

Welcome to TLA InFOCUS

I'm excited to introduce you to *TLA In Focus*, our new quarterly newsletter, that aims to keep our community updated on the work we do.

Each issue of *TLA In Focus* will report on a particular service area, so community members and organisations have a better understanding of the services we offer, and how to access them. We'll introduce our staff and share some of the latest data on how Tasmanians across the state are using our services.

TLA's vision is that all Tasmanians are safe, respected and have their voices heard.

We are an independent statutory authority, established by the Legal Aid Commission Act 1990 (Tas), to provide a wide range of legal services to Tasmanians who are unable to pay for legal assistance. We are funded by the Commonwealth and Tasmanian governments.

Advocating for justice system reforms is also an important part of TLA's role. We work with our clients, staff, legal and community partners to improve the experience and outcomes for Tasmanians in the justice system. The Children First Report (www.legalaid.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/children_first_report.pdf) is an example of the advocacy work we do. We also make submissions on legislative reforms and give evidence to Royal Commissions and other inquiries drawing on our data and the experiences of our clients and lawyers.

Based in our offices in Burnie, Devonport, Launceston, and Hobart, TLA lawyers and administrative staff help Tasmanians with their family, criminal and civil law problems.

Our ALS service is the first point of contact for most people to access legal assistance, via the phone help line, online chat or attending daily clinic sessions. ALS lawyers provide advice on a range of legal issues and refer people to the legal assistance they need.



Legal Aid Award 2022 Recipient

Fran McCracken

The Legal Aid award is awarded to a private practitioner in recognition of the significant contribution to the provision of legal aid

to the Tasmanian Community. Fran McCracken is a Launceston based lawyer practicing in Family and Criminal Law.

Fran communicates clearly and directly with clients, helping them understand their rights and informing their decisions. She also often assists with selection panels for legal aid positions in crime and family law.

Our Safe at Home service assists people experiencing family violence. We help people with disability who have problems with NDIS, the Mental Health Tribunal and Guardianship Board. Our Senior Assist service provides legal assistance to older people experiencing elder abuse.

TLA also provides legal aid grants to enable people to access private lawyers. This ensures that all eligible Tasmanians receive the legal help they need.

We are proud of the work we do at TLA and pleased to share more information about it with our community.

This issue of *TLA In Focus* highlights on our family law services.

I hope you enjoy it.

Warm regards,

Kristen Wylie
Acting Director

We support families with their legal issues

Tasmania Legal Aid offers a range of specialist services to support families with their family law issues.

Our Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) team works with separated parents to help them agree on how they will continue to care for their children. This service creates a supportive environment for parents who may not be able to agree completely to work together to come to an agreement on important decisions related to their children. Each parent is typically helped by their own lawyer and particular care is given to any parent without a lawyer to ensure that they are fully informed about the process and are enabled to engage fully.



In all our family law work we give children a voice in disputes that involve them. We support families to resolve cases at the earliest opportunity, saving emotional and financial costs for them and the community.

When a woman has experienced family violence, our Safe At Home (SAH) lawyers work with other government agencies to ensure she and her children are protected. When a SAH lawyer meets with a victim of family violence, they carefully document their story. Unlike other victims of violent crime, the evidence around the time and place of what happened is not always clear, and a victim of family violence may not even be aware that the more subtle behaviours they have experienced are abuse. Often people know it felt harmful but might blame themselves or not recognise the patterns of manipulation and coercion. It can be common for victims of family violence to experience subtle forms of control from their partners, such as restricting access to social activities or family and friends or requiring them to make sacrifices relating to their



Hi, I'm Sam Webster and I work at Tasmania Legal Aid as part of the ALS team. That's the Advice and Legal Service team; I answer the phone when someone has a legal question they need help answering. Sometimes they just need someone to explain the system for them – like how to resolve disputes about property boundary fences, or how to get a Working With Vulnerable People Card for a new job.

Someone can also come and speak to a lawyer from the ALS team at our offices. We meet in a private room and whatever is discussed is confidential, so people are safe to say whatever they want to get the advice they need.

Our team includes:

work or joint finances which keep them trapped. Family violence behaviour often starts with non-physical forms of control and abuse and escalates to physical or other obvious forms of violence much later in a long-established pattern of abuse within the relationship.

Our SAH lawyers offer advice, help, representation, and referral for victim-survivors of family violence

Our Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS) offers duty-lawyer services along with social-support services like Relationships Australia to help families affected by family violence who have a matter in the family law courts or family law problems. Our FASS lawyers work with social support workers to ensure that legal problems are addressed along with any associated or underlying issues. For some this may be related to finances, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse or mental health issues.

Our FASS lawyers are situated in the courts where family law matters are held. This enables us to help someone who arrives at court without a lawyer to give them any assistance they may need. We help explain the court process, draft simple court documents, give information to help future court hearings and offer limited court representation. The social support workers also help with risk assessment and safety planning as well as refer people to get all the help they need including more intensive counselling and support as well as financial, health and housing support.



Angie James
FDR Practitioner, Hobart



Lauren Binns
SAH lawyer, Launceston



Ann Summers
FASS Coordinator, Burnie

I've been a lawyer for 28 years and have worked at TLA for 3 years. I've also worked at the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions and the Hobart City Council. This gives me broad experience to be able to respond to people.

TLA also has in-house lawyers who work in criminal law (including youth justice) and civil law (minor civil assistance, NDIS, mental health, senior assist). We can also refer people to these specialised areas.

When someone meets with a member of the ALS team and they need a lawyer to do

ongoing work, we can refer them to a lawyer. Some people will also be eligible for an in-house lawyer to help them for free or receive a grant of aid to pay a private lawyer to work with them.

Tasmania Legal Aid

You can find out more about our range of legal services at www.legalaid.tas.gov.au

Keeping children safe

Our Family Law team provide specialty services that are focussed on keeping children and families safe.

Members of our family law team represent children as their Independent Children's Lawyer (ICL) in family law cases or as their Separate Representative (SR) in child safety cases. Many of the children we work with are affected by family violence. All ICLs and SRs have speciality training and work with an understanding of the dynamics and impacts of family violence and the impacts of trauma.

Children's lawyers work with children who have been impacted by trauma including family violence. This year we published the ICL Practice Standards and Guidelines so that lawyers are aware of these issues and respond appropriately. Done right, this supports the safety, dignity and wellbeing of the child. We have continued to provide training to the wider legal profession on best practice when working with children, and trauma informed practice.



Many of the children we work with are affected by family violence.



Scan me for service delivery statistics and financials

 **1300 366 611**

 **www.legalaid.tas.gov.au**

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**Tasmania
Legal Aid**