



Sharing stories, finding solutions

Annual Report 2019-20



Marion Hansen
CHAIRPERSON



Antoinette Braybrook
CEO

“Together
we stand up,
speak out and
act to stop
violence against
Aboriginal
women”

Chairperson and CEO

Our vision is that all Aboriginal women are strong, safe, independent, healthy and positive in their lives, culture and communities. This focus is the centrepiece of our work, and it sustains our fearless advocacy for women.

I am proud and energised with what we have achieved for Aboriginal women across Victoria this past year. We've continued to provide high quality services and much needed support to thousands of Aboriginal women and their families during a year of pandemic.

Aboriginal women make up close to half of our staff, including three Aboriginal lawyers and twelve Aboriginal paralegal support workers. It is especially pleasing to see our paralegal support workers becoming lawyers, and continuing to work at Djirra.

The “everyday” work of our teams is sprinkled with memorable milestones and remarkable achievements. We formally introduced our Djirra Keepers to the Aboriginal community at our NAIDOC event in July. The community engagement team delivered our 150th Sisters Day Out® in October. Weekly cultural and life skills workshops in the Koori Women's Place became “not to be missed” events attended by women from 61 suburbs across Melbourne. Our cultural safety advisors worked with mainstream family violence services in 22 organisations, to embed “whole of organisation” cultural safety principles and practices so that our women could attend with greater confidence knowing that their needs would be addressed and their Aboriginality respected.

Elders and respected Aboriginal women came together for the Elders Possum Skin Cloak Project in August. Making and wearing the possum skin cloak is an important cultural strengthening and healing practice for our women. One of the Elders commented at the end that “once the cloak is wrapped around you, it's like being wrapped in the love and strength of everyone that has been part of making it.”

Our services are expanding and diversifying all the time. During this year we've piloted a trauma-informed counselling service and commenced the work of establishing an intensive support service with case work specialisations in family violence, homelessness, AOD and post-prison support. Our plan is to ensure that Aboriginal women across Victoria will have access to these services and support. We've also been successful in attracting funding to establish an after-hours support line staffed by Aboriginal women.

In late 2019, we appointed our first monitoring, evaluation and learning advisor in our legal team. This role has significantly enhanced our legal service data collection, reporting, and analysis – including tracking COVID-19 impacts on clients and service delivery.

Increased funding from Corrections Victoria has enabled us to employ a full-time lawyer and two intensive support workers to enhance services to Aboriginal women in prison. This new funding enables Djirra to offer weekly legal and non-legal outreach and support at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, alongside our Bendigo team who provide regular outreach at Tarrengower.

In March 2020, Djirra appointed a second lawyer at our Mildura office with funding received from Court Services Victoria. This role enhances our reach and capacity to provide legal services to Aboriginal women presenting in the Mildura Magistrates Court Family Violence List and the Mildura Koori Court in relation to family violence intervention order breaches. Djirra has also relocated both our Warrnambool and Echuca premises to stand-alone offices, enhancing cultural safety for our clients.

In July 2019, I attended the 41st session of the UN Human Rights Council, calling for urgent action in key areas including family violence, self-determination, incarceration, child protection and ParentsNext.

In November 2019, Tracy Spicer handed her microphone to me and I shared the stage with Me Too Movement leader, Tarana Burke, at the Annual Sydney Peace Prize Award Ceremony. Tarana also participated in a roundtable hosted by Djirra.

In March 2020, I delivered the Pamela Denoon Lecture, "Making First Nations Women Safe and Strong", at the Australian National University.

The partnership between Djirra and Dardi Munwurro remains strong. Our National Gathering themed as "Women's Business, Men's Business, Everyone's Business: Our Cultural Way" has been postponed due to COVID-19 but a new date will be set once the circumstances are right.

Djirra has continued to be an active member of the National FVPLS Forum, standing united with other FVPLSs to be national voice on key issues.

We are proud to conclude our 18th year with an expansion in the services and opportunities that we can provide to Aboriginal women and we thank our Board, staff, volunteers, funders and supporters for making this possible. Your ongoing support is crucial, and very much appreciated.

A note from the Chairperson

This has been a challenging year, yet for the Board it has been one where Djirra's adaptability and responsiveness has shone through. It has also been a year when Djirra has been strengthened by some senior positions being filled by outstanding candidates. We welcomed Antoinette Gentile, a proud Wollithiga woman of the Yorta Yorta Nations, who joined Djirra to head up our Strategy team. Antoinette was formerly the Director of the Koori Justice Unit, Department of Justice and Community Safety. Annie Nash, well-known to us in Djirra, joined as Director of Strategy and Operations in January, having recently worked in Victoria Legal Aid.

The outstanding commitment of Djirra staff, under the leadership of our CEO, Antoinette Braybrook, is much appreciated by the Board. In our 18th year, our programs are being delivered in a different way, yet they remain rich in culture, trauma informed and they continue to promote the important work of Djirra, its services and programs.

I acknowledge the support of all directors for their active participation, and especially acknowledge the contribution of our Deputy Chair, Alan Thorpe.

Marion Hansen

Chairperson

Antoinette Braybrook

Chief Executive Officer

Acknowledgement

Djirra, our Directors, and our staff acknowledge the First Peoples and traditional custodians of the lands and waterways upon which we, and those connected to Djirra, work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present from the nations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across this land.



About Djirra

Djirra is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO). We work towards a future where all Aboriginal women are strong, safe, independent, healthy and positive in their lives, culture and communities.

We are committed to ending family violence against Aboriginal women and their children through holistic and culturally safe specialist services, prevention programs and advocacy for change. Our services have state-wide reach. As an ACCO, the governance, leadership and key staff in our organisation are Aboriginal people, in our case mainly women.

Djirra's 18 years of experience working at the frontline of family violence has given us a wealth of knowledge and cultural strength, provided in their own words by Aboriginal women expressing their lived experiences. Djirra has embraced and reinforced self-determination as the foundation of everything we do: it is Our Cultural Way.

Djirra's Aboriginal Family Violence Legal Service (AFVLS) provides culturally safe legal and non-legal support to Aboriginal people, particularly women, who experience family violence or sexual assault. Each client is assisted by a lawyer and support worker who together address the multitude of interrelated legal and non-legal issues our women face. Legal information, advice and representation is provided on intervention orders, child protection, family law and victims of crime assistance.

Our community education and engagement programs provide support for women through personal support and empowerment programs.

Djirra's Koori Women's Place provides wrap-around support and works to build trusting relationships with Aboriginal women through our shared connection to culture. Aboriginal women can be referred for an appointment, walk in to our space or book into a workshop. Mainstream and Aboriginal service providers are available for appointments within the safety of the KWP. This year, we provided a range of innovative services, workshops (and crucial community connections) through the effective use of social media and technology.

Djirra also offers a range of workshops in Melbourne and regional areas:

- Sisters Day Out is a wellbeing workshop where Aboriginal women support each other, get information about legal rights and options, and engage with mainstream and Aboriginal support services;
- Dilly Bag is a four-day residential program that draws on cultural principles to promote healing;
- Young Luv® is designed for young Aboriginal women aged 13 to 18 and focuses on promoting healthy relationships.

Our policy and advocacy work led by Aboriginal women in Djirra aims to achieve real systemic change through active engagement with government systems and decision makers, and more broadly across the community.

All of Djirra's work is designed by and for Aboriginal women, and is deeply respectful of and connected to community.

Highlights

2019–2020 has been a year for new projects and innovation. This year we:

- **launched the National Gathering** "Women's Business, Men's Business, Everyone's Business: Our Cultural Way" with Dardi Munwurro
- **celebrated the 150th Sisters Day Out** event in Yarra Glen – since 2007, SDO events have been held in 54 postcodes across Victoria
- **strengthened and extended our counselling services** at the Koori Women's Place (KWP) with the launch of a phone counselling service
- **introduced online delivery of all KWP cultural and wellbeing workshops**, extending our reach and making it possible for women to attend wherever they live in Victoria
- **reviewed our programs and services** and began the planning and recruitment phase for Djirra's new Intensive Family Violence Support services
- **expanded our Prison Support Program** through additional funding for a full-time lawyer and case-managers, enhancing Djirra's capacity to provide holistic service delivery for Aboriginal women in prison who have experienced family violence, including post-release
- **led the project of the Feasibility Study** for Aboriginal Women's Residential Program in partnership with the Centre for Innovative Justice – the project was commissioned by the Koori Justice Unit within the Department of Justice and Community Safety
- **officially and publicly introduced the Djirra Keepers** at a special NAIDOC event with Victorian Attorney-General Jill Hennessy
- **hosted a roundtable** between Tarana Burke, founder of the Me Too movement, and the Djirra Keepers at Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre in November 2019
- **received an international delegation** from Peru and Columbia visiting to learn about Australia's whole-of-government approach to prevention of violence against women and girls – the tour was sponsored by the Equality Institute
- **facilitated the Elders Possum Skin Cloak Cultural project** funded by the Dhek Dja North Metro Action Group. The project saw Djirra's KWP enabling Elders and respected Aboriginal women to share their personal stories and work together to sew the cloak with the guidance of artist Maree Clarke.



Snapshot



We delivered

1,238

legal and non-legal support services to **690** Aboriginal people who have or are experiencing family violence, supporting their safety while prompting recovery and re-engagement in community.

This included **94** Aboriginal women in prison through our outreach program.

“Dilly Bag has felt really empowering. I have felt a sense of belonging, of not being alone and connectedness.”

Dilly Bag participant

Our Koori Women's Place delivered

61

cultural and wellbeing workshops, received **830** visits and directly supported **307** women.

“You mob always make me feel much better about myself every time I come. Thank you all so much. I got to also speak to Birth Deaths & Marriages and Centrelink today which was so helpful.”

Sisters Day Out participant

“I wasn't expecting so much support. They check in on me and bubs if we need support regularly, not just on the day of court, which made me feel welcome and supported.”

AFVLS client

Our CEO and staff presented at



conferences, and public speaking engagements across Victoria and Australia – providing a strong voice on the prevention of violence against Aboriginal women and children.

“The best thing about Young Luv is getting to talk to other sisters and learning the signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships.”

Young Luv participant



We delivered

35

early intervention, prevention and community legal education workshops reaching

919

women

Sisters Day Out **734**

Dilly Bag **105**

Young Luv **80**

Djirra Client Story

The client story below provides an insight into the experiences of many women who approach Djirra seeking legal assistance. The story illustrates the holistic, culturally safe support that legal clients receive when they engage with the service. All identifying details have been removed.

Keira, a young Aboriginal mum, contacted Djirra's legal team after Child Protection became involved due to concerns about Keira's mental health and drinking. Child Protection had placed Keira's young children in foster care and Keira was scared they wouldn't be returned.

During intake, Djirra's paralegal support worker (PLSW) listened to Keira's story, reassuring her and building a connection. Keira had grown up in out-of-home care and had experienced violent relationships; Keira was experiencing the impact of this trauma. Despite her challenges, Keira was a great mum and wanted the best for her children.

At Keira's request, the PLSW connected Keira with culturally safe supports including trauma counselling and alcohol addiction support to help address the impacts of her traumatic past. The PLSW also linked Keira with the local Gathering Place to help her reconnect with her culture and community, and parenting classes to provide her with extra support with her children.

Djirra's lawyer provided comprehensive legal advice so Keira could make informed decisions about what to do next. At Keira's court hearing, the lawyer successfully advocated for return of Keira's children, while the PLSW stayed with Keira throughout the day to provide support.

Keira now has her children with her and she has continued to stay in touch with Djirra.

Women visit the Koori Women's Place for many reasons, and sometimes at the start without any particular idea of what they want. The client story below illustrates how the cultural safety, welcoming environment and easy to access practical support of the KWP delivers outcomes for women that often change lives. All identifying details have been removed.

Sally, an Aboriginal woman in her fifties, was a highly valued community member and worker in the local co-op. When her daughter, with three children, became a victim of family violence, Sally left the workforce for a couple of years to help her daughter and grandchildren.

Sally visited Djirra occasionally when her daughter had legal appointments, and often saw women sitting around the big table talking, weaving, laughing and sharing lunch together. She would usually join in for a yarn until her daughter was ready.

Sally mentioned to a KWP support worker in passing that now that her grandkids were at school she longed to go back to work but "those days are over for me".

With a bit of encouragement Sally joined the KWP pre-employment program; she went to the first session and never looked back. Sally felt culturally safe, accepted and welcomed by the facilitators and the women who shared their work stories, collaborated on their CVs and did practice interviews with each other.

After a number of interviews, Sally now has a part-time role as an Aboriginal hospital liaison officer. Sally loves her job providing culturally safe support and advocating for Aboriginal patients and is home by 3pm each afternoon for after school care.

Financial Snapshot

Djirra achieved an operating surplus in the 2019–2020 financial year and remains in a strong financial position.

A full copy of the financial report and auditor's report is available on our website www.djirra.org.au.

Statement of Financial Performance for the Year Ended 30 June 2020

	2020 \$	2019 \$
Operating Revenue	9,119,541	8,828,718
Operating Surplus	1,182,296	108,341
Accumulated surplus at beginning of the financial year	2,577,348	2,469,007
Impact of adoption of AASB 16	(15,875)	–
Accumulated surplus at end of the financial year	3,743,769	2,577,348

Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2020

	2020 \$	2019 \$
Current Assets		
Cash Assets	5,742,704	4,867,005
Receivables	1,708,262	929,118
Other	219,338	80,881
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	7,670,304	5,877,004

Non-Current Assets

Plant, Property and Equipment	2,116,494	2,165,142
Right-of-use assets	490,394	–
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	2,606,888	2,165,142

TOTAL ASSETS

10,277,192 8,042,146

Current Liabilities

Payables	548,503	489,711
Financial liabilities	9,798	52,639
Lease liabilities	211,760	–
Current tax liabilities	207,966	380,884
Provisions	589,480	622,849
Other	4,669,869	3,918,715
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	6,237,376	5,464,798

Non-Current Liabilities

Lease liabilities	296,047	–
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	296,047	–

TOTAL LIABILITIES

6,533,423 5,464,798

NET ASSETS

3,743,769 2,577,348

RETAINED SURPLUS

3,743,769 2,577,348



Board of Directors

Chairperson

Marion Hansen

Deputy Chairperson

Alan Thorpe

Directors

Bernice Clarke

Gail Crozier

Darlene Thomas

Georgina Panetta, Sandra Patten, Leanne Pearson, Terri Pollard, Margaret Portelli, Kathryn Robb, Jacinta Rose, Megan Ross, Carole Sarasa, Barbara Shalit, Nidhi Sirohi, Rhiannon Smith, Angela Tang, Adeline Thomas, Sharon Villanueva, Charlotte Watson, Claire Weigall, Casey Williams, Jaynaya Williams, Echo Ping Yu

2019–20 Former Staff

Thank you to former staff for their contribution to Djirra:

Brad Aitken, Alkira Austin, Kim Avers, Amanda Bresnan, Shelley Burns-Williamson, Em Castle, Kate Chapman, Shanel Cubillo, Lucy Daniel, Melissa Desantis, Wendy Dodd, Simone Elias, Bianca Failla, Dale Gerner, Kehndra Hooker, Karen (Kay) Johnson, Nicole Mazga, Katie Mliswa, Alana O'Neill, Meriki Onus, Saranya Saravanan, Ada Sculthorp, Martika Shakoor, Ruth Storer, Tori Stuchbery, Nick Toonen

Volunteers

Pat Brown and Mary Smith

Staff

2019–20 Staff

Eulia Armatolos, Sissy-Amelia Austin, Anne Bambrook, Carly Baque, Maggie Barford, Antoinette Braybrook, Wanda Braybrook, Trish Carberry, Sandy Clark, Vicki Clark, Janelle Cooper, Francesca Demetriou, Alice Dowling, Debbie Edsall, Tahnee Edwards, Calinda Egan, Kelly Faldon, Tanayah Fernando, Marlena Flynn-Flessner, Antoinette Gentile, Tanaya Harradine, Rebecca Hayes, Sheadeen Hearn, Lilly Jackson, Vulase Kailea, Blessing Keabilwe, Rebecca Kelly, Chloe Kenny, Teresa Kyprianou, Natalie Larsek, Anne Lenton, Kate Lightfoot, Kalinda McEachran, Torie McWilliams-Murray, Annie Nash,

We are Djirra



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Attorney-General's Department
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(Holding Redlich Social Justice Project)
City of Melbourne
City of Yarra
Corrections Victoria
Court Services Victoria

Department Health & Human Services
Department of Justice & Community Safety
Department of Premier & Cabinet
Family Safety Victoria
Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation
National Indigenous Australians Agency
Victoria Legal Aid



Australian Government



our pro bono lawyers

**LANDER
& ROGERS**

and our many other supporters and donors.



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