

From outreach to leadership



Tracey Castine

My journey within Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) has been shaped by both professional experience and lived reality, and it continues to guide how I support my team, our clients, and the broader community.

In 2021, the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission (NTLAC) received one-year funding to trial an integrated service model known as Legal Health Mob. This initiative embedded a full-time lawyer alongside an Indigenous Outreach Worker within Danila Dilba Health Service. Although the funding focused on supporting clients experiencing family violence during COVID-19, the relatively brief lockdown in the Northern Territory highlighted that clients' legal needs extended far beyond this. Housing issues, appeals, and broader advocacy needs were consistently present.

When funding ceased in 2022, Legal Health transitioned into the SEWB team, reinforcing the importance of maintaining legal support within a holistic, culturally-grounded framework. Legal advocacy remained essential not only for addressing practical legal matters but also for supporting the psychosocial factors impacting mental health and wellbeing.

As a SEWB Indigenous Outreach Worker, I worked closely with clients to provide advocacy across a range of legal and social challenges. Supporting clients with housing, appeals, and navigating complex systems, I saw how positive legal outcomes could improve stability and reduce mental-health pressures. This strengthened my commitment to holistic, culturally-responsive care.

My role evolved to include facilitating Elders social groups and contributing to the Cultural SEWB program. These experiences deepened my connections within community and reinforced the importance of culture, trust, and relationships in healing.

Stepping into the role of SEWB Adult Manager marked another significant shift. Moving from a close-knit team member to a leadership position challenged me to grow professionally and personally. I became responsible for guiding a diverse team of support workers, coordinators, and SEWB counsellors.

What I bring into this role is not just professional knowledge, but lived experience. My own journey with social and emotional wellbeing shapes how I lead. I



Photos of Tracey's family and community – people who keep her strong.



understand the importance of being heard, feeling culturally safe, and receiving genuine support, and this informs how I engage with both my team and clients. In managing my team, I've identified several key needs. Cultural safety is fundamental. My team must feel they can show up as their whole selves, grounded in culture and identity, without separating that from their professional roles. When this is supported, they thrive.

Ongoing support and supervision are also critical. The work is heavy, with staff supporting people through trauma, grief, and complex challenges often within their own communities. I prioritise regular check-ins, yarning, and debriefing to support both performance and wellbeing.

Workload management and clear boundaries are equally

important. SEWB workers often take on multiple roles, increasing the risk of burnout. As a manager, I focus on setting realistic expectations and reinforcing boundaries to protect my team.

I deeply value the lived experience my team brings. It strengthens their ability to connect with others, but it can also be a burden. My role is to ensure this experience is respected without it coming at the cost of their own wellbeing.

Connection and peer support are essential. Some of the most meaningful moments come from simply sitting together, sharing stories, and supporting one another. Creating space for this is vital.

I also recognise the importance of growth and leadership opportunities. Many team members have strong

potential, and I am committed to supporting their development and creating pathways forward. Ultimately, supporting my team means supporting the whole person culturally, emotionally, and professionally. Their needs are deeply connected to who they are, and my responsibility is to foster an environment where they feel valued and supported.

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In May 2025, I was delighted to attend a two-day workshop organised by the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP) and Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing (TIMHWB), at the University of Western Australia. The workshop focused on the needs of SEWB workers and the development of a SEWB training that will support them.

Over the two days, I found it meaningful to be in a space where the SEWB workforce could come together with a shared purpose — supporting and strengthening the way we

prepare staff entering the SEWB space. It was also powerful to connect with workers from other Indigenous Health Services and SEWB programs to identify workforce needs and strengthen our sector. The workshop was not just about developing training content; it was about hearing people's experiences, learning from each other, and recognising the importance of doing this work in a way that is culturally safe, grounded, and human. What stood out most for me was the openness in the room. People brought honesty, knowledge, and lived experience, which made the conversations feel genuine and practical rather than theoretical. It reminded me that SEWB work is deeply connected to relationships, trust, and understanding the whole person — not just their immediate challenges.

I also appreciated the chance to reflect on what new staff might need when stepping into this space for the first time. Entering SEWB work can feel overwhelming, and the workshop highlighted how important it is that training creates not only knowledge and skills, but also confidence, cultural awareness, and a strong sense of support.

Personally, the workshop reinforced why this work matters so much. Being able to sit alongside others who are passionate about strengthening social and emotional wellbeing for communities made me feel hopeful and motivated. It felt less like a formal workshop and more like a collective effort to build something meaningful for the workforce and for the people we support.

I am grateful to CBPATSISP and TIMHWB for facilitating such a meaningful workshop. Moving forward, I am excited to see the fruits of our labour by attending the pilot SEWB training through Danila Dilba Health Services, delivered by Ms Tegan Scheffe and the team at the CBPATSISP. I believe the training will support me in my leadership as I work towards providing holistic and culturally appropriate SEWB services for our peoples and communities.

Tracey Castine is a 38-year-old Wombaya woman from her mother's side. She is a mother of two and stepmother to three, bringing her blended clan to five (four boys and one girl). She was born on the beautiful Larrakia Country in Darwin and has lived in Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin.

This article is part of a series of Koori Mail columns about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention contributed by authors from the CBPATSISP, which as established in 2017 to develop and share evidence about effective suicide-prevention approaches for First Nations people and communities.