

*Proudly an Aboriginal Controlled Organisation*

# CAAFLUAC

## Sharing LORE and law



**CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL FAMILY LEGAL UNIT** Aboriginal Corporation

Established in 2000, the Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit Aboriginal Corporation (CAAFLUAC), a federally funded Family Violence Prevention Legal Service, delivers culturally-appropriate legal services to Aboriginal people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence throughout the Central Australian and Barkly region.

CAAFLUAC is based in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek and runs a regular outreach service to the communities of Ntaria (Hermannsburg), Yuendumu, Papunya, Elliott, Ti Tree and Ali Curung.

CEO, Phynea Clarke, is well-respected Aranda woman and has been employed with CAAFLUAC since 2000. Phynea holds a Bachelor of Social Work.

Our Finance Manager, Debbie McIntyre Day, is a local Alice Springs woman. Debbie applies her financial skills and other management skills across both Alice Springs and Tennant Creek offices and is aware of the diversity across both the NT and organisationally.

Employing eight Aboriginal staff members (out of a small team of thirteen staff in total) CAAFLUAC provides support for staff to undergo training not only for the purposes of better delivering CAAFLUAC's services but also for the personal career progression of our staff.

Having a high percentage of Aboriginal workers ensures that all our services are managed and directed in a way that is culturally sensitive to the needs of our clients and the wider Central Australian and Barkly region.

Our Client Service Officers (CSOs) are our cultural brokers and CAAFLUAC is fortunate to have strong well-respected Aboriginal men and women working with our service to enhance client outcomes and service delivery.

All staff have been trained by We Al Li to see trauma through a Culturally Informed Trauma Integrated Healing Approach lens. This informs us as a team daily. We check in with each other to ensure that staff are safe and space is provided before a day begins or a day ends with no single approach applied.

*CAAFLUAC has asked each CSO to provide their reasons for working at CAAFLUAC and to identify what they see as their unique contribution to the culturally sound approach to supporting victims of family violence:*



**✦ Elaine Wills/Dixon (Nangala) . . . . .**

I am a Warumungu woman born in Tennant Creek and I am connected to six generations of family in the area and surrounding cattle stations. I have been associated with CAAFLUAC in different roles namely community member, chairperson, staff member in Tennant Creek and currently, a CSO in Alice Springs.

One of my primary contributions to CAAFLUAC and the community is to be a voice for those who are unable to have their voices heard. Aboriginal people and/or people struggling with trauma are reluctant to go into an agency to ask for help without the support of a safe person who understands their circumstances. I walk alongside our clients at their own pace to help them do this and as a result I see them become more competent, confident people who believe in their own strengths. I see them strive to be in a safer place and make good choices for their wellbeing.

The work at CAAFLUAC is inclusive with the Board, CEO, solicitors, CSOs and administrative staff and continues to work holistically building the strength of the organisation, clients, stakeholders and communities.

As a CSO, my work is broad, ranging from supporting lawyers with culturally safe practice, warm referrals and case management. Also, from personal experience, I stand for the protection of those that cannot protect themselves when exposed to violence. My professional and personal experience supports safety and social justice.

**✦ Sabrina Barnes . . . . .**

I am an Alywarr woman born in Alice Springs. My language is Alywarr, also English. I am one of six children and I am the only daughter. I am also a twin. My mother's family is Alywarr but they have always called Tennant Creek their home.

I lived in Tennant Creek when younger, Cairns briefly when I lived with my father and his family, attended schooling at the Worawa Aboriginal College in Healesville Victoria, then back to Alice Springs to complete my year 12 NTCE at Centralian Senior Secondary College. Upon completing my secondary schooling, I commenced studying nursing at the University of South Australia. My studies were cut short when my mother passed away and I returned to be with my family.

I have been back in Tennant Creek for one year and have been working with CAAFLUAC during that time as receptionist and part-time in a CSO role.

My reason for working in this organisation is because I have seen my family suffer violence. I cannot speak to my family about it, but they know where they can come if they need help. We were never a violent family and were never exposed to violence growing up so why should our nieces, nephews and grandchildren? I feel like I am here to educate and guide my family to demonstrate that violence is not needed in a relationship.

When I'd listen to my grandmother, sharing stories of partners and family having problems back in her time—the whole community would come together to resolve the problems properly and respectfully. We do not want to teach our future kids to be disrespectful and hurt each other.

My CSO role teaches me every day about the law and new ways to approach problems. I want my family to also understand the law. I am willing to learn but I am also willing to share our ways with the lawyers to ensure that our clients are safe and feel comfortable enough to talk to the lawyers. Countrymen get frightened to talk to 'big lawyers', so I am like a link to white law—a connection to balance our law and white law.

I am currently studying a Certificate III in Business at Charles Darwin University. I am hungry for knowledge to pass onto my daughter and show her that you can do whatever you want to do and be whoever you want to be.

**✦ Matthew Adams . . . . .**

I am 54 years old and of Aboriginal descent and I have been employed by CAAFLUAC as a CSO for six years. I am a returning staff member and was formerly employed as a Community Legal Education Worker before returning as a Client Service Officer.

In 1993, I began working for the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CAALAS now North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency). I remained employed there for close to fourteen years as a Field Officer in both the criminal and civil sections. CAALAS is where I gained most of my experience as a CSO/Field Officer.

Apart from other jobs I have held over the years, I have also spent some time working as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer at the Alice Springs Correctional Centre. During these times there was significant shared learning between myself, lawyers, clients and other support staff. All up my experience spans approximately twenty-five years.

My main role at CAAFLUAC is to work closely with the lawyers and provide support to clients. Whether that is by being in attendance with client/lawyer in interviews; picking up clients and taking them to appointments; attending and supporting clients at the police station; going with lawyers to remote communities to attend bush courts and assisting with other tasks as requested by lawyers. The CSO can often be that link between the lawyer and the client.

Here at CAAFLUAC, where we deal with issues of a sensitive nature and where most of our clients are women, it is important to have empathy and be non-judgmental and to be mindful of the emotional condition the client might be experiencing. Being the only male CSO at CAAFLUAC, it's especially important that I earn the trust and respect of the client. I feel my presence as a male CSO brings balance to the CSO section. →



TENNANT CREEK TEAM – ANNA POTTER (LAWYER), SARAH PICKLES (LAWYER), SABRINA BARNES (RECEPTIONIST) AND TANYA SCRUTTON (CLIENT SERVICES OFFICER)

Over the years I have seen many lawyers who are not local to Central Australia come and go. So, there is value in appointing local Indigenous CSOs because they are local, they are in the one place for longer periods of time and they can get to know the clients quite well. Whether it's through working with them or personally knowing them already—they can get a better understanding of the client's personality, behaviors and habits as well as have a better idea of how to find the client if they become difficult to locate; provide guidance to lawyers in regard to culturally sensitive matters when required. It's not always easy. However, lawyers who remain for longer periods of time also get to know their clients quite well and become culturally aware too. There's always more to learn and experiences to gain.

**✦ Shirley Erlandson (Pengarte) .....**

I am an Aboriginal CSO at CAAFLUAC where I have worked for ten years and I am of Eastern and Western Arrernte and Kaytetye descent. I was born and raised in Alice Springs and have raised my children here. My mum was raised on Neutral Junction Station and in the convent in Alice Springs and when she left there she married and had seven children, of which I am one.

I come from one of the biggest families in Central Australia. My children know their Arrernte language and have always loved spending time out bush. They know their traditional family. I see my role at CAAFLUAC as being a very important one—I can connect with people in this area because I know where they come from and protocols to follow. I believe I improve outcomes for clients because I can talk to them about things like fighting and how bad it is and the damage that can happen from family violence. I ask them questions that make them think about their behaviour. I explain to them that drinking causes 'no good thinking' and bad behavior. I plant the seed to get them thinking about changing their behaviour. I also understand how to ask questions and how countryman answer questions—in our Aboriginal culture, people don't ask too many questions, especially direct questions. They get information they need to know by watching, listening or asking in roundabout ways because it can be quite rude in Aboriginal culture to be asking too many questions about 'this or that'.

I help lawyers to understand the right ways of interacting with our people. The lawyers understand that when they don't listen to my guidance and things go a 'no-good way' they need to learn from that. I try and educate them on how to communicate better and about the right ways to do so. I bring cultural knowledge to the lawyers, so they know about cultural ways and LORE.

As well as helping coworkers at reception and other CSOs who may not fully know our cultural protocols, my role includes preparation before visits to clients or community and when on community, knowing when to stay or go—knowing when to speak or be still. Especially when I am out bush, I have a strong sense of when to attend or visit—I believe this to be my own strong Aboriginal connection.

**✦ Tanya Scrutton .....**

I was born in Alice Springs and I grew up in Alice Springs and in Ti Tree. My father's side is Amajere and my mother's side is Warlpiri. I can speak English but also understand my father's language and some Warlpiri from when I lived in Ali Curung with my mother.

I was schooled in Ali Curung and Darwin at Haileybury School (formerly Kormilda College) and at Yirara College in Alice Springs until Year 9.

At fifteen years of age I returned to Tennant Creek and not long after commenced studying a Certificate I in Business at Batchelor College. I eventually secured employment with Julalikari Buramana as their receptionist and later worked as a Residential Youth Worker.

When I started my work as a CSO at CAAFLUAC, I realised how much could relate to clients. I am well-known to many tribes in the Tennant Creek community and can help the clients and lawyers work more closely. In knowing how to respect cultural ways for families, I can help lawyers make safe decisions about when to enter communities/camps as well as how to understand the sensitive nature of what might be happening in a family.



**ALICE SPRINGS TEAM – BACK ROW: MATHEW ADAMS (CLIENT SERVICES OFFICER), KIM RAINE (PRINCIPAL LEGAL OFFICER), CAROL SMITH (SENIOR LAWYER) ELAINE WILLS/DIXON (CLIENT SERVICES OFFICER), DEBBIE MCINTYRE-DAY (FINANCE MANAGER) FRONT ROW: PHYNEA CLARKE FRONT (CEO), RHEANNA FISHER (ADMINISTRATION OFFICER), SHIRLEY ERLANDSON (PENGARTE) (CLIENT SERVICES OFFICER) AND KATIE MCCARTHY (LAWYER) ABSENT**

I have worked on and off with CAAFLUAC for two years and see myself as a helper in a challenging legal environment and legal system. I am trying to be a strong role model for my son so that he will make good choices as an adult.

**Rhieanna Fisher** . . . . .

I have worked with CAAFLUAC for four years having moved here from Cherbourg in south-east Queensland. I relocated for employment and secured an Indigenous Pathway opportunity at Yulara which then led me to apply for the role at CAAFLUAC in Alice Springs.

When clients call or visit our service, I see my role as first and foremost to be a listener. I need to hear their story to assess at intake whether our service is the right place for them to receive assistance.

Persons that access our service could come through our doors at any time of the day and in a range of emotional states. CAAFLUAC is sometimes the last stop for them or the last legal avenue that is willing and/or able to assist so when they come here, they are often tired, drained and have mixed emotions. My role is to settle them so that I can identify if our lawyers and/or CSOs are the right people to help. This is a big responsibility to control entry and exit points. Additionally, my role is ever changing because I step into vacant positions, manage data entry points, answer calls, conduct training, remote travel when required and assist lawyers with continuing legal education where appropriate.

I see all the staff at CAAFLUAC as being on the same page and this makes me want to come back to work everyday. We are respectful of each other's skills, we have good lawyers—we are a good team.

The CAAFLUAC legal team is made up of two lawyers in Tennant Creek and three in Alice Springs. The lawyers work shoulder-to-shoulder with the CSOs to provide wrap-around and holistic support in the purest form.

Lawyers working within an Aboriginal organisational framework are informed daily around their approach to client need. How best to navigate around matters of great cultural sensitivity is a primary issue that cannot be underestimated when we manage client concerns. Our lawyers are not trained at university to consider the complexities of cultural nuances and protocols within Australia and especially, the Central Australia community. It is unique—it is another world that is to be respected and acknowledged in all ways possible. Meeting with clients who present a myriad of family violence concerns and issues and to embark upon a line of questioning that is culturally wrong—could be catastrophic for the client and their family. Disclosures are to be handled with much consideration and without the help of our CSOs, we are ill-equipped to manage cultural attitudes and appropriate responses and would not be prepared to contemplate such matters. We are shaped by the knowledge and information graciously shared and we believe that our clients are the beneficiary of this collaboration and holistic practice where LORE meets law. ■

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