

# Being an Aurora intern

By Roberta Foster

For my Aurora internship as part of the Aurora Native Title Internship Program, I was placed with Native Title Services Victoria (NTSV) from late August until late October 2012. I live and work in Melbourne, and my reasoning for staying in Melbourne for my placement was twofold: firstly, I am a graduate (juris doctor) law student, and my trimester timetables give me few breaks between study; secondly, I wanted to work with an organisation that specialised in native title, as opposed to general Indigenous legal or policy issues, as was more likely to be experienced at organisations such as the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency.

For me, NTSV was a perfect fit – it allowed me to both continue my studies in Melbourne and, being the main organisation that represents Indigenous native title holders (referred to sometimes as the “legal firm” dealing with Victorian native title), it appealed to my specific desire to get in-depth exposure to the Federal native title and Victorian land rights systems.

My internship at NTSV brings up all the usual (albeit clichéd) adjectives – it was challenging, eye-opening, exciting and fun. It was also that which all internships can be – confusing, uncertain and, at times, a tad lonely. What separates the Aurora Project from other internships is that, firstly, the internship is run by an external organisation: you are not only given preparatory advice and instructions, you also have access to a number of Aurora contacts who are there to assist in the resolution of any urgent or serious hiccups during your internship.

Secondly, a lot of the organisations that partake in the Aurora Internship Program will have multiple interns at the same time – this means that you have someone in the organisation that is having a similar if not exact experience to yours. I was lucky enough to arrive at NTSV a few weeks after my fellow intern, Bella Lockey, started. On the first day we had an hour-long meeting in which she summarised all the things that had taken her a few weeks to discover – a crash course not only in NTSV functions, but also in her specific experience of what the different lawyers expected from us as interns. The Aurora Placements team, in fact, specifically encourages relationships between its interns – they connect you with the other interns via email before your start date.

An Aurora internship is, therefore, an internship that recognises and harnesses the power of information sharing – and, furthermore, network building. As a budding lawyer interested in social justice, particularly in Indigenous communities, you will find that the interns and lawyers you meet at your internship will inevitably reappear throughout your career. Moreover, the relationships you form during your internship have the capacity to guide the pathway(s) that your career may take.

There are two lasting experiences from my time at NTSV that I have taken away, and which still resonate with me almost six months later.

The first was the opportunity to participate in Indigenous claim group meetings. These meetings, which are often on country, are a vital insight into the operation of native title, particularly how it is experienced by the Indigenous native title claim group. As social justice advocates working within the law, I believe it is very easy to get bogged down in legal frameworks, legal language and in the legal process itself – whether it be criminal law, refugee law or native title law. I think that this focus can sometimes obscure the human lives that are, or should be, at the centre of all these bodies of law. Through the opportunity to be involved in claim group meetings, the Aurora Internship Program reminds its interns of what the native title system is truly about: the welfare and cultural survival of Indigenous Australians.

The second experience is that of working with people who truly care about native title and Victorian land rights. NTSV, as with most Indigenous legal organisations (not only NTRBs), is full of dedicated individuals who have been fighting the hard fight for decades. As a bright-eyed and bushy-tailed law student, I am the first to admit that I often get starry eyed around impressive social justice advocates. My experience at NTSV was no exception: the people who work within native title, a complicated and at times frustrating legal regime, display tenacity, innovation and sensitivity. The Aurora internship provides students with an enriching and vital step in their journey towards qualification.

**Applications for the summer 2013/2014 round will be open in August, while applications for the winter round are open in March each year. More details can be found on the Aurora website: <http://www.auroraproject.com.au/nativetitleinternshipprogram>.**

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