

AN INTERVIEW

WITH JANETTE MURDOCH

by April Long & Simone King

INDIGENOUS LAW CENTRE (ILC)
COORDINATOR



Janette Murdoch is the ILC Coordinator. It is her responsibility to ensure that the ILC has a strong profile within the UNSW Law Faculty, the UNSW Student body and the wider community.

Can you tell me a little bit about your background, before you joined the ILC?

I have worked at the University of New South Wales ('UNSW') for 20 years, in various roles, in different teaching schools and research centres. I have always enjoyed working at the university, as the flexible working environment allowed me to be around for my children as they were growing up. I also enjoy working with people who are dedicated to bringing about change.

Before working at UNSW, I served in the NSW Police Force for several years, which gave me an invaluable experience about the application of the law. Prior to joining the Police Force, I completed a teaching degree in primary education. I have been fortunate in my working life and appreciate the experiences and skills I have gained through the varied roles I have undertaken. I do know to succeed at anything, you have to put yourself out there, and don't let setbacks derail you. I would not have had the experiences in my life without persevering.

Can you comment on the role of ILC Coordinator?

In any small centre such as the ILC, there is usually one constant and that is the coordinator. As the ILC Coordinator I am seen as the main contact person, so it is important that I convey a professional and friendly image of the Centre. Our physical location is isolating, so to ensure the Centre has a strong profile within the faculty and amongst the student body, I endeavour to find ways to build on our reputation and to enhance our profile further afield. It is challenging at times, but crucial to our success. The coordinator has a pivotal role and I enjoy the opportunity to support the staff and work of the Centre.

As the ILC Coordinator what does a typical day look like?

Never the same! Which is the great thing in some ways; under the Directorship of Megan Davis I have had wonderful opportunities and learning experiences. Yes I do paper push, but that is only a part of my job, and most jobs have an administrative element. I enjoy working with Megan on the new challenges that present themselves. We have great staff and students at the Centre which makes the big things little. I couldn't see myself doing anything else.

Why do you think it's important to have a centre such as the ILC?

Because of what we do; the ILC disseminates knowledge, and it encourages discussion and critical thought. Broadening people's minds is critical if we wish to encourage and create a tolerant and fair society. Like most Centres we don't run at a profit, nor should we, and it is through the Attorney General's commitment to justice, access to information and education that we can operate in the manner we do. It is hard sometimes, as we don't necessarily see the impact of our work like a builder, doctor or teacher. We work behind the scenes and hope when someone picks up our journal or attends our open forums they rethink the way they viewed something or take away another perspective. Education is one of our society's most valuable tools in bringing about positive change and indirectly we feed into that in our own small way, and that is important.

You work closely with the Indigenous Law Bulletin (ILB) editor, how important is the ILB as a resource?

The Editor has to know the important issues for Indigenous peoples to ensure the journal is topical and informative, so for me that is great as I am constantly learning through my work. The ILB creates the discourse;

it starts the conversations that help build a better understanding of issues, so it's critically important. The ILB gives Indigenous Australians and organisations a voice and shares that voice with our subscribers which extends far beyond through libraries (local, nationally, internationally), schools, government agencies etc.

What do you love most about your job?

The people mainly; the way they share their experiences and explain things to me. It is the constant learning, and the best thing is, I know I have become a better person because of it. For example when Megan Davis had to give the 11th Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture, I had to Google Vincent Lingiari as I was not familiar the name. When I read *A Blast from the Past* presented by Brian Manning, I was so moved by the paper and embarrassed at the same time, I should have known about this important struggle in our history. As a result, I continually seize upon the opportunity to learn, and now I am more confident to add a different perspective to the discussion and try to facilitate greater understanding. I am not sure of the impact I have on others, but I do know I am making small ripples, even in my own family.

What do you think are some of the challenges for the ILC and ILB?

Resources, monetary mainly - we are funded on an annual basis which leads to uncertainty for staff and projects we undertake. It is difficult to plan long-term, as our funding is not guaranteed. We don't know if a change in Government or a shift in policy is going to result in a lack of funding for the centre. It's unnerving to think that the funding might dry up one day. All we can do is produce a valuable and unique resource and hope the support continues.