

Community issues committee report

Kristen Abery, Wisewoulds and Penny Martin, Minter Ellison,
Co-Chairs Community Issues Committee

On 13 May 2002, Deacons Lawyers hosted a presentation ceremony for the Young Lawyers' Social Justice Essay Competition. The function was attended by young lawyers, the competition judges and sponsors, and the finalists with their proud teachers and parents.

Based on a theme of 'Refugees In Australia', the students were asked to reflect on the problems and challenges facing refugees in Australian society and the contentious issues relating to the government's treatment of asylum seekers. A large number of entries were received in the three categories (Junior – Years 7-8, Intermediate – Years 9-10 and Senior – Years 11-12) from schools all over Victoria.

The winners were as follows:

Junior – Fiona Law of Keilor Downs College, **Intermediate** – Elizabeth Harper of Myrtleford Secondary School, **Senior** – Amanda Burnnard of Mount St Joseph Girls' College.

It was great to see the effort put in by the students to understand and empathise with the situation of refugees and propose practical solutions. Some extracts from the entries are:

"The bottom line is, asylum seekers have just as many rights to dignity and human rights as everyone of us."
Maggie Law, MacRoberston Girls' High School (Senior Category).

"Australians have been largely immune from war and national injustice. Therefore many Australians fail to

realise that desperation borne of running for one's life is not conducive to waiting patiently in a queue. Perhaps the most urgent response required of our government, then, is education [of Australians]." Julian Alshorn, St Patrick's College, Ballarat (Senior Category).

"The teachers could explain about multiculturalism and teach that it is important to respect other cultures... The class could ask questions to the refugee girl during show-and-tell time. She could explain things and discuss her language, culture, religion etc. The teachers could also get all the other students to bring something about their culture..." Fiona Law, Keilor Downs College, Keilor Downs (Winner – Junior Category).

"How should we treat people who come to Australia seeking refugee status? Should we treat them like prisoners, when they haven't committed a criminal offence other than run for their lives? Refugees should be treated more humanely. They deserve improved facilities, access to the surrounding community, creative and educational alternatives, more humane treatment within detention centres, and a quicker release into the community upon acceptance, if genuine."
Dashani Siva, Marian College, Sunshine (Intermediate Category).

Many thanks to the judges of the competition: Mr Justice Cummins of the Supreme



JUSTICE CUMMINS, SUPREME COURT OF VICTORIA WITH KRISTEN ABERY FROM WISEWOULDS AT THE DEACONS & YOUNG LAWYERS' SOCIAL JUSTICE ESSAY COMPETITION PRIZE CEREMONY

Court of Victoria, Ms Jacki Dillon of the Refugee Council of Australia (who also kindly spoke at the presentation ceremony) and Dr Nouria Salehi on behalf of Melbourne's Afghani community. As one entrant said:

"A message to the competition judges: Thank you for providing youths in Victoria with an opportunity to express themselves concerning a major issue."
(Rueben Studzinski, Kyabram Secondary College – Senior Category).

Our Committee is now developing projects for the second half of the year on "Corporate Responsibility" in Law Firms and "Lawyers as Volunteers". If you are interested in these issues or have ideas for new Community Issues projects please contact Penny Martin at penny.martin@minterellison.com or Kristen Abery at kxa@wisewoulds.com.au. ■

Professional development committee report

Katie Coghlan, The Ascott Group and Catherine Dwyer, Abbott Stillman & Wilson,
Co-Chairs Professional Development Committee

The Annual Conference at Hepburn Springs and Mooting in the Supreme Court of Victoria!! These are two of the major projects conducted by the Professional Development Committee, which have been held over the last several months.

Annual Young Lawyers' Conference

The Annual Young Lawyers' Conference was held at the beautiful Bellinzona Grange Conference Centre at Hepburn Springs on 18 May 2002. The Conference began with a

seminar on risk management and ethical issues. As with previous years, the Conference participants were then able to choose seminars from various areas of law, which focused on either commercial, or litigation streams. Topics included the negotiation of