



Anna Kerr

Founder and Principal Solicitor of Feminist Legal Clinic in Sydney

Anna Kerr is Co-Chair of the Women and Girls' sub-committee of the Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) – a role she shares with Rita Shackel, an associate professor at the University of Sydney Law School. Kerr completed an Arts/Law degree at Macquarie University in 1991 before taking her first job in legal practice with the Aboriginal Legal Service in Sydney. She has worked for several free legal services, including Redfern Legal Centre, Shopfront Youth Legal Centre and NSW Women's Legal Service. In 2014, she founded the Feminist Legal Clinic and works part-time on pro bono legal work for women. She speaks to **KATE ALLMAN**.

What sparked your interest in the law?

I grew up on a farm in the Hunter Valley and was the youngest child, with three older brothers. I guess I was always somebody who took the side of the underdog. My mum is German and my father is fourth-generation Australian, so I had grandparents on both sides of World War 1. I grew up with an appreciation that there are a range of perspectives to every story.

What did you learn from your first legal job?

My first legal job was with the Prison Unit of the Aboriginal Legal Service in Redfern. I was a solicitor in the criminal section, and I would go to a different court each day and then usually visit a jail in the afternoon. On my second day at work, I did the Supreme Court bail list and I had no experience at all. That was a bit of a baptism by fire. I gained tremendous insights into what social inequity looks like and the shortcomings of our legal system.

What inspired you to found the Feminist Legal Clinic in Sydney?

Throughout my years working in community legal centres, I noticed that there are so many women falling through the gaps, who get caught up in family law or domestic violence issues, who are not qualifying for Legal Aid and can't afford private representation. I established the Feminist Legal Clinic to support feminist groups and services, such as the Coalition for Women's Refuges and the Women's Family Law Court Support Service, who work to fill this gap. It also enables me to do the work I find worthwhile while having the flexibility I need as a mother of four children.

Can you explain the work you do there?

Most of my legal case work relates to domestic violence and family law. I am working on several human rights claims and have just finished work on a Hague Convention case involving a child abduction return application, where our client instructs that her child's father is violent and that she fears for her safety should she be compelled to return to overseas with the child. I write law reform submissions to Parliamentary Inquiries. The centre also supports important campaigns like End 12, which aims to convince legislators to finally remove abortion from the *Crimes Act* with a Bill to be debated next week in NSW Parliament.

What is one of the biggest challenges women face in the Australian legal system?

There are so many. Even in 2017, women's reproductive rights are under attack, there is significant gender-based pay inequity, the women's refuge movement and other specialist women's services are being dismantled, and the legal system is failing to protect women and children from violence and abuse. The incarceration of women has risen drastically in the past few years in proportion to other groups. However, the vast majority of violent crime is perpetrated by men. Meanwhile, the majority of unpaid care work is still undertaken by women.

When you are 70, where will you be?

I probably will be doing what I'm doing at the Feminist Legal Clinic now, which is what I find worthwhile. Outside work, I'd hope to be spending time with my children. I might even be on grandmother duties by then.