safe sibling contact, strengthening cultural connection and engagement, and facilitating referrals to services and supports to address identified needs. This approach recognises that a child's needs do not end when a matter is finalised in court and that continued advocacy and culturally safe support can be critical to their wellbeing, stability and connection to family, community and culture.

2. Youth Empowerment Project – Strong Voice, Strong Futures

In 2025/2026 financial year, Balit established and commenced delivery of the Strong Voice, Strong Futures initiative, targeting Aboriginal children and young people aged 10 to 17 who are engaged in or at risk of engagement in the criminal legal system.

The program has been delivered in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) and has been operational largely across metropolitan Melbourne with a strong focus on:

- educational re-engagement
- employment readiness
- cultural connection and identity
- supportive peer and community relationships
- confidence building

The activities the program has been able to deliver to young people include:

- one-on-one tutoring and mentoring delivered in-house by Youth Pathways Coordinator
- life skills sessions
- tailored individual plans developed in partnership with participants
- Support re-engaging with school including in some instances transport to school
- flexible brokerage to address barriers such as short courses, uniforms, devices, or re-engagement costs.

Over the last 12 months, the two dedicated Youth Pathways Coordinators have supported participants to build confidence, overcome shame associated with disengagement, and reduce reoffending through targeted, strengths-based support.

Case Study

Advocacy for Diversion and Culturally Appropriate Outcomes

Balit Ngulu advocated for a young person in regional Victoria to have their matter dealt with through the Aboriginal Youth Cautioning Program ("AYCP") rather than the formal court process. When the Balit Ngulu lawyer's request for the police informant to reconsider their refusal to issue a caution was unsuccessful, Balit Ngulu management escalated the matter to a Victoria Police Commander responsible for the Youth Portfolio. As there is no formal avenue to challenge a police informant's refusal to issue a caution, this escalation was an important step in continuing to advocate for a culturally appropriate outcome for the young person.

As a result of this advocacy, the informant's decision to refuse a caution was reconsidered, with the Divisional Superintendent and the Inspector for the region also expressing strong support for the young person's matter to proceed through the AYCP program.

This case highlights the importance of strong advocacy in securing culturally appropriate outcomes for Aboriginal young people. AYCP provides an opportunity for young people to access culturally safe supports in the community, often delivered through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to address the underlying factors contributing to the young person's contact with police, while diverting away and reducing their exposure to the criminal justice system.

The matter also highlighted an opportunity to strengthen local police understanding of the benefits of reconsidering caution refusals, taking into account the young person's individual circumstances and broader needs, and ensuring responses to Aboriginal young people are culturally appropriate.





Bung Yarnda, Gunaikurnai Country

Civil and Human Rights Practice

Our Civil and Human Rights Practice provides legal advice, referrals and casework for civil law issues including tenancy, dodgy purchases, discrimination, complaints, end of life, intervention orders, victim compensation including redress schemes, Elders support, disability, spent convictions and police checks. We have a dedicated infringements clinic staffed by volunteers and supervised by our lawyers, alongside a Mental Health practice, Victims Legal Service and Disaster rights practice.

This year has seen the Civil and Human Rights Team grow in expertise and capability. We routinely contribute to justice reform in the areas of mental health, infringements, discrimination, disaster rights and tenancy. We are active throughout the state, with our lawyers regularly attending events with the Community Engagement Team, our Regional Practice Leads co-locating with Aboriginal organisations and running Wills Days in metropolitan and regional locations. We continue to build upon our relationships with pro bono firms, which strengthens our capacity to assist more clients with a wider range of legal issues.



Disaster Rights Practice participating in a cultural burn on Gunaikurnai Country





Community Legal Education session at Ngwala

We are proud to finalise some hard-fought wins for victims of crime, achieving awards outside the norm for our clients, including support for lost wages, faulty cars and holidays on Country to assist recovery.

Our Infringements Clinic, which is run by our dedicated volunteers and supervised by our lawyers, had $964,000 in fines waived. This amount includes fines waived in the Magistrates' Court after our clients have been arrested and bailed by the Sheriff. We continue to fight for our clients' rights to fair compensation in employment, consumer, discrimination and housing matters, winning $293,000 for our clients this year. We understand the importance of financial peace of mind, and we have worked with clients to have over $213,000 of debts waived.

We established our Disaster Rights Practice using retained funding linked to past bushfires and floods. The team, together with our new Community Engagement Officer, has been working across Victoria to visit disaster-impacted communities, deliver legal education and build disaster resilience.

$964,000
worth of **fines waved** with our Infringements Clinic

$293,000
was won for our clients in **fair compensation**

$213,000
of **debts waived** for our clients

Case Study

Risk of unpaid fines

Our client is an Aboriginal woman living in the Gippsland region. She was arrested and bailed in relation to outstanding infringement warrants totalling $49,000. If unresolved, the warrants could have resulted in a period of imprisonment.

The client reached out to our Community Support Officer (CSO), who is known to her through community. The CSO contacted the Civil Regional Practice Lead (RPL) to explore what support VALS could provide and then made the referral.

The RPL arranged for the client to be assessed by a psychologist to support her application to have the fines waived on special circumstances grounds. The RPL then appeared in Court with the client and the CSO and successfully had the fines reduced from $49,000 to $1,000, with the remaining amount to be repaid by the client through an affordable monthly payment plan.

Reducing the client's financial stress has changed her way of life. She has been able to move house with her children and engage more fully in community, without the fear of outstanding infringements weighing on her. She is now on a pathway to greater financial security.

Criminal Practice

Our Criminal Law Practice provides legal assistance and representation for Aboriginal people involved in court proceedings charged with a criminal offence. This includes bail applications, Jury trials, Koori Court, contested hearings and representation in both mainstream and therapeutic courts. Our highly skilled lawyers provide expert representation across a broad spectrum of matters, from driving offences through to serious indictable charges. We aim to provide a culturally safe service and to understand the underlying reasons that have led to the offending behaviour and ensure this informs the best outcome for our clients.

During 2025–26, VALS' Criminal Law Practice advanced justice for our clients by providing culturally safe, Aboriginal-led legal assistance at critical points across the criminal legal system. There was a significant increase in overall services provided by the Criminal Team this year compared with 2024-25. The practice supported 1,551 unique clients (up from 1350 the year before) and delivered 2,711 services, including 916 court and tribunal services (up from 747 the previous year), 660 duty lawyer services (up from 247 the previous year), 415 legal advice services (up from 160 the previous year), 455 non-legal support services and 256 referrals.

Bail and remand advocacy remained central to our work. Across duty lawyer and court attendance records, our lawyers assisted with 303 bail matters, 45 applications to vary bail and seven applications to discharge bail. This work reflects VALS' commitment to reducing the disproportionate and damaging impact of remand on Aboriginal people, families and communities.

A major achievement was the commencement of VALS' Bail and Remand Court (BaRC) expansion service in March 2026, strengthening access to representation when clients are most vulnerable. Between 16 March and 30 June, VALS delivered 176 BaRC duty lawyer services to 141 unique clients. More than three-quarters of these services were provided during weekday nights or on weekends, demonstrating our responsiveness to community need outside conventional service hours. Outcomes included 50 clients released on bail, six released following a plea and two released through another outcome.

The practice also conducted 17 contested hearings and recorded three successful Supreme Court bail applications during the reporting period. These results demonstrate the value of specialist advocacy and early intervention in protecting clients' liberty, rights and connection to family, culture and community. In addition, we saw a 56% increase in the number of indictable files being run by the Team, from 37 the previous year up to 58 this year. The increase in indictable files reflects the growing capability and expertise of our lawyers to effectively manage and represent clients in increasingly complex matters.

A total of 21.5 hours of high-quality professional development was provided to the lawyers throughout the year, featuring training from Supreme and County Court Judges, Magistrates and Senior Counsel. This represented significant investment in professional capability, providing lawyers with access to leading expertise and practical insights to strengthen their skills in managing increasingly complex matters.

Our work directly advances VALS' strategic priorities by strengthening community-centred service delivery, expanding staff capability in complex bail and remand advocacy, and using frontline experience to inform systemic reform. Through persistent advocacy and culturally informed representation, the Criminal Law Practice continues to challenge the over-incarceration of Aboriginal people and pursue fairer outcomes, ensuring our clients are heard, supported and represented throughout the criminal legal system.

Case Study

VALS Repesentation Matters

Our client was 19 years of age and has a diagnosed intellectual disability. She had spent significant time in residential care and secure welfare. She left school at thirteen years old and had experienced family violence and sexual assault.

She had endured traumatic experiences that had adversely impacted her neurobiology and her capacity to self-regulate, tolerate distress and form healthy trusting relationships. Her ability to inhibit her impulsive responses and high-risk behaviour was also limited due to an under-developed pre-frontal cortex.

In addition, she had a history of polysubstance misuse, recent and historic non-fatal suicide attempts, parental neglect, unconfirmed psychosis whilst intoxicated, significant history of being missing while in care and extended periods of absence from the home with undisclosed whereabouts. All factors which significantly increased her vulnerability and experiences of sexual exploitation alongside unassessed mental health, exposure to ongoing family violence and externalised behaviours related to trauma.

In short, her childhood had the hallmarks of child maltreatment including physical, sexual and emotional abuse and exposure to family violence and neglect. Our client's experience was marked by the confluence and protracted nature of social disadvantage and deprivation. She had 18 admissions to psychiatric care within the previous 12 months due to severe mental health episodes and intoxication.

When she came to us, she had 35 police briefs. 19 were listed in the Children's Court and sixteen in the Magistrate's Court. The offending was ongoing and characterised, on occasion, by our client being remanded. Despite the large number of outstanding briefs, she had no prior convictions.

This necessitated representation by VALS at a bail justice hearing which commenced at midnight. We had spoken previously with the police, advocating for them to bail our client given her vulnerabilities. The police erroneously suggested it had no discretion and the bail justice refused bail on the basis that in combination our client may serve a term of imprisonment.

Our client was remanded overnight to front the Magistrates Court in the morning. The Prosecution was embarrassed to the point it did not oppose bail.

By working closely with agencies such as YSAS, Mental Health Advice and Response Service, NDIS and health professionals (many of whom provided helpful reports) our client was able to, albeit slowly, increase her agency in decision making and envisage a future.

Ultimately the Magistrate, upon the provision of written submissions acknowledged the significant disadvantage and ongoing challenges faced by our client, and accordingly, dismissed all charges in the Children's Court under section 360(1)a of the *Children's Youth and Families Act 2005* and placed our client on an undertaking without conviction to be of good behaviour in all the Magistrate's Court matters.

Family Violence Practice

VALS has recently launched a dedicated Family Violence Practice, which is designed to be an integrated practice offering both legal and non-legal assistance to clients in relation to family violence-related criminal matters and civil intervention order applications, acting for both respondents and applicants. We know that family violence is an issue that impacts so many of our community, as the only Aboriginal legal service that provides criminal law representation for Aboriginal women who have been misidentified, we see the high rates of misidentification, and the destructive and distressing consequences for our community. Establishing this dedicated practice is part of our commitment to provide self-determined, high quality, holistic legal assistance, when and where our community need it.

The team has a strong focus on family violence misidentification matters.

We currently have funding for 10 full-time equivalent positions, comprising a mix of lawyers and non-legal support staff. Recruitment is being undertaken in phases so that we can gradually grow the team, assess what is effective and what is not, and ensure that the people brought on board are the right fit for both the organisation and the team.

Once the metropolitan practice is established and operating effectively, we will look to expand to a regional practice. Our first area of expansion will likely be the Gippsland region. This decision is based on an analysis of both internal and external data, as well as community feedback, regarding where VALS could potentially provide an enhanced family violence service.

Even at this early stage, it has become clear how necessary a dedicated practice of this nature is and how important it is to provide specialist support to clients affected by family violence.



Case Study

The impact of misidentification

Our client, Sally, is a dedicated family violence sector worker and mother. Despite surviving a prolonged history of coercive control, digital surveillance, and severe psychological abuse from her partner, a single incident led to her being wrongfully arrested and charged as the predominant aggressor. When police arrived after Sally called Triple Zero for help, the members fixated on a brief video recorded by the person using violence showing Sally grabbing his jumper to plead with him to leave. They ignored her disclosures of family violence history, dismissed her distress, and used leading questions with the person using violence to confirm their assumptions, and in doing so, decided that self-defence was primary aggression.

The immediate harm caused by this frontline misidentification was profound. Sally was taken to the police station and separated from her breastfed infant and older children. Police left the infant and teenager in the care of the person using violence, who had no history of caring for children independently, while family friends had to step in to care for her child with complex needs. Beyond the immediate trauma of police custody and forced removal from her home under a safety notice, criminal charges uprooted Sally's career just as she was set to start a new role in the family violence sector. A single, flawed police assessment instantly stripped a person experiencing violence of her children, her home, and her livelihood.

When the matter came before the court, our team was able to step in, file a cross-application, and successfully vary the intervention order so Sally could safely return home with her children. However, challenging the police error remains a steep uphill battle. During summary case conferencing, pushing back on the misidentification only caused police to double down on their position. As the matter proceeds through the courts alongside the criminal charges, our team continues to build a robust case to defend Sally.

This matter is a stark reminder of why a specialist, culturally grounded Family Violence legal representation is a critical point in the system where misidentification can trigger immediate civil, housing, education and employment, and child protection crises when police get it wrong. Continued advocacy is critical to highlight ongoing systemic police bias, hold people using violence accountable, and protect Aboriginal women and children from being further traumatised by the systems meant to keep them safe.



Family of proud Noongar maaman Jeffrey Winmar

Wirraway Practice

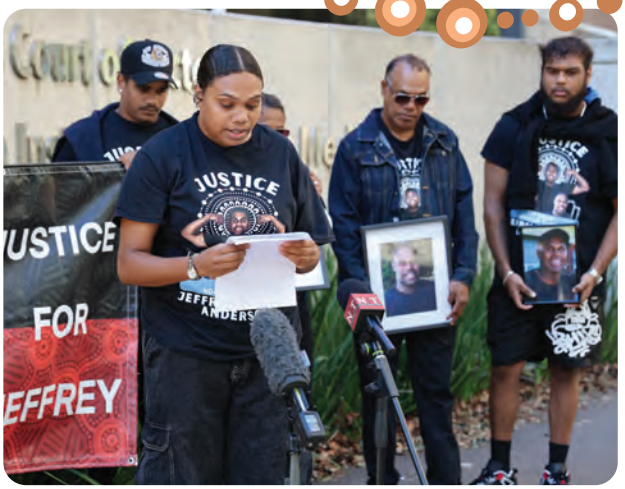
The Wirraway Police and Prison Accountability Practice provides free legal advice to clients who experience harms due to the actions of police or prison authorities. 'Wirraway' is a Wurundjeri word meaning 'challenge'. Our Wirraway Practice assists Aboriginal people who experience police and prison harms. We provide legal advice, assist with complaints, and bring court proceedings against the State for wrongdoing, including negligence, excessive use of force and unlawful detention.

Wirraway also acts for families in coronial inquests arising from deaths in custody and police contact deaths. We seek to champion the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to challenge abuses of power by police and prisons. Through this work, we hope to ensure greater accountability of police and prisons for the harm they cause Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.

Wirraway has been successful in filing an increasing number of matters in the County and Supreme Court on behalf of clients who experienced excessive use of force or otherwise unlawful actions by Victoria Police officers. This has led to a number of our clients obtaining confidential settlements in relation to police harms they were subject to. This included representing two children who were subject to use of OC spray, and representing a young Balit client who had experienced police harms since he was 12 years old. Our clients tell us that they feel proud to have brought these matters against police, to withstand the lengthy civil litigation process, and to do so to seek accountability and justice.

Wirraway has also litigated and advocated for VALS' clients who have faced and continue to face inhumane and degrading conditions in police custody. In the past year, Wirraway have also undertaken increased outreach to prisons across Victoria, and have advocated for people in prisons on issues including access to healthcare and medication, prison placements and conditions. We also advocated on behalf of clients in prison who were receiving limited or no fresh air, and in response to the government introducing legislation to restrict the right to fresh air in prisons.





Jeffrey Winmar's family at the Coroner's Court of Victoria

We are proud to have acted in the coronial inquest for the death in custody of proud Noongar man Jeffrey Winmar. Jeffrey was a beloved family man that loved spending time with his siblings, nieces and nephews and was only 28 years old when he died in Victoria Police custody. Throughout this coronial inquest process, Jeffrey's family have asked questions about how Jeffrey was treated during his pursuit and arrest, and raised concerns about Victoria Police's conduct and accountability. VALS was proud to walk alongside Jeffrey's family, and advocate for the issues that mattered to them.

In this period, we also represented the family of Clinton Austin in the final hearing block of the coronial inquest into his passing. Working closely with the family and our policy team we made final submissions reflecting the family's position on multiple issues leading to Clinton's passing. This included, the availability of healthcare and disability supports, his movements in the system including into isolation, and his application for parole. Findings are expected in the next reporting period.

Wirraway are acting on behalf of three families who lost their loved ones in police and prison custody over the last year. Alongside the Dhadjowa Foundation, who provide critical cultural, practical and strategic advocacy supports for families, VALS will continue supporting these families through the coronial process in their long journey to justice.





Family of proud Gunditjmara and Wiradjuri man, Clinton Austin



Bung Yarnda, Gunaikurnai Country

Case Study

Rights in Police Cells

Since at least May 2025, Wirraway became aware of the troubling welfare and safety concerns of people in police custody. Police cells were never meant to hold people for extended periods of time, but there has been an increasing number of people held on remand in police cells yet as a predictable outcome of the government's "tough on crime" agenda.

People in police cells spoke to us about the inhumane conditions they were experiencing in custody. This included having no access to fresh air, no change of clothes for up to three weeks, no access to withdrawal packs and medication, unsanitary and unhygienic toilets that didn't flush properly, and limited or no access to lawyers, family and friends.

The Wirraway Practice began strategically litigating to respond to these issues.

On 19 February 2026, the Wirraway practice sought an emergency injunction on behalf of our client, a proud Gunaikurnai man, who had been in police custody for 26 days. We sought an urgent transfer for him to be moved from police custody so he could receive adequate healthcare. In the hours before the application was due to be heard in the Supreme Court, Victoria Police agreed to move him.

The Wirraway Practice also began making multiple urgent habeas corpus applications in the Supreme Court seeking the release of people who had stayed over the legal limit of detention in police cells (usually 14 days). Wirraway also filed judicial review applications in the Supreme Court on behalf of clients who were spending extended periods of time in police cells. These matters are currently before the court.

The Wirraway practice worked with the Custody Notification Service and Policy Communications and Strategy teams at VALS about our clients being held in police cells, and launched an Open letter to the government urgently calling on them to end this practice. Following VALS' advocacy on this issue, the Greens successfully passed an amendment to the Corrections Act in the Victorian Parliament which means that police will no longer be able to routinely transfer someone in their custody from one station to another to override the 14 day limit. This is a significant win for our clients, and means that they will not be held for weeks on end in conditions that breach their human rights.

Wirraway are also assisting clients make complaints to relevant authorities about the conditions they are experiencing in police custody.

Community Justice Programs



ACJRs

The Aboriginal Community Justice Report (ACJR) Program aims to provide a more holistic account of individual circumstances, including as they relate to a person's community, culture and strengths and how these strengths can be applied to potential sentencing outcomes.

ACJRs, until April 2026, sat statewide in the County Court jurisdiction. Following on from the disastrous backflip on Poccums Law in early 2025, and the introduction of incredibly punitive bail measures, ACJR has sought an expansion of service delivery to the Magistrates Court statewide. The aim of this expansion is to ensure that there is a greater understanding of the continued impacts of colonisation and cultural factors in an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait person coming before the court.

The aim of the expansion of ACJR program into the Magistrates Court is to reduce the overincarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and improve sentencing processes and outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander defendants. It is noted that the vast majority of bail applications are before the Magistrates Court, VALS is seeking to expand ACJR to ensure there is a stronger awareness of information about underlying impacts on any Aboriginal person before the Court.

> ***I was happy with how the report writers told my story. It made me feel stronger in court.***
>
> *Aboriginal participant*

Unfortunately, as this reporting period has ended, so too has the funding for the ACJR pilot program, and the program is currently awaiting funding. During the 2025/2026 period, an evaluation was finalised by University of Technology Sydney. The evaluation documented how ACJRs enhance sentencing processes by centring Aboriginal life histories, cultural identity, intergenerational trauma and strengths that are often absent from conventional forensic and pre-sentence reports. The evaluation provided a strong evidence base for the continued funding of the ACJR Program, demonstrating its significant value to Aboriginal people and the justice system. Throughout the reporting period, ACJRs supported more informed and culturally responsive sentencing by providing courts with critical cultural, historical and personal context, including the impacts of colonisation, racism, structural disadvantage and intergenerational trauma. Judicial officers, lawyers and Koori Court Elders consistently reported that ACJRs provided a richer and more holistic understanding of Aboriginal people appearing before the court. The evaluation also demonstrated that the benefits of the Program extended beyond sentencing, with participants describing the ACJR process as supportive, reflective and, in many cases, therapeutic. The process supported participants to articulate their life experiences, reconnect with culture and identify meaningful pathways towards rehabilitation and healing. These findings reinforced the importance of sustained investment in the ACJR Program to ensure Aboriginal people continued to have access to culturally safe and culturally informed sentencing processes and supports.

Case Study

Positive impacts of ACJRs

John Smith* was just nine years old when police came to his family home and arrested him. “Before I knew it, I was thrown into the van… I was scared… My old girl was going off.” His mother remembers it just as vividly, “It was just terrible…. He was just gone, and we didn’t understand why.”

John was sent hours away to a boy’s institution where he spent the next 18 months, “I missed my brothers and sisters, and I was worried about mum and dad… I didn’t know how or if I’d ever get to go back home.” The offending deemed serious enough to warrant a child being taken from his home and everything he knew; the theft of an inexpensive toy.

That removal began a cycle of institutionalisation throughout John’s childhood. He recalled the boys learning from one another “new ways to do things we shouldn’t be,” while he learned to monitor for danger, stay out of sight and rely on himself. “You have to get tough to survive.” When John returned home, he was “no longer the same little boy who had left.” Before long, he was back inside. “You just end up learning the system. You get used to it. It becomes normal.”

John described much of his adult life as a series of attempts to build something different. He worked hard, raised a family, and contributed to his community, but periods of financial pressure, loss and substance use repeatedly disrupted that stability and, at times, brought him back into contact with the justice system.

When John was referred for an ACJR, he had spent decades being seen through his offending and criminal history, the ACJR gave John an opportunity to tell the Court who he was beyond that record, in his own words.

John initially described the process as overwhelming, saying he had rarely spoken openly about his life and found it difficult to trust. However, he didn’t let this stop him. With each contact, he came prepared with notes and openly shared his story with the writer. By the end, John said he gotten ‘a lot’ out of the ACJR process, “It was good getting it all off my chest. I feel heaps better in myself and a lot more relieved… Once this is all done and courts out of the way I’ve now cleared my head to see the future.”

In sentencing, the judge reflected on the limitations of psychological evidence in explaining Aboriginal disadvantage, observing that sometimes “the real source… is in history.” Of John, she said, “You were arrested at nine years old. There is no psychological explanation for that. The explanation is historical.”

She described his ACJR as a “remarkable document” that provided insight into the deprivations John had experienced through the rupture of family, and culture, the over-policing, and institutionalisation, alongside his family’s survival and resilience.

The judge ultimately found that the history set out in the ACJR warranted a significant reduction in sentence on Bugmy grounds. John’s history did not excuse his offending, but he was no longer being sentenced without it. The nine-year-old boy at the beginning of his story was finally seen, and so was the mother who had watched him be taken away without understanding why. Decades later, the systemic harm done to their family was heard and given weight. In that recognition, the little boy John had once been, and his family, were finally offered some justice.

Baggarrook

Baggarrook's aims to increase rates of safe, secure and long-term housing for women in their community when exiting custody. In the past 12 months, four women have been welcomed into the Baggarrook program and provided warm referrals to other housing support programs to ensure women exit custody into safe and secure housing options.

- Baggarrook staff have increased their outreach to both DPFC and Tarrengower to strengthen the relationship with both CV staff, and women in custody, this in turn has increased the referrals that come into Baggarrook, as well as the Community Justice Program more broadly.
- Baggarrook has also worked to strengthen relationships with stakeholders, particularly in the West Metro region to support the women reintegrating into the community. This has extended to Elizabeth Morgan House's Aboriginal Healing Unit at DPFC, to ensure Baggarrook's engagement with women is done in a culturally safe space.
- Provided four women with safe transitional housing post incarceration, individual support plans in a culturally safe and appropriate service.
- One woman was supported to achieve reunification with one of her children that had been out of her care for over 10 years.
- One woman has continued to engage with the Torch program post release from custody, was supported to continue to engage whilst at Baggarrook and then this continued into her long-term housing.

Shannon and Skye – Baggarrook Program Officers



Case Study

Impact of Baggarrook's strength-based approach

For Aboriginal women leaving custody, access to culturally safe, trauma-informed and holistic support can be life-changing. Lilly's journey through the Baggarrook Women's Transitional Housing Program demonstrates the importance of early intervention, sustained advocacy and wraparound support in breaking cycles of trauma, rebuilding family connections and creating pathways towards stability and healing.

Lilly entered Baggarrook following a custodial sentence at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC). A victim-survivor of significant family violence, Lilly had experienced extensive trauma throughout her life, including childhood exposure to family violence and involvement with Child Protection. Her three children had been removed from her care and placed with family interstate, with limited contact maintained over the previous decade.

Determined to change the direction of her life, Lilly actively advocated for herself, identifying specialist family violence services, alcohol and other drug counselling, and secure housing as priorities for her recovery.

Baggarrook's support commenced four months before Lilly's release, with staff undertaking regular engagement at DPFC to establish trust, understand her needs and develop a coordinated transition plan. This early intervention ensured Lilly had strong relationships and practical supports in place before returning to community.

Within weeks of her release, Lilly was actively engaged with her care team and community-based services. During this time, her eldest daughter expressed a desire to reconnect with her mother and return to Melbourne. Recognising the significance of this opportunity, Baggarrook staff undertook targeted advocacy and coordinated referrals to progress family reunification and secure suitable housing.

Through persistent advocacy and collaboration with specialist services, Baggarrook secured a property where Lilly and her daughter could begin rebuilding their lives together. Staff provided practical parenting guidance, recognising the challenges of reconnecting with a child who had grown into adolescence during their separation. Support also included navigating Centrelink entitlements, accessing parenting services and assisting Lilly's daughter to enrol in TAFE, supporting her own educational aspirations.

Within just two months of leaving custody, Lilly had reunited with her eldest daughter, strengthened relationships with her other children interstate and established a stable home environment.

For Lilly, this represented far more than securing accommodation. It was an opportunity to reclaim her independence, rebuild her identity as a mother and create a future grounded in safety, connection and hope.

Reflecting on her journey, Lilly shared that, for the first time in her life, she had a home that was truly hers.

Lilly's story demonstrates what Justice for Our People looks like in practice: culturally safe, community-led support that recognises the impacts of intergenerational trauma, removes systemic barriers and empowers Aboriginal women to rebuild their lives, strengthen family connections and determine their own futures.



Merri Merri, Wurundjeri Country

CNS

The CNS is a 24/7, 365 days service. VALS Client Notification Officers (CNO's) are the first contact between a community member in police custody and VALS. The CNS is notified within an hour of the Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander person coming into custody. CNOs conduct welfare checks and arrange pre-interview legal advice.

CNOs processed 18,540 individual notifications from Victoria Police notifying of an Aboriginal person in custody in 2025/26. Average notifications were 50.79 per day. CNOs undertook 122,686 client contact calls (an average of 336 calls per day). This included ongoing welfare checks, making referrals, liaising with police and custody staff, arranging legal advice and liaising with family members.

Key themes from our work in 2025/26 are:

- Too many Aboriginal people do not get access to appropriate medical care while in custody, often resulting in Ambulance attendances and hospital admissions.
- Increased rates of custodial sentences served in police cells, and increased rates of remand, and length of remand in police cells.
- Mental health and/or cognitive impairments and disabilities are disproportionately represented amongst mob in police custody. Too often, this can result in worse outcomes for our community as these needs are not sufficiently recognised and taken account of.

During June 2025, regular rostered hours sat at about 212 hours. Due to the increase of demand, this has now increased to a minimum of 420 rostered hours per week. This has largely been in part due to an increase of Aboriginal people coming through police custody, as well as increased remand times in police custody. To support the increase to three staff on during busy remand welfare check times, RosterElf was brought in to assist the streamlining of rosters and timesheets.

18,540
Notifications

420 hours
worked across the week

122,686
calls made by CNOs

Average of
50.79
notifications a day

Average of
336
calls per day

Following the increased times in custody, VALS has initiated a three-day welfare check where CNOs cover specific questions relating to medications, any medical conditions, treatment whilst in custody, and if they require a clean set of clothing. Through the advocacy of joint work between CNS and Wirraway, VALS was notified that people in custody are often held in custody for 14 days, and up to 30 days in Mildura, in the same clothing they were originally brought into custody in.

A quick snapshot across the 12 months saw a mammoth workload for the CNS, including:

- There was a total of 18,540 notifications of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person in police custody was received, an average of 50.79 per day.
- 122,686 calls made by the CNOs to police stations, family members, support networks and to lawyers. On average, this was 336 calls per day.
- 20,600 hours worked across the 12 months
- Steady increase to more than 420 hours are worked across the week to ensure timely and culturally safe support and advocacy is provided to mob in custody.
- Implementation of the 3 day welfare check, to support a change of clean clothes, appropriate medication and family contact being provided to the person in custody.

Case Study

The critical work of our CNS

Barry came into police custody in a regional centre in early 2026, and was subsequently remanded. Initially, there were no immediate welfare concerns were identified, and Barry advised that he had private legal representation. As his time in custody continued, however, significant concerns began to emerge regarding his health, safety and treatment while being held in police cells.

Barry was transferred between police stations and reported that pre-existing injuries to his hand and head had been further aggravated following a fall in a police cell. He also reported experiencing racial abuse, difficulties accessing appropriate medical care and vital medication, and being prevented from speaking with VALS despite repeatedly requesting contact. As Barry became increasingly distressed and frustrated, Custody Notification Officers (CNOs) increased their welfare monitoring and provided Barry with a culturally safe and trusted space to speak openly about his treatment, health, medication and advocated for contact with his family.

Following a further fall in which Barry hit his head on concrete, he was transported to hospital. Barry experienced ongoing seizures and remained in hospital for treatment, where he was also handcuffed during his admission. Given the escalating concerns for Barry's health and wellbeing, the CNO team continued regular contact and referred the matter to VALS' Wirraway Practice.

Wirraway became closely involved, strongly advocating that Barry should not be returned to police cells, strongly advocating that his ongoing detention in that environment presented unacceptable risks to his health and safety. Following sustained advocacy, Barry was transferred directly from hospital into a correctional facility, where his health and welfare needs could be more appropriately managed.

Wirraway also progressed Barry's matter through the courts and achieved a positive legal outcome for him. Throughout a highly distressing period, the coordinated response between CNOs and Wirraway ensured Barry had consistent access to culturally safe support, that his voice and concerns were heard, and that serious issues relating to his health, safety and treatment in custody were actively escalated and advocated for.

Barry's experience demonstrates the critical role of the Custody Notification Service beyond the initial notification of custody, in working collaboratively to achieve positive justice outcomes for our mob. Regular welfare checks, trusted relationships and strong internal referral pathways enabled VALS to identify escalating risks, advocate for safer conditions and connect Barry with specialist legal support at a time when he was particularly vulnerable.

Ngang Gak

Throughout the year, Ngang Gak demonstrated the impact of intensive, family-centred early intervention and prevention support combined with flexible brokerage in improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. The program supported 14 children and young people across North Metropolitan Melbourne, many of whom had current or previous involvement with out-of-home care and were experiencing disability, learning difficulties or mental health challenges. Despite these complexities, the program achieved important early outcomes, including supporting one young person to increase their school engagement from 0% to 47% within a single term.

Flexible brokerage was critical to the program's success, enabling practitioners to respond directly to barriers that may otherwise have prevented children and young people from engaging in education, health, culture and community. Six young people were supported with tutoring, Seven were supported to participate in sport and positive social activities, and brokerage enabled access to therapeutic supports including equine therapy. The program also supported eight young people to undertake 715 health assessments and four to access paediatric ADHD and/or autism assessments, creating pathways to allied health, school-based supports and potential NDIS assistance. Practitioners also provided practical support, including transport to school and appointments, while one young person was supported to pursue a driver's licence and transition towards TAFE as an alternative education pathway.

This work highlighted that justice outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people are strengthened when services can intervene early and address the broader factors affecting their lives. Through brokerage, intensive practitioner support and a whole-of-family approach, Ngang Gak was able to remove practical barriers, strengthen engagement with education and health services, and create opportunities for connection, confidence and positive development. These early achievements demonstrated the value of flexible, culturally responsive investment in preventing deeper contact with the justice system and supporting Aboriginal children and young people to thrive within their families and communities.



Case Study

Impact of a family-centred approach

This family represents six generations of co-occurring psychosocial and socioeconomic disadvantages. Their story demonstrates the ongoing impact of current government systems and past practices that still impact families today.

The grandmother, a strong and staunch woman, cares for four of her grandchildren. When we first began working with the family, we were warned that this as a 'difficult' family. What we found was a family that desperately needed to be heard—and, more importantly, needed someone to act.

The family had repeatedly asked Government and Community services for help. Their concerns were documented, passed to managers and ultimately closed, with little meaningful action that supported changing the family's circumstance or trajectory. We went in slowly, building trust and relationships. Our first meetings were held on Nan's front porch or around the fire in her front yard. We listened to the family's experiences and the grief and hopelessness experienced by the young people.

We asked the family what mattered most to them and worked with them to identify priorities. One immediate concern was poverty and the barriers this was placing on the family to meet their basic human rights, including: transport, food, clothing, health and education. Although the system recognised that Nan was caring for the children and the complexities each individual child had, she was not receiving all the financial support and carer payments she was entitled to, nor had she been supported to navigate the complex processes required to access them.

We worked alongside Nan and the young people to identify existing payments, understand the processes and gather evidence. Child Protection initially refused to review payments in February 2026, stating that their policy required assessment within the first few months of placement. Some children had been living with Nan for more than five years.

We challenged this decision, documented the children's individual needs, provided professional support letters and clearly demonstrated that the family was living in poverty and that the lack of appropriate financial support was causing significant disadvantage for the children residing in the home.

After four months of evidence gathering, advocacy, reports and meetings with Child Protection operational managers, higher payments were approved on 16 June 2026.

It's easy to see the change this has made to the home; Nan is no longer stressed if she has enough money to purchase food, children are being brought appropriate clothing and other essential needs, and they are planning a return to Country trip this September - the stress is lifting.

We have continued to supported Nan and the young people to access additional/new Services Australia payments by completing applications, gathering documentation and coordinating supporting letters from professionals.



Merri Merri, Wurundjeri Country

Local Justice Worker Program

During the reporting period, the Local Justice Worker Program (LJWP) returned to VALS, re-establishing an important community-led justice response across North Metropolitan Melbourne, West Metropolitan Melbourne, Mildura, Drouin and Morwell. Much of the year focused on implementation and building the workforce, with successful recruitment in Mildura and two positions in North Metro, alongside targeted recruitment efforts across West Metro and Gippsland.

The LJWP placed Aboriginal people, culture and community at the centre of justice responses. Local Justice Workers walked alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people engaged with the justice system, providing culturally safe, holistic and practical support to help individuals understand and meet their legal obligations while addressing the broader barriers that could contribute to ongoing justice system contact.

Working closely with Community Correctional Services, Victoria Police, courts, the Sheriff's Office and local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, the program strengthened pathways between community and the justice system. This collaborative approach supported improved access to culturally appropriate services, strengthened engagement with Community Correction Orders and parole requirements, and created opportunities for earlier intervention and diversion from further justice system contact.

The return of the LJWP to VALS reflected the Justice for Our People principle that better justice outcomes are achieved when Aboriginal people are supported by Aboriginal-led services that understand the importance of culture, family, community and self-determination. Through practical assistance, advocacy and culturally responsive support, Local Justice Workers helped remove barriers to engagement and supported Aboriginal people to meet their obligations while building stronger pathways towards stability, independence and connection to community.

Case Study

Connection and support matters

Following a period of significant personal challenges that contributed to contact with the justice system, Bob commenced a Community Corrections Order and began working with the Local Justice Worker Program. With consistent, practical and strengths-based support, Bob demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing the factors that had contributed to his offending and creating a more stable future.

Bob made significant progress in his recovery from substance dependence and engaged positively with his Community Corrections Order. Over time, he developed greater insight into his past experiences and behaviours, while building the confidence and life skills needed to make positive and sustainable changes.

The Local Justice Worker supported Bob to navigate the practical barriers that could impact his progress and independence. This included supporting his work towards regaining his driver's licence through participation in a behavioural change program and planning for future employment. Regaining his licence represented more than simply returning to driving – it was an important step towards greater independence, employment opportunities and reconnecting with everyday life.

Bob's journey reflected what Justice for Our People can look like when Aboriginal people are supported to move beyond contact with the justice system and are given the opportunity, practical assistance and encouragement to determine their own future. Through his engagement with the Local Justice Worker Program, Bob continued to build on his strengths, take responsibility for his future and work towards long-term stability, independence and employment.

Victoria Police e-Referral (VPeR)

The VPeR service demand has remained strong during the reporting period. Between July 2025, and June 2026, the VPeR service has received over 250 e-referrals, and then provided over 303 referral pathways to support Aboriginal community members with voluntary community support options. 203 of these referrals came directly from the police, with a further 47 from community partnerships. Overwhelmingly, the external referrals have related to Alcohol and other Drug support (32%), counselling (17%), Homelessness and housing (17%) and links for youth supports.

Looking forward the VPeR program is positioned for continued growth and impact, with plans to expand staffing and deepen engagement with stakeholders across the justice and community sectors. Building on the strong referral pathway established through the Custody Notification Service, VPeR will further strengthen culturally safe access to support for Aboriginal people navigating the justice system.

By expanding networks, engaging with more Aboriginal community members, and contributing to community legal education, the program will continue to champion social justice, amplify Aboriginal voices, and ensure that communities are empowered with the knowledge and connections they need to thrive. VPeR continues to act in non-emergency settings, and work towards preventative and early intervention options for community members to access.

Case Study

VPeR

For Aboriginal people experiencing complex personal challenges, timely access to culturally safe, holistic support can make a significant difference. Matthew's journey through the VPeR Program highlights the importance of early intervention, coordinated referrals and ensuring Aboriginal people can access the right supports when they need them most.

Following a recent death in his family, Matthew was experiencing significant grief, emotional distress and financial hardship. These challenges were compounded by an upcoming court appearance and a substantial taxation debt, leaving him feeling overwhelmed and uncertain about his future.

Recognising his need for additional support, Victoria Police referred Matthew to VALS through the VPeR Program, providing an opportunity for early engagement and connection to culturally appropriate services.

Through direct engagement with Matthew, the VPeR team identified his immediate priorities and coordinated referrals to address his legal, financial and wellbeing needs. This included a referral to Dandenong Aboriginal Co-operative for culturally appropriate counselling and referrals to VALS Criminal and Civil Law teams for legal assistance.

The VPeR team ensured referrals were communicated to the relevant services, with confirmation received from VALS legal teams and feedback provided to the referring police officer.

Matthew's story demonstrates what Justice for Our People looks like in practice: recognising that justice-related challenges rarely occur in isolation and ensuring Aboriginal people experiencing grief, financial hardship and legal difficulties are connected to culturally safe, coordinated support.

Through early intervention and meaningful service connections, the VPeR Program helps reduce barriers to accessing assistance and supports Aboriginal people to navigate complex challenges with dignity, choice and greater confidence.

End the cruel transfers and inhumane treatment of people in police cell custody







Open Air Rally, Naarm

Over the past 18 months VALS has warned the Victorian government that people will suffer deeply at the hands of police, corrections and court systems that are totally unprepared and ill-equipped to deal with the consequences of overly restrictive bail laws and surging numbers of people in custody. The dedicated work of our CNS team and Wirraway, Police and Prison Accountability Practice highlighted the inhumane conditions people were experiencing. We remain deeply concerned about the risk to life, without further reforms.

Police cells were never meant to hold people for extended periods of time, yet as a predictable outcome of this government's "tough on crime" agenda we have seen the significant increase of people being held on remand for extended periods, resulting in police cells, remand centres and corrections facilities being overwhelmed. In a practice to override the 14-day legal limit, Victoria Police have been moving people between police stations, all across the state. VALS has brought multiple habeas applications, an emergency injunction alleging negligence, and two judicial reviews in the Supreme Court on behalf of our clients who were spending extended periods of time in police cells, being moved between police cells, and the abhorrent conditions and treatment they were experiencing.

People in prisons are entitled to bare minimum standards under the Corrections Act to medical care and treatment, access to open air, adequate and appropriate food, suitable

Left to right:
Marie Mitchell – Director of Community Justice Programs
Ellen Sandel - Leader of the Victorian Greens
Raagini Vijaykumar- Former Principal Managing Lawyer Wirraway
Katherine Copsey – Greens member of the Legislative Council



clothing and to receive visits[1]. However, people in police custody – many of whom have not been found guilty of the charges laid – do not have these rights embedded in Victorian law. These are fundamental human rights for people who are imprisoned, and Victoria Police's current practice is failing to meet the human rights standards set out in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities[2] and the Mandela Rules[3]. This is a dangerous legal loophole that is enabling the mistreatment of people in police custody, and it must be urgently fixed.

VALS launched our **Open Letter** in June 2026, calling for the end of the cruel transfers and inhumane treatment of people detained in police stations, and Greens member, Katherine Copsey introduced their Private Members Bill 'Corrections Amendment (Stop the Legal Loophole – Better Rights in Police Custody) Bill 2026'.

Following the Bill's introduction the Greens worked hard to seek support and when the *Corrections Amendment Bill 2026* regarding access to open air in prisons was brought before the Parliament, this provided an opportunity to amend the Corrections Act. Katherine Copsey brought amendments which would legislate a cumulative legal limit of 14 days, which means Victoria Police can no longer move people between police stations to override the 14 day legal limit.

This amendment has bipartisan support, as well as overwhelming support from the progressive crossbench and was passed; it will come into effect in August 2027.

This is a significant win for VALS, VALS' clients and the Aboriginal community we support and advocate for. This would not have been possible without the impressive, dedicated and determined work of our CNS team and Wirraway Practice sounding the alarm on how Aboriginal people were being treated in police cells and fighting for our people's rights to be upheld.

People in police custody should be treated with dignity and to be transferred in a timely manner to corrections facilities. We continue to call for **immediate action** on the following:

1. The Victorian government must legislate the same basic rights for people in police custody as prison custody to stop enabling their mistreatment,
2. The Victorian government must reduce the legal limit that police are allowed to detain people in police stations from 14 days to 7 days, and
3. The Victorian government must establish a Police Ombudsman to provide independent oversight and monitoring of people being mistreated in police cells.

[1] Corrections Act 1986 (Vic) section 74.
[2] Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic), s22.
[3] UN General Assembly, United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules (8 January 2016, adopted 17 December 2015).

Policy Communications and Strategy



The Policy, Communications and Strategy (PCS) team has continued to deliver high quality, trusted and well-regarded policy and advocacy during a challenging period of regressive legislative reforms. We have delivered staunch calls to action and collaborative advocacy in response to regressive reform such as Victoria's bad and harmful bail laws, and the youth sentencing reforms which have resulted in young people's matters being heard in adults court for certain offences. We have seen the government knowingly limit and erode protected human rights when it comes to limiting access to open air in prisons, or the removal of prison as a last resort for children.

Policy

Over the last year the Policy Team have continued to lead the sector in advocacy. A selection of our public advocacy work includes:

Ending the practice of decanting

Policy worked alongside our CNS and Wirraway team to call for an end to the practice of decanting, for people in police custody to be treated with dignity and respect, and for human rights to be upheld.

In collaboration with the CNS and Wirraway, Policy worked closely with parliamentarians to advocate for the rights of people in custody, which ultimately resulted in the reading-in of a Bill to end the cruel practice of decanting and an additional amendment to the *Corrections Amendment Bill 2026* which limited how long a person can be help in police custody.

Racism inquiry

The *Commonwealth Inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people* commenced in May 2026. VALS prepared a significant submission, including 53 recommendations, that spoke to the racism our mob experience everyday – the overt interpersonal racism perpetrated by individuals, and the systemic and structural racism that functions to harm our people. The submission highlighted the interrelating and compounding impacts of racism and provided solutions for dealing with racism in a way that would achieve meaningful change.

We wanted to make sure community's voice was reflected in the submission. We hosted a drop-in session, opened our phone lines, developed a submission template, and helped people draft their own submissions.

We also supported Nerita to appear at the inquiry hearing, where she gave evidence to the Committee about the prevalence and impact of racism against our people.



Infographic showing the interrelated and compounding impacts of systemic racism experienced by Aboriginal people.

Voting accessibility sub

VALS made a submission to the Victorian *Inquiry into Voting Centre Accessibility* in collaboration with the Human Rights Law Centre and the Centre for Innovative Justice. The submission made 18 recommendations for improving access to and information about voting processes in prisons. Importantly, the submission was informed by people with lived-experience. We also appeared and gave evidence at the Parliamentary hearing.

The final report of the Inquiry reflected VALS advocacy. It noted that listening to people with lived experience is imperative to ensure that systems are designed to meet the needs of those who are impacted, which results in better outcomes for everyone. It also made two recommendations to improve access to voting and voting information for incarcerated people.

Communications

Our Communications team continued to deliver high quality, accessible and informative assets to community and VALS supporters over this reporting period. We grew our online presence, solidifying our advocacy and voice in the sector when it comes to justice issues which impact Aboriginal communities the most. We were involved in a number of public campaigns challenging the Labor government and their harmful approach to justice. In an overall challenging year of negative policy reform and media rhetoric, VALS stood strong in their resistance and leadership in the sector.

Some campaigns to note include VALS support of Victoria's Statewide Treaty, delivering community education on how Gellung Warl will support ACCOs like VALS to achieve a more just justice system. We worked with a coalition of Community Legal Centres and service delivery organisations opposing the announcement to further police vulnerable populations of unhoused community in the City of Melbourne (COM). We attended a Council meeting, ran a public petition opposing the criminalisation of poverty and made submissions to the COM budget calling for investment in evidence-based work supporting people and connecting them to services rather than punishing them for their circumstances. During this period, we ran a public 'Know Your Rights' Community Legal Education piece surrounding police powers, security guards and council officers as an unprecedented 6-month declaration of a designated area was announced. A key role of our Communications team is to empower community members with their rights, ensuring they are supported to access legal assistance anywhere in Victoria.

In January 2026 we hosted our annual Invasion Day webinar with the theme *'Our Kids Deserve Futures: Strength and determination for young people'* where we were honoured to have proud Gunditjmara woman Bonnie Dukakis, CEO of Koorie Youth Council moderate a discussion with VALS CEO Nerita Waight and Neghar Panahi, Principal Managing Lawyer of VALS dedicated youth practice, Balit Ngulu. This ran alongside our 'Donate don't Celebrate' campaign for Invasion Day.

The Communications team supported another two donation drives in the reporting period, including a call to action to support Aboriginal people experiencing extended periods of time in police cell custody by providing care packages, as well as our annual end of financial year drive. We successfully raised both $5,640 and $31,000 respectively for these campaigns.

In support of our Policy team's submission to the federal *Inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people* our communications team delivered a series of assets to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage with the federal inquiry into racism including running community sessions, providing templates, and support to share an experience to submit to the inquiry. This was done with support from our Policy, Community Engagement and external social and wellbeing support from VAHS.

In 2026 so far, the Communications team have supported the work of Wirraway in their advocacy to end the practice of 'decanting' and ensure people in prison have their right to open air protected. This included media engagement in digital, tv and online formats as well as hosting a press conference at Parliament alongside Greens MP's Katherine Copsey and Ellen Sandell. The important role of Communications in this work allows us to keep the focus and narrative on our clients and their experiences, never losing their dignity and lived experience.

We also continued to play a role in supporting the families of proud Yamatji, Noongar, Wongi and Pitjantjatjara woman Heather Calgaret, proud Gunditjmara and Wiradjuri man Clinton Austin, proud Noongar maaman Jeffrey Winmar and proud Barkandji man Adrian Payne as their families seek justice for their loved ones who lost their lives in custody. Our role is sharing community notices, garnering support for presence at the coroner's court and supporting families to engage with media. We also work alongside Dhadjowa Foundation, who are a critical support for Aboriginal families navigating a death in custody. It is a privilege to work alongside them in this space, and we thank them for their staunch advocacy and resilience.

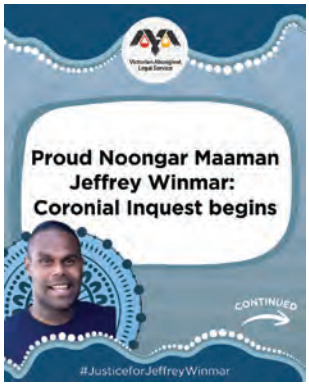
Reporting period July 1 2025 – June 30 2026: VALS shared over 250 assets of content across this period.

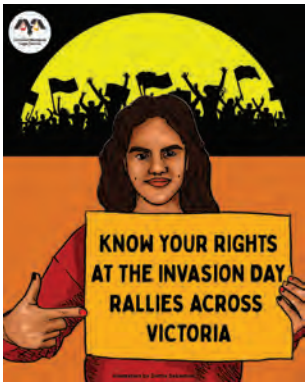
Instagram

1.6
million views
280 posts

177.6K
views
500 stories

265k
Reach
47.5K interactions









Facebook

921
new Followers
+158% from previous year

38,515
engagement
+240% from previous year



Lorena Walker – Community Legal Education Project Officer

Community Engagement

Our Community Engagement Team has continued to grow from strength to strength. Over the 2025/26 year we have hosted over 12 Community Legal Education sessions and attended 45 community events where we had stalls across the state.

Over the past year the Community Engagement Team has continued to focus on delivering CLE sessions across metro and regional Victoria. We delivered in-person CLE sessions about wills, tenancy, fines, Working with Children Checks, Elders rights, Know Your Rights and child protection, and have partnered with the Disaster Rights Practice in delivering some of the CLE sessions.

The team has continued developing and publishing our written legal education resources - Legal Yarns. Our Legal Yarns are designed to answer key questions often asked about legal topics or issues. The idea for the Legal Yarns arose from the need to fill the gaps of legal information where a person may have some questions about a topic or theme, but does not necessarily want to engage VALS at that stage. The Legal Yarns we have published to date this year are Online Safety, Identity Theft and Lemon Cars, with Child Protection and Tenancy Legal Yarns soon to be published.

The team continues to build connections and relationships with organisations and key stakeholders across Victoria though dedicated outreach and engagement at community events to improve access to and awareness of VALS services.

Justice Through Treaty

VALS' Justice Through Treaty Project (JTT Project) emerged out of a workshop which was convened by VALS in December 2022. The purpose of the *Justice Treaty Workshop,* which had representatives from across Aboriginal community-controlled and community legal sectors, was to engage in a discussion about a collective vision for an Aboriginal-led justice system.

Participants shared that it was beyond time for transformational reform to the legal system and its institutions, that the system was not fixable, and that there is a need for transformational change to put decision-making back into the hands of Aboriginal people.

The 2022 workshop provided a starting point for a longer programme of work focussed on developing a collective vision for what Aboriginal-led justice might look like, which was funded by the VLSB+C. From October 2024 to June 2026, VALS led a range of activities with the aim of fostering stakeholder and community conversations about Aboriginal-led justice models and scoping their key features, impacts, and areas for their further development.

VALS forums on self-determined justice approaches

The core of the project was a series of three forums that were convened by VALS between November 2025 and January 2026. The purpose of these forums was to engage community and key stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of Aboriginal-led justice to share and exchange their ideas and priorities for strengthening self-determination over justice matters.

Self-Determined Justice and Legal Pluralism

The first forum, which was held in November 2024, was a hybrid event which brought together academics, practitioners, and community leaders involved in Aboriginal-led justice from within Victoria, and Aotearoa, Turtle Island, and South Africa to discuss the recognition and application of Indigenous legal practices within their respective jurisdictions. The forum sparked conversations about the complexities and challenges that Indigenous communities and organisations are navigating as they work to build ways of resolving disputes and other matters both within and outside of the confines of the colonial legal system.



Part 1 of graphic recording from 2026 workshop on community visions of a more just justice system



Self-Determined Alternative Dispute Resolution

In November 2025, we convened a second forum on self-determined alternative dispute resolution (ADR) models, which was facilitated by the Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ). The forum brought together approximately 25 Elders, community leaders, and practitioners involved in the delivery of Aboriginal-led approaches for resolving disputes and addressing forms of harm that commonly result in interactions with the colonial legal system. The key aim of the forum was to share knowledge and discuss strategies for increasing access to and availability of self-determined justice models which sit independently of the colonial legal system.

Imagining a More 'Just' Justice System

The third and final forum hosted by VALS and facilitated by CIJ was held in January 2026 and focussed on the development of an Aboriginal-led vision for a more 'just' justice system. In a broader context in which governments have failed to deliver on their existing commitments and actively championed regressive and punitive reforms that disproportionately impact on Aboriginal communities, this workshop provided a space for Aboriginal Elders, community leaders, academics and practitioners to come together and identify their priorities for transformative change in relation to justice and existing community models, strengths and resources.

Additional Stakeholder Engagement

In the final six months of the project, VALS undertook additional, focussed engagements with local and international stakeholders to gather further information and perspectives on the opportunities and barriers for strengthening Aboriginal authority over justice processes.

Legal Advice

In addition to the community and stakeholder engagement component, VALS sought legal advice on the possibilities for strengthening Aboriginal control over justice matters within the context of the existing legal framework.

A final report will be released publicly this year.

Research and Evidence Development



The Research and Evidence Development (RED) unit has been created to build the evidence for the benefits of VALS' legal and support services, to support design of innovative justice programs, and to undertake research that informs our vital policy advocacy work and responses to community need. The Unit is responsible for a range of functions on the research and evaluation fronts. This includes:

- Maintaining a self-determining, strategic research agenda that advances VALS' strategic directions;
- Forging key strategic research partnerships and securing research funding to advance that agenda;
- Building the capacity of VALS to better monitor and evaluate its services in a culturally safe and appropriate way and tell the stories of its impact;
- Supporting VALS programs in negotiating external evaluations that are culturally appropriate in design and implementation.

The RED Unit also has responsibility for the First Nations Cultural Capability Uplift Program (FNCCUP). It is well established that First Nations people in Victoria frequently experience culturally unsafe and re-traumatising interactions with legal practitioners, organisations and the justice system, and that this can often lead to further harm and inequitable justice outcomes. The FNCCUP is a state-wide training and guidance package designed to build the cultural capability of legal professionals across Victoria. The program, led by VALS, has been developed with key input from the Institute of Victoria (LIV) and Victoria Legal Aid (VLA), along with a range of other experts. It comprises:

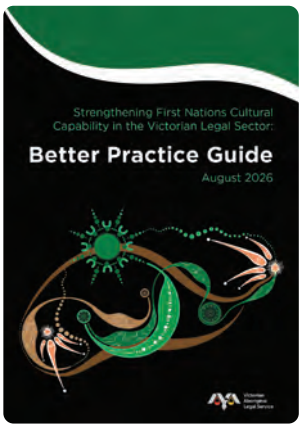
- A **Framework for Strengthening First Nations Cultural Capabilit**y that identifies key cultural capability domains, with associated knowledge, practice skills and attitudes;
- **E-learning and face to face training** focused on understanding and applying these capability domains;
- A comprehensive **Better Practice Guide** providing step by step practical guidance and resources to maintain learning post training;
- **Community of Practice** monthly sessions to further consolidate learning.

Key achievements

The RED Unit reached a great milestone by the end of the 25-26 financial year: it completed the design and piloting of the FNCCUP training and guidance package (see above).







Maria Birch-Morunga – Senior Training Officer

A total of 47 practitioners from within the Victorian legal sector participated in the pilot across a mix of metropolitan and regional sites. This included solicitors, barristers, legal secretaries, paralegals, non-legal support workers, and sector learning and development specialists. Overall, the pilot was a great success, with highly positive feedback:

- 90% were satisfied or very satisfied with the training overall
- 83% found the training to be effective
- 83% would recommend the training to a colleague

The pilot resulted in statistically significant improvement in self-reported ratings of knowledge and practice skills. It also identified a number of ways in which the package could be strengthened. This work was undertaken post pilot, with the package ready for formal roll-out to the legal sector from the first quarter of 2026-27. This training and guidance is unique CPD. It should not be mistaken for 'just' cultural awareness training: it is something very different - a bespoke package designed specifically for Victorian legal practitioners that takes participants deeply into knowledge about the history of First Nations and settler relations in Australia, the specific ways in which Australian law has been and continues to be central to colonisation and ongoing harms, that asks them to reflect deeply upon settler norms, ideas and practices, and that gives them a whole day of skill building in culturally safe and responsive legal practice with First Nations clients. Participants take away a 100-page guide - the first of its kind that contains extensive practical guidance to support ongoing learning 'back in the office'.

Alongside the FNCCUP, the RED Unit, together with the CEO, has been advocating through a range of channels for 'upstream' transformation of law school curricula across universities nationally, using the FNCCUP as a foundation for the push. With a couple of exceptions, law school courses do not require students to learn and demonstrate First Nations cultural capability skills and practices. This continues beyond admission. Law students graduating & being admitted when singularly not fit & ready to begin working in culturally safe and appropriate ways. It is not acceptable that we wait until post admission to try to compensate for these deficiencies in law school education.

The RED Unit has continued to build organisational evaluation capacity through:

- Participatory program logics and associated data plans;
- Further customising and streamlining of the information management system, Actionstep;
- Securing funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner to recruit data support and analysis roles to improve the reliability and usability of VALS' service data, and support service managers in the active use of service data for monitoring, insights and decision;
- Ongoing evaluation of innovative pilots, including Balit Ngulu *Strong Voice for Children, Balit Ngulu Strong Voice Strong Futures,* and Ngang Gak;
- Development and endorsement of a Client Feedback Strategy.

Research underway in this period that VALS is partnering in includes:

- the ARC research project, *From Care to Corrections*- young people's pathways from out-of-home care to adult criminal justice systems
- the *Boodjari to Boorai*s project - Aboriginal people's experiences of child protection during pregnancy and after birth' project

Corporate Services



As VALS has grown over the past four years from a small state-wide organisation into a medium sized organisation with expanded Legal Services and significant growth in our Community Justice Programs, Research and Evidence Development teams

Building on from last year's focus on strengthening the back of house functions, Corporate Services continued to strengthen the infrastructure and systems that allow VALS to deliver services reliably and sustainably. This work that sits behind the scenes but directly supports frontline teams to do their important work with clients and Community.

Corporate Services and Finance Review

A key priority was the comprehensive review of the Corporate and Finance function, examining structure, roles and accountabilities across the team. This review culminated in a finalised organisational structure, to be implemented from 1 July 2026, and the recruitment of new positions to build capability across HR and Corporate Services more broadly.

Strengthening governance

We strengthened VALS' governance foundations, finalising the Board Information Management Framework and Meeting Governance Framework, and progressing work on the Delegations of Authority Policy and organisational risk management. This work gives the Board clearer oversight of strategic priorities and embeds best practice on how decisions are made across VALS.

Volunteer program

Volunteers continue to play a vital role across VALS, supporting nearly every program in the organisation while building a pipeline into paid legal and community justice careers.

During the 2025/2026 period we supported 65 volunteers who delivered over 7,500 hours of volunteering VALS.

The volunteer program continues to assist our talent recruitment strategy with seven volunteers moving to paid employment within VALS since the last financial period. Several volunteers have also gone on to paid employment outside of VALS, demonstrating the value of their VALS experience in supporting their career progression.

As part of Youth Work Experience, six high school students undertook placement at VALS; four Aboriginal students and two non-Indigenous students. As part of a week-long placement, young people attended Marram-Ngala Ganbu (Koori Family Hearing Day) and further developed their understanding of the legal profession.

Other key highlights for 2025/2026 include:

- Ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers among the Youth and Volunteer Placements.
- Most volunteers were placed in the Civil and Human Rights Law Practice, Criminal Law Practice and Infringements Clinic.
- Secured paid scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers.
- Provided support to the Wirraway team in the Coronial Inquest.
- Successful grant from the Greater Melbourne Foundation in 2026 to support the Volunteer Program.

We'd like to thank all our volunteers for the contribution you have made to VALS this year. Your generosity and commitment help us serve our clients and community.

Facilities

Our office footprint continued to evolve this year in response to growth and changing needs across our regions.

- **Morwell:** restored a permanent presence with a new, refurbished office
- **Warrnambool:** temporarily closed following the end of our sublease; we continue to provide legal services locally while securing new premises.
- **Mildura and Werribee:** regional growth means we're now seeking larger premises in both locations.
- **Preston head office:** refurbishment is largely complete; with space filling fast, we're exploring a second Preston office.

Information and Communication Technology

We continued to strengthen VALS' ICT foundations this year with the following highlights:

- Telephony: transitioned to a new system in January 2026, improving reliability and call quality for clients and staff.
- SharePoint: commenced our move to SharePoint as VALS' central document and collaboration platform, targeted for completion by the end of 2026.
- ICT Roadmap: consolidated how ICT is managed across VALS, reducing the number of system vendors and standardising device management.
- Cyber security: uplifted our Essential 8 security score to 75%, above the industry standard, and rolled out cyber awareness training to strengthen staff recognition of phishing and other email threats.

Human resources

This financial year has been a year of growth for VALS, with 126 new starters and 55 employee exits over the past 12 months.

- **Team growth:** appointed a new HR Manager, with additional roles to follow before the end of 2026.
- **Recruitment:** new tools, including JobAdder and CVCheck, are streamlining recruitment for both candidates and hiring managers.
- **Onboarding:** streamlined the onboarding and induction experience to help new employees feel welcomed and connected from day one.
- **Performance:** introduced a new performance review process, placing greater emphasis on regular supervision, feedback, and ongoing development.
- **Wellbeing:** a new Employee Assistance Program, with a holistic focus on mental health, physical health, financial wellbeing and safety, launches early in the new financial year.

Supporting our people continues to remain an important priority alongside recruitment. Together, these initiatives reflect HR's commitment to creating a workplace where VALS people feel supported, valued and equipped to do their best work.

EBA

This year, VALS commenced negotiations on a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, working collaboratively with the Australian Services Union and independent bargaining representatives. By the end of the financial year, negotiations were well progressed, with the parties working towards a finalised agreement by the end of the 2026.

Safety Quality and Risk

VALS received its certificate of accreditation from the Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria on 26 June 2026, valid until 26 June 2029. Recommendations from the assessors will be absorbed into VALS existing quality improvement plan. Safety, Quality and Risk was seen as a priority area in the CSF Review. Recruitment of staff specialising in privacy, child safety, accreditation, quality improvement and information governance will commence early in the new financial year.



Merri Merri, Wurundjeri Country

Strategic Development

Strategic Development was established as a new portfolio in October 2025. The portfolio supports VALS through each stage of the funding lifecycle, from identifying new opportunities through to program implementation and reporting. This back of house support helps VALS grow strategically, while meeting the increasing complexity of reporting requirements that comes with a larger and more diverse range of programs.

Throughout the year, VALS was successful in bringing new programs into the organisation, expanding the services available to our community. Each new program brings its own requirements for implementation, staffing and reporting, and Strategic Development has worked alongside teams across VALS to ensure these programs are well supported from the outset and set up to deliver for community members.

Over the coming year, Strategic Development will continue to support the growth of VALS so that community members can access support when and where they need it. A key focus will be working toward a better understanding of unmet need across Victoria, so that future growth is directed to the areas where it will make the most difference. We will continue to prioritise how this growth can be maintained sustainably and in line with community expectations.

Looking ahead

Over the next 12 months, Corporate Services will focus on implementing the outcomes of the CSF Review and new strategic plan, building on the foundations already in place.

The new organisational structure will be implemented from 1 July 2026, with recruitment continuing to fill specialist positions across HR and Corporate Services. We will also continue our focus to strengthen governance across VALS.

In Facilities, we will streamline our facilities processes to better support all offices as VALS continues to grow. In ICT, our SharePoint transition is targeted for completion by the end of 2026, and we will work closely with the Research and Evidence Development team to understand and respond to the impacts of AI across the organisation. In HR, we will finalise our Enterprise Bargaining Agreement negotiations, welcome new HR appointments, and launch our new Employee Assistance Program early in the new financial year.

Together, this work reflects Corporate Services' continued focus on building the organisational capacity, systems and infrastructure that allow VALS' legal and community-facing teams to do their work with confidence in the foundations underneath them.

SOUTH EAST AUSTRALIAN
ABORIGINAL JUSTICE SERVICES LIMITED

Financial Report

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026



DIRECTORS' REPORT

Your Directors present this report, together with the audited financial statements of the South East Australian Aboriginal Justice Services Limited for the year ended 30th June 2026.

DIRECTORS

The names of the Directors in Office at any time during or since the end of the year are:

Crystal McKinnon (Chairperson)
Apryl Day (Secretary)
Robert Nicholls
Sarina Gentile (Treasurer)
Travis Lovett (commenced 25/11/2025)
Cienan Muir (resigned 19/02/2026)
Tarneen Onus Brown
Tiana Koehler
Holly Charles

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

The following person held the position of company secretary at the end of the financial year: Tarneen Onus Brown.

OBJECTIVES

Meet the legal needs of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait islander community in Victoria through legal services:

- Undertake related Services which may help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- Run VALS Legal Services effectively, efficiently and strategically; and
- Work co-operatively and collaboratively with other organisations for the benefit of clients.

STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES

Provide high quality legal representation to every Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person who seeks our assistance and fits the criteria for Service – in relation to Civil, Criminal and Family Law matters:

- work with key people such as members of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community, ministers, Government departments and Government committees through submissions, face to face meetings and hearings, on current and proposed legislation and policy and conduct proactive advocacy.
- make sure that our staff feel valued, supported and well informed through regular staff meetings, training, study assistance, policies that encourage work-life balance, mentoring opportunities and induction programs; and
- work with a range of mainstream and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander controlled organisations, with a focus on ensuring clients receive holistic support and assistance as required.

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES

Deliver a 24 hour, 7 days a week legal service to the Victorian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community and promote social justice, policy/law reform and community legal education.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Provide highly efficient legal and related services consistent with contractual obligations, legal professional, practical and ethical obligations and the relative needs of individual clients.

SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)

For the year, the entity earned a net surplus of $2051,481 after a depreciation charge of $977,052.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

No other significant changes in the company's state of affairs occurred during the financial year.

AFTER BALANCE DATE EVENTS

No matter has evolved since 30 June 2026 that has significantly affected, or may significantly affect:
(a) the entity's operations in future financial years, or
(b) the results of those operations in future financial years, or
(c) the entity's state of affairs in future financial years.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS AND RESULTS

Likely developments in the operations of the company in future financial years and the expected results of these developments have not been included in this report as the inclusion of such information is likely to result in unreasonable prejudice to the economic entity.

OPTIONS

No options over issued shares or interest in the company were granted during or since the end of the financial year and there were no options outstanding at the date of this report.

INFORMATION ON DIRECTORS

Crystal McKinnon: Chairperson
Dr Crystal McKinnon is a Yamatji person and is an Associate Professor in History, Law and Justice at the University of Melbourne. Crystal is an extensively published academic and expert speaker and presenter on subjects related to critical Indigenous studies, Indigenous People's histories, social movements, sovereignty and justice. Crystal is a member of various academic bodies and is involved in academic administration, university governance and wider participation in the Boards and steering committees of various not-for-profit and community organisations**.**

Cienan Muir:
Cienan Muir is a Yorta Yorta, Taungurung and Ngarrindjeri man who grew up in Northcote, Echuca, Moama and Mooroopna. Cienan has held numerous roles within the Victorian Government from Department of Justice to Homes Victoria, stepping away temporarily to work at the Koorie Youth Council in advocating for our young peoples voices, a time he is most proud of. He now works in the natural resource management space of the Victorian Government as a policy officer. Cienan has completed the Company Directors Course through the Australia Institute of Company Directors (AICD) and completed a similar course through the Institute of Company Directors Australia (ICDA). Cienan delivered Australia's first ever Indigenous Comic Con in 2019, founded his company INDIGINERD, creating space for Indigenous representation across the popular culture area and has written for the Australian Centre for the Moving Images (ACMI)

Apryl Day: Secretary
Apryl Day is a proud Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba and Barapa Barapa woman. She is a community organiser and campaigner, and a member of both Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance Victoria and Pay the Rent. She is the daughter of Tanya Day – a proud Yorta Yorta woman who died in custody in 2017. Apryl and her family successfully led the campaign to end the criminalisation of public drunkenness in Victoria and is at the forefront of the fight for police accountability and justice matters. Apryl is the Executive Officer and Founder of the Dhadjowa Foundation which provides culturally safe and strategic guidance and support to families whose loved ones have died in custody in hopes to amplify the campaigning of families and end Aboriginal deaths in custody. Apryl Day is co-owner of Interlude Bar, a cocktail bar and restaurant. She has won many awards, including Voltaire Human Rights Award (Jun 2021), Liberty Victoria, Civil Justice Award (May 2021), Australian Lawyers Alliance, Women of the Year Recipient (Nov 2020), Marie Claire, and the Tim McCoy Human Rights Award (Nov 2019).

Sarina Gentile. Treasurer
Sarina Gentile is a proud Aboriginal woman from the Wollithiga clan of the Yorta Yorta Nation. She brings over two decades of leadership and advocacy experience across government and community sectors. Her career has been grounded in a strong commitment to justice reform, culturally informed practice, and the empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Sarina has held senior roles in both government and community-led organisations, where she has led initiatives focused on improving justice outcomes, building culturally safe systems, and strengthening accountability to Aboriginal communities. Her work spans policy

development, program design, and strategic leadership — all with a focus on addressing the systemic challenges faced by Aboriginal people within the justice system. With a proven ability to influence change at both operational and strategic levels, Sarina is deeply committed to building partnerships, embedding cultural integrity, and promoting long-term, community-led solutions. Her appointment to the Board of VALS reflects her enduring dedication to equity, justice, and self-determination.

Holly Charles. Director
Holly Charles is a Yorta Yorta and Gunai woman who grew up on Waddawurrung country and spent several years living in Geelong and Melbourne before recently returning to Yorta Yorta country. She is a Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne and has worked across government, education and community advocacy roles. Holly previously worked as a lawyer in Commonwealth agencies and now focusses on community-led research and justice reform. Her work centres on race and the law, and the role of First Nations knowledges in challenging colonial systems and creating self-determined futures.

Tiana Koehrer
Tiana is a proud Yorta Yorta and Wurundjeri woman. Born and raised in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Tiana has actively contributed to her community through volunteer work and advocacy. Tiana has worked for several years in a number of high-level roles across the health, Treaty and justice spaces. She also has a wealth of governance experience though past and current board member opportunities. Currently working as a Manager in the Justice sector, Tiana is passion about ensuring all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Victorian's have access to culturally space supports and services, especially those in contact with the justice system. She is passionate about working with young, incarcerated mob to build tools with then to ensure they do not return to custody.

Robert Nicholls: Director
Bobby Nicholls is a proud Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, and Wadjabalok man and the nephew of Sir Douglas Nicholls. He is the Chairperson of Yorta Yorta Nations Aboriginal Corporation YYNAC. Bobby was a Director of VACCA for 10 years, first joining in 1981. Bobby has worked in community run organisations such as the Aborigines Advancement League, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, and the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria. Bobby is one of the founding members of Yarnin' Pictures, formed by his passion to document Elders stories whilst training Aboriginal youth in the art of filmmaking. To this end, he helped create an App called "Yalinguth" a Woi-wurrung word meaning 'yesterday' which echoes the sentiments of many Elders that "we need to go back, before we can go forwards". The Yalinguth app can be used for many educational and cultural applications, including efforts towards greater cultural awareness within schools for teachers and students, and in particular as a resource for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority.

Tarneen Onus Brown: Director
Tarneen Onus Williams is a proud Gunditjmara, Yorta Yorta person through their mother and Bindal and Meriam person through their father. Tarneen is living on the unceded land of the Wurundjeri peoples. Tarneen is a community organising lead at Australian Progress, previously VALS community legal educator, a community organiser for Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance working on Invasion Day, Black Deaths in Custody and Black Lives Matter. They're also a writer and filmmaker that has been published in IndigenousX, The Urban List, Crikey, NITV and RightNow. Tarneen's film "young mob questioning treaty" has been screened internationally at Imagine NATIVE in Toronto and Tampere Film Festival in Finland

Travis Lovett:
Travis Lovett is a Kerrupmara, Gunditjmara and Boandik man. He is the Executive Director of the Centre for Truth Telling and Dialogue at the University of Melbourne, leading transformative work to embed truth-telling, cultural authority, and systemic reform across institutions. Travis previously served as Deputy Chair and Commissioner at the Yoorrook Justice Commission, where he helped deliver Australia's first formal truth-telling inquiry. His leadership enabled and influenced landmark reports that shaped Treaty negotiations and advanced justice reform. He has also held senior roles across government, including in First Peoples State Relations, Aboriginal Victoria, and the Department of Justice, where he lead reform of the Koori Courts, water law, and built cultural safety frameworks. Travis led the historic Walk for Truth from Portland to Parliament, a 513-kilometre journey that carried the voices and authority of First Peoples across Country and into the heart of political power. Recognised internationally as a keynote speaker and advisor, Travis continues to mentor Aboriginal leaders and guide institutions to embed First Peoples' priorities into governance and strategy.

MEETING OF DIRECTORS

During the financial year, eight meetings were held. Attendances were:

	No. of eligible to attend	No. attended
Crystal McKinnon	7	7
Cienan Muir	7	6
Luke Martin	4	2
Erin Rose	4	1
Apryl Day	7	5
Robert Nicholls	7	4
Tarneen Onus Brown	7	3
Lisa Briggs	3	2
Tiana Koehrer	3	3
Sarina Gentile	3	3
Holly Charles	3	3

INDEMNIFYING OFFICERS OR AUDITOR

No indemnities have been given or insurance premiums paid, during or since the end of the financial period, for any person who is or has been an officer or auditor of the company.

PROCEEDINGS ON BEHALF OF THE ENTITY

No person has applied for leave of Court to bring proceedings on behalf of the entity or intervene in any proceedings to which the entity is a party for the purpose of taking responsibility on behalf of the entity for all or any part of those proceedings.

The entity was not a party of any such proceedings during the year.

AUDITORS INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

The auditor's independence declaration for this financial year has been received and can be found on the following page of this report

Signed in accordance with a resolution of the Board of Directors:

Signed at Preston on the Day of November 2026

Crystal McKinnon
_____ Director

Tiana Koehrer
_____ Director

TOWARDS A VISION SHARED

Collins & Co Audit Pty Ltd
127 Paisley Street
Footscray VIC 3011
Australia
Phone (03) 9680 1000
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AUDITOR'S INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION
TO THE DIRECTORS OF
SOUTH EAST AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL JUSTICE SERVICES LIMITED
A.B.N. 45 926 675 900

I declare that to the best of my knowledge and belief, in relation to the audit for the financial year ended 30 June 2026 there have been:

i. no contraventions of the auditor independence requirements of the *Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission Act 2012* in relation to the audit; and

ii. No contravention of any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.

Frederik Ryk Ludolf Eksteen CA
ASIC Auditor Registration Number 421448

Collins & Co Audit Pty Ltd
127 Paisley Street
FOOTSCRAY VIC 3011

Dated this 28th day of October 2026

Liability limited by a scheme approved under Professional Standards Legislation
ABN 33 614 161 796

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

	Note	30 June 2026	30 June 2025
Revenue including Government Grants	**2**	**30,635,540**	**26,007,381**
Auditors' remuneration	**3**	18,401	18,276
Depreciation and amortisation expenses		977,052	690,205
Employee benefits expenses		21,085,210	17,740,614
Outside briefs		274,683	102,416
Other expenses		6,123,952	4,281,267
Finance costs – interest		104,761	102,853
Total Expenditure		**28,584,059**	**22,935,631**
Surplus /(Deficit) before income tax		2,051,481	3,071,750
Income Tax		-	-
Surplus/ (Deficit) after income tax		2,051,481	3,071,750
Other comprehensive income		-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to members of the entity		**2,051,481**	**3,071,750**

No income Tax is payable by the Entity.

As members have no right to share in profit, no earnings per share information is presented.

The above statement should be read in conjunction with the attached notes to the financial statements and the audit report.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
AS AT 30 JUNE 2026

	Note	30 June 2026	30 June 2025
		$	$
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	**5**	70,044,756	43,970,642
Trade and other receivables	**6**	1,624,068	7,229,908
Other current assets	**7**	182,087	224,643
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		71,850,911	51,425,193
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Property, plant and equipment	**8**	12,610,728	10,572,253
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		12,610,728	10,572,253
TOTAL ASSETS		84,461,639	61,997,446
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade and other payables		1,200,412	1,936,847
Grant income carried forward	**10**	60,393,437	40,796,206
Other borrowings	**13**	298,423	203,416
Short-term provisions payable	**9**	1,581,110	1,324,154
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		63,473,382	44,260,623
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Other long-term borrowings	**13**	1,801,349	707,243
Long-term provisions payable	**9**	1,322,435	1,034,615
Long-term contingency provision	**14**	-	181,973
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		3,123,784	1,923,831
TOTAL LIABILITIES		66,597,166	46,184,454
NET ASSETS		17,864,473	15,812,992
MEMBERS EQUITY			
Reserves	**11**	6	6
Accumulated funds		17,864,467	15,812,986
TOTAL MEMBERS EQUITY		17,864,473	15,812,992

The above statement should be read in conjunction with the attached notes to the financial statements and the audit report.

STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

	Share capital $	Accumulated funds $	Reserves $	Total $
Balance at 1 July 2024	-	12,741,236	6	9,704,020
Surplus attributable to the company for the year ended 30 June 2025		3,071,750	-	3,071,750
Balance at 30 June 2025	-	15,812,986	6	15,812,992
Surplus attributable to the company for the year ended 30 June 2026	-	2,051,481	-	2,051,481
Balance at 30 June 2026	-	17,864,467	6	17,864,473

The above statement should be read in conjunction with the attached notes to the financial statements and the audit report.

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

	Note	30 June 2026	30 June 2025
		$	$
CASH FLOW FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES			
Receipts of government grants		52,304,224	20,306,855
Legal costs recovered		299,412	202,931
Other income		6,120,045	6,102,960
Donations		165,924	245,064
Interest received		1,854,810	1,525,921
Payments to suppliers, employees & disbursements		(31,650,693)	(22,898,358)
Net cash generated from (used in) operating activities	**12**	**29,093,722**	**5,485,373**
CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES			
Sale of property, plant & equipment		84,545	50,455
Purchase of property, plant & equipment		(3,104,153)	(3,395,725)
Net cash generated from (used in) investing activities		**(3,019,608)**	**(3,345,270)**
Net Increase (decrease) in cash held		**26,074,114**	**2,140,103**
Cash at the beginning of the financial period		**43,970,642**	**41,830,539**
Cash at the end of the financial period	**5**	**70,044,756**	**43,970,642**

The above statement should be read in conjunction with the attached notes to the financial statements and the audit report.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

The financial statements cover South East Australian Aboriginal Justice Services Limited (SEAAJSL) as an individual entity. It is a company incorporated and domiciled in Australia.

1. Summary of Significant Accounting Policies

Basis of Preparation

The general purpose financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 and Australian Accounting Standards and Interpretations of the Australian Accounting Standards Board. The Entity is a not-for-profit entity for financial reporting purposes under Australian Accounting Standards.

Material accounting policies adopted in the preparation of these financial statements are presented below and have been consistently applied unless otherwise stated.

Reporting basis and conventions

The financial statements, except for the cash flow information, have been prepared on an accrual basis and are based on historical costs, modified, where applicable, by the measurement at fair value of selected non-current assets, financial assets and financial liabilities. The amounts presented in the financial statements have been rounded to the nearest dollar.

Accounting Policies

Revenue recognition

Revenue is recognised when it is probable that the economic benefit will flow to the entity and the revenue can be reliably measured. Revenue is measured at the fair value of the consideration received or receivable.

When the entity receives operating grant revenue, it assesses whether the contract is enforceable and has sufficiently specific performance obligations in accordance to AASB 15.

When both these conditions are satisfied, the Entity:
- identifies each performance obligation relating to the grant
- recognises a contract liability for its obligations under the agreement
- recognises revenue as it satisfies its performance obligations.

When the entity receives a capital grant, it recognises a liability for the excess of the initial carrying amount of the financial asset received over any related amounts (being contributions by owners, lease liability, financial instruments, provisions, revenue or contract liability arising from a contract with a customer) recognised under other Australian Accounting Standards.

Revenue from the rendering of a service is recognised upon the delivery of the service to the customers.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Revenue recognition(continued)

Interest income is recognised using the effective interest method.

All revenue is stated net of the amount of Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Cash Flows

Cash flows are presented in the cash flow statement on a gross basis, except for the GST component of investing and financing activities, which are disclosed as operating cash flows.

Comparative Figures

In accordance with the Accounting Standards, comparative figures from the previous audited financial report for year ended 30 June 2025 are provided where appropriate.

Critical Accounting Estimates and Judgments

The directors evaluate estimates and judgments incorporated into the financial report based on historical knowledge and best available current information. Estimates assume a reasonable expectation of future events and are based on current trends and economic data, obtained both externally and within the group.

Key estimates – Impairment

The entity assesses impairment at each reporting date by evaluating conditions specific to the entity that may lead to impairment of assets. Where an impairment trigger exists, the recoverable amount of the asset is determined. Value-in-use calculations performed in assessing recoverable amounts incorporate a number of key estimates.

No impairment has been recognised in respect of this reporting period.

Income Taxation

The entity is endorsed by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission as a Public Benevolent Institution. Therefore no income tax is payable by the entity.

Property, Plant and Equipment

The entity has chosen to adapt the Cost Model under paragraph 30 of AASB 116 therefore property, plant and equipment is maintained at cost in the accounts less accumulated depreciation.

Property

Freehold land is reported at cost.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Leased Assets

For any new contracts entered on or after 1 July 2019, the Company considers whether a contract is, or contains a lease. A lease is defined as 'a contract, or part of a contract, that conveys the right to use an asset (the underlying asset) for a period in exchange for consideration'. To apply this definition the Company assesses whether the contract meets three key evaluations which are whether:

• the contract contains an identified asset, which is either explicitly identified in the contract or implicitly specified by being identified at the time the asset is made available to the Company

• the Company has the right to obtain substantially all the economic benefits from use of the identified asset throughout the period of use, considering its rights within the defined scope of the contract

• the Company has the right to direct the use of the identified asset throughout the period of use.

The Company assess whether it has the right to direct 'how and for what purpose' the asset is used throughout the period of use.

For any new lease type contracts, the entity considers whether a contract is, or contains a lease.

A lease is defined as 'a contract, or part of a contract, that conveys the right to use an asset (the underlying asset) for a period in exchange for consideration'. To apply this definition the entity assesses whether the contract meets three key evaluations which are whether:

• the contract contains an identified asset, which is either explicitly identified in the contract or implicitly specified by being identified at the time the asset is made available to the entity

• the entity has the right to obtain substantially all the economic benefits from use of the identified asset throughout the period of use, considering its rights within the defined scope of the contract

• the entity has the right to direct the use of the identified asset throughout the period of use.

The entity assess whether it has the right to direct 'how and for what purpose' the asset is used throughout the period of use.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Initially, the lease liability is measured at the present value of the lease payments still to be paid at commencement date. The lease payments are discounted at the interest rate implicit in the lease. If this rate cannot be readily determined, the Entity uses the incremental borrowing rate. Initially, the lease liability is measured at the present value of the lease payments still to be paid at commencement date. The lease payments are discounted at the interest rate implicit in the lease. If this rate cannot be readily determined, the Entity uses the incremental borrowing rate.

Lease payments included in the measurement of the lease liability are as follows:
- fixed lease payments less any lease incentives;
- variable lease payments that depend on an index or rate, initially measured using the index or rate at the commencement date;
- the amount expected to be payable by the lessee under residual value guarantees;
- the exercise price of purchase options, if the lessee is reasonably certain to exercise the options;
- lease payments under extension options if lessee is reasonably certain to exercise the options; and
- payments of penalties for terminating the lease, if the lease term reflects the exercise of an option to terminate the lease

The right-of-use assets comprise the initial measurement of the corresponding lease liability as mentioned above, any lease payments made at or before the commencement date as well as any initial direct costs. The subsequent measurement of the right-of-use assets is at cost less accumulated amortisation and impairment losses.

Right-of-use assets are depreciated over the lease term or useful life of the underlying asset whichever is the shortest. Where a lease transfers ownership of the underlying asset or the cost of the right-of-use asset reflects that the Entity anticipates to exercise a purchase option, the specific asset is depreciated over the useful life of the underlying asset.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Financial Instruments

Recognition, initial measurement and derecognition

Initial recognition and measurement

Financial assets and financial liabilities are recognised when the Entity becomes a party to the contractual provisions to the instrument. For financial assets, this is the date that the Entity commits itself to either the purchase or sale of the asset (i.e. trade date accounting is adopted).

Financial instruments (except for trade receivables) are initially measured at fair value plus transaction costs, except where the instrument is classified "at fair value through profit or loss", in which case transaction costs are expensed to profit or loss immediately. Where available, quoted prices in an active market are used to determine fair value. In other circumstances, valuation techniques are adopted.

Classification and subsequent measurement of financial assets

Trade receivables that do not contain a significant financing component are measured at the transaction price, all financial assets are initially measured at fair value adjusted for transaction costs.

For the purpose of subsequent measurement, financial assets other than those designated and effective as hedging instruments are classified into the following categories upon initial recognition:
- amortised cost
- fair value through profit or loss (FVPL)
- equity instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income (FVOCI)

Classifications are determined by both,
- The entities business model for managing the financial asset
- The contractual cash flow characteristics of the financial assets

Financial assets at amortised cost

Financial assets are measured at amortised cost if the assets meet the following conditions (and are not designated as FVPL):
- they are held within a business model whose objective is to hold the financial assets and collect its contractual cash flows
- the contractual terms of the financial assets give rise to cash flows that are solely payments of principal and interest on the principal amount outstanding.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Financial Instruments (continued)

After initial recognition, these are measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method. Discounting is omitted where the effect of discounting is immaterial. The Entity's cash and cash equivalents, trade and most other receivables fall into this category of financial instruments as well as long-term deposit.

Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss (FVPL)

Financial assets that are held within a different business model other than 'hold to collect' or 'hold to collect and sell' are categorised at fair value through profit and loss. Further, irrespective of business model financial assets whose contractual cash flows are not solely payments of principal and interest are accounted for at FVPL. All derivative financial instruments fall into this category, except for those designated and effective as hedging instruments.

Financial liabilities

Non derivative financial liabilities, such as trade and other payables, are initially measured at fair value, and, where applicable, adjusted for transaction costs.

Subsequently, financial liabilities are measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method except for derivatives and financial liabilities designated at FVPL, which are carried subsequently at fair value with gains or losses recognised in profit or loss.

Derivative instruments

Derivative instruments are measured at fair value. Gains and losses arising from changes in fair value are taken to the income statement unless they are designated as hedges.

Impairment

Under AASB 9, impairment requirements use more forward looking information to recognise expected credit losses - the 'expected credit losses (ECL) model'. Instruments within the scope of the new requirements include loans and other debt-type financial assets measured at amortised cost and trade receivables.

The Entity considers a broader range of information when assessing credit risk and measuring expected credit losses, including past events, current conditions, reasonable and supportable forecasts that affect the expected collectability of the future cash flows of the instrument.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Impairment of Assets

At the end of each reporting period, the entity reviews the carrying amounts of its tangible and intangible assets to determine whether there is any indication that those assets have been impaired. If such an indication exists, the recoverable amount of the asset, being the higher of the asset's fair value less costs of disposal and value in use, is compared to the asset's carrying amount. Any excess of the asset's carrying amount over its recoverable amount is recognised in profit or loss.

Where the assets are not held primarily for their ability to generate net cash inflows – that is, they are specialised assets held for continuing use of their service capacity – the recoverable amounts are expected to be materially the same as fair value.

Where it is not possible to estimate the recoverable amount of an individual asset, the Entity estimates the recoverable amount of the cash-generating unit to which the asset belongs.

Where an impairment loss on a revalued individual asset is identified, this is recognised against the revaluation surplus in respect of the same class of asset to the extent that the impairment loss does not exceed the amount in the revaluation surplus for that class of asset.

Employee Provisions

Short-term employee provisions

Provision is made for the Entity's obligation for short-term employee benefits. Short-term employee benefits are benefits (other than termination benefits) that are expected to be settled wholly before 12 months after the end of the annual reporting period in which the employees render the related service, including wages, salaries, sick leave and annual leave. Short-term employee benefits are measured at the (undiscounted) amounts expected to be paid when the obligation is settled.

Other long-term employee provisions

Provision is made for employees' long service leave and annual leave entitlements not expected to be settled wholly within 12 months after the end of the annual reporting period in which the employees render the related service. Other long-term employee benefits are measured at the present value of the expected future payments to be made to employees. Expected future payments incorporate anticipated future wage and salary levels, durations of service and employee departures, and are discounted at rates determined by reference to market yields at the end of the reporting period on high quality corporate bonds that have maturity dates that approximate the terms of the obligations. Upon the remeasurement of obligations for other long-term employee benefits, the net change in the obligation is recognised in profit or loss as part of employee provisions expense.

The Entity's obligations for long-term employee benefits are presented as non-current employee provisions in its statement of financial position, except where the Entity does not have an unconditional right to defer settlement for at least 12 months after the end of the reporting period, in which case the obligations are presented as current employee provisions.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Cash and Cash Equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents include cash on hand, deposits held at call with banks, other short-term highly liquid investments with original maturities of three months or less, and bank overdrafts. Bank overdrafts are shown within short-term borrowings in current liabilities on the balance sheet.

Goods and Services Tax (GST)

Revenues, expenses and assets are recognised net of the amount of GST, except where the amount of GST incurred is not recoverable from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).

Receivables and payables are stated inclusive of the amount of GST receivable or payable. The net amount of GST recoverable from, or payable to, the ATO is included with other receivables or payables in the statement of financial position.

Cash flows are presented on a gross basis. The GST components of cash flows arising from investing or financing activities, which are recoverable from or payable to the ATO, are presented as operating cash flows included in receipts from customers or payments to suppliers.

Provisions

Provisions are recognised when the Entity has a legal or constructive obligation, as a result of past events, for which it is probable that an outflow of economic benefits will result and that outflow can be reliably measured. Provisions recognised represent the best estimate of the amounts required to settle the obligation at the end of the reporting period.

Unspent Grant Funds

Unspent Grant Funds available as revenue or liable to be returned to the grant provider in the following year are recognised as a current liability in the balance sheet. They are not treated as an operating surplus or profit.

Current and non-current classification

Assets and liabilities are presented in the statement of financial position based on current and non-current classification. An asset is classified as current when: it is either expected to be realised or intended to be sold or consumed in the entity's normal operating cycle; it is held primarily for the purpose of trading; it is expected to be realised within 12 months after the reporting period; or the asset is cash or cash equivalent unless restricted from being exchanged or used to settle a liability for at least 12 months after the reporting period. All other assets are classified as non-current.

A liability is classified as current when: it is either expected to be settled in the company's normal operating cycle; it is held primarily for the purpose of trading; it is due to be settled within 12 months after the reporting period; or there is no unconditional right to defer the settlement of the liability for at least 12 months after the reporting period. All other liabilities are classified as non-current.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Comparative Figures

Where required by Accounting Standards, comparative figures have been adjusted to conform with changes in presentation for the current financial year.

When the Entity retrospectively applies an accounting policy, makes a retrospective restatement or reclassifies items in its financial statements, a third statement of financial position as at the beginning of the preceding period, in addition to the minimum comparative financial statements, must be disclosed.

Critical Accounting Estimates and Judgments

The directors evaluate estimates and judgements incorporated into the financial statements based on historical knowledge and best available current information. Estimates assume a reasonable expectation of future events and are based on current trends and economic data, obtained both externally and within the Entity.

Key estimates – Impairment

The entity assesses impairment at each reporting date by evaluating conditions specific to the entity that may lead to impairment of assets. Where an impairment trigger exists, the recoverable amount of the asset is determined. Value-in-use calculations performed in assessing recoverable amounts incorporate a number of key estimates.

No impairment has been recognised in respect of this reporting period.

New, revised or amending Accounting Standards and Interpretations adopted

The entity has adopted all of the new, revised or amending Accounting Standards and interpretations issued by the Australian Accounting Standards Board ('AASB') that are mandatory for the current reporting period.

Any new, revised or amending Accounting Standards or Interpretations that are not yet mandatory have not been early adopted.

New Accounting Standards for Application in Future Periods

The AASB has issued new and amended accounting standards and interpretations that have mandatory application for future accounting periods. The entity has decided against early adoption of these standards.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

2 Revenue	30 June 2026	30 June 2025
	$	$
Operating Activities		
Grant income		
Attorney General Department		
VALS	4,182,263	5,921,055
OTHER NLAP	224,000	1,880,956
NATSILS	-	0
	4,406,263	7,802,011
NIAA	-	859,793
	0	859,793
Victoria		
Department of Justice and Community Safety	35,676,979	13,302,784
Other Departments	2,292,925	2,561,944
	37,969,904	15,864,728
- plus unspent grants brought forward	40,796,206	34,015,174
- plus grants received in advance	0	758,268
- less unspent grants carried to future period	(60,393,437)	(40,796,206)
	(19,597,231)	(6,022,764)
Grant income	**22,778,936**	**18,503,768**
Legal aid income	265,885	179,220
Legal costs recovered	6,308	5,263
Total revenue from operating activities	**23,051,129**	**18,688,251**
Other Revenue		
- Other income	5,563,677	5,548,145
- donations	165,924	245,064
- interest received	1,854,810	1,525,921
Total other revenue	**7,584,411**	**7,319,130**
Total revenue	**30,635,540**	**26,007,381**

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

		30 June 2026	30 June 2025
3	**Remuneration of Auditor**	**$**	**$**
	During the financial year the following fees were paid or payable for services provided by:		
	Frederik R. L. Eksteen of Collins & Co Audit Pty Ltd		
	Auditing of the financial statements and acquittals	18,401	18,276
	Other services	-	-

4 Revenue and Expense items

Bad and doubtful debts

There were no bad debts provisions made for the reporting period (2025: $Nil).

Operating Lease expenses

Operating lease, contracted lease payments	385,157	240,837

5 Cash and Cash Equivalents

Reconciliation of cash

Cash at the end of the financial period as shown in the cash flow statement is reconciled to the related items in the statement of financial position as follows:

Current Assets		
Cash on Hand	-	-
Cash at Bank		
Recurrent	1,581	1,471
Term Deposit	-	34,000,000
Cash Management	70,043,175	9,969,171
Trust Account Funds	-	-
	70,044,756	**43,970,642**

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

6 Trade and Other Receivables	30 June 2026	30 June 2025
	$	$
Current		
Trade Debtors	975,645	5,775,193
Other receivables	648,423	1,454,715
	1,624,068	7,229,908

Credit risk – Trade and Other Receivables

The entity does not have any material credit risk to any single receivable or group of receivables.
The following table details the entity's trade and other receivables exposed to credit risk with aging analysis and impairment provided for thereon. Amounts are considered as "past due" when the debt has not been settled within the terms and conditions agreed between the entity and the debtor party. A provision for impairment is assessed as mentioned above.

An assessment has been made that both debts within trading terms and debts that have not been impaired will be received.

There are no financial assets that would have been impaired or past due, had they not been renegotiated.

	Total	Within trading terms	Past due but not impaired <30days	Past due but not impaired 31-90 days	Past due but not impaired >90 days
	$	$	$	$	$
2026					
Trade and term receivables	975,645	623,260	149,600	6,600	196,185
Other receivables	648,423	648,423	-	-	-
Total	**1,624,068**	**1,271,683**	**149,600**	**6,600**	**196,185**
2025					
Trade and term receivables	5,775,193	55,194	286,138.00	5,242,593	191,268
Other receivables	1,454,715	1,454,715	-	-	-
Total	**7,229,908**	**1,509,909**	**286,138.00**	**5,242,593**	**191,268**

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

7 Other Current Assets

	30 June 2026 $	30 June 2025 $
Current		
Prepayments	182,087	224,643
	182,087	224,643

8 Property, Plant and Equipment

	30 June 2026 $	30 June 2025 $
Land at cost	4,117,566	4,117,566
Total Land	**4,117,566**	**4,117,566**
Buildings at cost	4,254,807	4,022,213
Less: Accumulated depreciation	(670,879)	(561,543)
Total Buildings	**3,583,928**	**3,460,670**
Total Land and Buildings	**7,701,494**	**7,578,236**
Motor Vehicles at cost	1,012,455	940,972
Less: Accumulated depreciation	(359,650)	(327,306)
Total Motor Vehicles	**652,805**	**613,666**
Office Furniture and Equipment at cost	2,006,236	1,081,782
Less: Accumulated depreciation	(309,062)	(76,906)
Total Furniture & Equipment	**1,697,174**	**1,004,876**
Plant & Equipment at cost	705,022	705,022
Less: Accumulated depreciation	(474,536)	(416,914)
Total Plant & Equipment	**230,486**	**288,108**
Computer equipment at cost	915,936	782,896
Less Accumulated depreciation	(590,129)	(538,828)
Total Computer equipment	**325,807**	**244,068**
Right-of-use Asset at cost	2,628,201	1,295,585
Less Accumulated depreciation	(625,239)	(452,286)
Total Computer equipment	**2,002,962**	**843,299**
Total Property, Plant and Equipment	**12,610,728**	**10,572,253**

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Movement in carrying amounts for each class of property, plants and equipment :

	Land	Building	Motor Vehicle	Furniture & Fittings	Plant & Equipment	Computer Equipment	Right-of-use Asset	TOTAL
Carrying amount at 30 June 2024	**4,117,566**	**1,491,604**	**635,247**	**355,837**	**257,204**	**225,748**	**1,389,281**	**8,472,487**
New Acquisition	-	2,028,222	139,824	726,472	124,902	145,525	230,780	3,395,725
Disposal/Traded	-	-	(25,002)	(20,552)	(29,631)	(4,717)	(525,853)	(605,755)
Depreciation	-	(59,156)	(136,403)	(56,881)	(64,368)	(122,488)	(250,909)	(690,205)
Carrying amount at 30 June 2025	**4,117,566**	**3,460,670**	**613,666**	**1,004,876**	**288,108**	**244,068**	**843,299**	**10,572,253**
New Acquisition	-	232,594	210,380	924,454	-	214,110	1,522,615	3,104,153
Disposal/Traded	-	-	(41,900)	-	-	(2,219)	(44,507)	(88,626)
Depreciation	-	(109,336)	(129,341)	(232,156)	(57,622)	(130,152)	(318,445)	(977,052)
Carrying amount at 30 June 2026	**4,117,566**	**3,583,928**	**652,805**	**1,697,174**	**230,486**	**325,807**	**2,002,962**	**12,610,728**

9 Provisions Payable

	30 June 2026	30 June 2025
Short Term Provisions Payable	**$**	**$**
Employee Entitlements – Annual Leave	1,427,093	1,133,417
Employee Entitlements – Long Service Leave	58,990	52,128
Employee Entitlements – Other Entitlements	95,028	138,609
Employee Benefits –Current	**1,581,111**	**1,324,154**
Employee Benefits – Non current		
Employee Entitlements – Long Service Leave	-	5,308
Employee Entitlements – Personal/ Carers' Leave	1,322,435	1,029,307
Employee Benefits –Non current	**1,322,435**	**1,034,615**
Total provisions payable	**2,903,546**	**2,358,769**
Opening balance	2,358,769	2,007,685
Net provisions raised/(reduced) during year	544,777	351,084
Balance at end of period	**2,903,546**	**2,358,769**

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

		30 June 2026	30 June 2025 $
10	**Financial Liabilities**		
	Current – Short term financial liabilities		
	Grant funds unspent	60,393,437	40,796,206
		60,393,437	**40,796,206**
11	**Issued Capital and Reserve**		
	Statutory Reserve	**6**	**6**

12 Cash Flow Information

Reconciliation of Cash Flow from Operations with Surplus/(Deficit) after Income Tax

	30 June 2026	30 June 2025
Surplus /(Deficit) after income tax	2,051,481	3,071,750
Non-cash flows in profit after tax		
Depreciation & Amortization	977,052	690,205
(Gain) / Loss on Disposal of property, plant & equipment	(40,426)	29,447
Increase / (Decrease) in provisions	1,551,916	(224,121)
Increase/(Decrease) in Grant carried forward	19,597,231	6,781,032
Changes in assets and liabilities,		
Decrease/(Increase) in receivables	5,605,840	(6,316,017)
Increase / (Decrease) in payables & accruals	(736,435)	1,022,655
(Increase) / Decrease in prepayments	42,556	(95,430)
Disposal of Right of Use Asset	44,507	525,853
Cash flow from operations	**29,093,722**	**5,485,373**

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

13 Lease Liabilities	30 June 2026	30 June 2025
	$	$
Current		
Lease liability - leased premises	298,423	203,416
Non-current		
Lease liability - leased premises	1,801,349	707,243
Total	**2,099,772**	**910,659**

Capital Expenditure commitments

Capital Expenditure commitments contracted for:		
- Plant & Equipment purchases		
- Capital Expenditure projects	-	-
Payable		
- no longer than 1 year		
- longer than 1 year but not longer than 5 years		
- grater than 5 years		

14 Contingent Liabilities & Contingent Assets

Commonwealth Government for Caveat on property	-	181,973
Estimates of the potential financial effect of contingent liabilities that may become payable are:	-	-
	0	**181,973**

Indemnity to Attorney-General's Department (AGD)

SEAAJS, under the AGD acceptance of grant offer terms and conditions, has agreed that AGD will not be liable for any debts incurred or obligations undertaken by the grantee "SEAAJS" and that SEAAJS indemnifies AGD against liability for actions, proceedings, claims, costs and expenses which it may suffer, incur or sustain in connection with, or arising in any way whatsoever out of making the Grant to the Grantee, or out of the Grantee carrying out, failing to carry out or departing from Grant Conditions. This indemnity establishes a contingent liability by SEAAJS to AGD should any matter mentioned arise.

No other Contingent Liabilities or Assets exist.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

15 Events After the Balance Sheet Date

No events subsequent to 30 June 2026 that require disclosure

	30 June 2026 $	30 June 2025 $
Financial assets		
Net Assets held	Nil	Nil
Total financial assets	**0**	**0**

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

16 Economic Dependence

The entity is economically dependent on Commonwealth and State Government departments for Grant Funding. If funds are not spent in accordance with Grant Conditions the departments can suspend future grants or reclaim all or part of the grant(s).

17 Financial Risk Management

The entity's financial instruments consist mainly of deposits with banks, local money market instruments, short-term investments, accounts receivable and payable, loans and borrowings and mortgages.

The totals for each category of financial instruments, measured in accordance with AASB 9 is as follows:

	30 June 2026 $	30 June 2025 $
Financial assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	70,044,756	43,970,642
Trade and Other Receivables	1,624,068	7,229,908
Total financial assets	**71,668,824**	**51,200,550**
Financial liabilities		
Financial liabilities at amortised cost		
- Trade and other payables	1,200,412	1,936,847
- Lease liabilities	2,099,772	910,659
Total financial liabilities	**3,300,184**	**2,847,506**

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Financial risk management policies
The directors' overall risk management strategy is to assist the entity in meeting its financial targets, whilst minimising potential adverse effects or financial performance. Risk management policies are approved and reviewed by the Board of Directors on a regular basis. These include credit risk policies and future cash flow requirements.

The entity does not have any derivative instruments at the end of the reporting period.

Specific Financial Risk Exposures and Management

The entity is not exposed to any financial risk such as credit risk, liquidity risk and interest rate risk, due to its safe and sound ratio of assets over liabilities.

(a) Credit risk

Credit risk is the risk that parties that owe money do not pay it.

The maximum exposure to credit risk, excluding the value of any collateral or other security, at balance date to recognised financial assets, is the carrying amount, net of any provisions for impairment of those assets, as disclosed in the statement of financial position and notes to the financial statements.

The entity does not have any significant concentration of credit risk exposure to any single, or group, of counter-parties under financial instruments entered into by the entity. A profile of credit risk appears above under the Note 6 on 'Trade and Other Receivables".

(b) Liquidity risk
Liquidity risk arises due the possibility that the entity might encounter difficulty in settling its own debts or other liabilities. The entity manages this risk by managing credit risk on amounts owed to it, monitoring forecast cash flows and ensuring that adequate unutilised borrowing facilities are maintained.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Financial liability and financial asset maturity analysis

	Within 1 year		1 to 5 years		Over 5 years		Total	
	2026 $	2025 $	2026 $	2025 $	2026 $	2025 $	2026 $	2025 $
Financial liabilities due for payment								
Trade and other payables (excluding employee benefit provisions and deferred income)	1,200,412	1,936,847	-	-	-	-	1,200,412	1,936,847
Lease liabilities	2,099,772	910,659	-	-	-	-	2,099,772	910,659
Total expected outflows	3,300,184	2,847,506	-	-	-	-	3,300,184	2,847,506
Financial assets cash flows realisable								
Cash and cash equivalents	70,044,756	43,970,642	-	-	-	-	70,044,756	43,970,642
Trade and other receivables	1,624,068	7,229,908	-	-	-	-	1,624,068	7,229,908
Total anticipated inflows	71,668,824	51,200,550	-	-	-	-	71,668,824	51,200,550
Net inflow (outflow) on financial instruments	68,368,640	48,353,044					68,368,640	48,353,044

(c) Market Risk

Interest rate risk

Exposure to interest rate risk arises whereby future changes in interest rates will affect future cash flows or the fair value of financial assets and liabilities.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

Price Risk

Price risk relates to the risk that the fair value or future cash flows of a financial instrument will fluctuate because of changes in their market price.

(d) Foreign currency risk

The entity is not exposed to fluctuations in foreign currency.

Net Fair Values

The net fair values of listed investments have been valued at the quoted market bid price at balance date adjusted for transaction costs expected to be incurred. For other assets and other liabilities the net fair value approximates their carrying value. No financial assets and financial liabilities are readily traded on organised markets in standardized form other than listed investments.

The differences between fair values and carrying values of financial instruments with fixed interest rates are due to the change in discount rates being applied by the market to those instruments since their initial recognition by the entity. Most of these instruments which are carried at amortised cost (e.g. trade receivables, payables) are to be held until maturity and therefore their current net fair values bear little relevance to the entity.

As appropriate the net fair values and carrying amounts of financial assets and financial liabilities are disclosed in the Statement of Financial Position and in the notes to the financial statements.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

18 Key Management Personnel Compensation

	30 June 2026	30 June 2025
	$	$
The total of remuneration paid to key management personnel (KMP) of the entity during the period is as follows:	1,556,877	1,121,279
Short-term employee benefits	198,389	162,427
Post-employment benefits	-	-
Other long-term benefits	394,869	321,952
Termination benefits	-	-

19 Related Party Transactions

There were no transactions with related parties during the current and previous financial year. There were no trade receivables from or trade payables to related parties at the current and previous reporting date.

20 Registered Office

The registered office of the entity and the principal place of business is:

273 High Street
Preston, Victoria, 3072

DIRECTORS' DECLARATION

The Board of Directors' of South East Australian Aboriginal Justice Services Limited declare that in the directors opinion:

a) The financial statements and notes for the year ended 30 June 2026 satisfy the requirements of the Corporations Act 2001 and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012.

b) There are reasonable grounds to believe that the Entity is able to pay all of its debts as and when they become due and payable.

This statement is made in accordance with the Corporations Act and the subsection 60.15(2) of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2013.

Dated on: 9th October 2026

Tiana Koehrer

Director

Crystal McKinnon

Director

TOWARDS A VISION SHARED

Collins & Co Audit Pty Ltd
127 Paisley Street
Footscray VIC 3011
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Phone (03) 9680 1000
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SOUTH EAST AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL JUSTICE SERVICES LIMITED
A.B.N. 45 926 675 900
INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS

Opinion

I have audited the accompanying financial report of South East Australian Aboriginal Justice Services Limited (the company), which comprises the statement of financial position as at 30 June 2026, and the statement of comprehensive income, statement of changes in equity and statement of cash flows for the year ended on that date, notes comprising a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information and the statement by the Board of Directors.

In my opinion, the accompanying financial report of South East Australian Aboriginal Justice Services Limited is in accordance with Division 60 of the ACNC Act 2012, including:

i. giving a true and fair view of the company's financial position as at 30 June 2026 and of its performance and cash flows for the year ended on 30 June 2026; and

ii. complying with Australian Accounting Standards and Division 60 of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2013.

Basis of Opinion

I conducted my audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. My responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report section of my report. I am independent of the Company in accordance with the auditor independence requirements of the ACNC Act 2012 and the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (the Code) that are relevant to my audit of the financial report in Australia. I have also fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

I confirm that the independence declaration required by the ACNC Act 2012, which has been given to the directors of the Company would be on the same terms if given to the directors as at the time of this auditor's report.

I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

Responsibilities of Management and Those Charged with Governance for the Financial Report

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial report in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial report that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, management is responsible for assessing the Corporation's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the Entity or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the Corporation's financial reporting process.

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Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial report.

As part of an audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards, I exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. I also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial report, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.

- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the registered entity's internal control.

- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the responsible entities.

- Conclude on the appropriateness of the responsible entities use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the registered entity's ability to continue as a going concern. If I conclude that a material uncertainty exists, I am required to draw attention in my auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial report or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify my opinion. My conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of my auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the registered entity to cease to continue as a going concern.

- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial report, including the disclosures, and whether the financial report represents the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

I communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal controls that I identify during my audit.

Frederik Ryk Ludolf Eksteen CA
ASIC Auditor Registration Number 421448

Collins & Co Audit Pty Ltd, 127 Paisley Street, FOOTSCRAY VIC 3011

Dated this 28th day of October 2026

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Funders and Supporters Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all our funders alongside individual and corporate donors who have supported the delivery and growth of VALS services and advocacy throughout the year. Your support has allowed VALS to continue to provide high-quality, culturally safe and accessible legal services and community justice programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria. We would like to pay special mention to the following funders:

- Victorian State Government
- National Access to Justice Partnership
- Victorian Legal Service Board + Commission
- Victoria Legal Aid
- Oak Foundation

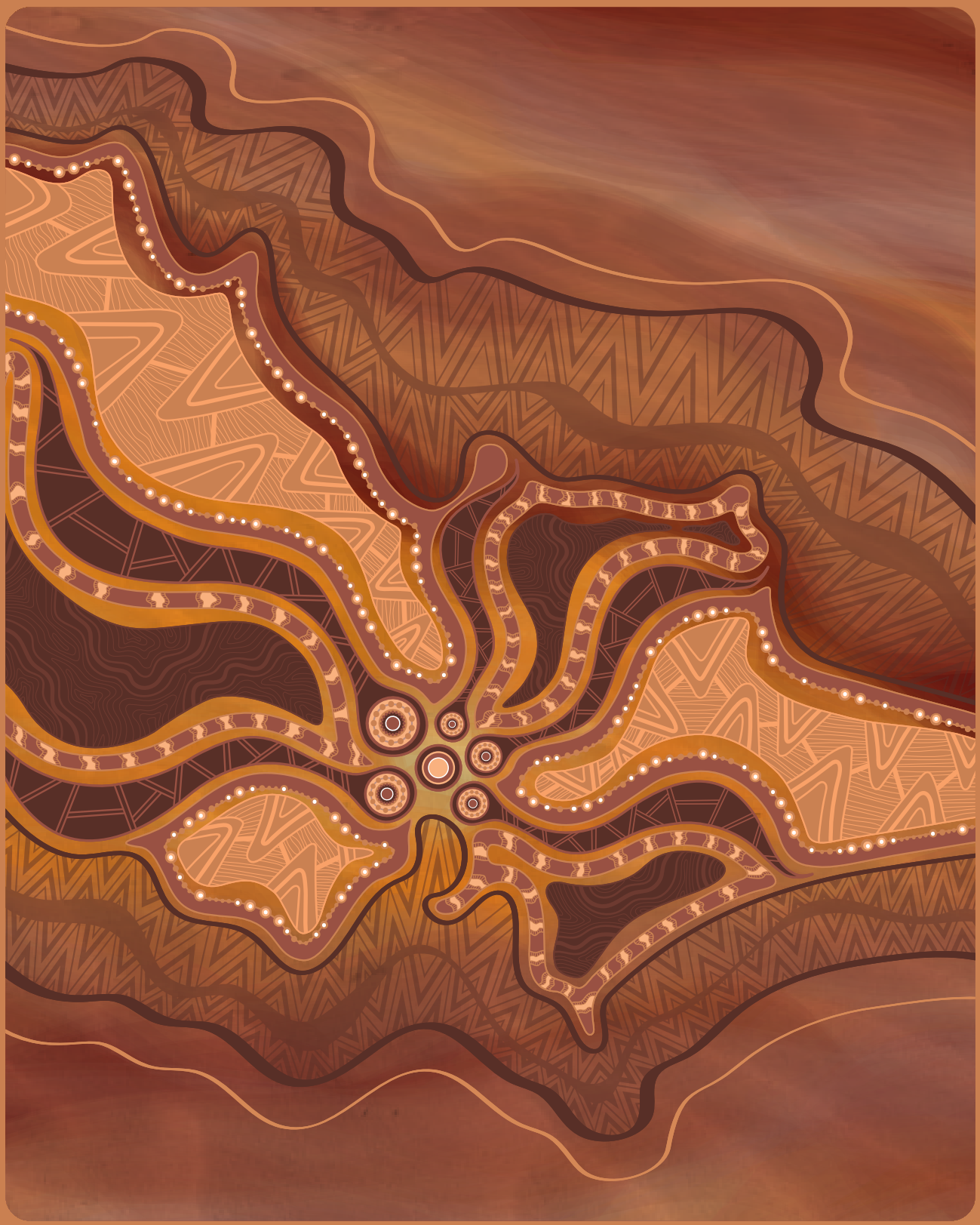
We would also like to acknowledge the pro bono support provided by the following legal firms over the past year.

- Allens
- Ashurst
- Barry Nilsson
- Clayton Utz
- Colin Biggers and Paisley
- Corrs Chambers Westgarth
- DLA Piper
- Gadens
- Gilbert & Tobin
- Gilchrist Connell
- Hall & Willcox
- HLW Ebsworth
- Holding Redlich
- King and Wood
- Maddocks
- Maurice Blackburn
- Mills Oakley
- MinterEllison
- Norton Rose Fullbright
- O'Farrell Robertson McMahon
- Polaris Lawyers
- Victoria Legal Aid
- Wotton Kearney

We wish to extend our thanks to the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled sector and community leaders for the collective pursuit of justice and advocating for the rights of Aboriginal children, young people, families and adults to be realised, protected and upheld.

To the allies who work and walk alongside us, in particular the Community Legal Sector, thank you for your continued support.

If you, or the organisation you work for would like to support VALS and the work that we do, please visit our website to make a donation.



This year's artwork is designed and created by proud Wiradjuri and Wemba Wemba woman, Reanna Bonno of Yakuwa Designs.

It represents the many Aboriginal nations we support and service across the state, interwoven like a possum skin cloak. VALS has been an Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation for 53 years, with strength, resistance and fight for justice passed across generations. As we look to the future, our strength and resistance will endure until justice is achieved for all.

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

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Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

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