

Essay Competition: young people not 'morons' after all

The Castan Centre congratulates Gabrielle Sing from Woodleigh School, the winner of its 2009 Writing for Human Rights Essay Competition. The competition was open to all Victorian year 11 and 12 students, who were asked to write on the topic "We're not morons: governments should butt out of young people's lives." Students were allowed to argue either for or against the statement and were encouraged to refer to specific instances of recent government intervention, such as internet censorship and curfews. There was a fantastic response to the competition, highlighting how interested today's youth are in both human rights and controversial public issues.

In Gabrielle's insightful essay, she noted that governments have traditionally limited the rights of young people to protect them and the whole of society. In her essay, she discussed the balance that must be achieved in protecting young people and ensuring their freedoms and liberties. She was presented with her \$1,200 prize by Castan Centre Deputy Director, Dr Julie Debeljak and Joh Kirby, Executive Director of the Victoria Law Foundation during the Monash Law School's 2009 Great Law Week Debate.

Place-getters and recipients of special commendation awards were also presented with their prizes. Second prize and \$800 went to Laura Tucceri from St

Aloysius College. Laura suggested that government restrictions have never been as stringent and invasive as they are today, and restrictive laws are usually drafted without consultation with young people. Third prize and \$400 went to Susannah Guthrie from St Catherine's School. Susannah argued that while the government's influence over young people in Australia is restrictive in some areas, it is necessary for the maintenance of safety and stability in society. Certificates of commendation for their outstanding submissions were awarded to Philippa Symon, also from St Catherine's School, Ivona Lonac of Northcote High and Tim Gibson of Woodleigh School.

The Castan Centre for Human Rights Law School of Excellence award and \$2000 went to St Catherine's School in Toorak for the overall quality of its submissions. St Joseph's College Melbourne placed second in the schools prize and received a certificate of commendation.

The judging panel was impressed by the entrants' ability to thoroughly explore both the specifics and generalities of the topic, illustrating their understanding of the



Gabrielle Sing is presented her award by Deputy Director Dr Julie Debeljak

need to balance the rights of individuals with those of society. In particular, essays highlighted the often dichotomous need to both protect young people and preserve their human rights and freedoms.

The Writing for Human Rights Essay Competition is sponsored by the Victoria Law Foundation. The winning essays are available on the Castan Centre website at www.law.monash.edu.au/castancentre

2010 Essay Competition

The 2010 writing for Human Rights Essay Competition topic will be 'Criminals don't deserve the same human rights as everyone else'.

For the first time the competition will be open to students in year 10, as well as years 11 and 12. The Centre received several petitions last year from year 10 teachers and students arguing that year 10 students should also be given the chance to think critically and creatively about human rights and the law.

In line with tradition, all winners, their families and nominated teachers will be invited to attend the Great Law Week Debate on 19 May 2010, with prizes presented at the conclusion of the debate. Three individual prizes up to the value of \$1200

are on offer and the winning essay will also be published in *Inscape*, the annual publication of VCE literature. The Castan Centre for Human Rights Law School of Excellence award valued at \$2000, will also be awarded to the winning school based on the number and quality of submissions received.

Schools will be notified of the upcoming competition in mid-November with entries closing on 22nd March 2010. More information will be posted on the Castan Centre for Human Rights website in the coming weeks.

In previous years students have shown incredible insight into the challenging topics and the Castan Centre believes the 2010 competition will see more outstanding submissions than ever.