

## News

### Monash University student wins National Child Rights Award

*"I've always been attracted to the idea of being an advocate, seeing your life as something, part of a bigger purpose. And asking, speaking out for and lobbying for the type of world you want to live in."*

As we went to print, the prestigious 2012 National Award for Youth in Advancing the Legal Rights and Interests of Children and Young People was awarded to Monash University student Chris Varney. Chris was nominated for the award by the Castan Centre in recognition of Chris' tireless advocacy for disability rights, Indigenous children, out-of-home care, homelessness, juvenile justice and immigration detention. As the 2009 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations, Chris conducted a nation-wide tour where he met and consulted with more than 12,000 children and youth on issues related to their lives, which culminated in his book *Dear Kevin*, which incorporated letters from a total 789 children on topics including, domestic poverty, foreign aid, and education reform. "Chris is passionate about children and young people's rights and in particular their right to participate. Through all his work he has shown that it is essential to advocate with children, not just for them," Dr Paula Gerber, Castan Centre, Deputy Director. Chris spoke at the 2012 Castan Centre Symposium on the development of the Children's Rights Convention (CRC), on the shadow report to the CRC.

In 2011, Chris contributed to the preparation, delivery, promotion and dissemination of the NGO Report, *Listen to Children*. This report included 40 testimonies from his book *Dear Kevin*, and was delivered to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child at Australia's NGO pre-sessional hearing in Geneva in October 2011. Recently, Chris's advocacy as a member of the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and the Australian Human Rights Commission contributed to the establishment of an independent National Children's Commissioner. Chris was also nominated by Dr Paula Gerber for the Future Justice Prize (Youth). He was the chosen winner and will be presented with the award on 22 November at a Castan Centre event.

### Recycle 4 Rights: Global Intern Starts NGO, Uses Recycled Mobiles for Funding

Recent Castan Centre Global Intern Kylie Pearce was so inspired by her time with the Human Rights Advocacy Centre in that she decided to start up a community-based NGO. Human Rights Youth Ambassadors Ghana (HRYAG) was officially incorporated in Ghana on the 23 May 2012. The HRYAG board is made up of eight local leaders (including two teachers, a marketing executive, an IT specialist, two business studies graduates, and a dance and cultural arts professional).

The HRYAG's aim is to help drive sustainable community development in a rural village of 700 people, called Akrama. There are many basic facilities and resources which this community is seriously lacking. The HRYAG's director, Mr Omari Oppong, is passionate about educating the youth in both entrepreneurial and cultural skills, as well as in their basic human rights.

Kylie will be working with 2013 Global

Intern Naomi McClellan, as well the HRYAG local board members, to develop a greater understanding of the needs of the local community in Akrama and to plan and initiate the organisation's first pilot human rights education program. They will also commence HRYAG's first educational and skills development programs in the community.

As part of their fundraising efforts, HRYAG are taking old mobile phones (as well as digital cameras, iPods and laptops) to Ghana to be utilised and recycled. Dubbed, "Recycle 4 Rights", the initiative shows that second hand electronic goods that might be thrown out here in Australia can be life changing to individuals in developing countries.

It's great to see our Global Interns continuing their human rights work after their internships. The Centre wishes them the best of luck!

### Closing the Gap on Birth Registration: Centre Directors Receive ARC Grant

*"A birth certificate is the gateway to the full enjoyment of the rights of citizenship. In particular, you need a birth certificate to obtain a passport, get a driver's license, attain a tax file number, and it is also frequently required to access social security and open a bank account. Without a birth certificate, it is difficult, if not impossible, for an individual to fully participate in society"* (Dr Paula Gerber).

Castan Centre Deputy Directors, Dr Paula Gerber and Ms Melissa Castan, alongside Monash University researchers Professor Lynette Russell and Associate Professor Jane Freemantle, have just commenced working on an ARC Linkage grant to conduct a three year project, entitled 'Close the Gap on Indigenous Birth Registration'. The aim of this

project is to develop culturally appropriate, evidence-based solutions that will not only positively impact on the lives of Indigenous Australians through overcoming existing barriers to the birth registration system, but also assist governments by ensuring that they have accurate population data on which to base future policies and programs. Rod Hagen is undertaking a PhD under the grant.

The project is a collaboration between the researchers from Monash University and seven industry organisations, namely: Plan Australia, Clayton Utz Solicitors, Western Australian Equal Opportunity Commission, Hills Community Support Group, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Tangentyere Council in the Northern Territory and the Queensland Department of Communities.

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