

# Enhancing women's access to justice



## KATHERINE WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICE

Katherine Women's Legal Service (KWILS) is a Community Legal Centre that has been providing free legal services to women in the Katherine region, covering an area of 330 000 km<sup>2</sup>, for over two decades.

Our small but passionate team of six staff members, which includes three lawyers and a Domestic Violence (DV) Support Worker, is focussed on providing access to justice for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in this region.

We adopt a proactive and sensitive approach to assist disadvantaged and isolated women, particularly those who face additional barriers for reasons including race, culture, disability, language, poverty, age and sexuality. We provide assistance on matters including but not limited to:

**Domestic and family violence; child protection; family law; government complaints; victims of crime compensation; tenancy; adult guardianship; credit, debt and consumer; and general civil law issues.**

The large majority of our legal and non-legal support work encompasses issues of domestic violence and child protection. Our DV duty lawyer and support worker provide daily legal assistance and social support at Katherine Court House to women applying for, or defending, Domestic Violence Orders, as well as legal advice for female witness in criminal matters involving DV.



We have observed that our clients' DV issues often have serious flow-on effects in the child protection space. We frequently assist mothers who are under investigation by Territory Families (TF), or have had children removed, due to circumstances precipitating from DV perpetrated by a violent partner. We adopt a preventative approach in these matters, and try to commence family and safety-planning meetings between clients, family members and TF as early as possible to resolve matters outside of court, and ideally before children are removed from their family.

At the core of our 'preventative lawyering' approach in child protection matters, is the facilitation of clear communication between clients (who often experience significant language barriers) and TF, so that safe and protective options are fully canvassed and incorporated in the resolution of matters. During these early stages we also liaise with social support services within Katherine and remotely to enable our clients to get assistance with counselling, housing, substance abuse and parenting skills. This often minimises presenting child protection concerns, and ensures that our clients continue to be well-supported after their legal matter has resolved.

KWILS is also involved in providing community legal education to professionals working within the Katherine region. This includes professionals such as teachers and health and social workers, in order to assist them in identifying domestic violence issues and making sensitive referrals and mandatory reports where appropriate.

Recently our Outreach Solicitor teamed up with Save the Children's social work staff and travelled out to provide a series of legal-social 'talks' to women residing in Beswick community. The aim of these 'talks' was to facilitate conversation and provide education around their legal rights in relation to DV, child protection and truancy issues. These talks were facilitated by Djilpin Arts Centre and conducted as a communal lunch at the Arts Centre, where we sat together with the women who attended to discuss these issues over lunch, in an approachable and non-intimidating environment. ■

**Freecall 1800 620 108 Phone 08 8972 1712**

**Email [info@kwils.com.au](mailto:info@kwils.com.au) Web [www.kwils.com.au](http://www.kwils.com.au)**