



ANNUAL REPORT

2024

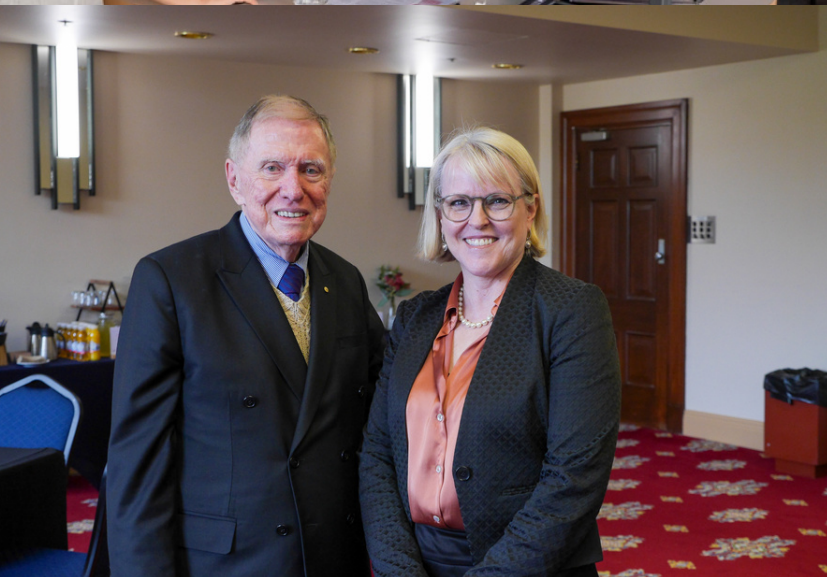


THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

**CENTRE FOR LAW
AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

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<https://www.newcastle.edu.au/research/centre/law-and-social-justice>





A WORD FROM OUR CO-DIRECTORS...



In 2024, the Centre for Law and Social Justice successfully contributed to social justice advocacy and law reform through a range of activities including submissions to parliamentary inquiries, Pacific engagement activities, publications, and the successful facilitation of events. In 2024, the Centre successfully facilitated 14 events including webinars, launches, round tables, public lectures, youth forums, symposiums, film screenings, and delegations to NSW Parliament.

In 2024, the Centre co-published the Right to Education in Australia Report with the Human Rights Law Centre and as a result, was invited to brief Senator Penny Allman-Payne on the work. The Centre also co-authored a submission in collaboration with Wakul Yabang Aboriginal Health Research Community Panel to the Inquiry into the Truth and Justice Commission Bill (2024). In addition, the Centre built collaborative partnerships with Samoa and Cook Island partners through trips funded by the University of Newcastle Global Experience Team. These trips established collaborative relationships with government agencies and NGO's to contribute to legal and policy projects based on legal needs identified by organisations - these trips furthered the University of Newcastle's commitment to Pacific Engagement.

In 2024, the Centre also welcomed Associate Professor Kcasey McLoughlin as co-Director alongside Professor Amy Maguire. We look forward to another successful year in 2025!



OUR NETWORK

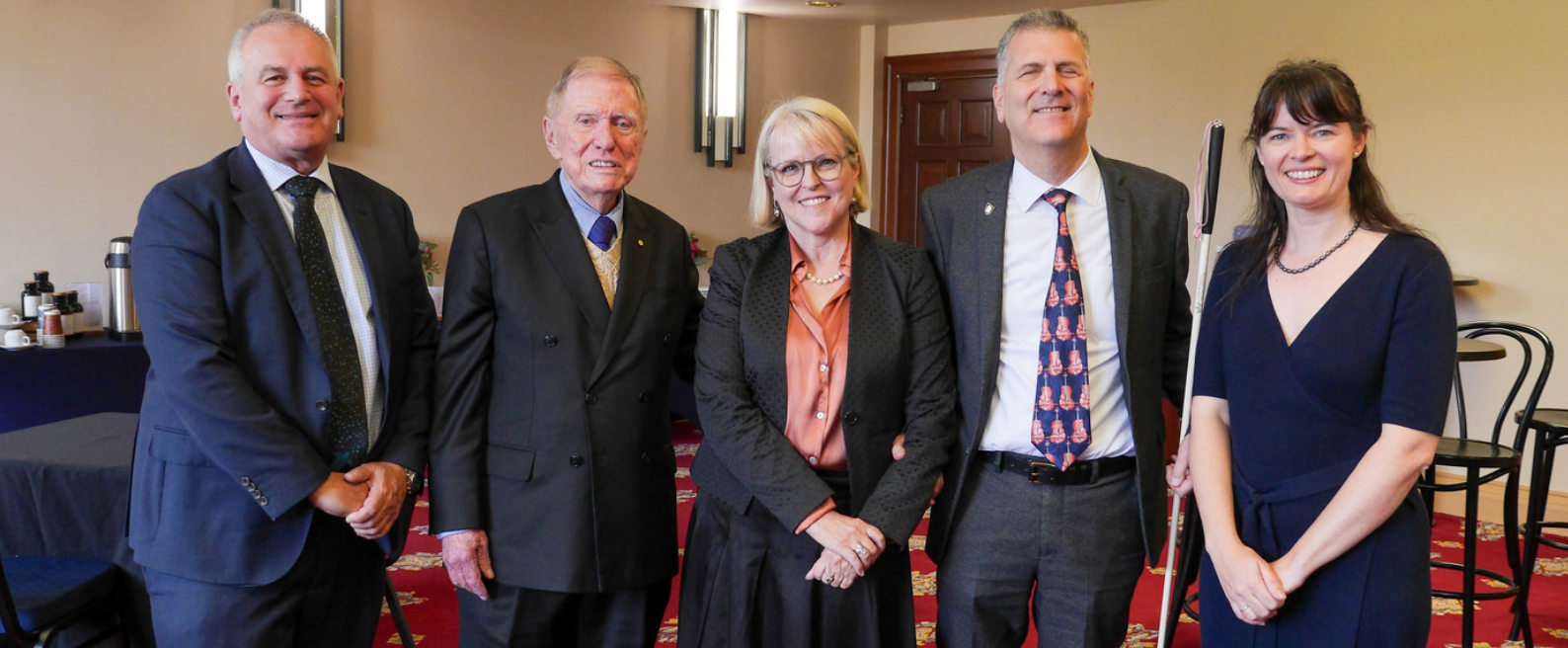
PARTNER ORGANISATIONS



Human
Rights
Law
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centre of **excellence**
for **equity** in higher
education



OUR NETWORK

CENTRE MEMBERS



Mirella Atherton



Belinda Bennett



Bethany Butchers



Justin Ellis



Marie Hadley



Shaun McCarthy



Lisa Molloy



Ray Nickson



Alice Neikirk



Kevin Sobel-Read



Joe Wenta



Samuel Woldemariam



OUR NETWORK

CENTRE ASSOCIATES



Jack Anderson



Natalie Baird



Zar Chavla



Hayley Cullen



Kishaya Delaney



Lauren Davies



Luke Hawthorne



Bronwyn Hemsley



Mary Anne Kenny



Fiona McGaughey



Jeffrey McGee



Maria O'Sullivan



Emma Parker



Charlotte Pascall



Sangeetha Pillai



Caitlin Reiger



Susan Harris Rimmer



Chris Turner



OUR NETWORK

UNIVERSITY FELLOWS



Tamara Blakemore



Professor Avi Brisman



Loren Collyer



Damien Linnane



Caitlin Mollica



Faye Nitschke



OVERVIEW

The Centre for Law and Social Justice is based in the University of Newcastle School of Law and Justice and is a site for research, engagement, learning, and advocacy. Here, expert researchers and clinical staff partner with students, communities, and key organisations. In its first three years of operation, the Centre has built a national and global profile as a driving force in social justice research, policymaking, law reform, and community engagement. The Centre has established an impressive network of centre members, partner organisations, fellows, and associates, and is committed to investing in clinical initiatives, research training, and student internships to support a sustainable future. The six core values of the Centre for Law and Social Justice are:



Vision

The vision of the Centre for Law and Social Justice is to position the University as a leader in social justice transformation through research, teaching and practice.

Mission

The Centre for Law and Social Justice aims to foster a deep commitment to social and ethical practices, to develop solutions to pressing and complex social justice problems, and to encourage and support multidisciplinary collaboration and innovation.



OVERVIEW

In alignment with the Centre's commitment to build a better justice system, address injustice, and apply legal solutions, the Centre has made impressive contributions in advocacy and law reform. In 2024, our Centre Members authored a collaborative submission to the Inquiry into the Truth and Justice Commission Bill (2024). In addition, our submissions to the Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework (2023) were cited extensively in the 2024 final Inquiry Report - demonstrating significant policy impact. In February 2024, the Centre launched the Right to Education in Australia Report with the Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC). As a result of our advocacy efforts in this space, the Centre was invited to brief Senator Penny Allman-Payne on the research findings. Senator Allman-Payne reported that the briefing was *"informative and helpful"* and that she would *"continue to consider how human rights discourse can help to identify resourcing needs."*

In 2024, the Centre expanded its outreach activities to an international context, with two funded international trips to Samoa and Cook Islands as part of our broader Pacific Engagement Strategy. The aim of these trips were to establish collaborative relationships with government agencies and NGO's to contribute to legal and policy projects based on legal needs identified by organisations. The international engagements were funded by the UON Global Experience grant.

In 2024, the Centre's advocacy and outreach activities expanded to include delegations to NSW Parliament on the invitation of Trisha Doyle MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Heritage. In addition, our 2024 Youth Forum on the Right to Participate in Public and Political Life attracted 80+ participants from across 17 schools in the Newcastle and Hunter Region and attracted significant interest from local media including NBN news, the Newcastle Herald, and ABC Newcastle. The Youth Forum was attended by Tim Crakanthorp MP, State Member for Newcastle who committed to facilitating a delegation to NSW Parliament in 2025. In addition to successful advocacy efforts, in 2024, the Centre was affiliated with two successful grant applications. Centre Director, Professor Amy Maguire was awarded a \$1.14m Australian Research Council Mid-Career Industry Fellowship. Dr Caitlin Mollica and Professor Maguire will collaborate with Associate Professor Stephenson Chow (WSU) and Associate Professor Fiona McGaughey (UWA) on research relating to students with invisible disabilities, funded through the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success 2024-2025 Large Grants program.

SNAPSHOT OVERVIEW

In 2024 the Centre for Law and Social Justice has...

Ø Hosted **14 events** and attracted **650 attendees** across all events and **100+ views** on recorded events. These events include public lectures, panel discussions, online webinars, Q&A sessions, roundtables, youth forums, report launches, film screenings, and a symposium.

Ø Made **a submission** to a parliamentary inquiry - Inquiry into the Truth and Justice Commission Bill (2024) and received **25 citations** in the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights - Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework Report.

Ø Hosted **a delegation to NSW Parliament** on the invitation of Trisha Doyle MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change, Energy, Environment, and Heritage.

Ø Supported **2 international trips** to Samoa and the Cook Islands as part of the Centre's commitment to Pacific Engagement. These trips were funded by the University of Newcastle Global Experience Fund. Funding was secured by Associate Professor Kevin Sobel-Read, who has led the School of Law and Justice in its Pacific engagement over many years.

Ø Published **a statement** on the Right to Participate in Public and Political Life.

Ø **Achieved external research funding success**, including funding from Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) and Australian Research Council (Mid-Career Industry Fellowship)

Ø Attracted **3,088 unique users to our website** and **6,440 page views** across **13 countries**.

Ø Disseminated **4 newsletters** to our mailing list of **300+ supporters**.

Right to Education in Australia Launch

"I appreciated the diversity of communities that the panel were representing and the time spent on speaking about the rights of asylum seeker, Aboriginal, disabled and incarcerated peoples experiences."



ADVOCACY AND LAW REFORM

A core function of the Centre for Law and Social Justice is to contribute to advocacy and law reform initiatives. Our advocacy extends to clinical expertise with our partner University of Newcastle Legal Centre offering pro bono services in the pursuit of public good. A detailed list of our advocacy and law reform efforts to date can be found on our [website](#).

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework

As part of our advocacy work, the Centre for Law and Social Justice (CLSJ) made two [submissions](#) to the Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework (submissions 185 and 185.1). One research-informed submission was focused broadly on proposed reforms to Australia's human rights framework, and the other submission was focused particularly on the human right to education in Australia. The Centre's submissions demonstrated the need for a comprehensive human rights framework, including the adoption of a national Human Rights Act, to guide decision making, prevent breaches of human rights, and establish appropriate mechanisms to resolve human rights complaints. The Parliamentary Committee received 335 submissions. Despite the high volume of submissions, the inquiry Report acknowledged the Centre for Law and Social Justice's contributions with **25 citations**, demonstrating significant policy impact. The Parliamentary Committee particularly noted the Centre's input regarding the rights of children and young people, LGBTQIA+ people, business and human rights, human rights in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of the Australian Human Rights Commission, and evidence that existing mechanisms are insufficient to adequately protect and promote human rights.

CLSJ submissions recommended the implementation of a Human Rights Act for Australia that reflects the full range of Australia's international legal obligations, and that human rights law reform attends to the rights of the most vulnerable people and communities in Australian society. In alignment with the Centre's recommendations, the Committee recommended 'comprehensive and effective protection of human rights in legislation, through the establishment of a Human Rights Act.' It is encouraging to see the Centre having influence on policy recommendations so soon after its launch in 2022, and a testament to the quality of the research contributed by Centre Members.



Delegation to NSW Parliament

On Thursday 26 September 2024, the Centre for Law and Social Justice led a delegation of Hunter high school students to NSW Parliament. The delegation was invited to Parliament by Trisha Doyle MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Heritage, following the [launch](#) of the [School Students' Statement on the Right to a Healthy Environment](#). This Statement was produced by Hunter school students at the Centre for Law and Social Justice 2023 [Youth Forum](#), which focused on the right to a healthy environment. The delegation had the opportunity to meet with:

- Rose Jackson MP, Minister for Water, Homelessness, Mental Health, Youth and the North Coast
- Yasmin Catley MP, Minister for Police and Counter Terrorism
- Greg Piper MP, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
- Jason Yat-Sen Li MP, Assistant Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
- Liesl Tesch MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Families and Communities, and for Disability Inclusion
- Tim Crakanthorp MP, Member for Newcastle
- Clayton Barr MP, Member for Cessnock

The students advocated for the protection of people's right to protest in the context of Hunter-based climate activism. Students also had an opportunity to advocate for an increased investment in mental health support in the school system. As a result of this direct advocacy, the delegation was invited by Minister Jackson to provide feedback on a report titled 'Reducing the Stigma of Mental Health'. This report was drafted by the NSW Government in consultation with the NSW Youth Advisory Council (YAC).

Inquiry into the Truth and Justice Commission Bill (2024)

The Centre for Law and Social Justice co-authored a [submission](#) in collaboration with Wakul Yabang Aboriginal Health Research Community Panel to the [Inquiry into the Truth and Justice Commission Bill \(2024\)](#). The submission supports the establishment of A Truth and Justice Commission to uncover the full extent of the past injustices experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The submission recommends that the Committee reviews the guiding principles for truth-telling provided by the organisation 'Uphold & Recognition' in their earlier submission to the Joint Select Committee Inquiry into Constitutional Recognition. The submission also identifies and recommends a number of amendments to the proposed Bill. Submissions received by the Committee can be found [here](#). The Centre's submission is number 35.



GRANT APPLICATIONS

Amy Maguire - ARC Mid-Career Industry Fellowship

With a commitment to human rights reform, including the development of a world-class national human rights index, a project led by Centre Director, Professor Amy Maguire has been awarded a \$1.14m ARC Mid-Career Industry Fellowship. The project seeks to address core challenges for human rights reform identified by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). It aims to deliver new knowledge about law reform in Australian and international systems, and a first ever study of human rights indices – forming the evidence base for Australian policy and law-making. Along with the world-class national human rights index to measure Australia's human rights performance, the project will deliver best-practice human rights education programs, and an AHRC Research Alliance to promote continuing cross-sector collaboration. The project aims to enhance protections, especially for the most vulnerable, and help establish a more preventive approach to rights, making Australian society fairer and more cohesive.

Industry partner: Australian Human Rights Commission

Enabling Equitable Learning Approaches for Students with Invisible Disabilities in Higher Education

A research project led by Dr Caitlin Mollica, Dr Stephenson Chow and Professor Amy Maguire, was one of three successful projects selected for funding as part of the ACSES's 2024-25 Large Grants Research Program. The 2024-25 Round was launched in March 2024, with ACSES calling for proposals that outlined projects across three research priorities:

1. Alternative pathways to university and impact on academic outcomes
2. Student wellbeing for success
3. Collaboration for student equity and success – intra-sectoral (institutions within higher education) and inter-sectoral (institutions across higher, vocational, and secondary education)

This project will use survey, focus group, and interview data collection and analysis to identify ways in which universities can better address the needs of students with invisible disabilities and support more equitable learning environments.



PACIFIC ENGAGEMENT

In June/July 2024, Associate Professor Maguire, Saskia Jones, and three law students travelled to Samoa to represent the Centre for Law and Social Justice. The aim of the trip was to establish collaborative relationships with government agencies and NGO's to contribute to legal and policy projects based on legal needs identified by organisations.

During the trip, Centre representatives met with the Ombudsman/National Human Rights Institution, The UN Country Team, The Australian High Commission, The Office of the Public Service Commission, Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental, and NOLA (Disability Advocacy Organisation). The group also had an opportunity to visit a local pre-school in the village. The trip was productive, with a number of partnerships in the preliminary stages of being formalised. This work was funded by the Global Experience Team as part of the University of Newcastle's commitment to Pacific Engagement.

In July 2024, Associate Professor Kevin Sobel-Read accompanied four law students to the Cook Islands where they provided a range of law-related contributions including policy research, rule and regulation drafting, legislative drafting and information brochures.





EVENTS

The Centre for Law and Social Justice is committed to knowledge dissemination and facilitation of robust and insightful discussion. In 2024, The Centre successfully hosted 14 events addressing a range of topics. These events attracted 650+ live attendees and 100+ views on recorded events.

Right to Education Report Launch

On 22 February 2024, the Centre in collaboration with The Human Rights Law Centre launched the Right to Education in Australia Report. The launch discussed the right to education, who is missing out on that right in the Australian context, and the difference a Human Rights Charter would make. The launch event attracted significant attention with 225+ registrations and 115 people attending live. The recording has since been accessed over 50 times. Professor Amy Maguire was also interviewed by 2NURFM to discuss the Report. Following the launch, The Centre for Law and Social Justice and Human Rights Law Centre received a request to provide a briefing on the Report from the office of Greens Education Spokesperson Penny Allman-Payne. The recording can be accessed [here](#).

School Students' Statement on the Right to a Healthy Environment - Launch

On Wednesday 10 April 2024, Trisha Doyle MP, NSW Parliamentary Secretary for Environment, Heritage, Climate Change, and Energy, launched the School Students' Statement on the Right to a Healthy Environment. The launch event was attended by more than 30 students, parents and carers, and school teachers. The event also attracted media attention with Alex Goodsir from St Francis Xavier's College Hamilton interviewed for ABC Radio's Drive program.

Just Work as a Team - Roundtable

On 24 April 2024, Newcastle-based researchers, parents, government, and child protection workers came together in what's believed to be a national first to find solutions to a broken system. The roundtable, led by Dr Nicola Ross, explored the role of families in the child protection system. The event attracted over 80+ attendees.

Public Lecture, Justice Kirby, What it is like being on the High Court of Australia

On 29 July 2024, the Centre for Law and Social Justice hosted The Hon. Michael Kirby for a public lecture. The public lecture was attended by 150 people in person with 40 people joining the livestream online. The recording of the full lecture can be accessed [here](#).

EVENTS

Book Launch, Agency and Ownership in Reconciliation: Youth and the Practice of Transitional Justice

On 6 August 2024, Dr. Caitlin Mollica (Lecturer, Newcastle Business School) and the Centre launched Dr. Mollica's recent book, *Agency and Ownership in Reconciliation: Youth and the Practice of Transitional Justice*, published by SUNY Press. The book draws on cases of South Africa, Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands and explores how reconciliation practices engage with young people as political actors.

Australian Human Rights Commission, Speaking from Experience Focus Group

On 7 August 2024, the Centre partnered with the Australian Human Rights Commission on their "Speaking from Experience Project" to raise awareness around workplace sexual harassment, especially in under-represented groups. The aim of the project was to hear from young people who have been sexually harassed at work to discuss helpful responses to workplace harassment and what these look like, unhelpful responses and what these look like, and to identify changes required in the workplace to address sexual harassment.

HDR Roundtable

On 26 August 2024, The Centre convened an HDR roundtable. The roundtable was part of the HDR Student Festival organised by Graduate Research which consisted of a week of events and celebrations. The roundtable brought together thirteen HDR candidates to present their research with peers from Criminology and Law disciplines. The group engaged in critical thinking guided by discussants Professor John Anderson and Associate Professor Xanthe Mallett.

We Gotchu Girl (WGG), Family Law Reform

On 16 September 2024, the Centre co-hosted a panel on family law reform in collaboration with We Gotchu Girl (WGG). The panel explored key issues affecting family law including domestic violence protections, the role of legal professionals, and ongoing reforms in this space.



EVENTS

AHRSN, Developments in Australia's Human Rights Framework

On Monday 16 November 2024, the Centre convened the Australasian Human Rights Scholars' Networks (AHRSN) inaugural event. The webinar explored proposed reforms to Australia's human rights system and offered insight into the Australian Human Rights Commission Free and Equal project, findings of a major parliamentary inquiry into Australia's human rights system, and next steps for the reform agenda. The recording can be accessed [here](#).

We Gotchu Girl (WGG), Domestic Violence against Indigenous Communities

On Wednesday 9 October, the Centre co-hosted a panel with We Gotchu Girl (WGG) on domestic violence and Indigenous women. The panel underscored the need for trust, cultural awareness, and systemic reform to address the specific challenges faced by Indigenous women in domestic violence situations.



EVENTS

Youth Forum, Right to Participate in Public and Political Life

On Wednesday 6 November, the Centre, in collaboration with the Australian Lawyers for Human Rights and Human Rights for New South Wales Alliance, hosted a Youth Forum on the Right to Participate in public and political life. The event brought together 80+ high school students from 17 schools across the Hunter region of NSW, to discuss the right to participation in the context of human rights. Together, the students collaboratively drafted the **'School Students' Statement on the Right to Participate in Public and Political Life.'**

The event was attended by Tim Crakanthorp MP, State Member for Newcastle, who committed to facilitating a delegation to NSW Parliament in 2025. The event also attracted media attention including engagement from Newcastle Herald, NBN News, and ABC Newcastle. For more information, visit our website [here](#).

The Forum was addressed by Nicholas Stewart, President of Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, and Anastasia Radievska, Protest Rights Campaigner at the Australian Democracy Network. The event was generously sponsored by Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, convenor of the Human Rights for NSW Alliance.





EVENTS

Human Rights Symposium

On Monday 25 November 2024, the Centre for Law and Social Justice hosted a Human Rights Symposium at the University of Newcastle Sydney Campus.

The symposium was timely, given Australia has reached a moment of significant opportunity in human rights terms. The Australian Human Rights Commission has concluded its landmark Free and Equal inquiry and published a report recommending major reform of Australia's human rights framework. The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights has reported on its own inquiry, issuing several complementary recommendations to Government, including for the passage of a national Human Rights Act.

This one-day event welcomed speakers with diverse perspectives on Australia's legal system to present research and share lived experiences relevant to Australia's human rights framework. The Symposium was attended by 40+ academics, lawyers, practitioners, advocates, and government representatives and covered a range of topics including human rights systems and vulnerabilities, current issues, anti-discrimination for LGBTQIA+ peoples, and reproductive rights. The Symposium included representation from peak human rights bodies including the Australian Human Rights Commission, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, the Human Rights Law Centre, and Anti-Discrimination NSW. The full program can be accessed [here](#).

The day was highly productive, providing a rare opportunity for the human rights community to come together to discuss Australia's human rights framework and solutions to complex problems.





EVENTS

Film Screening for the Newcastle Domestic Violence Committee

On Tuesday 10 December 2024 (International Human Rights Day), the Centre co-hosted a film screening of 'We Were Dangerous' (2024) with the Newcastle Domestic Violence Committee Fundraiser as part of the 16 days of activism against gender based violence campaign. The film was preceded by a panel facilitated by co-Director Kcasey McLoughlin - the panel was made up of Professor Penny Jane Burke, Dr Kathleen McPhillips, Di Brook-Fleming, and Dr Nafiseh Ghafournia. The screening was attended by 40 persons.



FEEDBACK SUMMARY

Right to Education in Australia Report Launch

"Please keep educating Australia on the importance of human rights, what they are, where they fit in our daily lives and how without a human rights act we are impacted significantly."

Next Steps for Human Rights Protection in Australia

"Thank you for an engaging and educational session. Answered a few queries I had, particularly regarding how ESC rights are to be addressed."

School Students' Statement on the Right to a Healthy Environment Launch

*"I was pleased to read of the students' strong commitment to promoting a healthy environment and their willingness to engage in constructive discussions about the diverse range of issues raised in their Statement. I congratulate the students, and all involved in organising the form, and for producing a considered and thoughtful Statement" – The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for the Environment and Water*

Youth Forum Right to Participation

"As an observer it was enlightening and educational watching and listening to the opinions and ideas of our young people."

Public Lecture - Justice Kirby

"The lecture provided an insider perspective on Justice Kirby's time on the bench and the cases which had the most profound impact on his perspectives of justice and human rights. We were taken on a journey which followed his early life as a lawyer leading workers compensation cases, to his reflections on his appointment to the High Court of Australia."

Right to Education in Australia Report Launch

"I read your report regarding the Right to Education and I certainly hope it gets the attention it deserves. An especially vulnerable cohort in terms of accessing education are children in care (especially the growing numbers in temporary and/or residential care) and young people who are involved in the criminal justice system" - Children's Court Magistrate

