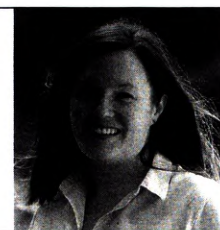


President's Report



By Anna Stewart, Consumer Law Centre Victoria

Community: 1. a group of individuals with some common characteristic e.g. profession, religion or status. 2. society in general. (The New Penguin English Dictionary)

As lawyers, we are all part of the legal community, but just as importantly we are part of society in general. And despite the fact that everyone loves to hate us, there's no denying that lawyers play an important role in the community – whether it be by protecting basic rights and freedoms through the courts or, on a smaller scale, by volunteering a few hours each week at a community legal centre.

Earlier this year, I spoke at the Orientation Day held for new practitioners at the Law Institute of Victoria ("LIV"), and it was pleasing to hear both the President of the LIV, Mr Bill O'Shea, and Chief Justice Rozenes of the County Court, urge new practitioners to maintain a work/life balance and to be actively involved in life beyond the law firm. At the end of the day, lawyers serve the community, and if we only ever see the inside of our offices, we can't really expect to fully appreciate the diversity of issues facing many of our clients.

'Diversity' was the theme at the Young Lawyers' Section ("YLS") Assembly held at the Werribee Mansion on 5 April 2003. One of the main issues we wanted to explore was whether the YLS is doing enough to guarantee that the diverse needs of junior practitioners from different cultural and religious backgrounds, rural/ regional young lawyers, mature-age new lawyers, junior practitioners with families or junior practitioners with a disability, for example, are being recognised by the Section. We were fortunate to have a number of extremely interesting guest speakers share their experiences with us, including Jo Renkin (Convenor of Victorian Women Lawyers), Saba Hakim (a young lawyer from Iraq), and Stuart Ewin (a mature age new lawyer with a disability).

The other focus of the Assembly was the identification of what it is that we want as young lawyers, including: supportive mentors, flexible work practices and open and transparent

workplaces. We then worked out how we can achieve these objectives and, more specifically, how the YLS can facilitate changes to the profession that will hopefully slow the flow of disenchanted junior practitioners out of the profession. In keeping with the theme of this edition of the journal, it is interesting to note that many delegates said that they wanted increased opportunities to contribute to society, particularly through pro bono secondments and other activities.

It is ironic that as this issue of the journal goes to print, the Federal Government is set to bring in higher education reforms that have the potential to seriously impact on the ability of young lawyers to assist the wider community. With many future law graduates leaving university carrying increased levels of debt (for example, a full fee paying student at Monash University can currently expect to pay \$60,000 for an Arts/Law degree), it is likely that fewer junior practitioners will be able to afford to work in Legal Aid, community legal centres, or in regional/rural areas where salaries are generally well below those offered at major commercial law firms. ■

The Melbourne Innocence Project

The Melbourne Innocence Project is a pro bono project that brings together lawyers, academics and law students to investigate cases and to attempt to secure freedom for innocent persons who have been wrongfully convicted.

While incidences of wrongful conviction are more readily associated with 'other' legal jurisdictions (such as the United States of America), wrongful convictions do occur in the Australian legal system. The exoneration of John Button and the current application by Andrew Mallard in the Supreme Court of Western Australia are evidence of this.

The project will run as a subject at a university in Melbourne, and will consider applications for assistance where there is a claim of factual innocence, where the person has been convicted and exhausted all appeal rights, and where DNA or other forensic evidence may possibly be used to bring about a fresh point of evidence.

The project would like to hear from junior practitioners who are interested in criminal law and who would like to devote some time to working with the project - whether at an organisational or legal level.

For further information, please contact Paul Coady on 9286 6901 or email to pcoady@claytonutz.com

Oxfam Community Aid Abroad Skills Sharing Scheme

Additional volunteer lawyers are being sought for Oxfam Community Aid Abroad's Skills Sharing Scheme.

This is an opportunity for you to share your skills with small NGOs and community groups in the Melbourne area, and to play an active part in achieving social justice in Australia. The aim of the scheme is to allow professionals to become involved in the big issues that confront us, whether they concern the environment, racism or poverty. The scheme seeks to overcome the division that often exists in people's minds between development abroad and development at home, by providing community organisations in the Melbourne region with experienced professional training and advice. Another objective of the scheme is to assist community organisations by sharing skills for specific projects planned by the community group. The scheme is managed by a team of volunteer supporters of Oxfam Community Aid Abroad who recruit, screen, train, allocate and manage the volunteers, ensuring quality, accountability and consistency.

If you are interested in being a part of the scheme, contact Keiran Croker on 9235 2571 (b) or 9481 4339 (h) to obtain an application form.