

**30<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF TASMANIA LEGAL AID  
RECEPTION REMARKS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA  
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, TUESDAY 4 MAY 2021**

**VICE-REGAL SALUTE IS PLAYED**

Good evening and welcome to this event to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Tasmania Legal Aid.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and yet who continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

May I acknowledge among you the Tasmania Legal Aid Chair, Director and fellow Board Members.

The importance of access to justice cannot be overstated and this is particularly true for our First Nations people who are overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

As the Law Council of Australia's Justice Project explained, there are personal, community and social costs when people cannot access justice.<sup>1</sup> These include:

- A greater likelihood of incarceration including in circumstances in which charges and arrest were warranted;
- Family violence victims being evicted for reasons which are not their fault, such as damage to the rental home by the perpetrator;
- An inability to resolve mounting debts resulting in poverty and or eviction and homelessness;
- An inability to access personal entitlements, such as unpaid wages or income support;
- An inability to seek redress as a victim of crime, workplace exploitation or discrimination;
- Remaining at risk of harm, violence and exploitation such as family violence victims, elder abuse victims and people with a disability who are abused by carers; and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> Law Council of Australia, *The Justice Project*, Final Report, 2018.

And there are costs to society in not providing legal representation which are largely born by governments, for example increases in self-representation in criminal matters results in delays, inefficiency and cost.

Legal aid is therefore of vital importance and its existence is to be celebrated.

It was not until 1954 that the *Legal Assistance Act* made provision for schemes administered by the Northern and Southern Law Societies. The next development came with the *Legal Aid Commission Act 1990 (Tas)* creating the Legal Aid Commission of Tasmania, which commenced operations on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1991.

Over the last three decades the legal aid sector has changed dramatically – community legal centres and specialist legal aid providers such as for the environment, refugees and tenants have emerged.

Today Tasmania Legal Aid provides a much greater range of services than it did 30 years ago addressing family violence, elder abuse and the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Online information and advice have also been added to telephone advice and face to face advice and representation.

Congratulations, then, on reaching this significant milestone.

And now it's my pleasure to announce a new award.

The TLA Outstanding Staff Award was initiated this year to recognise a staff member or team for their outstanding contribution that goes above and beyond their job role in order to achieve better results for the Tasmanian Community.

The recipient of the inaugural award is Kirsten Abercromby.

The nomination noted Kirsten's:

- dedication to her clients. She ensures that they understand the process and are able to make informed decisions, and always advocates for an appropriate outcome;
- support of other staff, including her strength as a mentor;
- support of practitioners in the North-West; and

- commitment to TLA and what it aims to achieve.

Congratulations Kirsten.

[Kirsten accepts her award from the Governor.]

Please now do enjoy the reception.