



**Victorian
Women
Lawyers**



WOMEN KEEPING IN TOUCH

VWL E-NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2012

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A WORD FROM THE CONVENOR

Dear Member,

This is the first WKIT for 2012 and as the year gets into full swing, I would like to thank you for your continued support of VWL and encourage you to become more involved.

There are plenty of opportunities for you to be more active in VWL including joining one of our committees, putting your hand up for a co-chairing role or simply attending our events.

VWL is a not-for-profit organisation run by a group of dedicated volunteers whose passion is to further women's success in the law. As a member, you are already showing your support for VWL, don't forget that there are more opportunities within the organisation for you to be involved.

This year's theme is mentoring and whilst this might seem clichéd considering my Greek background, the word "Mentor" comes from Homer's The Odyssey. Odysseus, the King of Ithaca, left his son, in the care of Mentor who acted as advisor, protector and wise friend. Despite these ancient origins, mentors are ever present in today's world, particularly in the law. I hope that the work of VWL this year encourages you to seek out your mentor or find your mentee - You can be someone's Jedi Master!

What better way to start 2012 then by having our first event, focusing on how to network to develop your communication skills and [Convert Contacts into Contracts](#). Ricky Nowack of Confident Communications will host this interactive evening event on 22 February, with ONLY 20 spots remaining [sign up](#) fast so you don't miss out!

Remembering amazing women who have contributed to the law, is also why VWL, in conjunction with the LIV holds the annual Dame Roma Mitchell Luncheon. Michael Kirby is the guest speaker at this event on 2 March and having known Dame Roma Mitchell well, honours her memory by speaking, while discussing what the movement for equal marriage rights can learn from the women's movement. See [here](#) for further details.

But it isn't just about events at VWL this month, I also attending the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), Critical Friends Group for their Women in the Law Project. This Project aims to examine and publish evidence of the experiences of women working in law firms in Victoria. VWL supports the work of the VEOHRC and believes that this work will complement the existing research done by VWL, in our earlier [Scoping Study for an Attrition Study of Victorian Lawyers](#).



Patricia Athanasiadis

2012 Convenor

Blake Dawson

middletons |
straight talking |

|||||
Maddocks

CLAYTON UTZ

MALLESONS STEPHEN JAQUES

Claire Carrucan, Assistant Convenor of VWL with Natalie Devitsakis, Networking co-chair volunteered at the annual Legal Laneway Breakfast hosted by the Victoria Law Foundation on 1 February to celebrate the opening of the Legal Year. The breakfast was well attended by dignitaries, including Attorney-General The Hon. Robert Clark and Shadow Attorney-General The Hon. Martin Pakula, barristers, solicitors and law students alike. On a brisk but sunny Melbourne morning those in attendance gathered to celebrate the legal profession and what's in store for the 2012 Legal Year.

If you would like to be more involved in VWL or would like to make a suggestion on how VWL can be more effective, please send us an email, we are always keen to have your feedback.

I look forward to seeing you at our next event, [Converting Contacts into Contracts](#).

Sincerely,

Patricia Athanasiadis
2012 Convenor
E: pat.athanasiadis@gmail.com

UPCOMINGEVENTS

Converting Contacts to Contracts

Date: 22 February 2012

Time: 5.45pm

Venue: Bourke Room, The Hotel Windsor, 111 Spring St, Melbourne VIC 3000

Cost: \$65 for members, \$75 for non-members

Register by Friday 17 February 2012

Victorian Women Lawyers, the Institute of Chartered Accountants and Women in Finance (VIC) are presenting their second annual joint event on Wednesday 22nd February 2012 from 5.45pm.

Converting Contacts to Contracts will feature guest speaker, Ricky Nowak MAICD, MCEOI, CAHRI, CSP and Director, [Confident Communications](#).

This interactive and engaging presentation will provide and demonstrate a networking formula to maximise business meetings, relationships and results, enabling you to fully develop and sustain your existing networks!

Learn how to tap into invisible networks and ensure that you are in a great position to convert contacts into contracts now and in the future.

What is really happening to women lawyers working in government? Are women smashing through that glass ceiling? Does it even exist in the government context? Does working in government mean that women really can 'have it all'?

Join our stellar panel for a thought-provoking discussion to be followed by networking over drinks and canapés.

Don't miss out! Click [here](#) to register for this event.

Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon

The Movement for Equal Marriage Rights

Guest speaker: The Hon. Michael Kirby

Date: 2 March 2012

Time: 12.15- 2.00 pm

Venue: Zinc at Federation Square, Corner Flinders Street & Swanston Street Melbourne VIC 3000

Cost: \$110 for members, \$130 for non-members

Register by Friday 24 February 2012

Those who struggle for true equality in the law and in society for women, like Dame Roma Mitchell, have much to teach those who are today trying to secure equal civil rights for same sex- couples.

Although great strides have been made in recent decades in women's equality and gay equality, there remain glass and pink ceilings. The common enemy for both movements is intolerance and stereotyping.

Why is Australia, once a leader in fresh legal thinking, lagging so far behind other Western countries? What has gone wrong with our journey to full legal equality for all citizens?

These are the questions the Hon. Michael Kirby believes Dame Roma Mitchell would be asking if she were here today.

The VWL and LIV are jointly hosting this annual Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Lunch to commemorate the life of Dame Roma Mitchell, the first female appointed as Queen's Counsel, Australian court judge and State Governor.

SAVETHEDATE

Victorian Women Lawyers and the Women Barristers Association of Victoria are currently planning the 5th Women Lawyers Achievement Awards (Victoria).

Date: Wednesday, 30 May 2012

Venue: Regent Theatre Plaza Ballroom, Melbourne

Guest speaker: Dr Helen Durham

The Awards, which are held bi-annually, honour outstanding women lawyers who have achieved professional excellence and have paved the way to success for other women lawyers. In 2010 the Awards for general excellence were presented to Justice Pamela Tate (the former Solicitor-General for the State of Victoria), Jane Dixon SC and Simone Cusack was the winner of the "Rising Star" Award.

This year our guest speaker is Dr Helen Durham, Senior Fellow, Melbourne Law School and Head, International Law and Principles, Australian Red Cross. Dr Durham has a passion for and expertise in international criminal law, with a particular focus on rape as a war crime and has worked in this area in a number of capacities both within Australia and internationally.

Further details regarding the Awards dinner and how to nominate will follow shortly. In the meantime we encourage each of our members to give considered thought to nominating one or more of their female colleagues or mentors for these Awards and to book a table for this special event.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NEW Membership and Justice Co-Chairs

VWL's Membership and Justice Committee require co-chairs for 2012. If you're interested in being part of the VWL Executive please send us an [email](#).

There are ample opportunities to get involved in any of the VWL Committees, including Communications, Work Practices, Law Reform, the Women Migration Legal Information Project, Membership and Justice. For more information please contact the Committee of your choice. For contact details please see our [webpage](#).

Reform Forum

The VWL law reform committee and the Women Lawyers Association of New South Wales have prepared a joint submission to the Attorney General's department, responding to the government's discussion paper on the consolidation of commonwealth anti-discrimination laws. The submission should be available on the Attorney General Department website shortly.

We will continue to be involved in this consolidation project, and if you would like to be involved, please feel free to email Emily Hart or Jessica Saunders to join the committee.

MEMBER UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

Every month, WKIT features a profile of one of our members as well as a lawyer from one of our sponsor firms. This way, we will introduce you to a broad spectrum of female lawyers who are proud to be associated with VWL.

This month we profile **Kerin Leonard**, Manager of the Legal Unit at the [Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission](#)

I became a lawyer because... I wanted to play a role in making our community better. I was not convinced about being a 'real lawyer' for a long time and am glad I combined degrees to study history and politics while working my way through equity and trusts! But I have found something I love to do in the law.

I am really proud of... the work we do at the Commission that improves the lives of individuals in our community. It's one of the reasons why I came to Melbourne to work with the State government.

I am extremely grateful for... the opportunities I've had to serve my community and my country, and the colleagues and friends who have challenged me, inspired me and kept me sane along the way.



A key mentor who influenced my career is... not someone I can pick just one of. I've been privileged to work with some great people who have taught me a lot. Sonja Litz who I worked with on international criminal justice issues gave me an example of a manager who was passionate, expert, hard working and good fun. Chris Moraitis who was then the Senior Legal Advisor at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade demonstrated great integrity as a lawyer in a highly political environment and gave me faith in the role we could play. Geoff Skillen who was my supervisor in the International Human Rights Unit stepped out of a senior military career to change direction. Geoff showed me a way of going about business that was patient, balanced and dignified whatever came his way. And my current boss Karen Toohey has amazing intellect, energy and insight. I have been lucky to work with such fine people.

If I wasn't a lawyer... I would be a teacher, make beautiful things, be an archaeologist, a scientist, a park ranger.

Before I started at my current workplace... I worked in international law at the federal Attorney-General's Department in Canberra.

The best advice I ever received was... from my mum. It was handed down and demonstrated in many different ways: All people have an inherent value that we should honour - be honest, be respectful, and be kind.

One of the key legal initiatives I am involved in... is the implementation of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 which commenced on 1 August last year. The Act adopts new mechanisms to address systemic discrimination and promote substantive equality. It's both an exciting time and a challenging one to make the best use of a law which is there to help people in Victoria get a fair go – at work, at school, when renting a house, and many other areas of life. We're undertaking a number of new projects in 2012 to look at discrimination and sexual harassment in particular settings – identifying some of the issues, as well as highlighting examples of good practice. This will help give people a picture of what the new positive duty to eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation looks like in practice. Look out for our survey on women in the law in March!

Outside of the law... I thrive on music, stories and fresh air.

SPONSOR UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

This month we profile **Liberty Sanger, Principal, Workcover** at **Maurice Blackburn:**

I became a lawyer because... I wanted to work for people. I have always railed against inequality and injustice. I wanted to work for people to ensure they had a fair go and an equal chance before the law.

I am really proud of... being a part of the Maurice Blackburn story. Maurice started our firm in 1919 to work for workers and their unions. Like all good ideas, it passed the test of time and here I am, 92 years later, doing the same work that Maurice himself was all those years ago. Thankfully because of Maurice and others like him conditions are a little better for workers and unions today. And of course today we are a national law firm with specialists across many practice areas. However I like to think that I am playing my part in the journey that Maurice started, and like Maurice, I will leave the law as it relates to workers and unions in a better state than I found it.



You can have it all... if you lower your expectations! I prefer the advice of our Governor General Quentin Bryce: you can have it all but not all at once. Life is a marathon not a sprint. Be ambitious and work hard, but make sure that what you are doing and how you are doing it is sustainable and enjoyable. If that means you have to tone down your involvement in something today that is fine. It will still be there for you to do tomorrow. Women can be so hard on themselves - we need to give ourselves a break! Don't stress!

I am extremely grateful for... being selected to represent so many decent, honest hardworking Victorians at their time of need. I never cease to be humbled by their generosity, spirit and appreciation for my assistance.

A key mentor who influenced my career is... my Mum and Dad. OK so shoot me for picking two - but if I had said my parents it's kind of one person! They instilled in me the importance of education, that everyone deserves a fair go irrespective of who they are or where they have come from and thus that you must be generous with your gift of education and give back to your community - it is not a gift to be selfishly guarded.

If I wasn't a lawyer... I would be the editor of US Vogue. Or captaining the Sea Shepherd. Or leading walking expeditions in New Zealand Or being an internationally acclaimed film director. Or championing the cause of human rights somewhere in the world (which is not that different from being a lawyer but in this role I would be doing more advocacy or hands on capacity building!). Or just spending my days going to farmers markets and doing some damn fine cooking. Or learning any other language. And that is just this week!

Before I started at Maurice Blackburn ... I was praying I would get an offer to do my Articles (Traineeship) at Maurice Blackburn. Seriously.

The best advice I ever received was... Always act with integrity. You can't beat thorough preparation and hard work. And always, always, always have good hair.

One of the key legal initiatives I am involved in... is helping workers and unions understand their rights and entitlements about workplace safety and access to compensation if injured. I am always striving to improve my communication about the law to people outside of the law. Lawyers can excel in talking to each other and the courts - it counts for nothing if the worker on the factory floor doesn't know how to say no to unsafe work and consequently suffers injury or even worse death.

Outside of the law... I love adventures with my friends and family! Daggy but true. Whether it be going to the theatre, trekking new frontiers (at least for us), dancing around the lounge room to Dolly Parton or just having a damn good natter at a BBQ nothing beats spending time with those you love. It's just the best fun!

VWL COMMITTEES

Joining a Committee is a great way to become more involved with VWL. All Committee work is voluntary. The time commitment is flexible; we are looking for enthusiasm most of all. Please [email](#) your expression of interest in joining a Committee to our Secretary, Beth Hilton-Thorp.

Our Committees are:

Justice - social justice events including the annual sexual assault forum and supporting indigenous law students.

Law Reform - monitoring law reform proposals and coordinating submissions on behalf of VWL.

Work Practices - addressing the important issues that affect women lawyers in the workplace, conducting research and holding forums.

Networking - organising events with affiliated organisations including the Women Barristers Association, liaising with regional lawyers' networks, and coordinating annual events including the Members and Guests' Evening and VWL's End of Year Celebration.

Women Migrants Legal Information Project - planning and producing various broadcasts (in several languages) to assist women migrants with key legal rights and support.

Women in Government (WiG) – VWL's newest Committee, in conjunction with the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office, plans events and initiatives to assist female practitioners working for public authorities and agencies.

Communications - organising this newsletter, coordinating the editing and publication of Portia, our annual magazine, maintaining VWL's website and liaising with the media.

Membership - looking after our members' needs, leading VWL policy and protocol development and promoting VWL membership within the legal community.