

social justice essay contest

by Aurora Kotezky, Tolhurst Druce Emmerson, and Community Issues Committee

The Community Issues Committee has finally found the time to draw breath after a busy start to the year. As well as running the hugely successful Shadowing Program for the fourth year (see last edition of YL Journal), the Committee ran its pilot of the Inaugural Young Lawyers/Deacons Social Justice Essay Contest.

University and Her Honour Judge Coate of the Children's Court, who judged the year 7 and 8 entries; Frank Guivarra, Chair of the Aboriginal Legal Service and John Corcoran, President of the Law Institute, who judged the year 9 to 10 entries; and Jackie Turfrey of Deacons and His Honour Justice Eames of the Supreme Court, who

judged the senior students' entries. political placard. Too often, I think, we get used to hearing vague and well-meaning but essentially hollow statements from public figures about reconciliation – statements like “we should forge links between urban non-Indigenous people and rural Indigenous communities”, or “let's develop an understanding of the issues of reconciliation”. But the Committee members involved in the essay contest actually read *real* and *realistic* ideas put forward by Victoria's young people about advancing the issue of reconciliation. Here is just a sample of the suggestions put forward by entrants when asked what they could do to help the reconciliation process:

- incorporate Aboriginal history and heritage into the curriculum at schools to prevent prejudice developing at a young age,
- research your local area to see if it was inhabited by indigenous people and seek recognition for this,
- consider “sister city” arrangements between urban local councils and Aboriginal communities,
- say sorry!
- treat everyone equally.

As you can see, being involved in the Community Issues Committee can be an extremely enriching and rewarding thing to do and I urge any of you with a passion for social justice or building community strength to come along to one of our meetings. We have a clean slate for projects for the next six months, so we are looking for fresh ideas before we start to gear up for next year's installment of the Social Justice Essay Contest.



HILARY JONES (MACROBERTSON GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL), HIS HONOUR MR JUSTICE EAMES (SUPREME COURT OF VICTORIA), JACKIE TURFREY (DEACONS) AND ALEXIS KELLY (GENEZZANO COLLEGE).

Centred on the topic of Reconciliation with Indigenous Australia, the contest was aimed at secondary school students across the state. Junior and middle school students (years 7 to 10) answered the question “Reconciliation – what can I do to help the process?”, while students in years 11 and 12 were asked to reflect on what Reconciliation means in this centenary year of Federation.

The Committee was overwhelmed by the responses it received, and found it was a tough call having to shortlist the entries. The final decisions were left to the competition judges – Syd Fry of the Institute of Koori Studies at Deakin

judged the senior students' entries.

Although all of the entries were of a high standard, prizes were eventually awarded at a special presentation lunch to Josh Attard Dickson, of De La Salle College, Brooke O'Brien of Cohuna Secondary College (who travelled 4 hours from just outside Swan Hill to receive her prize!) and Hilary Jones of MacRobertson Girls High School.

One of the best things I took away from my involvement in the essay contest was the knowledge that so many young people today are committed to making reconciliation a social reality, not just a convenient