



Culturally Proficient Legal Services for Our People

Quality, culture & leadership



CEO Shane Duffy & Chair Kenneth Georgetown

On the behalf of my Board of Directors and staff, it gives me pleasure to introduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service Qld Ltd (ATSILS Qld).

At ATSILS we are committed to providing quality legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, families and communities.

Our client population consists almost exclusively of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Despite the negative impacts of colonisation, we acknowledge that as the original inhabitants, our people continue to survive through a detailed knowledge, understanding and respect for ancient lores, customs, beliefs and strong cultural and spiritual connections to the land and the sea.

We acknowledge our challenges are complex and difficult, yet we remain totally focused on producing ground breaking results – results that aim to change our people's lives for the better.

We are acutely aware of the past and present psychological and sociological impacts of colonisation upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people, particularly as this relates to our people's potential exposure to the justice system.

Our Directors, with a strong sense of pride in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, are committed to the delivery of quality legal services.

In addition, we aim to restore this pride and dignity amongst our clients in a concerted effort to reduce their ongoing need for our services.

We measure success not only by the results we achieve, but how we achieve them.

Strong leadership, corporate governance, cultural and business integrity underpin every decision we make and every action we take.

I am proud to present this newsletter to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Queensland and welcome your participation, support and feedback.

**Kenneth Georgetown,
Chairperson**

Welcome to the first ATSILS Qld Newsletter, the purpose of which is to help tie us together as an organisation committed to providing a quality service for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the state.

As you are about to read our staff are a talented bunch, passionate about their work, no matter what their field, and some with truly awful, but always appreciated, senses of humour! We value all of our staff and are pleased to be able to introduce them to you for us all to share in each other's high ideals and commitment to the work at hand.

As Chief Executive Officer, I am committed to promoting pride in our culture and remain focused on the need to work closely with our communities and key government and non-government stakeholders to achieve the organisation's desired outcomes.

As a united team, we will deliver outcomes against our strategic goals by removing chance and creating choice.

**Shane Duffy,
Chief Executive Officer**

Redress Scheme high on agenda

ATSILS (Qld) Ltd provides Civil Law advice and representation throughout the State under the guiding hand of Barrister-at-Law Maria Rinaudo Lewis. High on her agenda for the past two-three years has been addressing issues around the Queensland Redress Scheme for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants.

It became clear to us that some of our questions could not be answered by the Department of Communities, she writes, and therefore required extensive research and action by ATSILS Qld. Our questions included:

- What is the scheme? Is it governed by legislation?
- What is the "eligibility" criteria - does it cover people who were placed in State run institutions under Federal Law, eg Aboriginal Protection Act?
- What support is available for applicants, given that they will be "reliving" the experiences of the past in order to apply?
- How will the Level 2 panel be chosen?
- What criteria will the panel use to make a determination of what amount will be offered to a Level 2 applicant?
- How would any payment under this scheme affect people on Centrelink payments?
- Will the payment be taxed?
- What is the effect and scope of the Deed of Release and Indemnity that applicants will have to sign to receive a payment?

As time has passed, many of ATSILS' original concerns began to emerge. For example, many applicants were refused Level 1 payments on the basis that they were 'ineligible' because no records existed of their time spent in State run institutions.

Many applicants who received Level 1 payments were refused Level 2 payments because the harm they declared they suffered was not considered severe enough to warrant redress. Many applicants who received Level 2 payments received very modest amounts even though they had declared significant harm having been experienced during their time in the institutions. Many people were refused payment because their applications were submitted past the closing date.

ATSILS (Qld) Ltd continued making submissions to the Department of Communities asking them to:

- accept applications past the closing date;



- accept evidence of relatives and friends to establish eligibility in cases where the Department had 'no records'; and,
 - reconsider the amounts offered to those Level 2 recipients who were dissatisfied with the payment offered to them.
- We have been successful in several cases relating to 'eligibility', however, our submissions asking the Department to accept late applications and to reconsider 'inadequate' Level 2 offers have been rejected.

ATSILS has enlisted the assistance of Blake Dawson Lawyers to assist in our research of the legal options available to dissatisfied applicants but those options are limited, potentially costly, and involve the Supreme Court of Queensland.

We are still refining our efforts in this regard, and hope to test a challenge option in the very near future.

We will keep the community informed of our progress in this regard, and hope to provide further updates in future newsletters.

**Maria Rinaudo Lewis
Barrister-at-Law**



Principally speaking...



In a role he describes as a “moveable feast”, Principal Legal Officer Greg Shadbolt says he rarely gets to do what he actually plans to do over the course of a day.

In essence, he says, his role is to assist the CEO to oversee the day-to-day operations of what is now a very large law firm.

“Whilst our CEO’s role quite rightly tends to focus more on the ‘big picture’ issues, I see my role as ensuring that the more mundane aspects of running a large law firm are addressed – hopefully with nothing being allowed to fall between the cracks,” he said.

“A significant part involves the drafting of various procedures, and perhaps more importantly, the training and monitoring of compliance by our staff, thus going some way towards ensuring a professional and consistent service for our clients.

“I am also involved in such areas as ‘law reform’, which I very much enjoy, flying the organisational flag on various key committees and occasionally rolling my arm over in court.

“It is the reduction in court time which I most miss – but such goes with the territory when there are 25 offices to help coordinate.

“Whilst being a husband and father has been my proudest achievement in life, being associated with our staff has also been a great source of pride.”

He said ATSILS Qld touchstone was simply that clients come first.

“And it is that central ethos which underpins most of what we do,” he said.

“It is always a challenge given that the demand for our services far exceeds our budgetary limitations.

“The fact that we are able to do so much is largely a reflection of the commitment and professionalism of our fantastic staff.”

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After a short stint with what was then QEA in late 1995, Mr Shadbolt started on a full-time basis with the legal service in April 1996 – being assigned to the “new” Beenleigh office in February 1998.

“There was no funding for a secretary back then so I doubled as the typist and Ricky Wecke (field officer) doubled as the receptionist,” he recalls. “Subsequent funding has since seen the secretary’s position filled by an array of characters – the very first of which was Owen McNamara - now a social worker at our Rockhampton office.

“Samantha Walsh, who had been my admin support in Brisbane back in 1996, now fills that role.”

In 2002 he was appointed by the board, which at the time included “the irrepressible” Freddie Coolwell, into a permanent position as Principal

Legal Officer.

“Despite my reservations, I am a very great believer in fate – and so with as much enthusiasm as I could muster, consistent with good manners, I accepted,” he said.

“I particularly missed the Beenleigh office’s camaraderie, which by then also included a second lawyer, Eugene O’Sullivan – an absolute rascal of the very best kind.

“I recall the wise words of Lyle Parker, now in our Brisbane office – “once you’re PLO Greg, you will only survive two years at most”.

“I recall responding that I felt I could break the mould and survive all of ‘three’ years before being axed.

“Nine years on and an additional two dozen new offices later, I’m still standing.

“It has been my very great privilege to be your PLO.”

ATSILS Qld – Office Locations

HEAD OFFICE:

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PO Box 13035 George Street, Brisbane Q 4003
Ph: (07) 3025 3888 (24 hrs) Fax: (07) 3025 3800
Toll Free: 1800 012 255

REGIONAL OFFICES:

- Beenleigh :** (07) 3804 5033
- Bundaberg :** (07) 4152 8044
- Cairns:** (07) 4046 6400
- Charleville :** (07) 4654 1721
- Hervey Bay:** (07) 4128 2488
- Ipswich:** (07) 3812 2772
- Mackay:** (07) 4953 4058
- Maroochydore :** (07) 5452 7633
- Mount Isa :** (07) 4744 0900
- Murgon :** (07) 4168 1944
- Rockhampton:** (07) 4927 5711
- Southport:** (07) 5532 6988
- Strathpine :** (07) 3205 1253
- Toowoomba :** (07) 4659 7822
- Townsville:** (07) 4722 5111



SATELLITE OFFICES:

- Chinchilla:** (07) 4662 8418
- Cunnamulla :** (07) 4655 2191
- Dalby :** (07) 4662 1317
- Goondiwindi :** (07) 4671 0766
- Normanton :** (07) 4745 1118
- Palm Island:** (07) 4770 1222
- Roma:** (07) 4622 5366
- St George:** (07) 4625 3052
- Warwick:** (07) 4661 7799



Our own 'top shelf' finance team

Wading through flood waters to divert phones is just one of the many 'above and beyond the call...' situations our Administration and Finance Team sometimes find themselves in. Finance Manager Ross Sivo explains...

It is my pleasure to introduce the team to you in this, our first ATSILS (Qld) Ltd newsletter.

In Brisbane the board and management team are ably supported by Angela Jacob (Executive Support Officer). Our data reporting team comprises Harry Pitt and Faith Maher, with Rose Mather, Lanora Jackson and Steven Oliver providing legal and administrative support to practitioners and officers in the field.

Our finance team comprises Julie Corpe – Accounts Officer (South) and Lorelei Gordon – Accounts Officer (North) and covers all aspects of financial administration from initial collating of payroll information for our fortnightly external processors, to banking, accounts payable and petty cash reimbursements for regional offices.

From July 2010 there will be a swap in duties for both team members to provide each with an all round experience of working with offices in both regions across the state.

Administration team members in all our 25 offices across the state perform duties from data processing to data collation for external reporting as well providing the day to day legal secretarial and operational support to our legal practitioners and field officers.

It has already been an eventful year for some of our regional offices.

In Charleville team member Jennifer Trovato waded through waist-deep flood waters to



ensure calls to the office switchboard were diverted to our mobile phones.

We are almost at the end of another financial year, and the requirements for year end reporting commence with our Fringe Benefits Tax Return this month and revised Annual budgets next month, and end with the presentation of our Annual Report to our Board and the Federal Attorney General's Department in September.

I look forward to continuing to work with all staff in all offices and welcome suggestions from across the state on ways we can improve our support services to your office in future.

Ross Sivo
Finance Manager



Imagining a better world...



Identifying himself as one of John Lennon's 'dreamers', ATSILS social worker Mark Conway is concerned for the future of advocacy in the face of a bureaucracy which doesn't take criticism – perceived or otherwise – very well.

In his view, establishing sound personal relationships remains the core competency of social work practice, implying lived respect for the individual in community, personal and cultural history inclusive of past triumphs and traumas, he says.

The task of articulating concerns to and on behalf of our clients, and to others in authority through verbal exchanges, formal submissions and reports must be competently exercised; but our continued grounding in respectful relationships and sustained engagement with our clients and communities, remains for me the touchstone of effective social work practice on behalf of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

There are two current hostile attacks on our time honoured role as advocates.

Firstly, we struggle with current attempts to meet the demands of our Canberra-based funding body directing us to reshape our social work functions into a predominantly therapeutic casework model which is clearly the responsibility of state statutory agencies.

The direction pushes out our advocacy role, which has to date been our motivation inherited from past Elders who originally established this legal service.

Secondly, we are on the verge of signing a Memorandum of Understanding/Mutual Statement of Intent with the Queensland Department of Corrective Services and are awaiting the Department providing us formal photo ID Cards of authorisation for four Prisoner Support Workers (Cairns, Townsville, and 2x Brisbane) to enter Correctional Facilities as Professional Prisoner Support Workers for



ATSILS Qld's Role

Our organisation is at the forefront of innovative, professional and culturally proficient legal services for our people.

We have a deep respect for cultural protocols, and an inherent understanding and appreciation of the psychological and sociological problems and challenges that affect Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people, and work efficiently within the justice system advocating the legal rights of our clients.

Our role is to:

- Ensure that clients are appropriately represented when they come into contact with the justice system;
- Assist and inform Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people and enhance their understanding of the justice system;
- Ensure that clients and their families receive quality legal advice and representation; and,
- Influence positive changes within the justice system that reflect better understanding

and appreciation of the diverse cultural backgrounds, problems and challenges that impact upon Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders.

ATSILS works together with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities, key government and non-government stakeholders to manage the delivery of services in a professional, culturally proficient and community-sensitive manner.

Our criminal, civil and family law services are delivered to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people throughout Queensland.

We also have state-wide jurisdiction in the following areas:

- Monitoring Indigenous Australian Deaths in Custody;
- Community Legal Education;
- Law Reform; and,
- Prisoner Support & Rehabilitation

easier access to clients.

I fear that delays in the latter may reflect a reaction by some elements of the Corrections bureaucracy to our inclusion of Advocacy on behalf of prisoner clients in the formal statement of our work role.

There remains a strong culture of control and exclusion of outsiders by some sectors within Corrections whose management appears to be dominated more by the need to avoid poor publicity, external scrutiny and accountability than to provide culturally competent and effective measures of rehabilitation for prisoners and their re-integration into communities upon release.

I fear further marginalisation of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people if both central and state bureaucracies continue to replace competent relationships and the advocacy that arises there from, with refined paper file management in order to protect poor rehabilitation and re-integration practices from effective scrutiny.

The more I push for effective advocacy the more I fear myself/our service is cast as

somehow supporting the criminal classes and lawlessness for daring to challenge the poor practice of service providers.

Criticisms arise repeatedly from the cohorts of new self-righteous managers dominating our bureaucracies, press and political forums of debate in the name of victim protection, which is often no more than scantily disguised support for a revenge-based ethic in courting a populist vote.

Perhaps I'm a dreamer still to believe respectful culturally competent relationships with the most disadvantaged individuals and communities remains the heart of good practice, but again to quote John Lennon, I imagine "I'm not the only one..."

Mark Conway
Senior Social Worker
i.e. the oldest one!



Community Profile:

Bob Colless & Gumba Gumba

(Cairns & District Aboriginal & Islander Corporation for Elders + Cairns Community Justice Group)

A Diesel Fitter & Marine Engineer by trade, these days Bob Colless is Deputy Chair & Manager of Gumba Gumba, which is the Cairns & District Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Elders and the Cairns Community Justice Group...

"Gumba Gumba itself means 'old people' in the Kuku Yalanji language, which is my tribal group," he says.

"The founder of this organisation was my mother, Rose Colless and it has been running for about 16 years since incorporation.

"Gumba Gumba is primarily a Council of Elders which is made up of all different tribal, clan and Torres Strait Islander groups.

"It's major function here is as a HACC – Home Aged Community Care – organisation, and it has a number of services that it provides under the HACC program.

"Now the Elders are directly, through the constitution, involved with every activity that happens

here at Gumba Gumba.

"The Cairns Community Justice Group has its own group of Elders and we have a Murri Court.

"We developed the Indigenous Elders visitation program, out of a number of recommendations from the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody.

"In addition to that we're also funded to run a transport service for loved ones and friends to visit inmates at the Correctional Centre.

"Through our Men's Program we also provide counselling and training modules we deliver here to people who are referred to us.

"And we have very close ties with ATSILS, as well as with the Prosecution Service to such an extent that our Justice Group is one of the very few in the state who meet pre-Court.

"Gumba Gumba works in

other areas here as well, apart from our Men's and Women's groups we have what we call 'specialist elders', and they come in and out of the two groups and enter at various times into some of our training programs.

"Today, for example, we have a cultural therapy program with participants learning basic welding techniques, mixing old culture and customary practices with modern materials and equipment (pictured).

"We attempt to get a reasonable gender mix, the majority of our offenders are male but the majority of our elders are female so we are actively looking at attracting more male elders in particular.

"We have grannies and grandad's retreats where we take the kids camping and we also take people away to a property we





Pictured above: Bob Colless (left) with cultural therapy program participants, staff and elders teaching and 'learning basic welding techniques, mixing old culture with modern materials and equipment'.

have up north.

"We also have a youth group which we've had for 10 - 11 years. "It's an after-school care group and ours is different to any other after-school care group we've been told.

"And I guess that's typical of Gumba Gumba – our group not only provides a safe supervised after-school activity but it is geared towards providing information about culture. "We want the kids to be proud of who they are and their history.

"Overall we attempt

to bring in aspects of traditional values in today's society and it's quite interesting at times. "I find the Court processes very interesting, not always effective with our people but I strongly support the system that we have and we will continue to actively work with ATSILS.

"I've been working in Indigenous affairs since 1982 and I generally have moments that I thoroughly enjoy it although I find my trade was more simple and straightforward.

"But I will continue to do my

best for my people which includes all Indigenous people of this Far North region for the next couple of years until I retire.

"I've been married for 34 years, I'm a very proud husband, and also a very proud grandfather of five grandsons - it appears I had all the daughters – four of them – and my daughters are having all the sons.

"That's it in a nutshell."





ATSIQS Qld Governance

Our Board is comprised of nine Directors elected from our Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander membership.

A specialist Director is also appointed to provide additional guidance in the areas of finance and corporate governance.

Our operational management team is comprised of the Chief Executive Officer, Principal Legal Officer and Finance Manager who look to the Board of Directors for policy decisions, advice and guidance.

Management is further assisted by a team of regional office managers.

We are a non-profit, community-based organisation contracted by the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department (AGD) to provide criminal, civil and family law services to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Australians and their families in Queensland.

We are also funded by the AGD to provide services in the following areas:

- Law Reform, Community Legal Education and Deaths in Custody Monitoring (LJAD); and,
- Prevention, Diversion & Rehabilitation (PDRR).

ATSIQS Qld Law Reform Officer Rory Downey (pictured opposite) is funded to investigate Deaths in Custody and employed to handle complaints against Police. In his previous employment he monitored the responses of the Queensland government to implementing the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Lives can be saved when the true cause of just one unnecessary death is found and recommended changes to avoid future deaths are made, he writes.

The coronial system is distinctive in Australian legal practice with investigations and inquests asking series of questions around events, rather than having two sides working against each other to prove or disprove a particular theory.

Coroners are expected to find the truth behind a death, including its underlying causes.

There is no doubt that coroners perform a valuable and vital task; giving certainty and re-assurance to bereaved people, and meeting the public interest by determining the facts of deaths which are reported to them.

The Office of Coroner is an ancient one, stemming back in English history to as early as the Year 800 AD; investigating deaths and working as a tax gathering office for the King. It also appears to have had role in the prevention of death from very early times with coroners making recommendations over the years on public safety.

The current coronial system in Queensland commenced operation on 1 December 2003 following the enactment of the Coroners Act 2003 (Qld).

Coroners in Queensland conduct approximately 300 inquests each year.

At the conclusion of an inquest, a coroner is able to make recommendations, directed to relevant persons or entities (commonly government agencies), that certain action be taken with a view to preventing a recurrence of the circumstances that led to the fatal incident.

Best practice models of inquests focus on the



Law reform looking to save lives

goals of truth, fairness, accountability, healing and prevention; and coronial recommendations play an important role in producing long-term solutions to any systemic problems at the heart of the death.

However, many families who have lost loved ones experience the coronial process and its aftermath as traumatic, mystifying, frustrating and disempowering.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families need legal representation and other support that is culturally competent in order to be able to exercise their human rights.

That is their rights to fully participate in the inquest – yet legal assistance is often not affordable, and appropriate support is not always available.

Inquests present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities with a special experience of disadvantage.

These families and communities are often people who are experiencing a devastating situation, only to have to then deal with agencies and procedures unknown to them and from which they often feel totally excluded.

Often they are searching for answers to the death of a loved one during their grieving processes, and they are often dependent upon an inquest to help them find answers, to explain why the death occurred, and to assist them to move on with their lives.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to and understanding of death are distinctive. The customs and wishes of Aboriginal and



Torres Strait Islander people are sometimes not fully appreciated by the officials with whom they must deal.

Effective and culturally competent legal representation can identify issues of special concern, suggest lines of investigation, provide a focus for the inquest, identify similar cases and suggest practical recommendations.

ATSILS Qld is skilled in, and committed to providing caring, compassionate and effective legal support for distraught Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities who are dealing with an unexpected death.

Our organisation can provide this support which can also help to permanently improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.



Need a hand with a matter of law?

Let one of the two Fionas help you to sort it!

Fiona Campbell and Fiona Vaughan are solicitors employed by ATSILS under the Commonwealth Government's Law and Justice Advocacy Development Program.

Fiona Campbell works from the Cairns office, covering from the middle of Queensland to the north.

Fiona Vaughan works from the Brisbane office, covering southern Queensland up to the middle of Queensland.

Their work in law reform includes looking at how laws and Government policies affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples sometimes leading to written submissions to Government to try to change or shape laws and policies so they work better.

Submissions written on a number of areas of law and policy, include:

- human rights;
- future policy development effecting those who are mentally ill and charged with criminal offences; and,
- the high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system; etc.

Community Legal Education work is designed to meet the information needs of the many communities we work with, and communities themselves ask our staff to meet with people to present and provide information on a certain area of law, or peoples' legal rights.

Focus to date has been on remote and rural areas where there is not a lot of legal information or legal services. Information can also be sent out to people or provided over the telephone.

Education and information on the law has also been provided to senior school students.

If you need information on any area of law or want to talk with our staff about them meeting with you and others to present information, please call 1800 012 255 (Free Call) to talk with either one of the Fionas, according to where you are.



Fiona Campbell





Fiona Vaughan

Areas we can provide information on include:

- Debt matters, where people have got into trouble because they cannot make the repayments, or because they know that they will not be able to make payments when they are due;
- Contract matters, where someone is not doing what the contract says, or the contract for some reason does not seem fair (e.g., there is a large interest rate or penalty rate for not complying, or the contract was not explained to the person before they entered it, or the contract affects more people than just the person who entered it and that person did not agree to it);
- Loan agreements, including for mobile phones, houses, cars, furniture and other items;
- Lease agreements, including for houses;
- Discrimination based on race, age, gender, sexuality, family responsibilities, religion, impairment (mental or physical disability);
- Wills;
- Finance matters, including those where guardians are involved or the Public Trustee;
- Family law matters, including:
 - where parents have or are going to separate;
 - divorce;
 - where decisions need to be made about where a child or children will live;
 - where a decision needs to be made about how property will be split;
 - child support issues;
- Domestic Violence Orders;
- Alcohol restriction laws;
- Police powers, including:
 - to question;
 - to search people, vehicles, houses and public spaces;
 - to move people on; and
 - to arrest.
- Mental Health matters including the Mental Health Review Tribunal and Mental Health Court;
- Complaints about the Government, or its officers and the way they treat people, or specific decisions made by them that affect people (e.g., decisions by a Government Department such as Centrelink, regarding payments);
- Complaints against the Police, such as the way they treat people;
- Child Protection matters;
- Employment matters – unfair dismissal etc;
- Vehicle forfeiture; and,
- Restricted license applications.



Our Vision

Leaders in the delivery of innovative, professional and culturally proficient legal services for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people.

Our Mission

Fostering collaborative partnerships with our communities, key government and non-government stakeholders to influence positive change and deliver innovative, professional and culturally proficient legal services for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people within, or exposed to the justice system.

Our Values

The traditional values of Care, Share and Respect form the foundation for our organisation and underpin our commitment to providing quality legal services.

- We **care** for the safety and psychological well-being of our clients, their families and communities.
- We **share** a common understanding of our clients' needs and challenges and strive to diligently deliver quality legal services
- We **respect** the cultural diversity, values and beliefs of our clients and deliver confidential, professional, culturally proficient and community sensitive legal services to our clients

Our Strategic Goals

ATSILS will contribute to the achievement of outcomes across five strategic goals:

- Quality Legal Services;
- Strong Leadership & Governance
- Highly Skilled & Culturally Proficient Staff
- Strong & Productive Partnerships; and,
- Continuous Improvement & Innovative Thinking.

Our Key Areas of Service Delivery

- Criminal Law representation & advice
- Family Law representation & advice
- Civil Law representation & advice
- Prison-based advice & referral assistance in legal and sentence management areas
- Deaths in Custody monitoring and Coroner's Inquest representation
- 24-hour assistance at police stations, etc



Working for Cairns and the far north



Cairns Regional Office Manager Michael McElhinney (Mike) hails from Mareeba and says he has seen many improvements over his years, even though many challenges remain.

His family go back many generations in the far north, and, he says, they even have a street named after them (a very short one, he says!).

One of his strongest memories is growing up playing in the yard with the Wason family, who lived next door. That, and that his parents were active workers for charity all their lives.

Local Justice Group Elder, Rhonda Dooley recalls his mother's charity fashion parades at his home as "deadly".

As a teenager at Saint Augustine's College in Cairns Mike said he witnessed a lot of bullying and formed what became a lifelong ambition to assist those who are weaker against bullies.

This hatred of injustice and bullying was a major influence on his life.

He was involved in a great many things at school, being a champion debater, Prefect and Dux of the College.

The school had a large number of Aboriginal and Islander boys. One of his favourite memories is travelling to Port Moresby for the holidays.

Later he went on to gain his Articles of Clerkship with MacDonnell's Solicitors, where he stayed for four years.

During those years Mike played Rugby League in both Cairns and Mareeba and his claim to fame was one game for Cairns (Under 19) and one A-grade game.

As he tells it, he would have gone on to greater heights, except from there he went south where he spent some years on the Sunshine Coast finishing his articles with Butler McDermott and Egan in Nambour.

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**Cairns Regional
Office Staff:
Standing (L-R):
Field Officers
Elise Deemal &
Selina Allen with
Administration Staff
Kylie Ross,
Kim Caelli (seated left)
& Monica Sabatino
(seated right).**

...From previous page

Mike was admitted as a Solicitor in September 1981. After some somewhat more adventurous years, Mike finally met his match and settled down with his wife of thirty years, Sue.

Sue and Mike continued to travel, working in Mt Isa, Atherton, and Sue's home town of Darwin, where Mike worked in the Northern Territory's Department of Law.

He developed a reputation as a "trouble-shooter" and was involved in the negotiations between the Government and the people of Milingimbi in the acquisition of the "Milingimbi Collection", a highly significant collection of anthropological research, bark paintings and artefacts that studied in detail the history of that part of east Arnhem Land.

One of his proudest moments was signing the government approval for the \$15M development, by the Gagadju people, of the famous "Crocodile Hotel" in Jabiru whilst

acting-Chair of the Jabiru Town Development Authority.

The design of the hotel won an award for the architect, and employed a great number of local youth trainees.

On return to Cairns Mike advertised himself as "That Lawyer Bloke" and developed a strong relationship with the people of Yarrabah.

He was offered a contract by Tharpuntoo Legal Service (TLS), to travel up one week a month to attend the Cape York Magistrates Court Circuit, and became hooked on the challenges, the country and the people.

He now has the responsibility for a region stretching from Innisfail to Weipa, east to Lockhart River and west to Pormpuraaw.

He has developed many friendships in the region, and over the years has taken on the "bully-man" without fear or favour.

Mike believes in fair and equitable access to the Justice system, no matter the race, the social standing, or the remoteness of the home of the client, and he has fought tooth and nail for those ideals for Far Northern Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for over ten years.

