



RAILS

Refugee and Immigration
Legal Service

2024-25

Annual Report

Refugee and Immigration Legal Service

Welcome

The Refugee and Immigration Legal Service (RAILS) is a Community Legal Centre (CLC) founded in 1980. For 45 years, RAILS has provided free legal assistance and education in immigration and refugee law. RAILS is the only specialist CLC in Queensland for this area of law and provides services throughout the State.

RAILS works with people who have experienced family violence; with people who have applied or need to apply for refugee visas in Australia after fleeing violence in their home countries; and with refugees in Australia hoping to reunite with their closest family members, often displaced and fleeing situations of danger, in Australia.

RAILS is a member of Community Legal Centres Australia and is registered as a Charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for Profit Commission.

RAILS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia, particularly the peoples on whose land we live and work and their continuing connection to land, waterways and community. We pay our respect to them and to Elders, past, present and emerging.



RAILS

Refugee and Immigration
Legal Service

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Message from the President

Abdul Jarrah, RAILS' President

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to RAILS' leadership, staff, and volunteers for their unwavering commitment to our organisation's mission. Their steadfast dedication is instrumental in providing legal assistance, education, and advocacy, empowering refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants who are especially vulnerable.

It is also important to recognise and thank our partners and the law firms that generously provide pro bono support. Their ongoing contribution of high-quality services not only strengthens our organisation but also has a meaningful and positive impact on the lives of our clients.

Additionally, I am grateful to the members of the Management Committee for their selfless contribution of time and expertise. Their guidance and support continue to help steer RAILS as we strive to fulfil our mission.

Year in Review: Key Achievements

Our team experienced another demanding and fruitful year, marked by several significant milestones. In the following sections, I wish to highlight some of the key achievements and moments that defined our progress and impact over the past year.

Strategic Planning

Between December 2024 and May 2025, a new Strategic Plan was developed for the organisation after workshopping and consultation with staff and the Management Committee and engagement with outside stakeholders. The new Strategic Plan was approved by the Management Committee on 6 May 2025. It is available on RAILS' website and will play a vital role in directing our work in the coming years.

Visit by the Commonwealth Attorney-General

The then Commonwealth Attorney-General, the Honourable Mark Dreyfus KC MP, visited staff at our Brisbane office on 14 February 2025. The Attorney-General was accompanied by then Labor Candidate (now Member) for our local seat of Griffith, Ms

Renee Coffey MP.

At that meeting (and separate meetings between RAILS's staff and the Assistant Secretary, Legal Assistance Branch, of the Attorney-General's Department), RAILS' Staff outlined:

- how the injection of Protection visa backlog funding had allowed us to build a robust and resilient programme that could respond to ongoing demand from very vulnerable and disadvantaged clients who would otherwise face significant barriers to accessing the Tribunal or courts;
- why a discontinuation of this funding would have a drastic impact on our clients and their ability to access and utilise the Protection Visa merits appeal and judicial review processes; and
- while the projected increase in our core funding under the new National Access to Justice Partnership 2025-2030 is very welcome, it will not be sufficient to off-set the discontinuation of our Protection Visa backlog funding (without significantly cutting into our other core programmes).

RAILS continues to lobby for further funding to continue this vital part of our work.

Refugee Week

Elijah Buol OAM, then member of our Management Committee, joined our staff and other members of the Management Committee on 20 June 2025 to celebrate Refugee Week and to share his powerful journey from arriving in Australia as an unaccompanied minor refugee from South Sudan to becoming a passionate advocate for social justice and youth empowerment. Following Elijah's talk, members of the Management Committee and Staff enjoyed a shared lunch filled with dishes from across the globe, prepared by our team. It was a timely reminder of the rich cultural diversity that strengthens our work and community at RAILS.

Message from the President

Abdul Jarrah, RAILS' President

Two Significant Achievements to end the Year

We ended Financial Year 2024/2025 with two significant achievements:

First, we achieved our re-accreditation for 3 years. On 9 May 2025, RAILS staff and members of the Management Committee participated in a re-accreditation process with a representative from Community Legal Centres Queensland. The re-accreditation, which is an ongoing requirement of our core funding, is an important opportunity for us to take stock of our policies and work practices and make improvements, if required. In a testament to the hard work of staff and Committee members over many years, RAILS received a strong report and was duly re-accredited for another three years.

Second, we secured our core funding for 5 years. On 3 June 2025 RAILS and the Queensland Department of Justice executed a new service agreement guaranteeing a continuation of RAILS core funding for five years under the new Commonwealth-States National Access to Justice Partnership 2025-2030. The new funding ensures much needed funding for our services in areas such as our domestic violence work as well as the further uplifting of staff wages and conditions.

Management Committee Membership Changes and Appointment of a New CEO

As we look ahead to the 2025/2026 year, RAILS is preparing for another period of significant activity and growth. There has been a notable change in the composition of our Management Committee, with several valued members departing. We deeply appreciate the dedication, knowledge, and effort each departing member has contributed over the years. Their work has been instrumental in shaping RAILS into the strong and resilient organisation it is today.

Simultaneously, we are pleased to welcome new faces to the Management Committee. The addition of these members brings fresh perspectives and innovative approaches that will help to strengthen

our strategy and governance. We are confident that their contributions will support the ongoing growth and adaptability of RAILS, ensuring we continue to meet the needs of our community effectively.

This year has also brought significant change at the executive level. Angus Francis, who has been closely involved with RAILS in various capacities—including as a staff member, advisor, pro-bono partner, Management Committee member, and most recently as CEO—has relocated overseas and, as a result, has resigned from his role. Angus' longstanding association with RAILS has left a lasting impact, and while we are sad to see him go, we take comfort in knowing he will remain a friend and trusted advisor to the organisation.

Following a comprehensive search process, the Management Committee interviewed several candidates to find a successor for Angus. We are delighted to announce the return of Malathi (Mal) Kanagasabapathy as our CEO. In addition, we celebrate the appointment of Ben Carrick, one of our own, as Principal Solicitor. These appointments mark an exciting new chapter for RAILS, reinforcing our commitment to strong leadership and expert legal service delivery.

I look forward to formally acknowledging the invaluable contributions of our departing members and extending a warm welcome to our new team members at the upcoming Annual General Meeting.

Final Reflections

It has been a distinct privilege and honour to serve both our dedicated staff and the wider community in my capacity as President. I am deeply grateful for the trust and support extended to me throughout the past year. With the continued approval of our membership, I am committed to serving another year as President of RAILS. I look forward to working alongside our talented team and newly appointed leaders as we embrace the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead, ensuring that RAILS continues to deliver vital legal services and advocate for those most in need.

Our Purpose

RAILS provides legal assistance, advocacy and education to seek due process and just outcomes that ensure dignity and respect for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in situations of vulnerability who are seeking safety and settlement in Australia

In the financial year 2024-25 RAILS...

Assisted people in **all local government areas of Queensland**



Represented 837 clients

Provided **legal advice** on 2,831 occasions and completed 1,976 **pieces of discrete legal work**



Referred people to appropriate support and legal services on 2,226 occasions

Worked across 11 **outreach locations** throughout Queensland



Provided 40 **community legal education sessions** to 687 participants

This was only possible thanks to our team...

63
staff
members



115
volunteers

Who were our clients?

In 2024-25, we helped **2,394** people.

They faced multiple barriers to accessing justice:

80% did not speak English as a first language.

88% were **financially disadvantaged** and **23%** had **no income whatsoever**.

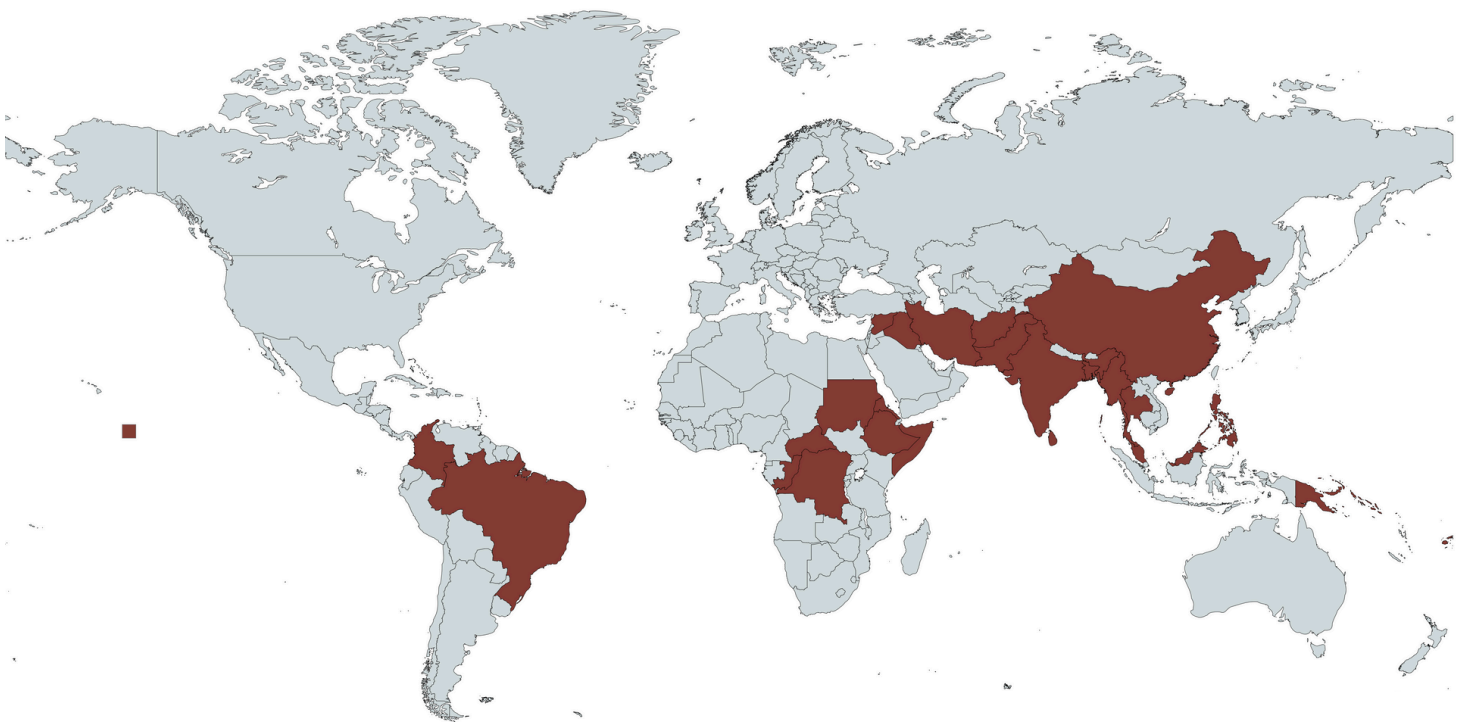
36% disclosed that they had experienced **family violence**. This is **872 people**.

33% were **homeless or at risk of homelessness**. This is **792 people**.

15% had a **disability**. This is **357 people**.

They are diverse: they came from **113 different countries** and **spoke 106 languages**.

2024-25 RAILS' Clients Top 25 countries of origin:



- | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Papua New Guinea | 6. Sri Lanka | 11. Colombia | 16. Central African Republic | 21. Brazil |
| 2. Afghanistan | 7. DR. of Congo | 12. Philippines | 17. Congo | 22. Thailand |
| 3. Iran | 8. India | 13. Pakistan | 18. Syria | 23. Malaysia |
| 4. Myanmar | 9. Bangladesh | 14. China | 19. Fiji | 24. Eritrea |
| 5. Iraq | 10. Ethiopia | 15. Somalia | 20. Solomon Islands | 25. Sudan |

Executive Director's Report

Angus Francis, Executive Director and Principal Solicitor

RAILS is Queensland's only specialist immigration and refugee law community legal centre. It plays a pivotal part in the lives of many refugees, asylum seekers and migrants who are seeking safety and permanency in Australia and who otherwise cannot afford legal advice and representation. RAILS' assistance can mean the difference between a successful outcome for a visa applicant and an unsuccessful one that exposes the failed applicant to return to persecution and other serious harm, long-term separation from family members, or continued domestic violence.

In 2024-2025, RAILS provided expert legal advice and representation to hundreds of clients across a range of core areas: Protection Visa applications at the Department of Home Affairs, Protection Visa appeals to the Administrative Review Tribunal, applications for judicial review to the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, applications for permanent visas for migrant women in Australia experiencing domestic violence, Ministerial intervention requests for boat arriving refugees, responses to visa cancellation risks for humanitarian visa holders, and applications for refugee family reunion.

The values set out in our Strategic Plan guide our work:

- Community-based, accessible, refugee and immigration law expertise - We provide refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in vulnerable situations with specialist legal assistance in refugee and immigration law and policy.
- Fair and just outcomes - We work to achieve fair and just outcomes and address systemic disadvantage in refugee and immigration law and policy for those seeking safety and settlement in Australia.
- Trauma informed and culturally safe - We provide trauma informed and culturally safe legal assistance to ensure the dignity and safety of our clients.
- Collaboration - We work in a collaborative manner with our clients, across legal teams and with external support agencies to deliver better client outcomes.

- Courage - We are resilient and courageous in our work.

The feedback we received from clients as part of our annual client survey in May 2025, detailed later in this report, is testament to the dedication of our staff in realising those values. 100% of clients surveyed said that RAILS staff listened to their problem in a friendly and respectful manner. RAILS' extensive work alongside communities in Queensland to engage in community and legal education informs our values and enriches our work culture.

RAILS is fortunate to work closely with other organisations that share our values. The Immigration

Women's Support Service continues to provide critical support to our mutual clients who have experienced domestic violence. Multicultural Australia, SSI and other settlement services provide both practical and strategic reach for our refugee family reunion practice. As the legal arm of the ASRA consortium, RAILS is part of a wholistic suite of services designed to assist those boat arriving refugees who have been subject to the harsh vagaries of Australia's border policy over many years.

In another very successful collaboration this year, RAILS and the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) launched a joint project to further develop a trauma-informed practice at RAILS, giving staff additional tools to engage with clients who have survived traumatic situations while maintaining their own resilience and well-being. QPASTT and other stakeholders also provided important input into the formulation of our new Strategic Plan at the start of this year. RAILS continues to utilise its network of interstate counterparts (RefugeeLegal, Refugee Advice and Casework Service, Tasmanian Refugee Legal Service and others) to lobby for law reform and to respond to new law and policy changes in a co-ordinated and effective way nationally.

Executive Director's Report

Angus Francis, Executive Director and Principal Solicitor

Our pro bono legal partners remain instrumental to RAILS meeting the huge demand for our services, as well as assisting us with the organisation's routine legal work in areas such as leasing and human resources. Their assistance covers all areas of our practice: from taking statements from clients setting out claims to protection, to assisting with refugee family reunion applications, to advising women on temporary visas of their visa options. Our long-standing law student clinic partners at the University of Queensland and Griffith Law School provide us with much needed financial support as well as smart and enthusiastic young lawyers in training – many of whom go on to become paralegals and caseworkers at RAILS.

We acknowledge in this report the critical importance of our funders: the Commonwealth and State governments for our core funding; the Department of Home Affairs for funding much of our protection visa and refugee family reunion work at the departmental level; the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department for directing much needed funding for our appeal work before the Tribunal and courts; Legal Aid Queensland for funding the work we do with IWSS in our domestic violence practice; and the private organisations and individuals whose generous financial contributions to RAILS allow us to extend our representation of clients from humanitarian backgrounds seeking to reunite with their families from overseas.

We are grateful to the then Commonwealth Attorney-General, the Honourable Mark Dreyfus KC, for attending our office in Brisbane in February this year to hear firsthand how the additional protection visa funding had contributed greatly to our representation work before the Tribunal and Courts. We are hopeful that further protection visa funding will allow us to continue our representation of protection visa applicants before the Department of Home Affairs and on appeal. As with most clients we represent, protection visa applicants – many of whom are impecunious and therefore unable to pay for legal representation, cannot speak English, and have no understanding of legal processes – are especially vulnerable to a negative decision if not properly represented.

The injection of further Commonwealth and State funding to enhance work conditions at community legal centres has allowed us to put in place more sustainable structures and work practices and to provide staff with additional professional development and training opportunities. The latter both extends staff expertise in our areas of work as well as their connections with interstate colleagues, linking them in with communities of practice nationally.

In June 2025, RAILS entered a new agreement securing core funding under the National Access to Justice Partnership 2025-30 for the next five years.

Much goes on to ensure that RAILS can provide ongoing professional legal services to our clients. The vital, frontline work of our intake team, staff and volunteer recruitment and induction, the implementation of legal professional practices and policies, funding reports and acquittals, financial reporting and accountability, satisfaction of legal and governance requirements under our incorporating legislation and ACNC rules, cross-checks with other CLCs to ensure compliance with legal practice requirements. All of these and more go into ensuring that RAILS keeps on delivering for its clients year after year. In May 2025, RAILS successfully obtained re-accreditation as an accredited community legal service, demonstrating that RAILS has in place sophisticated governance policies, procedures and practices.

Lastly, sincere thanks to our many volunteers who are listed later in this report. The RAILS organisation is overseen by a dedicated, volunteer Management Committee comprising busy professionals who give up much of their own time. Many thanks to the office holders Abdul Jarrah, the President, Kelly Morrow, the Secretary, and Kate McKeon, the Treasurer, for all their hard work, and to other members of the Committee who have contributed greatly to our governance this year: Elijah Buol and Gayan Mendis on the Financial Sub-committee, Alexis Wallace with senior staff recruitment. Their unfailing support is deeply appreciated.

National Legal Assistance Partnership

The National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP) funding is an agreement between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories to provide funding for the delivery of legal services to disadvantaged people.

For the past 5 years, RAILS' core services and visa cancellations practice have been funded by NLAP. In addition to this funding, during the 2024-25 financial year, RAILS received further funds to provide legal assistance to those having their protection visa decisions reviewed by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and the Courts; as well as funding to uplift the salary and conditions of our staff.

NLAP remained our most significant funding source.

Demand for our legal services was very high. Constant difficult triaging decisions and long waitlists added pressure to RAILS' staff in both our intake and legal teams and created long waits for clients in need of critical legal advice and assistance. We provided 160% of our overall NLAP deliverables.

Our core funding under the NLAP agreement allows RAILS to focus on the most critical immigration legal needs in the Queensland community which cannot be otherwise met. One of our core areas is the provision of legal assistance and representation to women experiencing family violence and to refugees seeking to reunite with their families, who are often displaced and living in danger. We also advised people in compelling circumstances outside of these areas. These compelling matters included people with disability or chronic illness needing advice on whether they met the criteria to apply for a permanent visa, so they could access supports such as NDIS funding.

Our work in the cancellations area aims to ensure that the visas of our refugee clients are not cancelled, ensuring that they and their families are able to remain in safety in Australia. We help our clients reduce the risk that the Department may consider cancelling their visa by ensuring they can comply with their obligations to provide correct information and notify the Department of changes in their circumstances. In cases in which the

Department is considering a cancellation or has already cancelled a visa, we also advocate for immigration authorities to not proceed or revoke the decision to cancel the visa. This work has a profound impact on clients' lives, as the cancellation of their visa leaves them and their dependent family members in a precarious position, uncertain for their future in Australia, the country where they have re-established their lives. We have met demand in referrals for this service.

Through NLAP funding, we also provided our evening advice sessions (EAS), where volunteer migration agents and lawyers provide legal advice on issues not covered by our core practice. We advised New Zealand citizens experiencing multiple vulnerabilities on applying for Australian citizenship; people seeking asylum on how to obtain work rights; women experiencing domestic violence who needed to know if separating from their partner would affect their permanent visa status, and people with chronic illnesses or disabilities who needed advice on their visa options. We deeply appreciate the time and commitment of our EAS volunteers. Without their generous support, RAILS would not be able to assist people facing these compelling issues.

After the beginning of the financial year, the State and Commonwealth announced the grant of additional funds for the uplift of staff conditions. RAILS invested these much needed and welcomed funds in strategies such as a seconded role to embed trauma-informed practice at RAILS, additional professional development, and supporting the implementation of an organisational re-structure to enhance employee conditions, role sustainability, and career progression.

The 2024-25 financial year was the last of the 5-year NLAP agreement. RAILS was grateful that, in Queensland, the process to re-allocate funds for the new cycle provided certainty and did not put unnecessary pressure on organisations. **We are very pleased to have seen our core funding continued under the new NAJP, which commenced in July 2025.**

National Legal Assistance Partnership

The story of Mere*, one of the people who we helped this year

Mere was 24 years old and lived in Fiji, where she was from. Her family had organised for her to marry Peter, the son of a family friend, who lived in Australia. Peter used to visit Mere in Fiji for them to spend time together and get to know each other. During those visits, Peter was verbally and emotionally abusive, but Mere did not say anything about this to her family, as she felt pressure to have a successful marriage. They celebrated their wedding in late 2023.

Peter wanted Mere to live in Australia with him, so they applied for a temporary partner visa (subclass 309), with him being the sponsor of her visa. Once she relocated to Australia, the abuse from her husband and visa sponsor only escalated, to the point that Mere started to be fearful for her life. However, she was worried that she would lose her visa if she left the relationship.

When Mere first contacted RAILS, we advised her about her right to continue the partner visa application after separation due to her experience of family violence. We also connected her with family violence services to assist her with emergency planning and safe housing. A few weeks later, Mere left the abusive relationship and moved into a women’s refuge.

We assisted her with the substantive work to notify the Department of Home Affairs about the separation, provide evidence of the genuineness of the relationship and the experience of family violence and assisted her to respond to a request from further information from the Department. Mere was granted a permanent protection visa 6 months after we started assisting her.

*Details have been changed to protect the client's privacy

In 2024-25, RAILS helped 942 people through NLAP funding. Our team...



Client Survey Results

In May 2025, we carried out an annual NLAP client survey with the assistance of volunteers, who phoned clients to read out the survey questions to them, often with interpreters. This method ensured the survey was accessible to our clients.

'Very good service, legal staff were very respectful.'

'RAILS helps people who are lost with where to go, we are very happy for RAILS and they should continue to do the job they are doing. Thank You.'

'I deeply appreciate RAILS for helping when I had no other support or contact- it would've otherwise been difficult to survive. I hope RAILS continues to support me and my children'.

'RAILS has been really helpful, we are standing on our own two feet now and able to move forward'.

'Many people applied to immigration and it's a disturbing process. When I contacted RAILS, they were patient and they made sure to listen, they worked hard on my case'.

'RAILS gave all their time to me. The best 100%'

100%

of clients said that RAILS staff listened to their problem in a friendly and respectful manner

96%

of clients said that RAILS helped them understand how to deal with their legal problem and gave them options

96%

of clients said that information and resources they received from the legal centre staff were very useful

95%

of clients said that they felt confident on the ability of the staff to assist them

95%

of clients said that they would recommend RAILS to other people

92%

of clients said that it was easy to access the legal centre when they first needed help

Community Legal Education

RAILS' Education program responds to need and is developed collaboratively with communities and practitioners, using best practice adult learning principles. It aims to be inclusive, engaging and effective.

Professional Development

Our long-running program of Continuing Professional Development webinars seeks to build the capacity of the legal and migration agent professions to assist refugees and people seeking asylum. It has national reach, and webinars are recorded for viewing-on-demand. Topics covered this year included Offshore Humanitarian Visas and the Community Support Program, Judicial Review of Migration Decisions, Merits Review of Protection Visa and Citizenship Decisions, Refugee Law, Credibility Assessments in Protection Visa Decisions and the Family Violence Provisions in the Migration Act.

Additional sessions were provided to RAILS' staff and volunteers on topics that included: the role of the lawyer in capacity assessments (with thanks to Stafford Shepherd and the QLS Ethics and Practice Centre), cross-cultural communication, RAILS' conflict of interest policy and procedures and issues encountered at Evening Advice Service.

Community Legal Education

RAILS presented legal education sessions to various refugee-background communities on topics that included Australian citizenship, the history of refugees in Australia and refugee family reunion. We developed a series of Help-Kits for people applying for citizenship and produced factsheets on citizenship, visa cancellations, visa pathways for Ukrainian nationals, humanitarian visas, permanent residents and family violence, bridging

visas and work rights, family violence and temporary visas, the Administrative Review Tribunal, Workplace Justice visas, visa pathways for Palestinians, Resolution of Status visas, setting up multi-factor identification (MFA) on ImmiAccounts and issues to be aware of when obtaining immigration advice.

We also updated the Immigration Law chapter of the Queensland Law Handbook, published online by Caxton Legal Centre.

Community Education and Community Engagement

The 'Family Peace-Building' collaboration with Multicultural Australia, South Community Hub and community leaders has continued to grow. With cultural support workers, we co-designed key resources for use in settlement work, worked with community leaders building their capacity to be family peace-builders, held 'Good Life Learning' programs integrating family violence awareness into language learning for TAFE adult English language learners and teachers, and informed refugee community leaders about new 'Coercive control' laws. In addition, we partnered with Inala Community House to create 'Community Healing and Accountability', a new program which supports natural helpers in community groups to promote healing for survivors and accountability for those using violence.

Our innovative 'Law Rap' project working with young artists at African Village in Moorooka was completed. We created eight compelling music videos for social media about human rights and ways to resist racism. This was a collaboration with the Queensland African Communities Council and Queensland Human Rights Commission, supported by Legal Aid Queensland's CLE Collaboration fund.

RAILS Education in numbers:

576	687	13
people attended	people attended	education resources:
22	40	9 factsheets
community education activities	community legal education	2 DFV guides
	sessions and workshops	Law Chapter for Caxton's
We produced 9 videos with local	425	Law Handbook
artists and professionals for Law	people attended	Interpreters Chapter for
Rap	11	Thomson Reuters' Lawyers'
	professional development	Practice Manual
	sessions	

Permanent Protection

The much anticipated and much needed funding for legal assistance for people applying for permanent onshore protection was received just before the beginning of the 2024-25 financial year. Thanks to this significant injection of funds from the Commonwealth Government, RAILS was able to build on its protection practice covering the Department, Tribunal and judicial review stages of the protection visa application process

The number of people who RAILS assisted with their protection visa matter this year is three times the number we were able to assist in the previous financial year. We have doubled the advice sessions given and tripled the number of legal tasks provided. We have provided full representation and finalised 64 cases for clients and their families and additionally opened another 168 files.

We provide legal advice about the visa application process and additional legal assistance and representation to those who we assess as having reasonable prospects of being successful in their application for refugee status. The type of assistance we provide to people seeking asylum depends on their circumstances and claims, as well as our resources. RAILS also advises people who have already applied for a protection visa and we assist them through different processing stages, including review at the Administrative Review Tribunal and judicial review.

Our Tribunal and Court protection practice had outstanding rates of success, with a 95% success rate at the Tribunal level and three court matters conceded by the Minister accepting that there had been a jurisdictional error. These matters were remitted back to the Tribunal for further assessment, where RAILS continued to provide legal assistance.

Our clients are men, women and children who have arrived in Australia on a valid visa and fear being persecuted if they return to their home country. They often face language barriers, lack of systems knowledge, lack of access to technology, mental and physical health conditions, and other barriers to navigating the visa application process on their own.

The majority of the people who we assisted through this practice were from Papua New Guinea (40%) - the vast majority of whom were women fleeing severe domestic violence in their home country. We also saw nationals of 79 other countries fleeing harrowing conflict and persecution from around the world. **RAILS assisted people from Ukraine, Russia and Israel and provided**

ongoing legal assistance to Palestinians living in Queensland, all of whom have now been granted Temporary Humanitarian Visas allowing them and their families to live safely in Queensland for the next three years.

Unfortunately, a continuation of the further funds that allowed RAILS to provide lifesaving legal help to all of these men, women and children, has not yet been confirmed. There has been no further commitment from the Government in providing ongoing funding for RAILS and other specialist refugee legal centres to continue to provide comprehensive, life changing protection visa legal assistance to some of the most vulnerable people living in Australia. **RAILS continues to advocate for ongoing funding for this work to ensure Australia upholds its international commitment to not return people at risk of persecution to their home countries.**

Case study: the story of G

In 2025, RAILS represented a young girl from Papua New Guinea, G, whose mother had recently died and was in the sole care of her elderly grandfather who had a deteriorating health condition. G's grandfather asked G's Auntie S, who is an Australian permanent resident, to take G into her care because as a young girl without family support and protection, her safety and wellbeing would be at risk in Papua New Guinea.

S organised for G to travel to Australia on a Visitor visa and subsequently applied for protection for G. G's protection visa application was referred to RAILS by the Department of Home Affairs, who S to seek advice from RAILS.

RAILS ensured that S understood the criteria and application process and prepared G and S for an interview with a Department case officer. RAILS provided all of the relevant information to the Department so they could make a positive decision on the application and ensured that the interview and application process was conducted in a sensitive way, upholding the best of interest of G as a child. At one point during the interview, RAILS asked for G to be removed from the room, so that S could provide meaningful evidence about her own experiences of harm in PNG as a young girl. This evidence supported G's claims and helped the Department in making a decision. . RAILS also provided country information on the risk of serious harm to G if returned. G was ultimately granted a permanent protection visa.

Continued

Permanent Protection

In 2024-25, RAILS assisted 635 people seeking asylum to apply for permanent protection. Our team...

...provided

1,123

legal advices

...completed

667

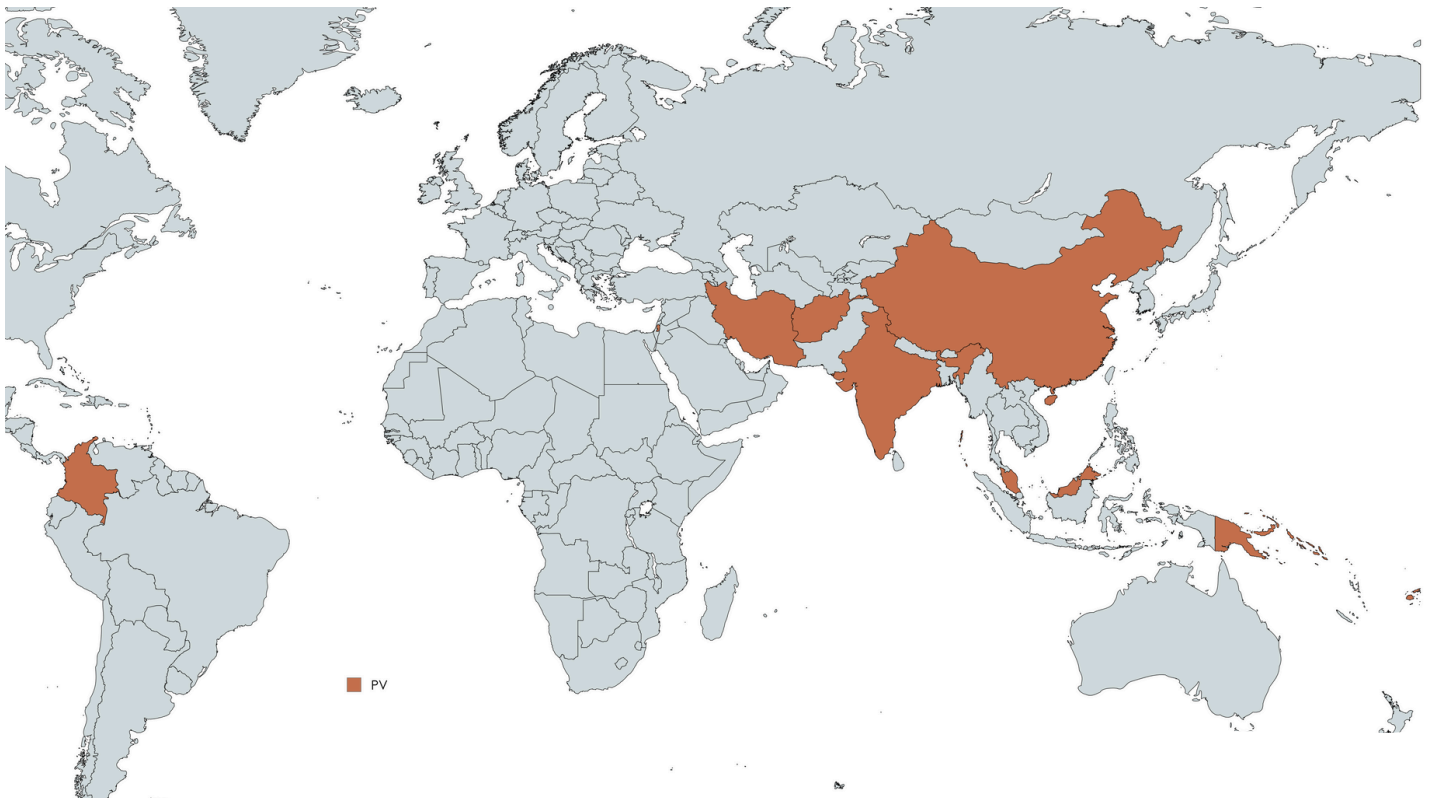
pieces of discrete legal work

...represented

168

people

Top 10 countries of origin of those who RAILS' assisted with permanent protection visas:



1. Papua New Guinea (40%)
2. Colombia (4%)
3. Solomon Islands (4%)
4. Fiji (3%)
5. India (3%)

6. Iran (3%)
7. Afghanistan (3%)
8. China (2%)
9. Malaysia (2%)
10. Palestine (2%)

Family Violence

In 2024-25, we provided 1,580 legal services to 872 people who had experienced family violence. 48% of them were homeless or at risk of homelessness 40% of them had dependent children

The precarious status of migrant women heightens their risk of experiencing ongoing family violence and their vulnerability to facing further legal, social and economic challenges. As the only specialist refugee and immigration legal service in Queensland, working with migrant and refugee victim-survivors of family violence is a core part of RAILS' work and we have provided assistance in this area for decades.

One in four of the people who we assisted in the 2024-25 financial year disclosed that they had experienced family violence. In some cases, this experience was relevant to their immigration journey.

Many of the people who we assist in applying for protection visas have survived harrowing forms of violence from their partners overseas. In many cases, women could face persecution if they were to end abusive relationships to find safety and their countries cannot or are not willing to protect them from the harm, as well as the stigma and the societal exclusion that is linked to this experience of violence or of leaving a relationship. Obtaining refugee status in these circumstances means that women do not have to return to the countries they fled, where they would be at risk of experiencing severe discrimination and further violence.

RAILS also assists women who have experienced family violence from their partners in Australia. This financial year we did so through funding from the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP) and Legal Aid Queensland (LAQ) and through a partnership with Women's Legal Service Queensland (WLSQ). Our work in this area during the financial year has been very extensive and mostly with women who hold or have applied for temporary visas. Depending on the visa type and whether they are the primary applicant/holder or a dependent on someone else's visa, their immigration visa options vary.

The Migration Act has family violence provisions that, if applicable, allow women to remain in Australia even after separating from their visa sponsor or the person whose visa they were dependent on. This year, the Migration Regulations were modified to extend the application of these provisions to people not previously able to benefit from its protection: secondary visa applicants for most permanent skilled and family visa streams, current and former Prospective Marriage visa holders and some partner visa applicants outside Australia. We are proud to have contributed to this positive legislative change, along with other individual and organisational supporters, and very pleased to see it applied in practice during the financial year to some of the clients we helped.

Where women are eligible for these provisions, we assist them with their application, either with full representation (in cases of most vulnerability) or through the provision of discrete, regular assistance. We completed work at both the primary application and the administrative review levels. RAILS received invaluable support in doing this work from our pro bono partner, MinterEllison, whose lawyers prepared substantive pieces of legal work for our clients.

However, and despite its recent expansion, the family violence provisions pathway is not available under all visa types, which means some women on temporary visas who have experienced family violence need to know about other visa options. **RAILS maintained a referral pathway for skilled visa advice from MinterEllison,** who provides skilled visa advice for vulnerable women who have experienced domestic violence and cannot afford legal assistance. MinterEllison also provided training sessions on skilled visa options to RAILS' lawyers. We truly value the immigration expertise and advice that women can receive outside of our core practice areas thanks to the commitment from our valued pro bono partner and their lawyers.

Through the financial year, we continued to hold a weekly outreach clinic at the Immigrant Women's Support Services (IWSS), a specialist service that provides counselling and support to migrant women who have experienced family violence. **The clinic has enabled women who are fleeing family violence to receive legal services in a female only space, often with a support worker present.** In furtherance of our collaborative relationship RAILS also provided training

Family Violence

to IWSS caseworkers on the family violence provisions of the Migration Act and Regulations, so they could assist our lawyers make the best case for our mutual clients.

RAILS' Temporary Visa Pilot Program partnership with WLSQ continued until March 2025. Through the Pilot, women were provided with immigration legal assistance from a RAILS lawyer and legal assistance with domestic and family violence, family separation or divorce, parenting and child safety matters from a WLSQ lawyer. This program made essential legal support more accessible to women who are navigating incredibly challenging situations. RAILS involvement came to an end after 3 years in the partnership, since the pilot shifted into a core program at WLSQ.

RAILS continues to apply our decades of expertise in advocating for the particular vulnerabilities and precarity of migrant women to be considered in law reform, decision making and service development. We are an active member of the CALD Advisory Group, run by the Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety, that advises Queensland Government on issues affecting culturally and linguistically diverse people who have been affected by domestic violence. RAILS is also a member of the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence.

In August 2024, RAILS submitted detailed feedback to the Domestic Violence unit at the Department of Home Affairs as part of their review into the evidentiary requirements of family violence for visa applications. We also made a written submission to the Education, Arts and Communities Committee in relation to the proposed introduction of Police Protection Directions in the Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. RAILS argued that the proposed amendments would have an adverse impact on our migrant people who are experienced domestic violence, due to the risk of being misidentified as the person using violence and the consequential risk of visa cancellation or refusal on character grounds.

Through the year, we have seen that demand from women who have experienced family violence and need immigration assistance remains very high. RAILS thanks our funders and pro bono partners who are committed to help them reach safety.

Case study: the story of Diya

Diya traveled to Australia in July 2024 following the grant of a Temporary Partner visa to live with her sponsoring partner and parents-in-law. Not long after, Diya started experiencing family violence in the form of physical, verbal, emotional, financial and social abuse from her partner and his family. To control Diya, he would frequently threaten to withdraw her visa to send her back to India. Diya was particularly vulnerable as she had only been in Australia for one month and was reliant on her partner's income, who scrutinized every purchase she made. Diya only had \$400 in savings.

Diya was referred to RAILS by a caseworker from the Department of Home Affairs (the Department) Domestic Family Violence Support Service. She was not aware that she could continue her partner's visa application under the family violence provisions after separating from her abusive partner. To do so, she was required to provide detailed information about the relationship and experience of family violence. Due to the complexity and intimate nature of this evidence, it can be very difficult for applicants to meet the Departments' evidentiary requirements. Without assistance from RAILS, it is unlikely that Diya would have become aware of her rights nor that she could have adequately gathered the necessary evidence.

RAILS completed Diya's statutory declaration and requested evidence from her psychologist and social worker, as well as from a respected community member and her General Practitioner. This bolstered her visa application and also helped Diya become aware of her entitlement to subsidized mental health services, which made real improvements to her wellbeing. RAILS also provided legal submissions, which enabled Diya's application to be processed expeditiously and without administrative issues.

After many months of uncertainty and stress about her visa status and ability to stay in Australia, in March 2025, Diya was granted a permanent visa. Diya can now work and live in Australia indefinitely and safely.

**Details have been changed to protect the client's privacy*

Refugee Family Reunion

Refugee Family Reunion services

35 clients represented

13 representation matters finalised

757 legal advices provided

171 pieces of discrete legal work

RAILS' Refugee Family Reunion (RFR) program supports those who have fled their home countries in search of safety, protection and the opportunity to rebuild their lives. For many, this journey involves the painful separation from loved ones, often left behind in dangerous or unstable environments while they navigate the uncertainty of resettling in a safe country.

Once settled in Australia on a permanent visa, many refugees hope to reunite with the family members they were forced to leave behind, often still living in conflict zones or areas lacking basic security and human rights. However, the path to family reunion is fraught with challenges, including social isolation, language barriers, limited access to information, health issues and the complexity of Australia's immigration law. Without adequate support, these obstacles can be overwhelming and prevent refugees from reuniting with family.

Through the RFR program, RAILS provides legal advice, advocacy, and practical assistance to help refugees in Queensland overcome these barriers.

Outreach clinics

RAILS's RFR work is primarily funded by the Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs through the Settlement Transition and Engagement Support (SETS) program. RAILS was pleased with the continuation of our SETS funding from the Commonwealth Government, with 2024-2025 being the first of three years of our renewed contract. SETS funding enables RAILS to deliver advice clinics and legal representation to refugee clients seeking to sponsor immediate family members and orphaned relatives. During the reporting period, **RAILS provided outreach services in partnership with settlement service providers at Woolloongabba, Logan, Goodna, Toowoomba, Cairns and Townsville** with Settlement Services International, Multicultural Australia, Centacare FNQ, CatholicCare and Townsville Multicultural Support Group.

To meet the high demand, RAILS provides additional legal services from its Brisbane office, both in person and via telephone, supported by NLAP funding. Through our core generalist immigration funding under the NLAP agreement, RAILS is able to address the most critical immigration legal needs in the Queensland community which otherwise cannot be met.

RAILS also conducts education sessions for refugee communities to help them understand and navigate the family reunion process for both immediate and extended family members.

RAILS continues to collaborate closely with key stakeholders to expand its reach across Queensland, including into areas such as the Gold Coast, in response to growing demand.

RAILS's Approach to RFR Cases

Refugees can apply through either the Humanitarian Resettlement Program, which is free but highly limited, or the Family Visa Program, which is costly but offers broader appeal options. Under the RFR program, RAILS primarily assists clients seeking to sponsor their immediate family members for reunion under the humanitarian pathway. For clients without financial means, we provide ongoing legal support in high-priority cases, guiding them through every stage of the visa process. This includes comprehensive legal advice on visa options and applications, while ensuring that critical deadlines are met. We also offer targeted assistance to clients sponsoring dependent children or orphan relatives, with close attention to age-related deadlines to ensure applications are lodged before a child turns 18.

Recognising the complex challenges refugees face, RAILS extends its support well beyond legal advice and visa lodgement. Our team assists clients in responding to Department of Home Affairs requests, arranging biometrics and medical appointments, and preparing waiver requests where departmental requirements cannot be fulfilled by the clients.

While demand for RFR support remains high, **RAILS' work continues to be driven by a strong commitment to accessibility, cultural sensitivity and the delivery of assistance with empathy and respect.** Client feedback during the 2024-25 financial year reaffirmed that RAILS' services embody these values.

Refugee Family Reunion

Reuniting Families Initiative (Donations funded)

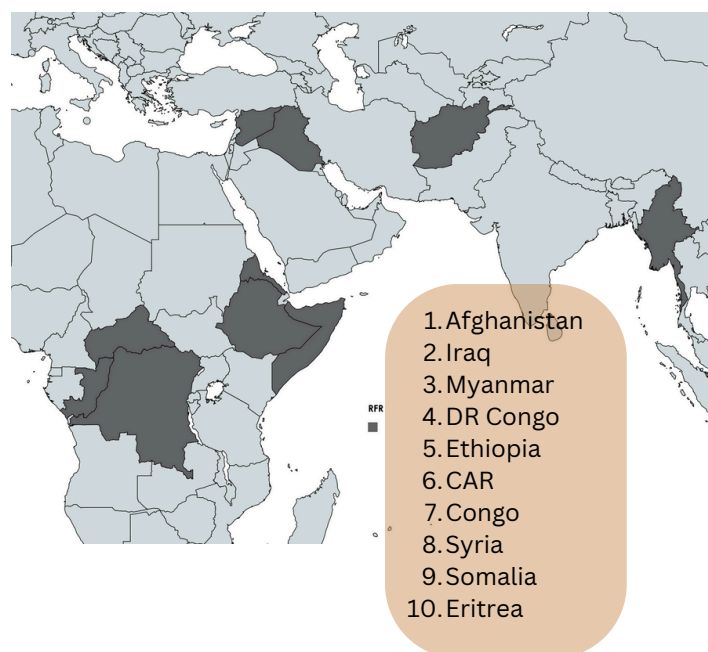
Through the Reuniting Families Initiative, RAILS helped refugees who were initially boat arrivals and have since been granted permanent Resolution of Status (ROS) visas to reunite with their loved ones after years of separation.

Many of these families had endured over a decade apart, with families living in refugee camps or in conditions of persecution and danger. With generous pro bono assistance from law firms Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer (HSF Kramer) and Allens, and donations from Presentation Sisters, Religious of Queensland, and HSF Kramer, we were able to help refugees on ROS visas with partner, child and orphan relative visa applications. RAILS provided comprehensive legal advice, while volunteers from our partner firms assisted in preparing visa applications, forms, statements, supporting evidence, and submissions. RAILS is immensely grateful to our partners and donors for their generosity and commitment to this vital work. In the 2024-2025 financial year, 70 services were provided to this cohort of clients.

Unaccompanied children's reunion with families

RAILS had been assisting unaccompanied minors who were evacuated from Afghanistan without their parents following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan since 2021. **This financial year, the last of those children were successfully reunited with their families, ending years of painful separation.**

Top 10 countries of origin of RAILS' Refugee Family Reunion clients



Legal representation and assistance for groups with distinct legal needs

In partnership with Multicultural Australia, RAILS also provided fee-for-service support to individuals sponsoring family members under the Community Support Program (CSP), which facilitates humanitarian resettlement through private sponsorship. In this reporting period RAILS was able to assist 15 families with CSP processes.

RAILS remains committed to assisting Afghan women judges who are still in hiding due to threats from the Taliban regime. Using self-funded donations, RAILS provides legal support to help these clients seek permanent migration to Australia.

Case study – Family reunited after more than 3 years

Fatima* contacted RAILS in January 2022* after arriving in Australia with two* children on a humanitarian visa. She sought to bring her daughter, who was living in a refugee camp in Indonesia,* to reunite the family. Fatima is illiterate, and her family faced significant challenges, including a lack of identity documents, language barriers, and strict restrictions on movement imposed by the camp director, which made obtaining necessary documentation extremely difficult.

The circumstances were further complicated by the daughter's two pregnancies, requiring consent from different fathers, the need for birth certificates and DNA testing for both babies. RAILS continuously updated the Department of Home Affairs on these changing circumstances to ensure the applications remained accurate and up to date. Alongside these challenges, the camp director ultimately withheld identity documents of Fatima's daughter to prevent her from leaving the camp. RAILS went above and beyond by drafting letters to the camp director to request the release of these documents, allowing Fatima's daughter to meet the Department's requests for biometrics, medical check, and other visa requirements.

Through persistent advocacy and support, RAILS successfully obtained child visas for Fatima's daughter and her children in July 2025.* RAILS further assisted the client and her daughter to book flights to Australia after the visas were granted. The family has now begun their journey to reunite and settle in Australia.

** Details have been changed to protect the client's privacy*

Boat arriving refugees and asylum seekers

Boat arriving refugees and asylum seekers

97 clients represented

25 representation matters finalised

330 legal advices provided

913 pieces of discrete legal work

2150 pieces of non-legal support

The Asylum Seeker and Refugee Assistance (ASRA) program is a collaboration of seven partner agencies: Communify Queensland, HART 4000, RAILS, Multicultural Australia, Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT), World Wellness Group, Indooroopilly Uniting Church and Common Ground Queensland. The program provides wrap-around services for refugees and people seeking asylum who came to Australia by sea and don't have a permanent visa.

While people who attempt to enter Australia by sea now are immediately transferred to Nauru, around 30,000 people who arrived before 1 January 2014 were not granted permanent refugee visas but instead subjected to a special processing regime that included quick assessments, temporary visas, bans on permanent visas, and reduced access to merits review if their temporary refugee visas were refused. The ASRA program assists these people, as well as those who arrived around 2014 and were transferred to Offshore Processing Centres in Nauru or PNG but later returned to Australia for medical reasons.

As the legal arm of ASRA, RAILS' work in this area aims firstly to ensure that as many people as possible retain some kind of visa, making them eligible for Medicare and employment, and secondly to respond quickly when opportunities arise for particular clients or groups to obtain permanent residence. ASRA clients are impacted by trauma from their countries of origin and their journeys to Australia, as well as from the ongoing uncertainty and arbitrary nature of the immigration system they have been subjected to. Nevertheless, in many ways their resilience and determination to establish lives in Australia epitomises the refugee journey.

People Accepted as Refugees in Australia

Until 2023, people who arrived by sea and were determined by Australia to be refugees could only be granted 3 or 5 year temporary refugee visas. In February 2023, the law changed to allow them to be granted permanent visas. While most people in this group transitioned to permanence before the start of this year, a smaller number of the most complex applications are still being processed by Home Affairs. This year, RAILS assisted 33 clients with the conversion of their temporary refugee visas to permanent ones. The work done in assisting these refugees obtain a permanent visa was funded by the National Legal Assistance Partnership as well as the Cth Department of Home Affairs through funds administered by Red Cross.

People Seeking Asylum in Australia

The special legal regime that was used to assess the refugee claims of people who arrived by sea meant that many were assessed not to be refugees. Across Australia, approximately 2,300 in this situation have lived here for the past 12-15 years with a highly precarious immigration status. A number are legally unable to apply for any visas at all, and the remainder can only apply for short-term bridging visas of 1-6 months duration. Having even a short-term bridging visa is beneficial because it usually allows a person to work and may ensure they have access to Medicare. Throughout the year, we assisted 45 clients with renewing these visas each time they expired.

In order to obtain a more durable status, an Immigration Minister needs to personally intervene and grant them permission to apply for another type of visa. Significantly, for the first time since the Afghan Crisis, Ministers this year demonstrated a willingness to use

Boat arriving refugees and asylum seekers

these personal intervention powers to create pathways to permanency for some people in this situation. Following successful Ministerial Intervention outcomes, we assisted: 6 clients with permanent visa applications, including people who came to Australia as unaccompanied minors or as children who were part of family groups; 13 clients with temporary refugee visa applications; and 6 clients with applications for Partner Visas.

Encouraged by the willingness of Ministers to intervene, the ASRA team assisted 29 additional clients to request Ministerial Intervention. We are grateful for the support of DWF who provided a part-time secondee to assist with some of this work.

Finally, ASRA also continued to assist 13 Afghan clients who were given permission to apply for temporary refugee visas in 2023. Those applications have not yet been decided by Home Affairs.

Refugees Transferred from Nauru or PNG

People who were sent to Nauru or Papua New Guinea and then later medically evacuated to Australia now reside here with short term bridging visas, usually granted for 6 months at a time. There are around 800 people, across Australia in this group, the remainder having been accepted for resettlement in the USA, New Zealand or Canada.

Although almost all have been granted refugee status by Nauru or PNG, the Australian Government's position continues to be that this group should pursue resettlement in a country other than Australia. RAILS assisted 65 clients (families or individuals without families) in this situation to renew their bridging visas every 6 months.

Australian Citizenship

Many ASRA clients consist of family groups with children born in Australia. Even though they are unable to apply for permanent visas in Australia, some Australian-born children can obtain Australian citizenship. These include those who are stateless (unable to access citizenship of any other country) and those who have lived in Australia for 10 years. The ASRA team assisted 12 children with citizenship matters throughout the year.

Case study

Leyla came to Australia from Iran in 2013 with her two children, aged 9 and 12 years. Living in Iran as a single mother, Leyla had experienced repeated assaults and

feared for the safety of herself and her children. When they arrived in Australia, the family applied for permanent refugee visas. However, these applications were still under consideration by Home Affairs in 2014 when the special legal regime for people who arrived by sea was implanted. Their visa application was converted into an application for a temporary refugee visa and then Home Affairs refused it in 2016.

In 2023, Leyla's youngest child, Mark, who was now an adult, came to RAILS seeking any options to improve their immigration status. He identified as LGBTQ and knew he would be in serious danger if forced to return to Iran. Having grown up in Australia, he also felt himself to be Australian. Yet the family were restricted to bridging visas, granted for 2-3 months at a time. They were allowed to work but when Mark finished high school, he was unable to go on to tertiary study with his friends because of the conditions on his visa. His older sister, Maryam married an Australian citizen and had a daughter, yet she could not apply for a Partner Visa. She lived with the constant threat that she could be separated from her husband and child at any time and forced to return to Iran.

RAILS assisted Mark and his mother to apply for Ministerial Intervention in 2023, asking that the Minister allow them to apply a second time for temporary refugee visas. For the next 18 months, they waited for an outcome and RAILS repeatedly advocated for them to Home Affairs and the Ministers' offices. In 2024, we also assisted Maryam with a Ministerial Intervention request, asking that she be allowed to apply for a Partner Visa.

Finally, in late 2024, the Minister told Leyla and Mark they could apply for temporary refugee visas. The application bars were lifted for 7 days and RAILS assisted them to quickly prepare and lodge the applications. A few weeks later, the Minister also gave them permission to apply directly for permanent visas. Mark underwent visa medicals and their permanent visas were granted 3 weeks later. A few weeks after that, Maryam was given permission to apply for a Partner Visa.

Leyla and Mark's lives have been transformed by their permanent residence. Mark is commencing university study next year and they will be both soon be able to apply for Australian citizenship. RAILS is continuing to assist Maryam with her Partner Visa application.

**Details have been changed to protect the client's privacy.*

Treasurer's Report

Kate McKeon, Treasurer

It is my pleasure to present the Financial Statements for the year ended 30 June 2025.

The financial year ended has seen a significantly improved financial performance at RAILS.

Overall, the 2025 year reported a surplus of \$323,646 (2024: surplus \$139,762). This surplus is a result of additional unbudgeted funding received throughout the year, and primarily represents interest income and other general revenue, which are typically used to fill service gaps.

This year's unusually high surplus supports our long-term strategic goal of putting RAILS in a more stable financial position when circumstances permit. This surplus will enable the organisation to remain sustainable through inevitable political cycles and economic downturns.

Our total income for the year was \$5,899,143, marking an 87% increase from the previous year and setting a new record for RAILS. This significant growth resulted mainly from non-recurrent grants to address onshore protection visa demand, including backlogs within the Administrative Review Tribunal. Additionally, through our National Legal Assistance Partnership contract, we secured one-off 'Uplift funding' from the federal and state governments, which greatly complemented our core funding. These additional funds enabled us to offer improved working conditions, including the implementation of an organisational re-structure to improve the sustainability of our roles and increase our ability to attract and retain people with highly specialised skills within a competitive market.

Grants from the federal and state governments continued to represent the largest source of revenue for the organisation. I want to acknowledge our funding partners for their financial contribution towards essential programs and invaluable client services.

The main ongoing expenses for the Service over the 2024-25 have been staff entitlements, which represent 84% of the total costs, and rent. In response to the increased demand and enhanced funding noted above, both of these expenses increased from the previous year. The Uplift Funding also enabled significant investment in professional development compared to previous years, particularly in trauma-informed awareness and supervision, enabling us to support our staff and clients better.

RAILS is in a sound financial position and continues to have a strong current ratio of 1.3 (2024:1.5), indicating its ability to pay debts as they fall due. Looking at our balance sheet, total reserves at 30 June 2025 are \$1,419,250. This is slightly above the benchmark set by the Management Committee and provides a buffer to unforeseen future risks.

Independent auditors, Haywards, have audited the accounts. Once again, RAILS has received a clean and clear audit.

This year saw continued improvements to financial and business practices. Key priorities for 2025 were achieved, including the implementation of an improved budget and forecasting tool. We also made updates to the Financial Delegation and other key policies, ensuring our operations are transparent and in line with best practices.

The coming financial year will see improved core funding secured under the new National Justice Assistance Partnership Agreement, in addition to remaining funding under the non-recurrent onshore protection visa programs. A significant challenge will then arise with the contraction of such non-recurrent grants in future years, whilst the demand will still exist.

In readiness for this inevitability, the leadership team are investigating other funding options to secure RAILS' long-term operations. This includes strengthening our fundraising campaigns and partnerships. We greatly appreciate the support of individual donors and organisations that enable us to be more responsive to changing demands to assist migrants and refugees, outside of the limitations of current funding programs.

I wish to acknowledge the Finance Subcommittee for its outstanding work. In particular, I would like to thank Gayan Mendis for his expertise and guidance on various financial issues. I'd also like to acknowledge Kelly Morrow's helpful participation and perspective until she stepped down in November 2024. Thank you both for your thoughtful advice and contribution.

To our Executive Director and staff, especially the Operations Director, Management Accountant and Finance Officer – thank you for your dedication to the challenges and changes throughout the year. Your professionalism and skill have been essential to effective financial management and to the oversight of our operations.

Acknowledgment of funders

National Legal Assistance Partnership – combined State and Commonwealth Government funding

RAILS receives funding through the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP), encompassed within the National Strategic Framework for Legal Assistance. RAILS' NLAP funding agreement commenced on 1 July 2020 and expired on 30 June 2025.

In 2024, for a period extending until 30 June 2025, RAILS received one-off NLAP Commonwealth funding to provide legal assistance to those having their protection visa decisions reviewed at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal level and appealing those decisions to the Courts.

RAILS also received one-off NLAP State funding for the uplift of salary and conditions of staff employed under the NLAP program and one-off NLAP Commonwealth funding to reduce pay disparity.

Settlement Engagement and Transition Support – Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs

RAILS receives funding from the Department of Home Affairs to provide legal assistance to humanitarian visa holders to sponsor their family to reunite with them in Australia, and to provide enhanced Domestic and Family Violence support to this client group. This contract started in July 2024 and will end in June 2027.

Protection Visa Legal Assistance - Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs

RAILS received one-off funding to provide legal assistance to asylum seekers applying for permanent onshore protection visas at the primary level.

Asylum Seeker and Refugee Assistance (ASRA) program, managed by CommuniFY and funded by Multicultural Affairs Queensland

RAILS received funds to provide legal and non- legal assistance to boat arriving asylum seekers and those impacted by the crisis in the Middle East, as part of a 3-year agreement ending in June 2026.

Legal Support for Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Family Violence - Womens' Legal Service Queensland (WLSQ)

As part of a pilot program funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services, RAILS renewed our partnership by WLSQ to provide immigration legal assistance to this vulnerable group.

Legal Aid Queensland

For the provision of funding to provide immigration legal assistance to victim-survivors of family violence and to support RAILS' Community Legal Education program.

Legal Support to Temporary Protection and Safe Haven Enterprise Visa holders- Commonwealth Government through Australian Red Cross

To provide critical legal assistance to support holders of a Temporary Protection (subclass 785) visa (TPV) or a Safe Haven Enterprise (subclass 790) visa (SHEV) to navigate a pathway to a permanent visa.

Digital Capacity and CLASS Transition funding

The State Department of Justice and Attorney General provided RAILS with funding to enhance RAILS' digital capacity and to support the transition to a new client management system, as well as the associated licensing costs.

Griffith University and University of Queensland

For their collaboration with RAILS to host students for clinic placements. This gives students experience in working in a legal service, as well as learning about professional responsibilities, while they provide valuable assistance to RAILS' staff.

RAILS also thanks **the Religious of Queensland** and **Presentations Sisters** for their long-term support for our vulnerable clients. We thank the **Gambling Community Benefit Fund** for their grant to support the purchase of new laptops and other equipment. RAILS also thanks the **generous individuals and organisations who have donated to us.**

Management Committee members

Abdul Jarrah, President

Abdul is a senior executive with extensive experience in leading mining and construction businesses, both nationally and internationally, and ensuring strong and accountable governance in organizations. He is currently a Commercial Director of a large infrastructure consortium.

Abdul holds a Bachelor of Science (Civil Engineering) from George Washington University and a Master of Science (Civil Engineering) from the University of Maryland. He also holds a Juris Doctor from the University of Maryland and a Graduate Diploma in Applied Law from the University of Queensland.

He is admitted as Attorney-at-Law to the Bars of Maryland and Washington DC in the US. He is also admitted as a Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Queensland.

Abdul previously served on the Board of the Queensland Resources Council and NSW Minerals Council Executive Committee. He joined RAILS' Management Committee in November 2021 and has been its President since November 2022.

Kelly Morrow, Secretary

Kelly previously practised in both state and federal personal injuries law before moving into the community legal sector in 2023. Kelly has volunteered with Law Right (formerly QPILCH), VoRTCS, the Indooroopilly Uniting Church Visa Application Program and at RAILS as a law student and volunteer lawyer. She joined RAILS' Management Committee in November 2021 and became secretary in November 2023.

Matt Black, Member

Matt is a barrister in private practice. He has a particular focus on Administrative law, which includes migration and citizenship proceedings. Since about 2013, Matt has regularly provided pro bono representation in judicial review proceedings involving protection visas and related issues. In 2015, he was awarded the Australian Lawyers Alliance Civil Justice Award for pro bono work on a significant migration law case.

Matt has been a member of RAILS' Management Committee from November 2018 until August 2025.

Kate McKeon, Treasurer

Kate has a Bachelor of Business (Accounting) degree and Post Graduate qualifications in Information Technology. She was a qualified Chartered Accountant and has over 25 years of experience covering all aspects of finance and administration, project management and business analysis. She has previously worked in finance roles for KPMG, Australian Red Cross and International Red Cross.

Kate has more recently operated her own consulting company focusing on financial feasibility and business transformation. Her clients have been diverse across multiple sectors including Government, Higher Education, Social Impact Organisations, ASX and Global companies. She joined RAILS' Management Committee as the Treasurer in June 2022.

Dr Angus Francis, Member

Dr Angus Francis has over 30 years' experience representing refugees. He represents clients across Australia and overseas before the Department of Home Affairs and on appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, the Immigration Assessment Authority, the Federal Circuit and Family Court, and the Federal Court of Australia.

Prior to commencing his own practice, Dr Francis was Principal Solicitor at RAILS, where he was awarded the Australian Lawyers Alliance Queensland Civil Justice Award for his work representing refugees. He is listed by the 2022 Doyle's Guide to the Australian Legal Profession as one of Queensland's leading immigration lawyers.

Dr Francis was awarded a PhD from the Australian National University for his thesis examining refugee status determination from a comparative perspective and is the author of two books and numerous journal articles and book chapters in the area. He has established and delivered undergraduate and postgraduate courses and student legal clinics in immigration and refugee law at Griffith Law School, Queensland University of Technology, and Charles Darwin University.

He stepped down from the Management Committee in October 2024

Management Committee members

Dr Alexis Wallace, Member

Dr Alexis Wallace joined the RAILS Management Committee in November 2024. Alexis is a former Member of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, Migration Review Tribunal, Refugee Review Tribunal and Mental Health Review Tribunal (Qld).

Early in her legal career Alexis was a case worker at RAILS. Later she practiced commercial migration law with Minter Ellison and frequently travelled to Christmas Island to represent asylum seekers in offshore immigration detention. Alexis' academic qualifications include a Masters in migration law from the University of Oxford and a PhD in law (supervised by Prof Kim Rubenstein and Prof Mary Crock).

In recent years, Alexis has developed an understanding of trauma, mental health and neurodiversity through her lived experience as a carer. In her spare time, Alexis loves to dance.

Elijah Buol, Member

Elijah Buol is a distinguished advocate and community champion who arrived in Australia as an unaccompanied minor refugee from South Sudan. He has actively supported young people and marginalised communities and played a crucial role in the successful removal of children under the age of 18 from adult prisons in Queensland.

Elijah's commitment to social justice and youth policy reform has earned him numerous prestigious accolades and honours, including: the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) and the 2019 Queensland Local Hero of the Year.

Elijah possesses advanced qualifications in Law, Justice, Intelligence, and Human Services. He is currently Chairperson of the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland, Chief Executive Officer of Act for Peace and member of both the Settlement Advisory Council for the Federal Government and the Safer Gambling Advisory Committee with the Queensland Government.

Through his advocacy, leadership, and personal experiences, Elijah promotes social justice, inclusion, and empowerment for all Australians, including refugees and immigrants, helping them achieve their aspirations and realise their potential.

Gayan Mendis, Member

Gayan is an experienced finance professional who has honed his craft as an accountant, spanning various roles across both public practice and the commercial industry sectors. Gayan graduated in 2008 with Bachelor of Business (majors in Professional Accounting and Management) from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). Thereafter Gayan worked at the big 4 accounting firm KPMG where he qualified as a Chartered Accountant (CA) and provided a range of professional accounting services to for-profit and not-for-profit clients on a national and global scale. Following his time with KPMG, Gayan transitioned into the commercial finance industry sector with a move to Queensland Investment Corporation (QIC), an alternative fund/investment manager headquartered in the city of Brisbane, Australia. He worked across various roles at QIC and is currently the General Manager Finance, Investments, leading a team that delivers investment finance and operational expertise to execute strategic objectives at an enterprise, business unit and investment mandate level.

Gayan was awarded the Queensland Young Chartered Accountant of the year in 2021 and serves as a member of the Queensland Corporate Panel for the Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand (CA ANZ). He joined the RAILS' Management Committee in November 2023.

Hiwa Zandi, Member

Hiwa is a practicing lawyer specialising in commercial litigation and migration matters. Hiwa has worked for the International Organisation for Migration in a consultancy position to coordinate the asylum seeker Voluntary Return Program in Manus and Nauru. Hiwa is currently the Managing Director of a Brisbane based boutique law firm, Madina Lawyers and its associated migration firm Migrating to Australia Consultancy.

Hiwa's association with RAILS goes back more than 10 years, when he initially worked as a voluntary legal clerk between 2004 and 2006. He has been a member of RAILS' Management Committee since 2016.

Volunteer testimonies

Anh Doan, social work placement student

During my social work placement with the Intake and Triage team at RAILS, I had the privilege of working alongside a passionate and knowledgeable team committed to supporting asylum seekers, refugees and migrants navigating complex legal and social systems. This experience deepened my understanding of trauma-informed practice, cultural safety, and the importance of accessible legal support in promoting justice and dignity.

I was involved in initial client assessments, service coordination, and advocacy, which allowed me to witness firsthand the challenges and systemic barriers faced by individuals seeking safety and stability in Australia. I learned how to engage with people respectfully and sensitively, especially when working with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences of displacement.

RAILS provided a supportive learning environment where I could grow professionally and personally. The team's commitment to human rights and social justice inspired me and reaffirmed my passion for working in refugee and migration support services. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the meaningful work RAILS does. The learning I received through hands-on experience, reflective supervision, and observing skilled practitioners was invaluable. This holistic experience has equipped me with practical, transferable skills and a deeper appreciation for the critical intersection of legal and social work practice, which I will carry forward in my future career.

Suzie Ngo, legal clinic student and day legal volunteer

Having been on a student visa throughout my time in Australia, I became very familiar with the complexities of the visa process. This experience, combined with my studies in immigration and refugee law at Griffith University, motivated me to enrol in university's clinical course at RAILS—the first step in what has become a truly rewarding journey.

My time at RAILS has since grown from a student placement into ongoing volunteer work, and now my PLT training. I have been incredibly supported by my supervisor and the team of solicitors, who are accommodating, friendly, always willing to guide me and generously sharing their knowledge.

Working with RAILS' clients—many of whom seeking safety, stability, and a better life in Australia—has given me a deep sense of purpose and a genuine desire to help others rebuild their lives. While I have gained invaluable practical legal experience, the most meaningful lessons have been about kindness, empathy, and how to work respectfully with people who have experienced trauma and vulnerability. RAILS has provided me not only with the knowledge to build my future legal career but also the compassion, cultural sensitivity, and social awareness that I will carry with me throughout my life.

Banipreet Kaur, Legal clinic student and day legal volunteer

I had initially joined RAILS to complete my Clinical Legal Education elective at my university, not knowing how much this experience would shape me. Picking RAILS proved to be one of the best decisions I made due to the extremely rewarding and insightful experience I had. This inspired me to continue volunteering right up till I graduated from university.

Volunteering at RAILS made me realise my desire to make a change in social justice and be the voice of those who are the most vulnerable. During my time at RAILS, I often came across individuals who had overcome immense hardship in their home countries and were again facing challenges in navigating the complex new legal system here. I got to see how our legal support could change someone's future, in helping them to find safety, stability and hope. I can truly say that my experience at RAILS has been like no other and has fostered both my professional development and personal growth.

I am also very thankful to have volunteered at RAILS with the support of two incredibly supportive Solicitors, Fay Brewer and Elle Ko, whose guidance taught me lessons that I will carry throughout my career and life. I am proud to have been part of RAILS and to have played even a small role in an organisation that makes such a meaningful difference in people's lives.

2024-25 Staff members

Angus Francis – Executive Director and Principal Solicitor (from November 2024)

Kylie McGrath – Executive Director and Principal Solicitor (until November 2024)

Bernie Carrick – Legal Practice Director

Neha Vaidyanathan – Legal Practice Director

Susan Hogarth – Legal Practice Director

Cristina Prieto Salvador – Operations Director

Hiba Rafik Kheir Beik – Executive Assistant

Lawyers and Migration agents

Abby Jiang – Solicitor

Amelia Sturton – Senior Solicitor

Amy Halliwell - Solicitor

Eleanor Gordon – Solicitor (paralegal until March 2025)

Elle Ko - Solicitor

Emily Humphreys - Solicitor

Emma Fell – Senior Solicitor

Evelyn Sinclair – Solicitor

Fay Brewer - Solicitor

Grace Prince – Caseworker

Jennifer Nugent – Senior Solicitor

Jessica Truong – Solicitor (paralegal until November 2024)

Jodie Chapman - Solicitor

Lara Conlan-Kinsella – Senior Solicitor

Latif Murtazawee – Solicitor

Madeline Young - Solicitor

Michelle Hua – Solicitor (paralegal until March 2025)

Mu Shwe – Senior Solicitor

Nadia Guta - Solicitor

Noel Reeves - Senior Solicitor

Robert Lachowicz – Solicitor

Sadia Azizi – Senior Solicitor

Sadie Burton – Solicitor

Sarah Ward - Solicitor

Shefali Atwal – Solicitor

Simone Cameron – Solicitor

Sonia Oki - Solicitor

Stephanie Towns – Solicitor

Timothy Madigan - Solicitor

Operations and Support Staff

Asmaa Mohammed - Triage and Intake Officer

Bethlemmer Tambua – Paralegal

Bill Kyle - Finance Manager

Cameron Christ - Legal Support Coordinator

Camilo Galeano – Intake Manager

Cleo Shave – Paralegal

Emily Doyle - Paralegal

Georgina Angus-Hellyer – Triage and Intake officer

Homa Kosha – Legal Support Coordinator

Jacinta Astles – Senior Intake officer

Kano Nawagawa - Paralegal

Kate Scott – Triage and Intake Officer

Kell Anderson – Senior Intake officer

Khristianne Naffah – Paralegal

Kyle William – Finance Manager

Lavanniya Ganeshanathan - Paralegal

Malika Turlybayeva - Paralegal

Meera Nair - Triage and Intake Officer

Mei Wang – Finance Officer

Melissa da Costa Couto – Triage and Intake Officer

Micheline Haddad – Triage and Intake Officer

Mirai Samaan – Paralegal

Nandish Singh – Legal Support Coordinator

Philomena Baumann – Human Resources and Volunteers Coordinator

Rebecca Lawrence – Triage and Intake Officer

Rose Ukin – Paralegal

Therese Henderson - Paralegal

Thi Ngoc Anh Doan – Triage and Intake Officer

Thank you!

The generosity, commitment and skill of pro bono law firms and barristers, volunteer lawyers and migration agents, day and evening volunteers, clinic and placement students meant that more people in Queensland were able to access justice this year.

We deeply thank MinterEllison for providing significant immigration legal assistance to clients who have experienced family violence and in relation to sponsorship of our staff, for providing extensive employment law advice and assistance in complex matters and for their assistance with our lease agreements. Their continued partnership is deeply valued.

DWF provided invaluable support to the ASRA program, including in relation to citizenship applications and Ministerial Intervention requests for people with Australian citizen partners. The expertise and commitment of DWF lawyers was instrumental in seeing these clients move from precarity to permanency.

Reuniting Families was supported again this year by the financial contribution from Herber Smith Freehills Kramer and volunteer lawyers from Allens and Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer. The commitment of these firms over many years to refugees who arrived by sea has been critical to us continuing this important work.

We are also thankful to Barry Nilsson for their support of our permanent protection visa work through the provision of pro bono lawyers and a financial contribution.

Our judicial review work has been possible due to the generosity, hard work and dedication of pro bono barristers including Storm Scarlett, Min Guo, Kathleen Foley SC, Sam Crock, William Hall, Chadwick Wong, Angel Aleksov, Aaron Hartnett, Emma Hoiberg, Gabriel Perry, Marc McKechnie and Matt Black.

We also thank:

Day Legal and Administrative volunteers

Aditi Kataria
Advitya Arora
Alexander Reid
Ana McAuley
Aryana Samarakkody
Bailee Brazil
Banipreet Kaur
Bethlemmer Tambua
Chiara McGinty
Daisy Mein-Smith
Dava Chuka
Dayle McDonald
Eilish McDiarmid
Evelina Limboro
Farhan Khudir
Glennis Gill
Hisham Aloraifi
Huynh Phuong Uyen Ngo
Jaziba Iftikhar
Jessica Wu
Kani Hameed
Khristianne Naffah
Malika Turlybayeva
Marila Santos
Melissa Meier
Mirai Samaan
Nicole Harvey
Nooria Admadi
Samual Wall
Skyllette Hercus
Therese Henderson
Tooba Nayyar
Uche Iheruome
Wilmi Corallo
Xavier Donnelly

Thank you!

UQ clinic students

UQ - Semester 2, 2024

Aileen Alviso
Banipreet Kaur
Benjamin Lonie
Cleo Shave
Ella North
Hisham Aloraifi
Lauren Gunther
Niall McKenna

UQ - Semester 1, 2025

Evelina Limboro
GiaAn NguyenQuach
Hunter Hutton-Olijnyk
Jessica Xu
Julia Richardson
Matilda Stinson

Griffith clinic students

Griffith - Semester 2, 2024

Alisha Biju
Bailee Brazil
Huynh Phuong Uyen Ngo
River Brunsma
Tatiana Dustin
Xindi Lu

Griffith - Semester 1, 2025

Alexander Reid
Cynthia Tangeria
Jane Elizabeth David
Jingyeong An
Sam Perkins
Tooba Nayyar

Practical Legal Training students

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Khristianne Naffah
Lauren Bellamy
Nathan Hunter
Shay Morrison
Therese Henderson

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Jackie Thomas
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Pro bono volunteer lawyers and migration agents

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Sarah Walters
Simon Batten
Tamira Harrington
Taya Hunt

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