



Strategic Plan 2015 – 2019

Approved by the Committee on 20 October 2015

This Strategic Plan document lists the types of activity the Women Lawyers' Association of South Australia Inc (WLASA) plans to engage in over the coming five years in furtherance of the Objects listed in its Constitution. Each financial year the specific activities the Committee of WLASA will implement to further the Objects will be set out in the Action Items arising from each year's Strategic Planning Day.

The Strategic Plan also indicates which Committee Role or Subcommittee is responsible for carrying out each area of activity, however, this is a guide only and the responsibilities of each committee member will be decided at each year's Strategic Planning Day.

Executive Summary

The WLASA is at a very interesting time in its corporate life. Discrimination and other issues affecting women practising the law have become a national and local focus since the release of the Law Council of Australia's National Attrition and Reengagement Study (NARS) Report in March 2014. Other organisations including the Law Society of South Australia and the South Australian Bar Association are also taking steps to respond in a positive way to the recommendations of the NARS Report. An organisation promoting the interests of women has again been proven to be relevant and necessary.

WLASA has done a lot of excellent work in the field of women's rights for many years, but much of its work goes unnoticed. It is desirable that WLASA be a leader of change. To do this the activities and ideals of WLASA need to be promoted more often and to more people. Developing a media and information dissemination plan are essential to this ambition.

To assist WLASA to focus its attention on creating gender equitable practices and policies and continuing its valuable law reform agenda, its management structure needs to be further updated. This includes the gradual and affordable introduction of outsourced administration, which at present consumes much of the Committee's time.

WLASA has enjoyed a significant increase in membership over the past two years with the introduction of Corporate Membership and Free-for-Member CPD Sessions and will continue to work to increase it further so that as an organisation it can be truly representative of women in the South Australian legal profession. With increased membership and interest, however, new challenges face the organisation and hence there is a need to develop long term policies and a five yearly Strategic Plan to ensure the work of WLASA continues to operate in the best interests of women.

History of the Association

As early as the 1960s, women practising in the law (albeit few in number) recognised the need to meet together for support. Roma Mitchell QC (as she then was) and others hosted occasional lunches, providing the opportunity for social contact, support and guidance for younger women entering the profession.

Unlike the eastern states, it was not until the 1980s that the concept of a formal association took hold in South Australia. On 21 September 1988 a meeting was held at the Law Society to discuss forming a women lawyers group. Over 95 women attended and 60 more sent their apologies. This represented more than half of the women practising law at that time and clearly indicated that the concept of a women lawyers committee or group had considerable support.

An informal volunteer committee was established. One of the first activities was a dinner for women practitioners, in March 1989. Following is an extract from the first newsletter, published in July 1989:

"As everyone who attended will agree, our inaugural dinner in March was a great success...Following an introduction from Catherine Branson, (now Justice Branson, of the Federal Court), Dame Roma Mitchell addressed the guests. After reminiscing about earlier days, Dame Roma commented on the need for women to actively pursue careers in the law (and related fields) and gave her blessing and encouragement to our Women Lawyers' section."

The Women Lawyers Committee of the Law Society of South Australia (WLC) was formally established in April 1989. Then, as now, women were clearly identifying barriers to their career paths and actively seeking solutions. Tax deductibility of childcare was on the agenda, as was concern at the low numbers of women appointed to Courts and Tribunals. Then, as now, there was a commitment to maintaining contact between all women in the law, whether working full time or part time, in private practice or elsewhere.

The WLC has played an active role in the South Australian legal scene ever since, participating in Law Society debates, putting forward submissions on law reform issues, and providing regular social activities. Following the establishment of Australian Women Lawyers in 1997, the Women Lawyers Association of South Australia Inc was incorporated in 1998 and has operated as an independently incorporated body. However, most of the women comprising our committee continue also to act as members of the WLC and the activities of the two committees remain complementary.

Mission Statement

Fostering equality and justice in the legal profession and the general community and championing the recognition of women lawyers and supporting them to achieve their full potential

WLASA Objects

Clause 1.2 of the Constitution of WLASA reads:

- 1.2 *The objects of the Association are:*
- (a) *to achieve justice and equality for all women;*
 - (b) *to further understanding of and support for the legal rights of women;*
 - (c) *to identify, highlight and eradicate discrimination against women inherent in the legal system and in the community generally.*
 - (d) *to advance equality for women in the legal profession;*
 - (e) *to create and enhance awareness of women's contribution to the practice and development of the law;*
 - (f) *to make recommendations or submissions on law reform;*
 - (g) *to provide a professional and social network for women lawyers;*
 - (h) *to do all such other things as may be incidental to the attainment of such objects;*
 - (i) *any other objects as the Association may in General Meeting decide.*

Planned Activities to achieve each Object

Objects (a), (b) and (f)

- (a) *to achieve justice and equality for all women***
- (b) *to further understanding of and support for the legal rights of women***
- (f) *to make recommendations or submissions on law reform***

1. Prepare submissions and other policy documents which are consistent with WLASA's objects, whether in response to requests or otherwise, in relation to various legal issues and proposed legislative or other legal reforms.
2. Work together with and support the policy agenda of Australian Women Lawyers.
3. Prepare responsive and relevant press releases.

Responsibly:

Policy Subcommittee.

Objects (c), (d) and (e)

- (c) to identify, highlight and eradicate discrimination against women inherent in the legal system and in the community generally.**
 - (d) to advance equality for women in the legal profession;**
 - (e) to create and enhance awareness of women's contribution to the practice and development of the law;**
1. Support and facilitate the establishment of a mentoring program by the Law Society of South Australia for women lawyers who have five to fifteen years post admission experience.
 2. Be aware of the strategies being recommended by the LCA following the NARS Report and adopt such of those strategies which will best further the objects of WLASA.
 3. Promote South Australian women lawyers for State, National and International awards.
 4. Develop a South Australian Women in Law Awards.
 5. Recommend South Australian women Lawyers for promotion to senior positions within the profession – for example for judicial and senior council appointments.
 6. Further develop and formally launch the Find a Female Lawyer Listing.
 7. Assist in the development of and contribute to a regular Women in Law (or similar) Bulletin feature publication.
 8. Continue a close and mutually supportive relationship with Australian Women Lawyers and to develop a working relationship with the constituent bodies of other states and territories.
 9. Investigate the feasibility of developing, either independently or in conjunction with other organisations, Gender Equity Best Practice Guides for use by legal firms and other employers.
 10. Host, endorse and present at Continuing Professional Development seminars on the issues identified by the NARS report and which promote gender inclusive and supportive work environments, in particular on the topics: Unconscious Bias, Flexibility in the Workplace and Bullying and Harassment.
 11. Assist in the development of workable flexible and gender equal workplace practices by interviewing mid-career and senior members of the legal profession and contributing these interviews to the Bulletin Magazine of the LSSA.

Responsibly:

Education Subcommittee; Recognising and Promoting Women Subcommittee

WLC Chair and WLC Mentoring Subcommittee

Object (g)

(g) to provide a professional and social network for women lawyers

1. Continue to hold regular networking functions which meet the membership's expectations as to time, location and content.
2. Connect with students studying law at the South Australian universities by investigating the feasibility of establishing a yearly Alternative Careers Seminar.
3. Continuing to be involved with University Law Career fairs, Women in the Law Seminars and similar events.
4. Foster relationships between briefing solicitors and women practising at the South Australian independent bar.
5. Partner with the Young Lawyers Committee of the Law Society to survey the profession on the mental health impacts of current practicing methods and cultures and to assist in identifying changes which can be made to improve the sustainability of a healthy workplace.
6. Work to establish more connection with women working in the public sector, in-house, the independent bar and law students.
7. Develop partnerships with other legal (LCA, LSSA, AWL, AWL constituent bodies) and non-legal organisations.
8. Re-establish connections with former members of WLASA who are now senior members of the profession and record the history of WLASA as told by these members.
9. Investigate the feasibility of developing a regular e-newsletter for Members.
10. Maintain and continue the development of the website and social media platforms.

Responsibly:

Member Benefits Subcommittee, Education Subcommittee, Secretary and Website & Social Media Administrators.

Object (h)

(h) to do all such other things as may be incidental to the attainment of such objects

1. Manage WLASA with integrity and accountability and to improve the efficiency of its administrative systems.
2. Prepare an Annual Report to members and Budget each financial year.
3. Engage contracted administrative support that is affordable within the Budget and work towards increasing the amount of support that the Association can afford.
4. Develop policies to govern committee management as required, including reviewing Committee Roles, Subcommittees and Role Descriptions annually.
5. Work to improve financial systems as required including investigating methods of online banking, online membership renewal and payment for events by credit card.
6. Continue to raise funds to support the activities of WLASA through membership, sponsorship and grant applications.

Responsibly:

Treasurer, Secretary and Member Benefits Subcommittee.

Strategic Plan Approved By Committee



Signed by: Leah Marrone, President

Date: 20 October 2015