



Family Law Conference 2026

Contemporary Issues, Pragmatic Solutions

Conference Programme for Thursday 10 September

JustFund8

**The *Law*
Association**
OF NEW ZEALAND

In Person: *Registration* 8:30 AM – 9:00 AM
Conference 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM
Networking 4:30 PM – 5:30 PM
Livestream: *Conference* 9:00 AM–4:30 PM

CPD Hours: 6

Venue: TLANZ, Level 18, 48 Shortland
Street, Vero Centre, Auckland
(Shortland and Chancery Rooms)

Join us at the **Family Law** Conference 2026

Family law is constantly evolving and with changing legislation, emerging case law, and increasingly complex family dynamics.

The Family Law Conference 2026 brings together members of the judiciary, experienced practitioners, and leading experts to examine the key issues shaping contemporary family law practice. Through practical, thought-provoking sessions, the programme explores recent legal developments, judicial perspectives, and the real-world challenges facing family lawyers today.

Designed for family law practitioners at all stages of their careers, the conference delivers practical guidance, expert analysis, and valuable insights to support confident and effective practice. From navigating legislative and procedural changes to understanding emerging trends and refining advocacy, you'll gain the knowledge and perspectives needed to meet the evolving demands of the profession.

Whether you're looking to deepen your expertise, stay abreast of the latest developments, or connect with colleagues and leaders in the field, this conference offers an outstanding opportunity to enhance your practice. Join us for a day of learning, discussion, and networking with peers, members of the Bench, and respected experts from across the family law community.

Secure your spot today!

Networking Opportunities

Build valuable connections at the Family Law Conference 2026. Engage with peers and industry experts during dedicated networking sessions and post-event drinks.

Expand your professional network, exchange insights and connect with like-minded professionals in a relaxed and engaging setting.

**Don't miss this chance to
grow your connections!**



Family Law Conference *Tickets*

Thursday 10 September 2026

9:00 AM – 4:30 PM (6 CPD Hours)

TLANZ, Level 18, Vero Centre, 48 Shortland Street, Auckland

Livestreamed and In Person
Limited in-person spaces available.

	Member	Non-member
Early Bird Pricing (until 20 August 2026)	\$552 ^{+GST}	\$779 ^{+GST}
Full Pricing (from 21 August 2026)	\$615 ^{+GST}	\$865 ^{+GST}
Early Bird pricing ends 20 August 2026)		



Register for
Auckland In Person



Register for the
Livestream

Group bookings available by emailing
cpd@thelawassociation.nz

The Programme

Time	Mins	Session	Presenters
8:30 AM	30	Registration, Coffee and Pastries	
9:00 AM	5	Opening by Co-Chairs	Alissa Bell, Partner, McVeagh Fleming Stuart Cummings, Senior Counsel, Surrey Chambers
9:05 AM	45	From the Bench: Judicial Perspectives and Insights Hear directly from his Honour Judge Goodwin and her Honour Judge Gray as they offer judicial perspectives and practical insights into the issues facing today's family law practitioners. A unique opportunity to gain insight from the Bench.	His Honour Judge Goodwin Her Honour Judge Gray
9:50 AM	45	Evidence Integrity Challenges in the Digital Paradigm Digital evidence is now a feature of many family law proceedings, raising important questions of authenticity, reliability, and evidentiary integrity. This session examines the challenges posed by the evolving digital landscape, including the impact of artificial intelligence, and considers practical approaches to assessing, verifying, and challenging digital evidence in litigation.	Dr David Harvey, Barrister, Retired District Court Judge
10:35 AM	45	Psychology and High Conflict Cases: De-escalation in Practice By its nature, family law involves clients and others experiencing significant stress. What strategies can be engaged to manage difficult interactions, address challenging behaviour and handle high-conflict situations? This session will provide practical insights for maintaining professionalism and effectiveness in demanding practice environments.	Alex Ashmore, Barrister, Hepburn Chambers Dr Bahrie Velu, Clinical Psychologist
11:20 AM	10	In Focus with JustFund As New Zealand's first specialist family law funder, JustFund helps clients fund legal fees and living expenses during separation. This session explores how flexible funding supports better client outcomes and allows lawyers to focus on the legal work that matters most.	Lauren Milne, Director, Family Law (NZ)
11:30 AM	45	Networking / Morning Break	
12:15 PM	30	Family Law and Cross-Jurisdictional Issues Family law does not sit in isolation. Cases can intersect with criminal, youth, employment, and immigration matters. This session will explore the role and interaction of protection orders within the criminal jurisdiction, including consideration of the appropriateness of seeking the adjournment of Family Violence Act proceedings for extended periods while criminal proceedings are determined. Navigating the complexities created by overlapping branches of law will also be examined.	Alissa Bell, Partner, McVeagh Fleming Vanessa Curac, Barrister, Friendship Chambers

The Programme (Cont'd)

Time	Mins	Session	Presenters
12:45 PM	40	The Future of Family Law Billing – Fixed Fees What difference will AI make to your fees and pricing? This session looks at fixed fees and how that compares with hourly billing. Communication and openness is key to agreed pricing.	Jeremy Sutton, Barrister, Bastion Chambers
1:25 PM	50	No Good Deed Goes Unappointed: PPPR Update From difficult appointments to difficult families, this practical session explores the realities of PPPR practice through recent developments, case studies and some of the thornier issues facing practitioners today. Together, Theresa and Chris explore the topic from “entry to exit” throughout the PPPR life cycle.	Theresa Donnelly, Head of Legal, Perpetual Guardian Chris Holdaway, Barrister
2:15 PM	45	Networking / Afternoon Break	
3:00 PM	35	Managing a Legal Aid File Legal aid plays a critical role in ensuring access to justice for family law clients. This practical session will explore the effective management of legal aid files within practice, including practical approaches to running matters efficiently and sustainably, while encouraging greater engagement with this important area of work.	Reagan McKenzie, Barrister Jessica Thwaites, Senior Solicitor, Holbrook Law
3:35 PM	50	PRA in Practice: Advanced Issues and Emerging Trends Join our panel as they discuss some of the more complex and evolving areas of Property (Relationships) Act practice. Drawing on recent developments and practical experience, this session will provide valuable insights for family law practitioners.	Jennie Hawker, Director, Haigh Lyon Lawyers Jeremy Johnson, Barrister, Bankside Chambers Georgia Johnston, Senior Associate, Wynn Williams Zandra Wackenier, Partner, Tompkins Wake
4:25 PM	5	Closing by Co-Chairs & TLANZ President	Alissa Bell, Partner, McVeagh Fleming Stuart Cummings, Senior Counsel, Surrey Chambers Tony Herring, President, The Law Association of NZ
4:30 PM	60	Networking and Refreshments	

Our *Presenters*



Co-Chair of the Conference

Stuart Cummings

Senior Counsel, Surrey Chambers

Stuart commenced practising in 1979 as an old-fashioned law clerk while completing his law degree. After admission in 1982, Stuart practised in the criminal and family courts before specialising exclusively in family law from the late 1980s. Stuart has practised as a Barrister Sole since 1990, was a contributing author to Brookers Family Law on Relationship Property and is convenor of The Law Association Family Law Committee. His practice is now principally in the areas of relationship property and complex COCA cases.



Co-Chair of the Conference

Alissa Bell

Partner, McVeagh Fleming

Alissa is a partner and Chair of the Board at McVeagh Fleming. She has been practising family law since 2003, initially in Christchurch before joining McVeagh Fleming in Auckland in 2011. Alissa specialises in relationship property, estate, and trust disputes, care of children, family violence and mediation. She is also an accredited NZLS Panel of Mediators Family Specialist, a trained Collaborative Practitioner, and a Lawyer for Child.

His Honour Judge Goodwin

Judge Goodwin was appointed a District Court Judge in 2016. He began legal practice as a solicitor in London, practising in family law, housing law and serious crime. He immigrated to New Zealand in 1994 and built a practice in family law. Before moving to Eden Street Chambers as a barrister, he was a managing partner at Corban Revell Lawyers. He holds General and Family warrants, and sits in Manukau.

Her Honour Judge Gray

Judge Gray was appointed as a Family Court Judge in 2025 and sits in Auckland Family Court. She was previously a family lawyer practising in Wellington. Judge Gray practised in all areas of family law. She has a particular interest in medico legal, disability and PPPR matters. She was appointed as lawyer for subject person and was a District Inspector under both the Mental Health Act and IDCCR Act.

Our *Presenters (Cont'd)*



Alex Ashmore

Barrister, Hepburn Chambers

Alex is a senior barrister specialising in Family Law, with over 35 years' legal experience. Admitted in 1990, he practised as a solicitor for 17 years, including 12 years as a partner in a Waitakere City firm, before joining the independent bar in 2007. Based in Auckland, his practice focuses on relationship property, family protection claims, and matters involving children. Alex has particular expertise in Hague Convention international child abduction cases and is regularly appointed by the Central Authority. He also has extensive appellate experience, appearing in Family Court appeals for more than 20 years. Alex holds a BCom/LLB and a Master's degree with First Class Honours, and has presented on family law topics both in New Zealand and internationally.



Vanessa Curac

Barrister, Friendship Chambers

Vanessa has been practising law for over 20 years, starting out as a solicitor for Oranga Tamariki, before becoming a barrister. Vanessa has a general family law practice but predominantly specialises in advocating for children in the Family Court and young people in the Youth Court, in South Auckland.



Theresa Donnelly

Head of Legal, Perpetual Guardian

Theresa graduated from Auckland University in 1992 and has a wealth of experience in Elder Law and Trust-related matters. Theresa was formerly from Public Trust (Senior Solicitor and Team Leader) and the Ministry of Social Development where she was lead Senior in the Public Law Team, working with Parliamentary Counsel, Older People's Policy and the Office of Senior Citizens. Theresa worked on the 2017 changes to the EPA forms. She is a regular presenter to professional groups such as TLANZ, NZLS, CCH, STEP, and Legalwise, and is known for her practical approach.

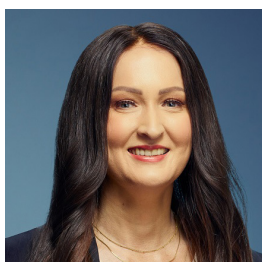
Our *Presenters (Cont'd)*



Dr David Harvey

Barrister, Retired District Court Judge

David (LLB; MJur; PhD) is a retired District Court Judge. He sat full time from 1989 to 2016 and with an Acting Warrant from April 2018 to December 2021. Prior to his appointment to the Bench, he practised as a barrister and solicitor in litigation for 18 years. He taught Law and Information Technology, an undergraduate paper, for 18 years, and has been involved in a number of Judicial Education programmes particularly in the area of cybercrime, evidence and the judiciary and the media. He has written numerous journal articles, presented at conferences in New Zealand and internationally, and continues to mentor young lawyers and write legal columns.



Jennie Hawker

Director, Haigh Lyon Lawyers

Jennie, a director at Haigh Lyon Lawyers, co-leads the firm's vibrant and effective family law team. Certified Fellow of the International Academy of Family Lawyers, she's recognised by Doyle's Guide as a foremost expert in New Zealand on relationship property and family law. Jennie has 20 years' experience in family law and is a contributing author to Westlaw's family property and family procedure chapters.



Chris Holdaway

Barrister

After starting working life in education, Chris was admitted to the bar in 1995 and immediately started working for the organisation which is now known as Oranga Tamariki. Working in both Youth Justice and Care and Protection involved engagement in situations where young persons with particular challenges transition from the Oranga Tamariki Act framework but require the ongoing scaffolding available under the PPPR Act. For the last 3 years Chris has been practising as a barrister currently working primarily in COCA, Family Violence and Oranga Tamariki Act proceedings.

Our *Presenters (Cont'd)*



Jeremy Johnson

Barrister, Bankside Chambers

Jeremy is a member of Bankside Chambers in Auckland and Bankside Singapore. He is one of New Zealand's leading litigation and dispute resolution barristers with particular expertise in the fields of private wealth, relationship property, equity and trust and commercial law. Jeremy works on cases across New Zealand and in the wider Asia-Pacific Region. Valued for his discretion, he is considered one of New Zealand's leading private wealth barristers and he often undertakes cross-border private wealth work. He was the youngest person in history to become a Fellow of the Arbitrators' and Mediators' Institute of New Zealand and is also a Fellow of the International Academy of Family Lawyers. As a recognised leader in the community, Jeremy was awarded the King's Service Medal in the 2025 New Year Honours.



Georgia Johnston

Senior Associate, Wynn Williams

Georgia is a Senior Associate in the Family Law team at Wynn Williams in Ōtautahi Christchurch. She advises on complex relationship property disputes, contracting out agreements, trust and estate matters, spousal maintenance, PPPR issues, and care of children and guardianship disputes. She brings strong technical expertise and calm, practical judgement to sensitive family law matters, including helping clients to protect property interests before or during relationships. Known for combining sharp legal acumen with genuine care, Georgia provides clear, compassionate advice and is focused on achieving outcomes that support her clients' long-term interests.



Reagan McKenzie

Barrister, Auckland

Reagan is a specialist family law barrister, with a particular focus on care of children, relationship property, family violence and Oranga Tamariki matters. She has practised in Hawke's Bay, Sydney and Auckland, acting for both private and legally aided clients.

Our *Presenters (Cont'd)*



Jeremy Sutton

Barrister, Bastion Chambers

Jeremy specialises in family law, with an emphasis on complex relationship property cases. Jeremy has extensive family law and general litigation expertise. He is a past convenor of the Family Courts Association. Jeremy is a trustee of START and a court-approved lawyer for child.



Jessica Thwaites

Senior Solicitor, Holbrook Law

Jessica (Ngāti Raukawa) is a family lawyer with particular interests in care of children, family violence, relationship property and matters involving Oranga Tamariki. Jessica regularly appears in the Family Courts across Auckland, and in other regions of New Zealand.



Dr Bahrie Velu

Clinical Psychologist

Dr Bahrie Velu is a Clinical Psychologist with extensive experience in high-conflict Family Court contexts as a report writer and treatment provider. She provides specialist training, supervision, and consultation for family lawyers and other Family Court professionals, supporting reflective practice and psychologically informed decision-making. Dr Velu is the founder of PsychLens, an initiative that promotes interdisciplinary practice by translating psychological frameworks into practical tools for lawyers, judges, mediators, and other Family Court professionals.



Zandra Wackenier

Partner, Tompkins Wake

Zandra is an experienced family lawyer with over 20 years in practice. She leads the Tompkins Wake family law team in Auckland. Zandra's expertise covers all aspects of family law including division of relationship and trust property, contracting out agreements, spousal maintenance, child support and reproductive law. She appears regularly in the Family Court and has appeared as counsel in the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court.



For every lawyer,
at every step.

Lawyers by nature thrive on doing their best work. Our aim is to help them achieve excellence through the solutions, tools, skills and connections we deliver every day. And by bringing a voice, an identity, and a sense of belonging to our community, we support the collective advancement of legal practices and laws. We're right here enabling New Zealand's lawyers to take their work, their career, and our profession, to the next level.

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cpd@thelawassociation.nz 

thelawassociation.nz 