
Annual Report 2025



The Justice and Equity Centre stands for a society that is fair and free from discrimination and disadvantage. A society where nobody is left behind.

Established in 1982 as the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, we use the law and policy advocacy to challenge injustice and address disadvantage.



We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Gadigal as the Traditional Owners of the land on which our office stands and recognise their continuing connection to land, water and community. Sovereignty over Gadigal land was never ceded and we stand with First Nations people in their struggle for justice.

Cover images: Paula Hobley, JEC Client (image credit: Guide Dogs Victoria); Byrdie Zorz, Wiradjuri woman, Towards Truth Research Assistant and ambassador for the Uluru Youth Dialogues (image credit: Georgia Brogan and Lachlon Simmons); Oliver Williams, Wiradjuri man and Aboriginal Social Justice Graduate; Grace Gooley, JEC Senior Solicitor.

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Throughout this report we share experiences of our clients. Where we have changed their name to protect privacy, it is denoted with an asterisk (*).



From our Chair and CEO



Determined to drive change and undaunted by the challenge

The Justice and Equity Centre makes society fairer for people experiencing disadvantage.

Our commitment to social justice is not a vain hope or utopian ideal – it's a way we face the world: refusing to accept that discrimination, oppression and inequality have a place in our community.

We work tenaciously to expose, challenge and defeat systemic injustice, taking on powerful institutions like NSW Police, Youth Justice NSW, the National Disability Insurance Agency and corporate giants like Uber, Transgrid, Serco and Qantas.

We hold decision-makers accountable for their actions, like social housing providers unfairly evicting tenants and gas and water companies looking to pass on excessive costs to household consumers.

And by putting people and communities at the centre of what we do, we build power to make real change.

As you will see in these pages, our work is transformative. It changes systems and it changes lives.

We have driven law reform and policy change to improve the child protection system, the NDIS, anti-discrimination laws, access to justice, housing and homelessness policies, the energy system and the criminal legal system.

We have exposed and defeated discrimination and targeting of already disadvantaged communities, working as partners and allies with First Nations people, people with disability, the LGBTIQ+ community and people who have experienced homelessness.

We are also proud of how we do our work. Our priorities are directed by what matters to the people and communities we work with. We are strategic, focusing our efforts where they have maximum impact. We collaborate and partner generously with others, amplifying calls to action, developing solutions that reflect lived experience and ensuring our wins are sustainable.

Achieving social justice requires playing the long game, seizing opportunities and strengthening capacity for advocacy in the community. These pages show how the Justice and Equity Centre does just that.

Thank you for sharing our commitment to justice.



Sera Mirzabegian SC
Chair



Jonathon Hunyor
Chief Executive Officer

Driving change and improving lives

Highlights from our impact in 2024-25

- * The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission recommended NSW Police cease unauthorised home checks of people on bail, finding a 'powerful argument' the practice is unlawful and amounts to trespass.
- * People with disability are co-designing aviation disability standards with the Commonwealth Government to make air travel safer and more accessible.
- * NSW is a step closer to real reform of the discriminatory and damaging child protection system, with the first stage of the Aboriginal Authority for Restoring Children agreed upon between Aboriginal peak organisations and the NSW Government.
- * The Commonwealth Government is banning insurers from using genetic testing results to refuse cover or increase premiums, so people can get tested for genetic diseases and receive appropriate medical care without impacting their access to life insurance.
- * NSW gas consumers will save at least \$185 million over the next 5 years, with the Australian Energy Regulator ruling against gas companies' claim to recover more, unfair costs from consumers.
- * People with assistance animals can fly more easily, following changes to the Qantas application and approval processes.
- * Victim-survivors of harassment and discrimination can seek justice in court without crushing financial risk under new rules for legal costs in federal discrimination complaints.
- * Support is building in NSW to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14, with more people agreeing 10 is too young for prison and police cells following a \$3 million+ pro bono advertising campaign.
- * Two more Aboriginal law graduates have been equipped with the skills, experience, confidence and relationships that are the foundation of a successful social justice legal career through the JEC/Shopfront Aboriginal Social Justice Graduate Program.
- * NSW has a comprehensive Consumer Energy Strategy designed to improve household affordability and efficiency, with targeted programs for communities that face energy disadvantage.
- * Thousands of people including journalists, researchers, academics, students and First Nations communities have shared truth-telling resources to understand how government decisions have impacted the lives of First Nations people since colonisation began.
- * LGBTQ+ communities will be counted in the 2026 Census, providing evidence for government decisions about health, education and other services.
- * First Nations people treated unlawfully by police have received compensation and NSW Police have been held accountable for discriminatory policies and practices.
- * More than 650 people experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless received legal help and associated support, which prevented evictions, gave people access to secure homes, wiped unfair debts and provided compensation to victims of violent crimes.



How we create impact

We tackle injustice and inequality by:

Exposing injustice

We show where laws, policies or practices are causing or entrenching disadvantage.

- > We secured widespread media coverage of our client Paula Hobley’s disability discrimination complaint against Uber in the Federal Court and highlighted challenges faced by people who use assistance animals.

Challenging decision-makers

We hold those with power to account over actions that are unlawful or unfair.

- > We challenged discriminatory policing practices that target already overpoliced communities, achieving settlements for young people, First Nations people and trans people that brought accountability and compensation.

Identifying solutions

We work collaboratively to develop and promote legal and policy solutions that deliver fair, practical outcomes.

- > We are driving a fair decommissioning of the retail gas network in NSW by changing the rules around how costs of disconnections are shared and recovered, to ensure a just transition of the energy system.

Engaging the public and decision-makers

We lead conversations and campaigns that bring about change.

- > We are shifting the narrative around young people and community safety, with a multi-million-dollar pro bono advertising campaign highlighting that the NSW Government is locking up 10-year-olds.

Empowering people

We support individuals, groups and organisations to initiate, inform and influence positive change and become leaders in social justice.

- > We work with people with mental health conditions and lived experience of homelessness or housing instability, to advise and advocate to NSW government agencies. This improves outcomes for people who access housing and mental health services in NSW.

Impact at a glance

Over the year, the Justice and Equity Centre has:



helped
733 people
resolve their legal problems



secured
\$459,111 for our clients
in compensation, debt relief and other entitlements



supported
276 organisations
to achieve their social justice objectives with our legal and policy expertise



attracted
61,800 visitors
to our website



influenced with
303 briefing letters and submissions
to politicians and decision-makers



reached up to
2,548,744 people
each month in the media



connected with
9,131 followers
on LinkedIn



leveraged over
\$14.6 million
worth of pro bono support from pro bono partners

* Civil rights

Because those with power must be held accountable.



Senior Solicitor Grace Gooley at the Australian Parliament House

As convenor of the NSW Raise the Age Campaign, the Justice and Equity Centre has proven its ability to lead with heart and deliver tangible impact. The JEC successfully united a diverse range of organisations, all dedicated to a single goal: to build an effective campaign that will achieve lasting change for young people across the community.

– Ben McAlpine, Director of Policy and Advocacy, NSW Council of Social Service

The JEC's Impact Litigation Fund is supported by Balance Legal Capital LLP, Amanda Banton and Banton Group, CASL Management Pty Ltd, Echo Law, FTI Consulting, Matt and Pippa Lee, Litica, Mayweathers, Owen Nanlohy, Blake O'Connor, Dawna Wright, William Roberts Lawyers, Scott & Kathryn Roulstone, Paul Lindholm, Shine Lawyers, Slater and Gordon Lawyers, John Temple-Cole and Woodsford Australia Pty Ltd.

We gratefully acknowledge the Paul Ramsay Foundation, Dusseldorp Forum, UnLtd and many individual donors for supporting the Raise the Age campaign.

We thank the Williams Fund (a sub fund of the Australian Communities Foundation) and the Ross Trust for supporting our Asylum Seeker Rights work.

Raise the Age

In NSW, 10-year-olds can be sent to prison. That is too young.

The NSW campaign to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 is building support for change.

We have a strong base of community power – bringing together more than 160 organisations – and are working to shift public opinion, showing a better way is possible for children and communities.

The campaign secured more than \$3 million in pro bono advertising through UnLtd, a social purpose media organisation. With creative agency Tag, we developed a powerful advertising campaign emphasising that kids can be locked up at 10 and that is too young.

Our partner, market researchers FiftyFive5, analysed the ad's impact, finding support for raising the age increased amongst viewers from 33% to 54%, while support for maintaining the status quo dropped from 34% to 20%. The campaign was featured on ABC Radio and in advertising trade media.

'Raising the Age is a matter of changing hearts and minds, in the public and in the Parliament. We are building support and cutting through negative narratives about children and crime to make space for the NSW Government to work with us to create a better system for children and communities.'

Emily Mayo,
Raise the Age Campaign Manager



Doing better for children and community safety

Governments and police continue to dial up tough approaches to ‘youth crime’ – despite overwhelming evidence these do not work. We are shifting the debate with recommendations to improve community safety and keep children out of prisons and police cells.

When the NSW Police Commissioner announced yet another ‘crackdown’ targeting young people in regional towns, our CEO Jonathon Hunyor responded with an opinion piece warning that the answer to failure isn’t to do more of the same thing. Published in the Newcastle Herald, the piece explained how governments can address the drivers of ‘youth crime’ through investment in proven community-led services and supports.

In regional newspaper The Land, Jonathon highlighted that regional communities are being let down by an approach that is increasing crime and not making communities safer. And in the Sydney Morning Herald, he explained how a NSW Government review into the legal principle of *doli incapax* – which recognises that young children should not be held criminally responsible when they lack capacity to understand their actions – is a distraction from the work that needs to be done.

‘If we are serious about community safety – and we should be – we need to confront the reality that current approaches towards offending by children and young people are not working. And get real about the fact that they never have.’

**Jonathon Hunyor, CEO,
in the Newcastle Herald**



Influencing NSW Parliament on community safety

Our evidence guided the NSW Parliamentary Committee on Law and Safety to recommend prioritising community-led solutions that effectively engage young people at risk.

We all want safer communities and fewer victims of crime. But the current law-and-order approach in NSW is not making regional communities safer.

In our evidence to the inquiry into ‘Community safety in regional and rural communities’, we urged a move towards evidence-based prevention, and earlier help and diversion measures, with funding for locally

designed and delivered services. Our evidence was cited throughout the Inquiry’s interim report. It made 19 recommendations including investment in mental health and drug and alcohol services, targeted support in at-risk communities, and funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver dedicated services.

The Commonwealth’s obligations to keep children safe

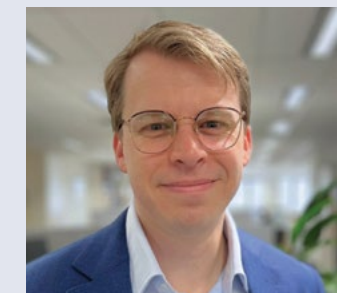
State and territory governments are responsible for policing and detention, but the Commonwealth can and should step in when those systems fail to protect children’s rights.

We made the case for the Commonwealth to urgently intervene after two children died from self-harm in youth detention in WA, the Queensland Government suspended human rights laws to keep kids in police watchhouses for days and Tasmania agreed to pay \$75 million to victims of abuse and neglect in its youth detention centres.

In our submission to the Senate inquiry into Australia’s youth justice and incarceration system, and in the Law Society Journal, Principal Solicitor Jonathan Hall Spence explained the Commonwealth can protect Australian children using the Constitutional external affairs power.

‘Australia has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of children and young people, including with respect to their interactions with police and prisons.’

**Jonathan Hall Spence, Principal Solicitor,
in the Law Society Journal**



Challenging police refusals to provide information

Government agencies must be transparent and accountable – including police. We challenge police refusals to release information to protect our clients' rights and the public interest.

Accessing police records and information is crucial to our legal cases and law reform advocacy. But our requests are regularly blocked by unjustified refusals or hampered by excessive redactions.

We regularly challenge police decisions to ensure they are meeting their obligations to hand over information to which the public and our clients are entitled.



Exposing the oppressive FPO search regime

We raised concerns about police targeting already overpoliced communities with heavy-handed search powers, increasing public scrutiny and building the case for change.

Since 2013, police have used Firearms Prohibition Orders (FPOs) to search people, their homes and cars without a warrant or any reasonable suspicion. We obtained data revealing almost 99% of FPO searches are unsuccessful and minor offences like traffic violations can be enough for police to impose an FPO. Our investigations discovered that once a person is targeted with an FPO, it is almost impossible to challenge it.

We worked with the Guardian to expose impacts of the regime, which unfairly targets First Nations people and young people, calling for greater transparency and accountability and building the case for an overhaul of FPOs.



Watchdog agrees on ending police trespass

For years we have argued that police are trespassing when they conduct unauthorised home visits of people on bail. The police watchdog has agreed and called for an end to the practice.

Our advocacy led to a review by the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC) into how police conduct bail compliance checks in NSW. The LECC recommended that police stop conducting those checks unless they have a court order or reasonable suspicion of a breach, noting there is a 'powerful argument' the checks are otherwise unlawful.

The LECC did not express a final view on the legality of this practice, noting that two test cases the JEC has taken to the NSW Supreme Court will decide the issue.

In an article in the Law Society Journal, we highlighted the LECC's review and the tenuous nature of the authority police rely on for these invasive checks.

'NSW Police are not above the law. Intrusive home visits without lawful authority must stop.'

Grace Gooley, Senior Solicitor

Accountability for trans discrimination by police and prisons

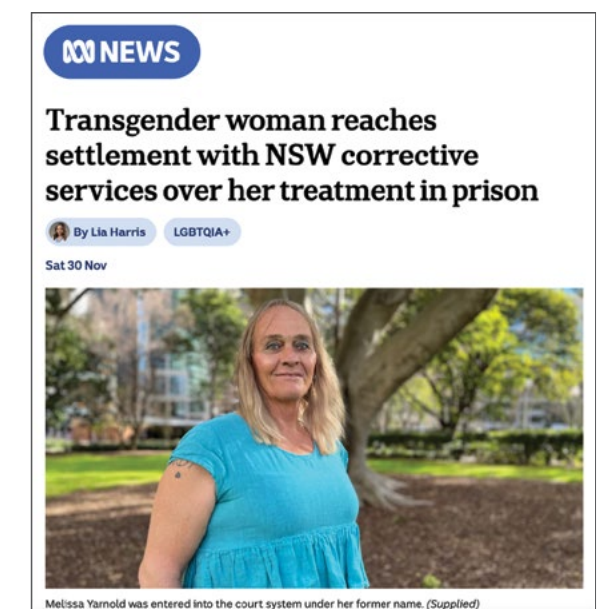
We exposed discrimination and sexual harassment by NSW Police, Corrective Services NSW and Justice Health NSW to drive positive change of the justice system.

Melissa Yarnold was arrested following a family dispute, spending weeks in custody on remand. She then endured transphobic discrimination, including misgendering, harassment and intimidation from police, prison guards, health staff and the male inmates she was inappropriately detained with. Melissa was eventually transferred to a psychiatric hospital when her mental health seriously deteriorated. When she finally had her day in court, Melissa was released without conviction, subject to a mental health plan.

We represented Melissa in a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission. After conciliation, the matter settled on confidential terms, with Melissa feeling there was finally some accountability. The ABC, Star Observer and QNews shared the story.

'Nobody should have to go through what I went through. I was so traumatised by the whole experience. I want my story and complaint to improve the system.'

Melissa Yarnold, JEC client



Protecting LGBTIQ+ rights

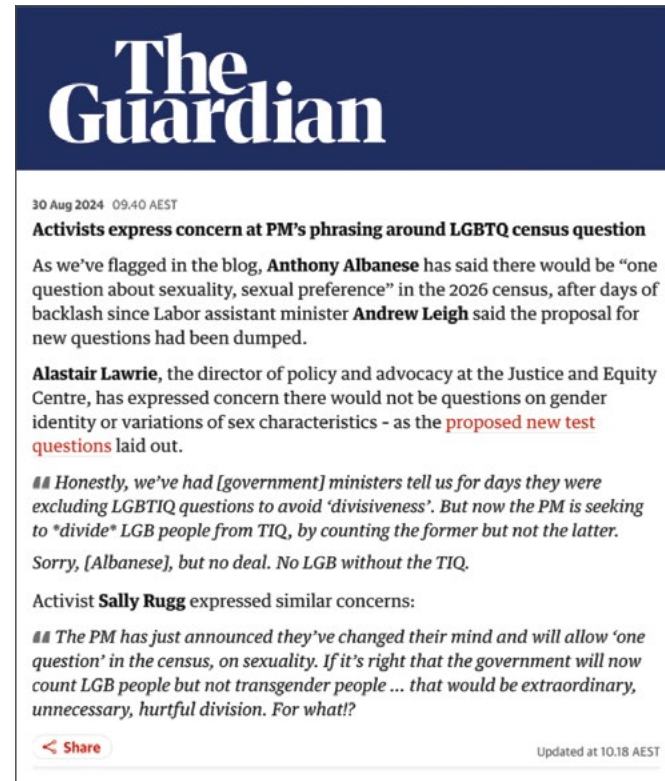
Everyone is entitled to equal protection under the law. Our work contributes to better legal protections for LGBTIQ+ people in NSW and seeks to ensure LGBTIQ+ communities are counted.

When the Commonwealth Government broke its promise to include questions to count LGBTIQ people in the 2026 Census we joined with civil society partners to call them out. As a former member of the LGBTIQ Expert Advisory Committee to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Alastair Lawrie, our Director of Policy and Advocacy, provided expert commentary to the ABC, the Guardian and 2SER.

The Government reversed its position and re-committed to including questions on gender identity and sexual orientation. This data can inform government policy, resource allocation and program delivery to ensure the needs of these communities are met. However, the Government continues to exclude intersex people from the 2026 count, meaning it cannot make accurate policies and decisions addressing intersex community needs.

In NSW, we welcomed the passing of the 'Equality Bill', but emphasised the need for broader reform of anti-discrimination laws to protect LGBTIQ+ communities in comments syndicated in the AAP, including the Canberra Times. The new equality laws came into effect on 1 July 2025, improving rights for trans and non-binary people and other LGBTIQ+ people.

We continued to highlight the Commonwealth Government's failure to honour their long-standing commitment to protect LGBTQ students and teachers from discrimination in religious schools in the Australian Journal of Human Rights, with Alastair Lawrie analysing the current state of law reform and public debate.



Responding to rising hate speech

In a year of international conflict, Australian leaders responded to local tensions with proposals for new hate crime laws.

Director of Policy and Advocacy, Alastair Lawrie, warned against the narrow focus of the Commonwealth Hate Crimes Bill, noting in the Guardian it would not adequately address the challenges faced by many communities. We emphasised those concerns at the Senate Inquiry into the Bill and argued for protections based on attributes beyond race, including religion, LGBTIQ+ status and disability. The Commonwealth Government refused to consider expanding protections and ignored widespread opposition to introduce mandatory minimum sentences for several of the new offences.

The NSW Government also ignored the advice of the NSW Law Reform Commission by introducing a new offence of inciting racial hatred – without protections for other attributes, such as religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, disability or HIV/AIDS status. In the Law Society Journal, Alastair urged the Government to expand the groups protected under the new offence and critiqued its failure to do so in City Hub.

'By introducing a new criminal offence of 'intentionally inciting racial hatred' – but only racial hatred – the Government is effectively saying that other forms of hatred are less serious, and do not deserve the same legal response.'

Alastair Lawrie, Director of Policy and Advocacy



Asylum seeker rights

Australia's immigration detention regime is cruel and harmful. People locked up by the Commonwealth deserve to be treated humanely and with dignity.

We oppose the practice of mandatory and prolonged detention, which condemns people seeking asylum to years of inhumane treatment behind razor wire. And we work to uphold the human rights of people while they are detained.

Our Minimum Health Standard is a concrete reform proposal to regulate conditions in immigration detention centres and provide minimum standards of safety, humanity and dignity. We distributed a brief to Commonwealth MPs making the case for the Standard, including an effective expert oversight body. We met with MPs and their advisors to brief them on the issue and advocate for change.

We assisted nine former and current detainees to make complaints to the Australian Human Rights Commission about the excessive use of handcuffs. The complaints allege the Department of Home Affairs breached those people's human rights under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights when they were handcuffed in detention centres, particularly when handcuffed against medical advice.

These complaints are an important tool for scrutinising the immigration detention regime, which is hidden from public view, allowing for the unchecked exercise of power.

Warning on immigration detention contractor failures

When the Commonwealth revealed controversial multinational Serco will no longer run Australia's immigration detention centres, we warned that the new contractor must not be allowed to repeat past failings.

We have been a consistent critic of harmful and inhumane treatment of people in detention centres operated by Serco over the course of its 15-year watch. In the media, we called on the Commonwealth Government to use the opportunity of a change of contractor to address the toxic conditions, urging sweeping reform of the entire system.



Winning fairer access to justice for discrimination claims

New laws allow more victim-survivors of harassment or discrimination to seek justice in court.

We seized the opportunity presented by the Respect@Work report to make the system fairer for people bringing discrimination claims. Under the old rules, many people felt they could not take a claim to court, due to the risk of losing their home or facing bankruptcy if they were unsuccessful and had to pay the other party's legal costs.

With Grata Fund and a coalition of partners, we successfully pushed for an 'equal access' costs model, which protects against this outcome and removes the prohibitive financial risk for a victim-survivor of discrimination taking their case to court.

'Discrimination claims can be a David and Goliath battle. This change helps to level the playing field.'

Mitchell Skipsey, Senior Solicitor



Strengthening privacy protections

The first meaningful reform to Australian privacy laws in decades brought improved protections – but it is only the first step.

Over years, we have made recommendations to improve privacy laws, to ensure they are fit to protect people in the digital age and put appropriate responsibilities on corporations and government agencies. In late 2024 we finally saw progress, with the introduction of several reforms aligned with our advocacy.

These include a new legal right to challenge a serious invasion of privacy, recognition of a public interest in protecting privacy and strengthening the enforcement powers of the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner.

With allies, we continue to push for additional personal privacy protections and hold the Commonwealth Government accountable on its commitment to further reform.



Disability Rights

Because people with disability should be able to thrive.



JEC client Paula Hobley with her Guide Dog Kristen (image credit: Guide Dogs Victoria)



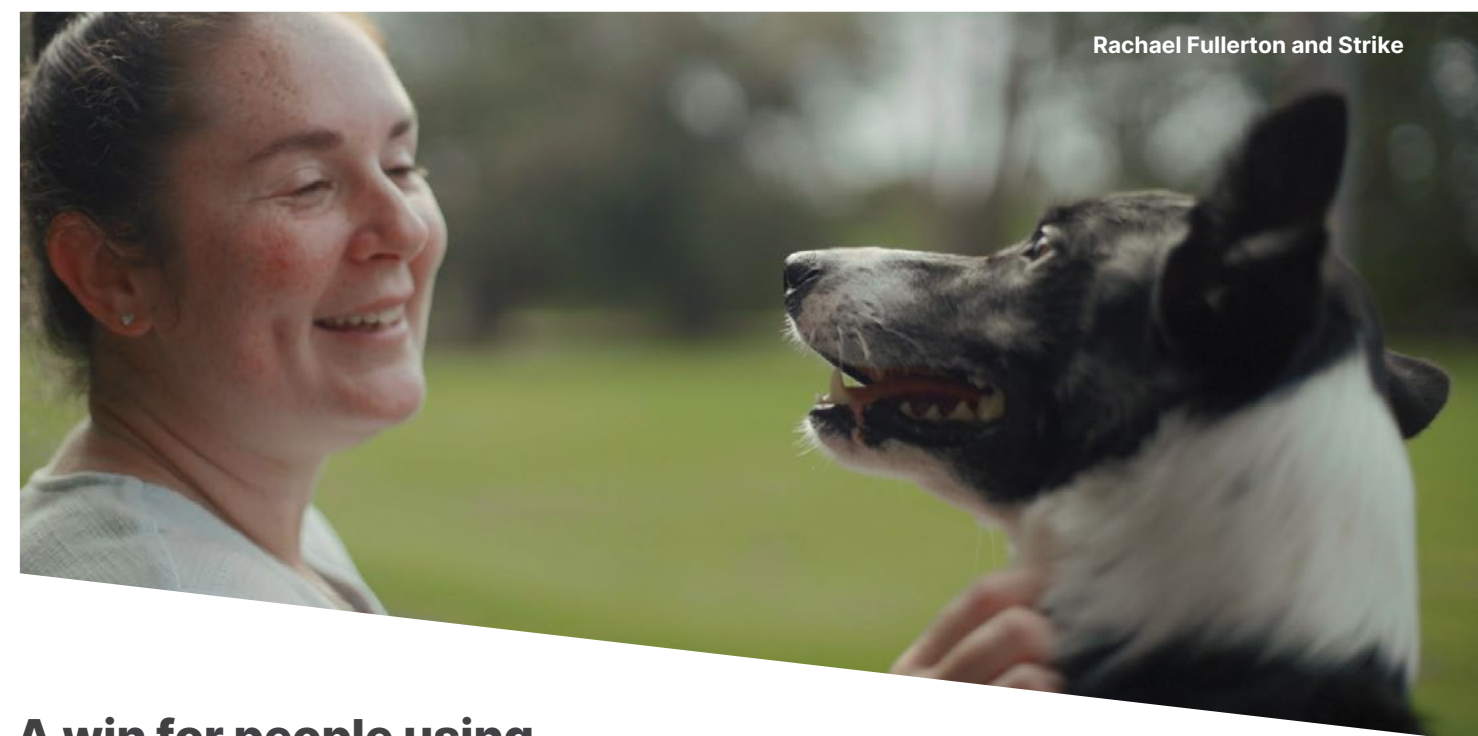
The JEC is an invaluable partner of AFDO, bringing a deep knowledge of disability discrimination law and practice, and a wealth of experience in dismantling the barriers people with disability face when travelling by air. They provide trusted, practical, and solutions-focused advice in plain language. They are committed to upholding and advancing the rights of people with disability, and have empathy for and real concern for the discrimination people with disability experience and the harm that causes.

Matthew Hall, National Manager Systemic Advocacy & Policy, Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO)

We gratefully acknowledge the Paul Ramsay Foundation in partnership with an anonymous donor for supporting A Fairer NDIS.

The right to safe, independent travel

Our clients are taking on major airlines to make their services more accessible, so people have equal access to air travel.



Rachael Fullerton and Strike

A win for people using assistance dogs

Our client Rachael Fullerton has made it easier for people with assistance dogs to fly after we took her disability discrimination complaint to the Federal Court.

Rachael relies on her assistance dog Strike for safety and independence. But Qantas refused to allow Strike to travel with her, as Rachael could not meet the airline's particular requirements for assistance animals.

Strike is recognised as an assistance dog by Rex Airlines and Virgin Australia, and the National Disability Insurance Agency. But Qantas' requirements went well beyond the federal Disability Discrimination Act's training and qualification requirements for assistance animals.

With Maurice Blackburn Lawyers we settled Rachael's case. Qantas agreed to change its application and approval process for assistance animals so dogs like Strike can get approval to fly more easily.

'It's inconceivable that people with disabilities are still facing so many barriers to service, but hopefully this will set a precedent for improved disability standards and better practices from many businesses.'

Rachael Fullerton, JEC client



Jetstar enhances passenger services

Disability advocate Emma Bennison was left stranded in Melbourne Airport after disembarking a Jetstar flight. Her disability discrimination complaint resulted in Jetstar committing to make its services more accessible.

Emma is blind and had booked assistance from Jetstar ground staff for her arrival in Melbourne. But she was left waiting in the airport, not knowing where she was and with no way to contact the staff supposed to assist her.

'Every time I go to an airport I brace myself for something to go wrong... And I prepare myself emotionally for the disregard that airlines and airports seem to have for people with disability. Having to consistently fight for decent treatment really wears you down.'

Emma Bennison, JEC client

After Jetstar failed to respond to her suggestions to make its service more accessible, we represented Emma at the Australian Human Rights Commission.

The airline finally committed to trialling a new escalation process, so customers with disability can call a help line when they need assistance at Australian domestic airports.

9NEWS



Emma Bennison has encountered so many problems flying over the years, she's lost count of how many times she's been poorly treated.

"Every time I go to an airport, I'm anxious," said Ms Bennison, who is blind and a cane user.

Formerly CEO of Blind Citizens Australia and now chief innovation officer for Life Without Barriers, Ms Bennison has regularly travelled by air for work.

While she can't remember every single incident, a couple of distressing events spring to mind.

Setting a new standard for accessible air travel

Working with the disability community, we won a major breakthrough in regulation that will make travelling by air more accessible, convenient and dignified for people with disability.

We achieved a critical milestone when the Commonwealth Government committed to co-designing aviation disability standards setting out requirements for airlines and airports to improve the accessibility of their services.

With partners People with Disability Australia (PWDA) and the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), we were appointed to a Steering Committee to lead the co-design. We helped guide workshops where people with disability contributed solutions to make air travel more accessible, and participated in airport site visits, where government representatives could observe the barriers faced by passengers with disability.

We are also influencing design of the Aviation Industry Ombuds Scheme, a Commonwealth Government initiative to resolve consumer complaints, ensuring it recognises the experiences of air travellers with disability.

At the Aviation Law Conference, we co-presented a session on Accessible Air Travel with PWDA and AFDO, helping industry stakeholders understand the challenges faced by people with disability during air travel and the reforms needed to address those challenges.

'Australia needs enforceable accessibility standards for air travel, so people with disability do not have to battle to have their rights respected. Our collaborative work with disability advocates influences decision-makers with the power to hold airlines and airports to account.'

Erin Turner Manners, Senior Solicitor



Members of the Steering Committee with Virgin Australia staff at an airport site visit

Protecting rights for people with assistance animals

We are working with the disability community on a better system for recognising assistance animals and upholding the rights of people who use them.

Assistance animals are a vital support for people with disability. But inconsistent regulations and unfair rules result in discrimination, with people using assistance animals being refused access to public places and services.

We have provided expert commentary and advice to the Commonwealth Government through consultation to develop National Principles for Assistance Animals. As the Principles will be non-binding guidelines, we are also urging governments to replace the current legal patchwork with an accessible and inclusive national legislated framework.

We joined a NSW Parliament roundtable hosted by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT where the Minister for Disability Inclusion heard about the experiences of people who use assistance dogs and was advised on what needs to change so those people can travel safely and independently. Advocates and decision-makers agreed on the need for better regulation and a national standard.

Senior Solicitor Mitchell Skipsey shared expert insights on the ABC Radio National Law Report, making the case for clear and consistent national regulation.



Senior Solicitor Sheetal Balakrishnan with the Minister for Disability Inclusion and other participants of a NSW Parliament Roundtable hosted by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT

Taking Uber to court to stop ride refusals

Uber drivers cancelled rides more than 30 times when Paula Hobley was travelling with her Guide Dog. We are representing Paula in a disability discrimination claim in the Federal Court to hold Uber to account for their failure to provide an accessible service.

Paula is blind and lives in regional Victoria and relies on services like Uber to meet friends, go to medical appointments and get around.

Uber drivers can be fined for refusing to pick up a person with an assistance dog, but this requires the person with disability to make a formal complaint to a regulator each time and fines are often insubstantial.

With Paula, we are demanding that Uber takes responsibility for the actions of its drivers. Their system is broken and we say it's up to them to fix it.

The case has received widespread media coverage including on the ABC, Channel 7's Sunrise, SBS, the Law Society Journal, Lawyers Weekly and The Daily Aus.



Achieving a ban on genetic testing in insurance

We helped secure a win for the community when the Commonwealth Government committed to banning life insurers from using genetic testing results to refuse cover.

The ban will allow people who might be at risk of genetic disease to be tested, without impacting their access to life insurance.

We have pushed for this reform over years, alongside medical experts, academics and other advocates.

'This decision means people can get potentially life-saving genetic tests, safe in the knowledge life insurers cannot discriminate against them by denying coverage or hiking up fees.'

Ellen Tilbury, Principal Solicitor



Making the NDIS fairer

Our legal and policy expertise plays a major role in making the NDIS fairer. We are influencing reforms, ensuring proposed changes are widely understood by disability advocates and holding decision-makers accountable.

The Commonwealth Government has started implementing the most significant changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) since it began. Our work has improved reform processes and outcomes, including by supporting the disability community in collective advocacy.

We convene the NDIS Systemic Advocacy Working Group and provide legal and strategic expertise to guide sector responses to significant government proposals. The group includes representatives from national disability and legal organisations and is a highly regarded forum within the disability sector.

This year we influenced and improved the interim ‘NDIS supports’ lists that define supports that will and will not be funded by the NDIS. Our analysis of drafts of these lists was recognised by departmental staff and informed submissions by disability partners. We secured a range of important changes.

Our ‘NDIS Insights 2024-25’ explainer gave updated analysis to the disability community on NDIS law changes and cases. At the DSC Annual NDIS conference, our advocacy reached decision-makers and informed NDIS participants about navigating appeals at the new Administrative Review Tribunal.



Members of the NDIS Systemic Advocacy Working Group

‘The NDIS is vital for the hundreds of thousands of people with disability who rely on it. Through our NDIS Systemic Advocacy Working Group, we’re privileged to work with dedicated advocates from national disability peaks and legal experts – together we’re working to ensure a fairer NDIS.’

Sheetal Balakrishnan, Senior Solicitor



First Nations justice

Because reconciliation requires action.



Brydie Zorz, Wiradjuri woman and Towards Truth Research Assistant, at AbSec's November 2024 Conference. Image credit: Georgia Brogan and Lachlon Simmons



There are 6,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in NSW. Many children can go home to their families but are prevented by ongoing systemic injustice, racism, and abuse. The Justice and Equity Centre play a critical role to support Aboriginal organisations, communities, and researchers to overcome these barriers. I am so grateful for the meticulous expertise and unwavering advocacy that JEC have demonstrated throughout our negotiations with government to plan for the Aboriginal Authority for Restoring Children. Thank you JEC!

BJ Newton, Wiradjuri woman and Associate Professor UNSW Sydney

We gratefully acknowledge generous financial support from Allens for our work on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice. The JEC and Shopfront Aboriginal Social Justice Graduate Program is supported by a generous grant from the Matana Foundation for Young People, the B B & A Miller Fund, JRA Support Fund (sub fund of Australian Communities Foundation), The Ryan Family Foundation, Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer and David & Marcia Atchison. Our Aboriginal Child Protection Project is supported by a generous grant from the B B & A Miller Foundation.

Towards Truth is made possible by financial support from Allens, Clayton Utz Foundation, Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Heather and Malcolm Crompton AM, Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer, Just World Investments, Lander and Rogers, Maple-Brown Family Foundation, Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, Macquarie, Angus and Emma White; and Johnstone Gumption Fund, JRA Support Fund, Williams Fund (sub funds of Australian Communities Foundation).

Empowering truth-telling

Towards Truth is our ground-breaking truth-telling partnership with the UNSW Indigenous Law Centre. In its second year, the Towards Truth website has helped thousands of people uncover the truth about government decisions that have impacted First Nations people since 1788.

Towards Truth year at a glance

- ✱ 10,572 people visited our website
- ✱ 41,970 pages viewed on our website
- ✱ 12 presentations and public events
- ✱ 9 new subjects published across 2 research topics
- ✱ 7 additional research topics underway
- ✱ 6 firms provided pro bono research support
- ✱ 3 firms provided secondees to be part of our team
- ✱ 5 media articles

'To bring about progress for First Nations people, Australians need to understand our history and the issues we still face. Truth-telling is the best tool we have to create this understanding.'

Corey Smith, Ngemba man and former Towards Truth Project Manager, in the National Indigenous Times

Calling for Truth

On the anniversary of the Voice referendum, Towards Truth's Corey Smith made the case for using truth-telling to change minds and change lives.

In the National Indigenous Times, Corey reflected on how the referendum outcome might impact progress for First Nations justice and urged decision-makers to find meaningful ways to advance First Nations rights.

We backed the creation of a Commonwealth Truth and Justice Commission in a submission to a Commonwealth Parliamentary inquiry, recognising it as an important opportunity to reckon with our history as a foundation for our future.



Truth-telling can change lives by changing minds

Corey Smith - October 17, 2024



OPINION

Supporting community truth-telling

Towards Truth is empowering community truth-telling and showing how past actions continue to impact the lives of First Nations people.

We met with Stolen Generations survivors at the centenary of the notorious Kinchela Boys Home, where NSW Government agencies held Aboriginal boys removed from their families. We learned from survivors' stories and shared our research showing their experiences were the direct result of government decisions. Our research was included in coverage by the ABC.

With Georges River Council, we highlighted local truth at Hurstville Library on Bidjigal Country, including the history of nearby Salt Pan Creek, a centre of Aboriginal political activism. The ABC and National Indigenous Times also shared this story.

'We have seen time and time again, various processes of truth-telling led by governments that result in reports and recommendations that just sit on a shelf collecting dust. We need to do something different.'

Bridget Cama, Wiradjuri woman and Indigenous Law Centre Associate, in the National Indigenous Times





Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Home survivors mark 100 years as push continues for museum

Claire Stearns, Nabita Jager and ABC Indigenous Affairs team

ABC Coasts Stolen Generations

Scrutiny around Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Home's operations emerged as early as the 1930s, according to Towards Truth research project.



This image of a class in 1959 was probably captured during a visit by an official government photographer. (Supplied: National Archives of Australia: W Pederson)

The initiative, led by the Justice and Equity Centre and the University of New South Wales Indigenous Law Centre, has analysed state laws and policies that exploited boys at the home.

Aboriginal king honoured in NSW truth-telling launch

By the Indigenous affairs teams Carly Williams and Brooke Fryer

Indigenous Australians



Joe Anderson, son of Ellen Anderson of Salt Pan Creek, was an Aboriginal elder and activist in the 1920s and 30s. (supplied)

Truth in law and education

Towards Truth presentations have helped teachers, lawyers and judges to understand the project and its value to their professions.

In presentations hosted by Ngara Yura Committee of the Judicial Commission of NSW and Francis Forbes Society for Australian Legal History, we explained how Aboriginal people have been excluded from giving evidence in court, and how colonial governments enabled frontier violence. We emphasised that an understanding of past injustice is vital to achieving justice for First Nations people today.

Our presentations to the Department of Education and Museums of History NSW are supporting schoolteachers and influencing how our shared history is explored in public spaces.

At conferences hosted by AbSec and Reconciliation Australia, we demonstrated how Towards Truth supports truth-telling and education, and explained that exposing and accepting truth is an essential foundation for justice and healing.

'Towards Truth has been influential in media, education and the legal sector. It is supporting and compelling our nation to better understand our history, providing a foundation for repair and reform.'

Elizabeth Clark, Research Manager



Aboriginal Social Justice Graduate Program

The Aboriginal Social Justice Graduate Program provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law graduates with the qualifications, skills, confidence and relationships that are the foundation for a successful social justice legal career.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are underrepresented in the legal profession and overrepresented in legal systems. With Shopfront Youth Legal Centre, we deliver a 2-year program

in civil and criminal law for Aboriginal law graduates, developing the next generation of social justice lawyers. Five Aboriginal graduates have participated so far.



Oliver Williams is a descendant of the Wiradjuri Kooris, now working at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (NSW) after participating in the program.

'The program was strongly experiential and career building. I think I was gifted the best opportunity possible straight out of University. These opportunities are things that my Aboriginal Grandfather would have only dreamt of having access to.'

'The program nurtures participants into the Legal Profession. Both the Legal Profession and the Aboriginal Community are then gifted with a newly minted First Nations Lawyer.'

'My family is proud, and I am so thankful for the privilege of meeting so many people, sharing my story and hearing others.'



Supporting Aboriginal-led reform of the child protection system

Aboriginal families are being torn apart by a child protection system that removes First Nations children at significantly higher rates than non-Indigenous children. We are working in partnership with Aboriginal organisations to drive reform.

In NSW, Aboriginal children make up less than 8% of the child population but almost 50% of children in care.

The Aboriginal-led Family is Culture (FIC) Review provided a roadmap to system reform, designed to keep First Nations families safe and together, connected to culture and on Country. We have joined with partners AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation, the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW / ACT) and the UTS Jumbunna Institute as the Family is Culture Advocacy Working Group, to call out government inaction and present a vision for the future grounded in self-determination and accountability to Aboriginal communities.

Our co-authored ‘Family is Culture: Five Years On’ Community Report urged the NSW Government to take immediate steps to recognise, respect, and resource community leadership on child protection reform. A new website, hosted by AbSec, provides an independent record of progress on FIC recommendations and resources for Aboriginal families and organisations.

We built momentum for reform through media coverage in the ABC, Newcastle Herald and the Guardian – including an opinion piece by Aunty Debra Swan, a founding member of Grandmothers Against Removals and former child protection caseworker.



Calling for a NSW Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People

The Family is Culture Advocacy Working Group met with 16 NSW MPs to advocate for a NSW Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, and overdue law reform.

We built support for our advocacy in meetings with the Acting National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People and the Australian Human Rights Commission's Social Justice Commissioner.

In May 2025, we welcomed a significant milestone when the NSW Government entered into a landmark agreement with AbSec and the ALS, committing to work together as equal partners on reform.



Laying the foundations for community-led restoration

Our legal expertise is supporting the creation of an independent, community-led program to restore Aboriginal children to their families.

The Aboriginal Authority for Restoring Children (AARC) could greatly reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in NSW and set a ‘gold standard’ for working with families and respecting First Nations authority and expertise in decision-making.

We successfully negotiated with government to jointly brief the NSW Solicitor General to provide practical advice on enabling the functions of the AARC. We were invited to talk about implementing this advice with the Ministerial Aboriginal Partnership Group, a forum including the Minister for Families and Communities, senior Department of Communities and Justice staff and First Nations experts and leaders. Our work providing legal support to the AARC has helped secure significant breakthroughs and shifts in ways of working, moving NSW closer to real reform.

‘We are proud to work alongside fearless and expert First Nations partners to call out systems and policies that negatively impact First Nations families. Together, we are driving positive and sustainable change to ensure more First Nations children are with their families and communities, connected to culture and Country.’

Lucy Kelley, Policy Lawyer



Challenging discriminatory policing

First Nations people in NSW are unfairly targeted by police, resulting in shamefully disproportionate rates of arrest and imprisonment.

We work as an ally with First Nations organisations, combating discriminatory police practices that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and pull them into the criminal legal system.

Securing justice for First Nations clients

Our clients hold NSW Police to account for oppressive policing practices which too often result in unlawful and discriminatory outcomes.

We have secured our clients many thousands of dollars in compensation, and recognition of police mistreatment. This year we negotiated settlements for:

- * an Aboriginal woman in regional NSW whose car was pulled over and searched multiple times by police without good reason.
- * a young Aboriginal man stopped and searched 16 times as part of his targeting under the now discredited 'Suspect Targeting Management Plan', which was abandoned by police as a result of our work.
- * a young Aboriginal woman who was unlawfully arrested on the street in front of friends and family and subject to unreasonable and heavy-handed police treatment during a search of her family home.
- * a young Aboriginal boy stopped and searched on the street without good reason when he was 16 and on bail.

The experiences of our clients inform our advocacy for law and policy reform; our submissions and inquiry appearances; our collaboration with partners; and our direct representations to decision-makers.



Solicitor Kate Sinclair at the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal contesting police decisions that make it harder for our clients to get justice.

Tackling harassing home visits by police

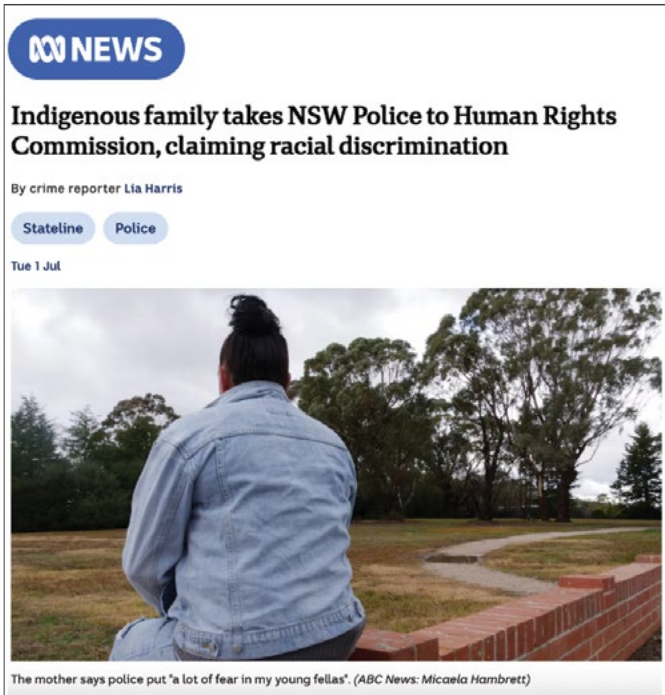
Megan* lives in regional NSW with her three young sons. When two of the boys, aged 11 and 13, were on bail after being passengers in a stolen car, police started turning up at her home at all hours. They said they were checking whether the boys were complying with their bail conditions – but they did not have court authority to do that. And the visits were relentless.

Over 20 months, the family endured 150 intrusive home attendances, often in the middle of the night and more than once a night. Megan felt her family was targeted because they are Aboriginal.

We filed racial discrimination complaints against NSW Police at the Australian Human Rights Commission, on behalf of Megan and her sons.

To support their claim, we commissioned a report by academics Don Weatherburn and Anna Ferrante, analysing NSW Police use of 'bail compliance checks' on young people and children. The report exposed a discriminatory system, with Aboriginal young people 11.7% more likely to be checked than non-Aboriginal young people, and subjected to 42% more checks.

The complaints and report were highlighted by the ABC, the National Indigenous Times and the AAP. The complaints will be conciliated at the Commission, and if no outcome is reached, Megan can take her claim to the Federal Court.





Energy and water justice

Because everyone should have affordable, sustainable and dependable energy and water.



The Justice and Equity Centre has played a pivotal role in amplifying our efforts to ensure that the specific needs and perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities are not overlooked in the energy transition. Their policy expertise and resources in fostering cross-sectoral collaboration have strengthened our advocacy.

Nirmal Joy, Co-Executive Officer, Sydney Community Forum

We gratefully acknowledge the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, for funding our Energy and Water Consumers' Advocacy Program; and an anonymous donor for funding JEC's Sustainable and Fair Energy Transition (SAFE) project.

Setting the roadmap for the energy transition

We need urgent action to achieve Australia's goal of a net-zero economy by 2050 and mitigate the worst impacts of climate change. And a just transition must be underpinned by social and economic transformation that builds a fairer community.

Our work is guiding governments, corporations and regulators to avoid catastrophic climate change by accelerating the transition away from fossil fuels, while supporting better outcomes for the communities most at risk from the impacts of a warming planet.

With a specialist climate and energy lawyer working with our policy team, we are advancing change through targeted legal strategies that reform regulatory frameworks and make the energy system fairer and more sustainable.

We have pushed energy market decision-makers to deliver on Australia's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the energy system. Through our involvement in key national reviews and planning processes, we called for better tracking of emissions from emerging fuels like biomethane and hydrogen, challenging assumptions that these fuels are zero-emissions.

We advocated for energy system planning to work towards a future consistent with the goal of limiting climate change to 1.5°C, and for energy market design that would reward clean, flexible energy sources and give the market operator more tools to manage storage and reliability.

'Care must be taken to ensure no one is left behind in the energy transition. We've provided the roadmap, offering smart and principled solutions to drive positive and meaningful change. Now it's up to governments to be ambitious and get us moving.'

Alana West, Policy Officer



Shaping the NSW Consumer Energy Strategy

Our expertise helped deliver the NSW Consumer Energy Strategy and has shaped its scope, priorities, and focus on equity, health and wellbeing.

The NSW Government’s Consumer Energy Strategy outlines a vision to transform homes and energy in the state. But it also highlights the significant work required to ensure NSW’s transition to net zero is fair for all.

We welcomed the strategy’s intent to progress household electrification and improve energy efficiency for those who need it most, its commitment to mandatory disclosure of residential energy efficiency for properties being sold or leased, and protections for consumers – reforms we advocated for in our input to development of the strategy. Our response was covered by Renew Economy and the AAP (syndicated across regional press).

The next two years will be vital for developing the detail of the strategy and its implementation. We will continue to work with the Government to ensure it delivers for all people in NSW.

‘The Consumer Energy Strategy offers a vision for a fairer NSW energy system, where some of the worst cost pressures are alleviated and household health and wellbeing is improved for many people experiencing disadvantage – but there is a lot of work to do.’

Douglas McCloskey, Director Energy and Water Justice, in Renew Economy

A pathway to efficient and electric homes

Making Australian homes energy efficient and all-electric is essential for a rapid and equitable transition to a zero-carbon-ready society. It is also critical to improving the affordability of maintaining a home.

Leading a collaboration with ACOSS, with contributions from more than 60 community and industry organisations, we have delivered a Roadmap for Efficient and Electric Homes. It provides a pathway to making all Australian homes healthy and affordable, shaping our work with governments and regulators, and influencing the work of others.

In Renew Economy, we explained how governments can use our detailed roadmap to deliver on ambitions for a renewable future, and the community’s call for strong action on climate and energy.



Driving gas network reform

Replacing household gas use with cleaner, cheaper electricity makes sense for health, household finances and the environment. The JEC is working to ensure the transition is fair and supports people who have limited choice.

Decommissioning gas networks is key to enabling a rapid transition. But as more people disconnect from gas, fewer people are left paying for infrastructure. These are people who often have limited ability to disconnect, such as renters, social housing residents and those who cannot afford the upfront costs involved.

We are driving regulatory reform and advocacy for government assistance, to ensure people get the support needed to make the switch – and don't face unfair costs in the meantime.

We successfully opposed Jemena Gas Network’s proposal to make NSW households pay more to cover the risk of stranded assets as people leave the network, saving gas consumers \$185 million over the next five years. The regulator’s decision confirmed our view that gas businesses are not guaranteed to recover all investment costs from consumers, and businesses and governments should share the cost.

In partnership with Energy Consumers Australia, we proposed a package of reforms to gas network rules. Our proposal limiting the costs of gas disconnection was picked up immediately by the Australian Energy Market Commission, recognising it addressed a critical regulatory gap. The Commission also agreed to progress our other proposals as part of a long-overdue review of gas rules to ensure they are fit-for-purpose for the energy transition.

This work is critical to overcoming Government policy inertia holding up the household energy transition. Industry media The Energy and Renew Economy explained how our proposals will make cost-sharing fairer and enable a faster transition.



Energy affordability

The default market offer (DMO) should be a reference price to compare energy deals. It should also be a fair price for all people.

Since its introduction seven years ago, we have pushed tenaciously for reform on behalf of NSW households, securing progressive improvements making the DMO a more robust protection in the face of rising costs. Our work also enables other community organisations to engage with these reforms.

We had a win when the Commonwealth Government agreed with our recommendations, initiating a comprehensive review and reform of the DMO. This is a critical opportunity to better protect people and ensure the DMO works better to shape an energy market that works for everyone.

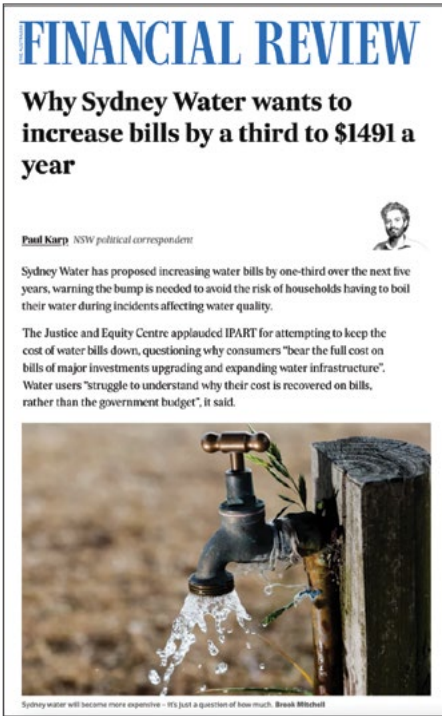
Fair prices for sustainable water services

All NSW households and communities should have dependable, affordable and sustainable water services. We work as the voice for households and communities in water policy, planning, regulation and pricing processes in NSW.

As the independent pricing regulator makes decisions setting urban water bills for the next 5 years and the NSW Government reviews local water utility regulation, we have advocated successfully to keep water bills as low as possible.

We also argue that NSW households should not pay the full upfront cost of important investments in growth and sustainability. This would ensure affordability and equity is protected, including through more consistent and effective payment assistance.

As part of this work we opposed a Sydney Water proposal to increase bills by more than 53% over the next 5 years, and questioned a revised proposal with a 32% increase, gaining coverage in the Australian Financial Review.



Building community capacity to make energy markets fairer

We build capacity in community organisations to empower diverse voices to shape energy market reform.

In the past year, we have helped more than 20 of our community partners to be part of decision-making processes to improve the application of concessions and rebates, improve switching processes, strengthen energy contract terms, improve disconnection protections and reform the energy protections framework.

We worked closely with CHOICE to highlight poor experiences in energy services and create pressure for reform. We informed their complaint as a 'designated complainant' to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) about misleading energy retailer behaviour.

We support the work of the First Nations Clean Energy Network, highlighting the impact of poor regulation and inconsistent consumer protections on First Nations communities in the Northern Territory. Nearly all remote First Nations households in the NT are forced to use prepaid electricity, leading to frequent disconnection with devastating impacts on health and wellbeing. We are helping to build pressure on NT government agencies to collect data and monitor the experiences of remote households – a first step to improving protections and supporting families to have more dependable and affordable access to the energy they need.

Action on energy equity

We have influenced government work to embed equity in energy policy, including by calling for and enhancing a cross-government framework.

We have been a prominent contributor to the National Energy Equity Framework, which aims to ensure energy policy and regulation promotes equity and effectively addresses disadvantage.

When a flawed initial draft with weak and patchy commitments was released, we called out its deficiencies and helped bring together a collaboration of community stakeholders and service providers. We led advocacy resulting in government committing to ongoing review and reform to improve the framework and do better for disadvantaged consumers.

'Energy is essential. Our intervention in the development of the framework helps ensure all Governments and agencies will better consider improving energy equity in all their policies and decision-making.'

Thea Bray, Senior Policy Officer



Homelessness

Because everyone should have a safe and secure home.



Members of our Homeless Persons' Legal Service team with StreetCare lived experience advocates

Our family's journey to homelessness happened extremely quickly. One night we were safe, secure and in a home we had lived in for over 5 years but due to our inability to find a new rental we had nowhere to go. The Homeless Persons' Legal Service is an invaluable service that provides a safety net to those in the community who have nowhere else to turn. Thank you HPLS for all that you've done for our family but also the wonderful work that you continue to do for others.

Tilly*, HPLS client

We acknowledge the generous support for the Homeless Persons' Legal Service, including StreetCare, from the NSW and Commonwealth Governments' Community Legal Centres Program, the NSW Department of Communities and Justice and the Public Purpose Fund NSW, Ray Wilson and Plenary Group, MinterEllison, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Hicksons | Hunt & Hunt, Allens and Australian Government Solicitor.

We thank the Judith Neilson Foundation and the Clark Family Foundation, for providing valuable funding for our HPLS Women's Service.

Homeless Persons' Legal Service

Our Homeless Persons' Legal Service (HPLS) protects the rights of people facing homelessness and challenges systemic barriers preventing people from having a safe home.

In the 2024-25 financial year, we provided legal help or referrals to more than 430 people experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless. Many of them were facing additional challenges, such as mental health conditions, poverty and disability. Their stories fuelled our advocacy to fight homelessness.

Following a comprehensive service review in 2024, we have refined the HPLS service model to increase our impact. The changes have made our services more client-centred and trauma-informed.

- The HPLS in-house legal and client support team is the contact point for clients, identifying legal issues and providing initial referrals, information and advice.
- Our five pro bono legal firm partners focus on casework, particularly litigation, making the most of their legal expertise.
- Our in-house legal team provides supervision and training for pro bono lawyers, and works with clients who have particularly high needs. Our caseworkers help clients to resolve related non-legal issues, providing holistic support.
- We have also deepened relationships with our partner agencies – the services who refer people to us for legal help and provide space for our outreach clinics – to better meet client needs.

Homeless Persons' Legal Service in 2024-25

- * 432 people helped
- * 13% were Aboriginal
- * 62% had a disability
- * 56% were homeless
- * 28% were living in social housing

How we help

Housing

We negotiated with social housing landlords and took claims to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal to prevent people being evicted and becoming homeless.

Criminal law issues

We supported dozens of people facing criminal charges, with a focus on assisting clients with complex mental health issues and diverting them from custody into therapeutic programs.

Financial issues

We helped people facing financial hardship by clearing **\$134,198** in debts and fines for our clients.

Policing and government

We helped people make complaints against police and other government agencies, or make requests relating to Freedom of Information, immigration, the NDIS and guardianship.

Compensation payments

We supported people to access government compensation payments after being a victim of a violent crime.

We obtained **\$144,709** in victims' compensation payments for our clients.

Who we help

Many of the people we help require specialised support due to complex needs, including concerns related to disability and mental health conditions. We work actively to reach clients who face challenges accessing mainstream legal services and provide a trauma-informed service to meet their needs.



Challenging unfair costs of being homeless

Charles* had been homeless for 5 years when he came to an HPLS outreach clinic. In a period of illness due to a lapse in the treatment of his mental health condition, he had built up almost \$35,000 of fine debts, largely for sleeping on trains without a ticket. During that time, Charles had no income, so no means to buy a ticket or access safe accommodation.

We helped Charles commence a Work Development Order (WDO) to start paying off his debt. Then we successfully negotiated with Revenue NSW to write-off about \$30,000 of his debt, noting the profound impact on his mental health. Charles is now in supported accommodation.



Helping David avoid homelessness

David* had managed his schizophrenia over many years and was living in social housing, following long periods of homelessness. But his mental health deteriorated when he was unable to access consistent mental health care. While he was unwell, he attacked and damaged his neighbour's door.

David represented himself at the Tribunal in relation to the incident, but his lease was terminated. When he came to HPLS, he was facing a return to rough sleeping. Our lawyers successfully appealed the Tribunal decision and had the termination order set aside and ensured the social housing landlord did not blacklist David.



Image credit: freepik.com

Supporting women facing homelessness

Complex social and economic factors increase the likelihood of women being pushed into homelessness or insecure housing. Our HPLS Women’s Service responds to the specific challenges women face by providing specialised legal help and associated support.

Many of the clients accessing our Women’s Service have experienced family or domestic violence, or face disadvantage due to poverty, mental health concerns or past abuse. We offer specialist, trauma-informed legal support, connection to a range of support services across Sydney and access to an experienced Community Caseworker, to support their varied needs.

We deliver legal outreach clinics at women-only spaces with a women-only team of lawyers, creating safe and welcoming spaces where women from diverse backgrounds can access justice with confidence.

Our Women’s Service is growing. In the 2024-25 financial year – its second full year of operations – we helped 226 women with legal issues and additional supports. Around one third of these women were facing or at risk of domestic or family violence when they came to us for help.

We helped:

- 81 women with housing issues, including clearing unfair rent debt, getting access to priority housing lists and providing advice on ending a tenancy with a violent partner;
- 61 women with financial issues, including challenging unfair debts and getting access to victims of crime compensation payments;
- 32 women with criminal issues, including several circumstances where women were convicted of a crime as a result of their experiences of domestic or family violence;
- 79 women with casework and other non-legal support that helped them access temporary accommodation, financial support and mental health services, and find or maintain social housing.



Senior Solicitor Rachael Barwick, Liaison Officer Anna-Jane Lark, Criminal Solicitor Lucinda Nadj and Community Caseworker Christina Kasavetis

Some of the women we help



Michelle* was in her fifties and living in emergency accommodation after being evicted from a boarding house. Despite reporting abuse, harassment and threats by her neighbours, her landlord refused to intervene and instead moved to evict her. Michelle attempted many times to arrange for the return of her belongings but received no response from her landlord. When she eventually returned to collect her things, the landlord called the police, who gave Michelle 15 minutes to pack up and leave. We represented Michelle at the Tribunal, where her landlord was forced to return her full deposit, repay rent unfairly charged to her, and make a compensation payment for disrupting her tenancy. This ensured Michelle had the money she needed to secure stable housing.



After experiencing physical, financial and sexual abuse and coercive control, **Selina*** fled her husband to live in her car. She was in Australia on a partner visa, so could not get social security payments. We helped Selina access victims of crime supports, including counselling and \$10,000 in compensation and emergency payments, which supported her through her immediate challenges. We also referred her to services to help with her immigration status and search for work.



When **Charity*** was released from prison she had nowhere to go. She could not return to her social housing property, as her former partner was an authorised occupant on the lease and had taken out an ADVO. Charity had been wrongly identified as the perpetrator of domestic violence. With our support, Charity successfully had the ADVO and her bail conditions varied so she could return to her home.



Samantha’s* violent and destructive former partner had caused significant damage to her community housing property. She came to us with a \$4,200 debt for repairs, which was preventing her from accessing a new home. We assisted Samantha to get the debt waived, clearing the way for her to make a new start in a safe home.



Eva* was only 20 when she came to us reporting multiple incidents of domestic violence and sexual assault. We advised her on the process for reporting to police and taking the criminal complaints to court. We also supported Eva to collect evidence and submit 4 applications for victims’ compensation. Eva was initially told she would only receive \$10,000 in relation to 2 incidents. We challenged the decisions, emphasising the seriousness of the events across the 4 applications. The reviews went in our favour, with Eva ultimately awarded \$35,000 to recognise the harm done to her, which will go some way to giving her stability and security for her future.

StreetCare: lived experience guiding responses to homelessness

StreetCare empowers people with lived experiences of homelessness to provide advice to decision-makers – improving laws and policies and the lives of the people they impact.

StreetCare's impact has been recognised with an increased funding commitment over 2 years from the NSW Government. This welcome investment will enable the group to expand its influential advisory role contributing to decision-making forums addressing homelessness and housing insecurity – including in regional and remote communities.

At the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Public Toilets and in the Law Society Journal, StreetCare emphasised the importance of public toilets as an essential public service, upholding dignity and safety for people experiencing homelessness. StreetCare members shared lived insights on how limited access disproportionately impacts women and contributes to criminalisation and stigma for those sleeping rough.

'If you can't access public toilets your hygiene is going to be lacking. That's a huge part of the discrimination that homeless people are faced with each day.'

Rocky, StreetCare Member, in the Law Society Journal



Project Manager Charmaine Jones and Policy Officer Alannah Daly with StreetCare members at NSW Parliament.

StreetCare is providing input to government housing and homelessness planning, contributing expertise to key initiatives, including the Homes for NSW plan which will guide delivery of social housing over the next decade, and the NSW Homelessness Strategy, a whole-of-government effort to ensure homelessness is rare, brief and not repeated. Members highlighted the need for early intervention, and ensuring programs and policies are person-centred and trauma-informed.

As part of Sydney Zero, a joint project between local housing, homelessness and health services, StreetCare is advising on the implementation of the By-Name-List, a way of sharing information about people sleeping rough between service providers. Successful implementation will get people the support they need faster and without having to retell traumatic histories when using different services.

With Sydney Zero, StreetCare is shaping the NSW Government's approach to providing Temporary Accommodation, a critical safety net for people in housing crisis. We welcomed improvements in response to StreetCare's advocacy, including an easier process for re-applications in Sydney and a fairer implementation of the user co-payment contribution.

Specialist advocacy and advice on housing and mental health

A safe home is fundamental to health and wellbeing. But people with mental health conditions often face barriers to securing and maintaining a home.

Over the last two years, the JEC has coordinated a Lived Experience Committee (LEC) which has been guiding the statewide Housing and Mental Health Agreement between NSW Health and the Department of Communities and Justice.

The LEC has achieved better outcomes for people with mental health conditions who are experiencing housing instability or living in social housing. Committee members are empowered to transform their own experiences into practical advice to government agencies.

Insights from the LEC have helped develop a trauma-informed training module for Homes NSW staff, to encourage more empathetic interactions with social housing tenants who might be experiencing mental health challenges. The LEC has also improved awareness of the need for trauma-informed communication with social housing tenants, by advocating for changes to communication templates in the social housing system.

The Committee's work was recognised when it was awarded the Service Delivery Excellence award at the 2025 Mental Health Services Awards.

Helping keep people in their homes

Our policy advocacy challenges unfair systems and policies compounding homelessness.

We welcomed the overdue reforms passed by the NSW Government to end no grounds evictions. We are proud to have played a role in this campaign, led by the Tenants' Union. These changes offer greater housing security, help prevent homelessness, and empower renters to assert their rights without fear of a retaliatory response.

Our submission to the NSW Audit Office's review of social housing played a key role in shaping the final report, which reflected our recommendations for clearer processes to access social housing and stronger support to maintain tenancies. The report's conclusion that the current system is 'inefficient and inequitable' strengthens advocacy to reform problematic Homes NSW policies and processes.

'By building understanding of government processes and the context for law reform, we support lived experience advocates to share stories that are purposeful and impactful.'

Alannah Daly, Policy Officer





Action for Reconciliation

Our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) commits us to practical action to promote reconciliation and the rights of First Nations people. It guides us to provide a culturally safe environment for First Nations staff, partners and clients.

Staying true to Uluru

The JEC remains steadfast in our support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and achieving its objectives of Voice, Treaty and Truth.

We have proudly supported the Uluru Statement from the Heart since 2017 and stood with over six million Australians in endorsing a First Nations Voice in the Constitution.

In October 2024, a year after the Voice Referendum, we publicly re-stated our ongoing commitment to the core principles of the Uluru Statement and committed to ongoing solidarity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A new cultural learning plan

Our new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural learning plan ensures JEC staff, secondees, volunteers and board members learn about First Nations cultures and develop capacity to build cultural safety into our work on issues impacting First Nations people.

Staff will participate in annual formal training, with the JEC offering additional cultural learning activities and targeted cultural learning for those working directly with First Nations clients or organisations.

'As a First Nations woman, I'm proud to see our RAP driving real change: centred on truth-telling, cultural learning, and solidarity. Our commitment to reconciliation and the Uluru Statement from the Heart isn't symbolic – it's lived daily, creating culturally safe spaces for our people, and walking together toward justice, empowerment, and self-determination.'

Emma Bastable, Gamilaraay woman and RAP Chair



Reconciliation highlights

- Respecting and supporting First Nations cultures by expanding cultural leave allowances for First Nations staff.
- Deepening our understanding of racial literacy through training with First Nations-led creative agency Garuwa, which explored concepts of white privilege and racism, and their impact on our work.
- Hearing the reflections on impact of truth-telling, how it helps us understand our history, and how it offers a path to reconciliation in a Reconciliation Week discussion hosted by the UTS Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion.
- Fundraising for AbSec through our reconciliation film night. We showed 'Like My Brother', a documentary about four sisters from the Tiwi Islands trying to break into the AFLW.



Book covers reproduced with permission of University of Queensland Press and Text Publishing.

- Engaging with contemporary First Nations perspectives through our reconciliation book club, discussing Tony Birch's *Women and Children*, Melissa Lucashenko's *Edenglassie*, Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts' *Long Yarn Short* and Tyson Yunkaporta's *Sand Talk*.
- Learning from First Nations writers including Lorena Allam, Thomas Mayo, Jazz Money, Lulu Houdini and Enoch Mailangi at the Sydney Writers' Festival.



JEC staff at the Reconciliation Book Club

Financial Performance

The JEC closed the 2024-25 financial year in a strong and stable position.

The audited financial result was a 'break even' year, with income just exceeding costs, resulting in a surplus of \$147. Notably, we saw total income growth of \$1,333,897, which is a 21% increase on our 2023-24 income.

This boost in income came from growth in our grants and philanthropic funding, and in money raised through our fundraising campaigns and events. The additional funding increased our capacity across our priority projects and expanded our core organisational resources.

Our total income of \$7,701,771 reflects the value of the JEC's work and the strength of our collaborative efforts. We thank our partners and donors for their generous support.

We also continue to benefit from generous in-kind support from pro bono partners, who contribute through staff secondments, volunteer engagement, and the donation of resources and facilities.

At 30 June 2025, we maintained healthy net assets of \$2,933,895.

FUNDING SOURCES

Grants \$3,657,526 47%

Includes grants from the Commonwealth and NSW Governments and the NSW Public Purpose Fund

Philanthropic \$1,696,614 22%

Income from philanthropic trusts and foundations

Donations and events \$1,738,839 23%

Income from donations, fundraising appeals and events

Fee for service \$147,298 2%

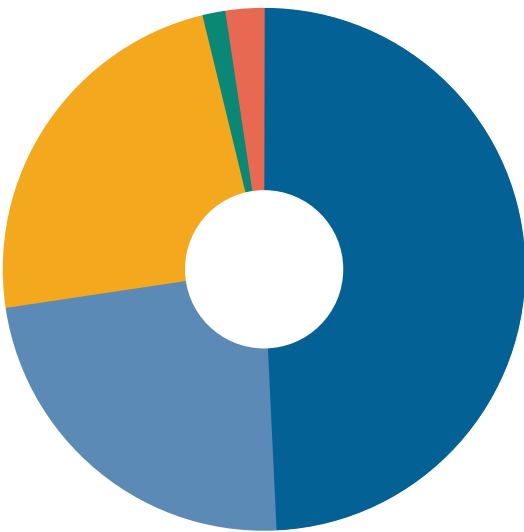
Income from legal casework

Other income \$461,494 6%

Includes interest income, fees for participation in regulatory processes and recovery of rental costs

Total \$7,701,771

INCOME 2025



- Grants
- Philanthropic
- Donations and events
- Fee for service
- Other Income

PROGRAM COSTS

Employees \$6,232,734 81%

Includes staff salaries and related costs

Consultancy \$112,681 1%

Includes the cost of experts assisting with program delivery

Depreciation and amortisation expense \$572,554 7%

Includes occupancy costs

Administration \$666,382 9%

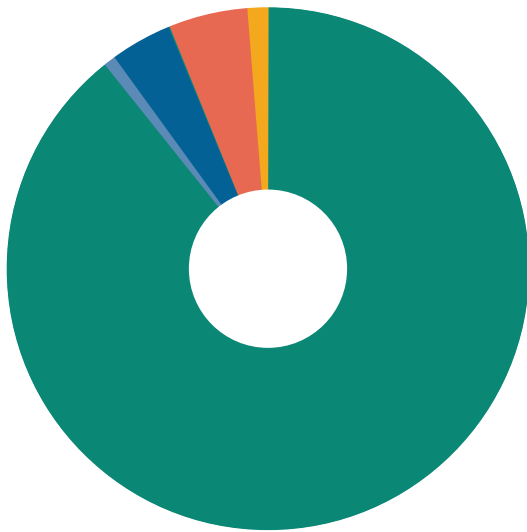
Operating expenses associated with administration including finance, IT, office costs and telecommunications

Other \$117,273 2%

Miscellaneous costs

Total \$7,701,624

EXPENSES 2025



- Employees
- Consultancy
- Depreciation and amortisation expense
- Administration
- Other

The JEC's full financial statements are available on request and at the Australian Charities Register on the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission website: www.acnc.gov.au.

Our Board



CHAIR

Sera Mirzabegian SC is a senior barrister who practises in commercial litigation, regulatory investigations and litigation, class actions and human rights. Sera has acted for major Australian and international companies in a variety of industries and independent commissions including the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. She regularly acts for human rights and environmental organisations as well as marginalised and disadvantaged individuals and communities on a pro bono basis. Sera is currently the Co-Chair of the NSW Bar's Diversity and Equality Committee and has previously served as a Councillor of the NSW Bar Association.



Brooke Massender is a partner and Global Head of Pro Bono at Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer, where she leads the direction of pro bono services across a global network of 26 offices. She has extensive experience in social impact, using advocacy for systemic change, and bringing together cross-sector stakeholders to achieve tangible outcomes for disadvantaged communities. Brooke is an experienced advocate with particular expertise in access to justice and working with First Nations clients. She provides strategic and executive advice for many non-profits, including as Chair of Justice Connect and a member of PILnet's Pro Bono Leadership Council.



Jade Tyrrell is a Senior Associate in Johnson Winter Slatery's Dispute Resolution and Employment Team. She has experience acting in complex and large-scale commercial litigation, employment-related disputes, and defamation proceedings. In addition to her commercial work, Jade has a strong interest in supporting pro bono projects. Jade is a Councillor of the Law Society of New South Wales and sits on various Law Society committees.



John Temple-Cole is a Partner at advisory firm HKA Global. He is a Forensic Accounting Specialist designated by Chartered Accountants Australia & New Zealand. For over 30 years, John has led complex disputes and financial and accounting investigations. He has provided expert evidence in a range of Australian Courts, the High Court of Singapore and in international arbitration proceedings. His engagements have required him to investigate or provide expert opinions on issues including fraud, false accounting, failed investments, tax avoidance and breaches of contract.



Kate Morgan SC is a leading Sydney barrister who appears throughout numerous jurisdictions (civil and criminal) with a focus on regulatory matters. Her practice includes regulatory investigations and litigation, corporate and commercial litigation, class actions and general appellate matters. Before being called to the Bar, Kate practised as an attorney in New York State, and as a solicitor at Mallesons Stephen Jacques and the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions.



Kirsten Gray is a Muruwari/Yuwaalaraay woman, mother and lawyer. She started her career representing parents in child protection matters and has worked extensively in Indigenous policy and human rights. Kirsten has served several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioners at the Australian Human Rights Commission and has contributed to Indigenous human rights advocacy both nationally and internationally. Kirsten worked on the Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children in the Northern Territory and led the First Nations Policy and Engagement at the Disability Royal Commission. She is currently an Associate Professor at Jumbunna, UTS.



Penny Gerstle AM joined the board of the Justice and Equity Centre in 2020 and is the Chair of our Community Engagement Committee. She chairs Human Rights Watch Australia Committee, and is a Director of Hand Up Foundation and Palmera Projects. She was Director Marketing and Fundraising for Participate Australia, Chair of the Aminata Maternal Foundation, and a disability policy officer with the Australian Human Rights Commission. Penny has advocated as a volunteer registered migration agent at the Refugee Advice and Casework Service and with Australia for UNHCR's Women's Steering Committee on Maternal Health.



Sally Karandrews is a not-for-profit, community, and disability sector leader with 20 years' experience in policy development, program design and delivery, community engagement, and advocacy. A vision impaired and neurodivergent leader herself, Sally is passionate about access and inclusion, and regularly writes on the topics of disability leadership, accessible education and employment. Sally was the Chief Executive Officer for Blind Citizens Australia until September 2023. She is now consulting with a number of organisations on employment, governance, and audio description.



Simon Rice is a consultant at Chalk & Behrendt, advising Local Aboriginal Land Councils, and is an Emeritus Professor of Law at the University of Sydney, where he was previously Kim Santow Professor of Law and Social Justice. He is an expert in human rights law, and in anti-discrimination and equal opportunity law. He has extensive experience in not-for-profit leadership, governance and strategy.



Stuart Price is the Chief Executive Officer, Managing Director, and co-founder of CASL, with over 30 years of experience in banking, investment banking, and litigation finance across the UK, Middle East, and Australia. He has held senior positions in litigation finance for over a decade, notably leading the resolution of a \$190 million class action against the Queensland State Government for alleged stolen wages on behalf of over 12,000 First Nations people. As the inaugural CEO and Managing Director of the Association of Litigation Funders of Australia (AALF), Stuart played a pivotal role in its establishment and continues to serve as a Director.

Staff

EMPLOYEES

Alana West
Policy Officer

Alannah Daly
Policy Officer

Alastair Lawrie
Director, Policy and Advocacy

Anna Harding
Project Director, Towards Truth

Anna-Jane Lark
Liaison Officer / Paralegal

Annie Barker
Casual

Brent Woolf
Research Assistant

Briana Ewing
Relationships Coordinator

Brydie Zorz
Research Assistant

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Project Officer, StreetCare

Christina Kasavetis
Community Caseworker

Corey Smith
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Director, Energy and Water Justice

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Raise the Age Campaign Manager

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Aboriginal Social Justice Graduate

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Hannah Fernie
CLCNSW Cadet

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UNSW Intern

Jade Johnston
UNSW Intern

Janet Fraser
WSU Intern

Leen Jayoush
WSU Intern

Raahat Shaik
UNSW Intern

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Ilona Ho

Jordan Abrahams

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Secondee, Strategic Litigation

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Wotton Kearney Secondee,
Towards Truth

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Australian Government Solicitor
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Krista Gerrard

Thank you

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Macquarie Group Foundation
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Maple-Brown Family Foundation
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Riverbush Pty Limited
The Ross Trust
Williams Fund (sub fund of Australian Communities Foundation)

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Jacqueline Dawson

The passion for social justice shared by our corporate, pro bono and community partners, and by the trusts and foundations that support us, is vital to our success. So is the generous support of the many individuals who donate through our appeals and campaigns, including those supporters who wish to remain anonymous.

The Hon Elizabeth Evatt AC
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Stephen Norrish KC
Annette Olle
Blake O’Connor

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Nick O’Neill
Blair Palese
Kiera Peacock
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Ralph and Sybil Pliner
David Robb
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John Temple-Cole
Sera Mirzabegian SC

JEC ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Penny Gerstle (Chair)
Therese Cochrane
Ivan Li
Simon Rice
Philippa Sawyer
Jade Tyrrell



2025 SOCIAL JUSTICE DINNER

We are very grateful to Yvonne Weldon AM for sharing her heartfelt Welcome to Country, special guest speaker Dr Cassandra Goldie AO, host Craig Reucassel, and to our staff, board and committee members, family and friends for their generous contributions to our silent auction.



Our Supporters

THANK YOU

The Justice and Equity Centre is driven by partnerships and a commitment to strengthening the community. The passion for social justice shared by our supporters is vital to the JEC's success and we gratefully acknowledge their generous support.

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ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS)
ANTAR
Amnesty International Australia
Australian Autism Alliance
Australian Centre for Disability Law (ACDL)
Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)
Australian Discrimination Law Experts Group (ADLEG)
Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO)
Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR)
Australian Services Union NSW/ACT

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Blind Citizens Australia (BCA)	First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN)	Queensland Council of Social Service (QCROSS)
Change the Record	Georges River Council	Race for 2030
Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)	Grata Fund	Redfern Legal Centre (RLC)
CHOICE Australia	Guide Dogs Australia	Rev. Bill Crews Foundation
ClimateWorks	Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC)	Rights Information and Advocacy Centre (RIAC)
Combined Pensioners and Superannuants NSW (CPSA)	Inclusion Australia (IA)	Shopfront Youth Legal Centre
Community Legal Centres Australia	Indigenous Law Centre, UNSW	South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS)
Community Legal Centres NSW	Inner City Legal Centre (ICLC)	Spinal Cord Injuries Australia (SCIA)
Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC)	Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA)	St Vincent de Paul Society NSW
Consumer Policy Research Centre (CPRC)	Institute for Sustainable Futures, UTS (ISF)	Sydney Community Forum (SCF)
Council on the Ageing (COTA)	Just.Equal Australia	Sydney University, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA)	Justice Reform Initiative	Teachers Federation
Disability Voices Tasmania (DVT)	Just Reinvest NSW	Tenants Union NSW (TUNSW)
Down Syndrome Australia	Legal Aid NSW	The Parenthood
Energy Consumers Australia (ECA)	National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA)	Uniting NSW.ACT
Energy Efficiency Council (EEC)	National Legal Aid (NLA)	UTS Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research
Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON)	National Mental Health Consumer Alliance	Victoria Legal Aid
Ethnic Communities Council NSW (ECCNSW)	Newtown Kids Cottage	Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service
Equality Australia	NSW Council for Civil Liberties (NSWCCL)	Weave Youth & Community Services
Equality Tasmania	NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)	Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)
Every Australian Counts (EAC)	Original Power	Youth Action
Financial Counsellors Association of NSW (FCAN)	People with Disability Australia (PWDA)	Youth Off The Streets
Financial Rights Legal Centre (FRLC)	Physical Disability Australia (PDA)	
First Nations Clean Energy Network (FNCEN)	Physical Disability Council of NSW (PDCN)	
	Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion (QAI)	



At the Justice and Equity Centre we challenge injustice in the knowledge we can, against the odds, make change.



Donate to deliver justice and equity

Our work is strategic and collaborative. It is focused, practical and highly skilled. It is also ambitious.

With your help, we can support more people to challenge injustice and make positive, transformative change.

Support us to do the work that changes laws, policies and practices that are unlawful or unfair.

Every donation helps change the lives of people and communities who are marginalised and disadvantaged.

How to donate

ONLINE	Visit us online at: jec.org.au/support-us		
BANK TRANSFER	Account name:	Justice and Equity Centre Limited	
	BSB:	062 005	
	Account No:	10023786	
	Payment reference:	Your name – “donation”	
LEAVE A BEQUEST	<p>Systemic change doesn’t happen quickly. Policy and law reform often takes years of determined advocacy. A bequest is a powerful way to do something meaningful and lasting for the future.</p> <p>Visit jec.org.au/support-us for more information or contact us for a confidential discussion about making a bequest.</p>		
CONTACT	<p>Cris Parker Head of Philanthropy and Relationships P 02 8898 6523 E cparker@jec.org.au</p>		

The Justice and Equity Centre is an independent non-profit charitable institution endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR). Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible in Australia.

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