# Walk beside us

Reflections from Victoria Legal Aid’s Equality Law Program Sexual Harassment Service Reference Group

## Acknowledgement of Country

This piece was written on the land of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge and pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Traditional Custodians throughout Victoria, including Elders past and present.

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## Acknowledgement of lived experience

We acknowledge the people with lived experience as victim-survivors of workplace sexual harassment who have guided and continue to guide the work we do. We recognise your expertise, and thank you for your courage, determination and dedication to improving legal service delivery for others who will need legal services in the future.

## Introduction

At our Equality Law Program planning day mid-2024, we were joined by two lived experience members from our **Sexual Harassment Service Reference Group** (Reference Group). They spoke about their experiences, the barriers they faced, and the many victim-survivors of workplace sexual harassment who never contacted a lawyer or made a legal claim. Lifting three heavy folders of materials onto the table before us, one former client explained that all these documents came from her legal case. For her, the process of bringing a legal claim was long, difficult, and hard to understand. When asked by one of our lawyers what we could do to better support victim-survivors through legal processes, her response stuck with us – ***‘Walk beside us’***.

The importance of trauma-informed and client-centred legal services is widely acknowledged.[[1]](#endnote-2) But what does this look like in practice?

This reflection has been put together in consultation with the Reference Group and sets out some **key learnings** from our **sexual harassment legal practice** and **Reference Group**.

In this document, we consider:

* What are the **core principles of trauma-informed practice**?
* What have we learned about **facilitating a Reference Group that includes lived experience members**?
* What have we learned about trauma-informed and client-centred **legal practice**?
* What are the **next steps** for our service?

We have also outlined some of the work of our sexual harassment legal practice, which in 2021, together with other legal aid commissions, Aboriginal legal services, community legal centres and others, received funding from the Australian Government to increase access to legal assistance for victim-survivors of sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace as part of implementing the Respect@Work reforms.

We hope that others in the legal assistance sector can use and build upon what we have learned to continue to embed client-led, trauma-informed practices in the way we work with victim-survivors of sexual and gendered violence. We also acknowledge that we still have much to learn and that there is a wealth of experience across the legal assistance sector. We welcome your thoughts and feedback.

## The core principles of trauma informed care

There are **five core principles of trauma informed practice** provide a roadmap to walking beside our clients. These principles, outlined by the [Blue Knot Foundation](https://professionals.blueknot.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/45_BK_FS_PRF_BecomingTraumaInformed_Services_DEC23.pdf) are:

* **Safety –** cultural, emotional, physical and psychological;
* **Trust –** being sensitive to client needs at each point of contact with our service, ‘doing what we say we’ll do’, and providing clear explanations when plans change;
* **Choice –** providing choices wherever possible, ensuring victim-survivors have the information they need to make informed choices;
* **Collaboration –** ensuring that we are working in partnership with victim-survivors and not doing things ‘to’ them, addressing power imbalances wherever possible; and
* **Empowerment –** ensuring that ‘service systems, programs and processes’ enable empowerment of victim-survivors and support self-determination.

These five principles sit at the heart of our work with our clients and Reference Group.

Circular diagram with the five core principles written in separate circles, safety, trust, choice, 
collaboration and  empowerment. Central circle with the words 'trauma informed practice'

Figure 1 – The five core principles of trauma informed practice

## What we have learnt about facilitating a reference group with lived experience members

The Equality Law Program has been working with victim-survivors of workplace sexual harassment since 2010. Over that time, we have seen the pervasive nature of workplace sexual harassment, the deep harm and trauma it causes, and the resilience, courage, and strength of victim-survivors.

In 2022, as part of the expansion of our sexual harassment services, we established the Reference Group to ensure that the design, delivery, and evaluation of our sexual harassment legal service expansion met the needs of victim-survivors.

Our Reference Group is comprised of people with lived experience expertise and professional representatives from key stakeholder organisations. The group is facilitated by VLA staff. While this is one example of a legal service working alongside victim-survivors, we recognise that an ideal approach would be to have people with lived experience expertise design, deliver and evaluate services from inception. We acknowledge examples of this happening in the legal assistance sector and that there is an opportunity to enhance how we work with people who have lived experience expertise in the future.

The Reference Group’s formation and purpose drew on programs that embed lived experience expertise. For example, Victoria Legal Aid’s Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) service has prioritised partnerships with people who have lived experience expertise in multiple ways, including through the co-design of the IMHA service, Speaking from Experience consumer advisory group,[[2]](#endnote-3) recruitment of staff with lived experience expertise to dedicated roles, training staff on the value of lived experience expertise in induction, and co-design of resources and services with people with lived experience expertise.[[3]](#endnote-4)

IMHA drew on Indigo Daya’s Participation Ladder[[4]](#endnote-5) which maps types of participation in the mental health context. This starts with *inform*, stepping up to *consult*, *engage*, *co-design, co-produce, consumer-led* and finally, *consumer owned*. The participation of the Reference Group currently sits across the *consult* and *engage* rungs of the ladder, whereas a service like IMHA currently sits at the *co-design* and *co-production* level of participation.

Figure 2 – Steps in Indigo Daya's Participation Ladder

Our key learnings from facilitating a Reference Group with lived experience members include:

### Recruitment

* **The importance of diversity.** Ideally, a reference group should be representative of the diversity of victim-survivors and communities we work with, noting that no individual Reference Group member can or should be expected to be a ‘representative’ of all members of a group they belong to. There are currently no First Nations people with lived experience expertise on our Reference Group. As part of VLA’s Reconciliation Action Plan[[5]](#endnote-6) and Aboriginal Services Strategy,[[6]](#endnote-7) we are committed to working safely and inclusively with First Nations people. VLA is currently undertaking work to strengthen cultural safety and provide support to First Nations lived experience experts and are therefore not specifically recruiting First Nations lived experience experts at this stage while this work takes place.
* **Recruitment can be challenging.** Some barriers to joining the group included not wanting to revisit traumatic experiences, the weight and pressure of feeling seen as representing an entire group, and other life commitments, including work and family.
* **Consider the composition of the group,** ensuring lived experience voices have equal or more representation than the professional membership.
* **Consider the term of membership and when to recruit for additional lived experience members.** The impact of revisiting traumatic topics can be significant, and it is important that members feel supported to discontinue their membership at any time. We suggest a 12-month membership period followed by a check in to see how they are travelling and review their plans to continue. Ideally, recruitment for new members should occur annually before the end of the 12-month period. This may relieve pressure on existing group members if they wish to step down and will ensure continuity of the group.
* **Communicate transparently.** Provide clear details on the group's purpose, structure, meeting schedule, remuneration and expectations to help prospective members make informed decisions. Offer individual discussions to ensure a mutual fit.
* **Pay lived experience experts for their expertise.** It is essential that group members are adequately remunerated for their time and expertise, including preparation time.
* **Develop a safety and support structure for group members.** Ensure there is a support structure for participants, for example by providing options for one-on-one check ins between meetings and access to the VLA Employee Assistance Program. Ask members what they need to help them participate. Recognise the strengths that members bring to the group as survivors.

### Facilitation of meetings

* **Facilitate with warmth, compassion, and humanity.** As one of our Reference Group members told us, **‘*Lead with your heart first, not your head’.***
* **Ground yourself.** Adjust your pace and emotional state for Reference Group meetings to be fully present and grounded.
* **Provide appropriate time for reflection.** Ensure that agendas are not rushed and there is sufficient time for reflection and discussion.
* **Manage transitions.** Build in time at the beginning of the meeting for everyone to enter the space and come together as a group. Avoid ending meetings with difficult news or potentially challenging material.
* **Use clear language.** Avoid acronyms and legal jargon. Speak clearly using plain English. Set a culture where people can ask if they don’t know or understand.
* **Plan for staff turnover.** Manage staff transitions carefully, by providing appropriate crossover time to maintain trust.
* **Seek feedback.** During meetings or via separate reflection sessions, seek feedback to understand members’ experiences of the meetings and facilitation style.
* **Consider having a person with lived experience expertise facilitate.** We have not done this, but other groups in VLA are coordinated and facilitated by a person with lived experience expertise.
* **Provide support with technology.** Ensure group members can use the technology needed to participate in the meeting.

### Meeting structure

* **Acknowledge lived experience expertise.** Start meetings by acknowledging the contributions of members with lived experience expertise. This is different and not comparable to an Acknowledgement of Country but sets an important tone and power balance in meetings. Our recognition of lived experience expertise reads as follows:

*We acknowledge the people here today with lived experience as victim-survivors of sexual harassment. We recognise your expertise, and thank you for your courage, determination, and dedication to improving legal service delivery for others who will need legal services in the future.*

* **Give people space and time to be fully present in the meeting.** We use an optional check-in activity following acknowledgements to give participants a way to enter the space and acknowledge their feeling state if needed.
* **Provide choice wherever possible.** Create an environment where people don’t feel pressured to share. Provide options for participation such as making contributions via Teams chat, as well as verbal comments and conversations. If you use the chat function, read out comments so that everyone can follow. Remind participants that they can turn off their cameras or take a break at any time.
* **Take time to check in, build trust and establish norms.** In early meetings, work with the reference group to develop norms and build trust between group members and relevant staff:

*‘The way that the first meeting was facilitated was really beautiful and established confidentiality and group norms. It commenced with a recognition of individuals with lived experience after the Acknowledgement of Country. This should be said after acknowledgement at every meeting. By letting us value our experience and the team-ness of us together. It set the tone that continued on.’ - lived experience member*

* **Provide a detailed agenda.** Provide certainty and safety by providing detailed agendas and guiding questions in advance of meetings.
* **Ensure confidentiality.** People’s individual experiences are their own and aren’t to be shared outside the group without express permission.

### Acting on advice

* **Be clear about the authority of the group.** Ensure from the beginning that the level of authority of the group is clear, and who has ultimate decision-making power.
* **Be transparent, sensitive and accountable when things don’t go to plan.** Being honest and accountable builds trusting relationships.
* **Do what you say you will do.** Follow through with promised action items. If this doesn’t happen, provide an update on why not and the next steps that will be taken.
* **Provide a feedback loop.** Let the group know any outcome of their feedback and how it has impacted our work.

### What we’ve done, together

Among many things, our Reference Group has helped us to:

* **Develop a new role aimed at increasing referrals from our priority client groups through community engagement and education:** The Reference Group were consulted on the development of a new allied professional role in the team to lead the development of relationships, identification of referral pathways and promotion of the expanded service to priority clients and those who work with them. This is the Stakeholder and Community Engagement Coordinator.
* **Improve communications and engagement materials:** The Reference Group has provided input into our engagement and communications materials and approaches, including reviewing stakeholder lists, providing feedback on our community legal education materials, and assisted in tailoring materials to priority groups.
* **Improve our legal practice:** The Reference Group has had significant input into the way we assist victim-survivors.

## What we have learned about trauma-informed and client-centred legal practice

Trauma-informed practice is built into the way the Equality Law Program practices law. Working with people who have experienced trauma in a client-centred way is our team’s core work. While we are striving to embed best practice trauma-informed approaches in our work, we are aware that this learning is ongoing and our focus is on continuous improvement through reflection, what we learn from our clients and Reference Group members and through professional development. At times, it can feel difficult to balance trauma-informed and client-centred approaches with the pressures of a high-volume legal practice and significant waitlist. Some of the ways we are incorporating trauma-informed concepts into our legal practice include:

* regular all-staff training on trauma-informed practice
* regular debriefing sessions for staff
* dedicated agenda items in our planning days
* dedicated discussions in supervision and team meetings.

The Reference Group has provided our team with further learning on trauma-informed service delivery by having members reflect to the group **not only on what a trauma informed practice looks like, but what it feels like**. We have grouped this feedback into the five core principles of trauma-informed practice and included direct quotes from Reference Group members.

### Safety

‘The impact of sexual harassment is really significant. In a [legal] complaint form that gets very lost and people don’t feel heard. Hearing someone’s experience can be very moving.’

* **Minimise the potential for further harm.** Being a victim-survivor takes a toll and the ways that any service is provided can either ease or exacerbate that.

‘People need support for when they can’t litigate, and help navigating all the places they need to go. Just navigating life is incredibly hard, that needs to be understood.’

* **Provide training and support for staff** in trauma informed legal services, legal-service specific wellbeing (including group debriefing and supervision), intersectional experiences of victim-survivors and how lawyer power and privilege can impact service provision.
* **Validate the experiences of victim-survivors and really hear them** bylistening carefully, validate their experiences and feelings and acknowledging their strengths. Believe them.

‘Know that we are trying to believe it for ourselves first, then need to be believed by others.’

* **Minimise the number of times victim-survivors need to tell their story.** Ask if this is the first time a person has told the story. It is an important responsibility to hear someone’s story for the first time and should be treated with respect.
* **Acknowledge the tension between legal processes and recovery.** There is a disparity between other information and support services for victim-survivors (which centre victim-survivor strength and validation, for example) compared to the legal process (which may test/seek to undermine victim-survivor credibility). As one Reference Group member told us:

‘There is a real disparity between the information and support in counselling compared to a legal setting. The legal setting can feel quite heavy and hopeless. What’s good for recovery can conflict with the legal matter.’

* **Wherever possible, provide certainty,** including what we can and can’t help with, time frames, and what to expect with any legal process. Be upfront about the process and what the journey looks like so that clients can make informed choices.

‘Sometimes you talk to a lawyer, they don’t give you information, they just say “leave it to me” - sometimes that “leave it to me” is an area that I go with a lot of doubt and confusion, that confusion and doubt that makes me feel unsafe.’

**Give warnings and explanations before asking for information about traumatic events.** Be specific – for example:

*I am now going to ask some questions about (what happened with your boss / what you did after the sexual harassment / the incident that happened over the weekend). I need this information so that I can (prepare your statement for court / write a letter to your employer / give you legal advice about your claim). Please let me know if you need a break at any time.*

This can also be used when having difficult conversations about evidence - for example, where a lawyer needs to ask a victim-survivor questions about a conflicting account of events from documents filed by a perpetrator:

*I’ve received (copies of text messages / a statement / CCTV footage) from the Respondent. I need to ask you some questions because some of what you told me previously is different to what’s in these new documents. I want you to know that I believe you and know that people respond to trauma in different ways. It is important that you share with me what you remember, so that I can give you the best possible legal advice.*

* **See the whole person.** Clients’ experiences of workplace sexual harassment and discrimination can be shaped by intersecting experiences of marginalisation and systemic injustice. These experiences can also be a source of strength and community during a legal process. With victim-survivor consent, consider secondary consults with specialist services to ensure culturally appropriate supports are provided.
* **Recognising the value and importance of lived experience expertise to our work**. Lived experience expertise (and/or demonstrated experience and understanding of working with priority client groups) should be listed as a highly desirable attribute in position descriptions and people with lived experience expertise could be part of interviewing panels. Consideration should also be given to the power and impact of dedicated lived experience roles.

### Trust

* **Provide education and engage with key stakeholders to increase access to legal services.** The law is complex, and getting help is not always accessible. Education and engagement of stakeholders who work closely with victim-survivors is vital so they can identify clients with legal issues and make warm referrals into the service.
* **Be led by victim-survivors at each point of contact.** Every victim-survivor’s experience is different, and what is needed to feel safe can change over time. Provide choices and be flexible and responsive to what your client needs. Examples of prompts could include:
  + Check the victim-survivor feels safe to talk about their issue at the time of contact.
  + Offer to meet in person, speak over Zoom or Teams, or to call at another time.
  + Ask for, and respect, victim-survivor preferences in how to communicate and receive advice (by phone, email etc.).
  + Ask victim-survivors what they need to feel comfortable.
  + Offer breaks as needed.
  + Continue to check in with victim-survivors during the period we are working with them as their needs may change.

‘Lawyers…need to understand that people who’ve experienced trauma will have a wide variety of responses – from wanting to know everything, to feeling like any information is overwhelming and too much. The same person will feel different on different days, and lawyers need to understand and respond accordingly.’

* **Avoid legalese and jargon.** Acronyms, legal and organisational terms such as ‘means test’, ‘jurisdiction’, and ‘limitation dates’ are exclusive language and can exacerbate the power imbalance between lawyers and victim-survivors. Use clear and accessible language in all communications with victim-survivors.
* **Do what you say you’ll do.** Be realistic about timeframes, keep lines of communication open, and don’t make promises you are not able to keep**.**
* **Have difficult conversations with care.** Victim-survivors need to know what is coming up in their legal matters – even (or especially) if next steps are going to be hard. Have these conversations with care and compassion.

‘If a person decided to go ahead with a trial, did they feel informed about the whole process, did they know what it would be like to go into the courtroom…did they feel well-supported and protected through that process?’

### Choice

* **Empower victim-survivors to make choices by letting them know that they can choose what to do and can stop at any point during the legal process.**  At its core, sexual harassment is underpinned by power imbalance and injustice – assisting victim-survivors to exercise power over what they can control is critical. Provide legal information and advice in a way that clearly explains options and empowers victim-survivors to make informed decisions about what is best for them.

‘Legal pathways can get more and more complex. The value is when a lawyer can help make meaningful sense of options and not make people feel overwhelmed.’

* **Different people will want different things.** No two victim-survivors will be the same. It is important to ask and listen to what each client wants to achieve and tailor an approach to the individual.

‘People need to feel supported to make the decision that’s personally right for them, and their lawyer to make them feel comfortable with that choice.’

* **Dignity of risk and recognition of strength.** Respect that victim-survivors are the experts in their own experiences and can make decisions – including decisions to pursue or continue with a legal claim – that can be painful and distressing for them. Our role is to provide accurate and accessible information about options, to respond to survivors’ choices and preferences, and to minimise harm where we can throughout the process.
* **Understand and respond to the impact of trauma.** A human-centred approach is one that understands the physiological effects of trauma on the individual. Work to understand the individual and their needs and the complexity of keeping track of everything that is happening legally while also processing trauma.

‘Some peoples’ brains will be super busy and will need things to be repeated many times. [Victim-survivors] need someone who can repeat the information and advice as much as possible or necessary.’

* **Be patient and gentle.** It takes time for people to understand how the law works and how different parts of the legal system interact. It can also take time for people who have experienced trauma to tell their story. Patience, repetition, and gentleness are needed. As much as possible, lawyers should manage their files to allow for this.
* **Develop resources for lawyers to use when giving advice.** Consider what additional materials may assist a victim-survivor to understand their legal options and have these available as fact sheets, written materials, infographics or videos. We are currently reviewing the resources we have available, and what more is needed.

### Collaboration

* **Acknowledge power imbalances between lawyers and victim-survivors.** Lawyers and service staff should consider how we talk to victim-survivors, the words and language we use, our body language and how we reference victim-survivors’ stories and experiences. Focus on the strengths of victim-survivors and work to foster genuine collaboration throughout the legal process.
* **Position yourself alongside the client.** Walk alongside victim-survivors; explain and navigate the difficulties and challenges of the legal system together. Validate the experiences and any feedback you receive on service and system improvement and consider ways to incorporate feedback into broader strategic advocacy work (with consent from victim-survivors).
* **Work with victim-survivors to provide holistic support where needed.** Provide connections with other support services and make warm referrals when possible. Considered referrals to targeted services can mitigate compounding exhaustion and overwhelm.
* **Where a victim-survivor cannot be assisted, provide referral options.** This may be to another legal service that could assist or other avenues for support or information. Make warm referrals where possible.

### Empowerment

* **Adjust service eligibility where appropriate.** Victim-survivors of workplace sexual harassment may earn more money, have savings, or be receiving workers’ compensation payments that mean they would ordinarily not be eligible for assistance from a Legal Aid Commission or Community Legal Centre. If possible, consider the possibility of adjusting eligibility guidelines to recognise this.
* **Centre client voice.** Seek feedback from clients to improve your service. Involve lived experience experts in service design, delivery and evaluation.
* **Advocate for systemic change.** With consent, ensure that victim-survivors’ experiences and voices are central to advocacy work to improve legal systems and processes.

## Next steps

We look forward to continuing to work with our reference group to:

* **Expand membership of our Reference Group** to increase diversity and ensure continuity.
* **Reach priority client groups** to provide education and information about seeking legal help.
* Review our **community legal education materials**.
* Finalise a **client survey** to embed service improvement into legal service delivery.
* Undertake an **end-to-end review of our legal service delivery model from a victim-survivor lens** including first contact with our service, booking an appointment, first advice, providing advice in writing, taking instructions, preparing to give evidence, closing files and contact after file closure.
* Continue work on **strategic litigation and advocacy**.

## The work of our sexual harassment legal practice

The work of our sexual harassment legal practice, since commencing our expanded service provision in 2022, is set out under our program objectives, **increasing access to legal help**, delivering **client-centred services** and **improving systems and sustainability** of the work.

### Increased Access to Legal Help

* From January 2022 to December 2024, we have provided approximately 370 advice appointments and 74 minor work services for people who have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. We have also significantly increased our complex legal casework, running 27 litigation files, including two matters in the Federal Court of Australia. This intensive work is important for accountability and outcomes for individual victim survivors, but also for broader systemic impacts, including prevention and cultural change.
* Since the beginning of 2022, our sexual harassment clients have received over $480,000 in compensation. We have also obtained non-financial remedies including apologies and systemic outcomes such as agreements for staff to receive training.
* Engaged with over 50 stakeholder organisations to promote service expansion, consult on service design, and strengthen relationships.
* Established a Sexual Harassment Service Reference Group to guide service design, with 14 meetings held since establishment.
* Developed and implemented a stakeholder engagement strategy to increase awareness and improve access for priority clients.
* Launched a strategic communications plan, including a social media campaign that reached over 700,000 people.
* Created a suite of communication materials for stakeholders, including [social media content](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fcontent.legalaid.vic.gov.au%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2F2023-09%2Fvla-elp-sex-harass-stakeholder-social-toolkit.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK), [factsheets](https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/specialist-sexual-harassment-and-discrimination-law-services), and [website copy](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fcontent.legalaid.vic.gov.au%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2F2023-09%2Fvla-stakeholder-web-info-SH-services.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK).

### Client-Centred Services

* Implemented staff wellbeing initiatives, including group debriefing sessions to manage vicarious trauma.
* Commissioned and implemented a Service Design Report by VLA’s Sector Engagement and Service Design Team.
* Established a First Nations client referral pathway and adjusted the financial eligibility test for survivors, increasing access.
* Increased our specialist team and developed a bespoke professional development plan, with staff training in trauma-informed service delivery, alternative dispute resolution, new legal jurisdictions and intersectionality.
* Our lawyers recently received this letter from a client who they had walked beside through her sexual harassment matter, demonstrating the impact of providing client-centred services:

Firstly, I would like to say thank you for all of your help in more than 2 years, you were helping me went through the difficult times, you were very patient and gentle when I missed your call, when I cried, when I was late to the meeting…

Although the sexual abuse and unfair treatment will leave a psychological scar for the rest of my life, your help has enabled me to stand up and courageously face everyone around me. Your help makes me feel like I'm not alone, I'm not some kind of bad person or trash, I'm not at fault with my own life or with society.

Because I have no close relatives or friends, your help saved me from the worst. After going through this story, I understand why some people become depressed and commit suicide when they are sexually abused. Even though I can't forget it, your help has made it possible for me to get through the most difficult days. I really appreciate and thank you.

Secondly, thank you very much your grants team for helping me without any fee, thank you for the time and effort you spent completely free for me. Your kindness has given me more faith in life and myself that I will overcome difficulties.

Thirdly, my story is something that I don't want to remember for the rest of my life but I hope you will use it as a real life example of sexual abuse and maybe from these real stories to create a regulation or principle to protect women in the workplace or to impose a heavier penalty for those who take advantage of their power to trample on women's dignity.

Finally, again I would like to thank you for your help, for your sympathy and comfort during my long period of difficulties and tears.

I sincerely thank you and appreciate it from the bottom of my heart.

### Systems Improvement and Sustainability

* Contributed to law reform and systemic change, including regarding non-disclosure agreements, discrimination by judicial officers, inclusive employment guidelines and the Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence.
* Played a leading role in the Power to Prevent coalition which advocated for fairer costs arrangements in sexual harassment claims, resulting in the *Australian Human Rights Commission Amendment (Costs Protection) Act 2024* (Cth).
* Initiated a project evaluation to assess impact and inform future improvements.

## Our thanks

We believe that embedding victim-survivor voices into our work goes to the very heart of what we are trying to achieve: **to walk beside** victim-survivors. We are deeply grateful to the Reference Group, and the clients we work with in our legal practice, for improving and enhancing our work in so many ways.

We thank the Australian Government for the dedicated funding of legal aid commissions and community legal centres to implement Respect@Work recommendation 53, including supporting victim survivors to understand and assert their rights.

We look forward to continuing to learn from our Reference Group, the victim-survivors we work with and each other. We welcome your feedback and thoughts on this reflection.

Please contact us to share your thoughts, reflections, feedback, or to continue this conversation: [equality@vla.vic.gov.au](mailto:equality@vla.vic.gov.au).

## Authors and acknowledgements

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1. See, for example, Blue Knot, [*Becoming Trauma Informed Fact Sheet*](https://professionals.blueknot.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/45_BK_FS_PRF_BecomingTraumaInformed_Services_DEC23.pdf)and [*Talking About Trauma Fact Sheet*](https://blueknot.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/26_BK_FS_TalkingAboutTrauma_GeneralPublic_DEC23.pdf); AHRC, [*Racism: Nobody Wins: Guidelines for working with a trauma informed approach;* and National Legal Aid’s [*With You*](https://nationallegalaid.org.au/national-services/withyou)Training Program.](https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/ahrc_sr_2021_8_trauma-informed_approach_a4_r2_0.pdf) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. [Speaking from experience – our consumer advisory group | IMHA](https://www.imha.vic.gov.au/our-consumer-advisory-group-speaking-experience). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. The IMHA service provides non-legal advocacy to people who are receiving, or at risk of receiving, compulsory mental health treatment to support them to make decisions and have as much say as possible about their assessment, treatment, and recovery. For further information, see the [*IMHA website*](https://www.imha.vic.gov.au/). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. <http://www.indigodaya.com/resources/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. [Reconciliation Action Plan | Victoria Legal Aid](https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/reconciliation-action-plan). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. [Aboriginal Services Strategy 2020–25 | Victoria Legal Aid](https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-services-strategy-2020-25). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)