



**Victorian
Women
Lawyers**



WOMEN KEEPING IN TOUCH

VWL E-NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2011

CONTENT

**WORD FROM THE
CONVENOR**

UPCOMING EVENTS

EVENT REPORTS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

**MEMBER UNDER
THE SPOTLIGHT**

**SPONSOR UNDER
THE SPOTLIGHT**

VWL COMMITTEES

Sponsors:

**CORRS
CHAMBERS
WESTGARTH**
lawyers

Maurice
Blackburn
Lawyers
Since 1919

MinterEllison

DLA PIPER

**Law
Institute
Victoria**

Allens Arthur Robinson

A WORD FROM THE CONVENOR

Dear Members,

What an extraordinary year it's been for Victorian Women Lawyers! We set many ambitious goals for ourselves and I'm pleased to report that we've achieved everything we set out to accomplish, such is the incredible passion and diligence of each and every member of the 2011 Executive Committee.

With record membership numbers, healthy finances, myriad Committees, effective communications platforms and a high calibre of events throughout the year, VWL is truly in great shape to continue to represent the needs of our members and to rise to future challenges. However we should never rest on our laurels and we're continually seeking new ways to improve how we serve you. We always welcome your feedback and suggestions, so please don't hesitate to contact the Executive Committee via [our website](#).

My term as Convenor is now drawing to a close, and as I await the birth of my first child in December (whose first word will surely be VWL), may I take this opportunity to wish you well over the festive season and in the new year. Thank you for your support and encouragement throughout 2012. It has been an honour and a privilege to serve as Convenor and I hope you can join me at our [AGM and Christmas Party on 10 November](#) to celebrate and reflect.

Cheers,
Kate

PH: 0403 334 245

E: kate.ashmor@gmail.com



Kate Ashmor
2011 Convenor

Blake Dawson

middletons |
straight talking |

|||||
Maddocks

CLAYTON UTZ

MALLESONS STEPHEN JAQUES

UPCOMINGEVENTS

Annual General Meeting and Christmas Party: 10 November

A reminder that VWL's AGM is being held on 10 November at 5.30pm sharp at the offices of Ord Minnett and the Australian Executor Trustees, Level 23, 120 Collins Street, Melbourne.

We have received the following nominations:

Convenor - Patricia Athanasiadis

Assistant Convenor - Claire Carrucan

Treasurer - No nomination

Secretary - Beth Hilton-Thorp

General Members - Jackie Gilles, Michelle Florenini, Virginia Marshall and Alexia Staker.

As we have not received a nomination for Treasurer, there will be an opportunity to nominate for this position at the AGM. Members interested in undertaking this important and interesting role can contact the Secretary, [Beth Hilton-Thorp](#) (PH: 0416 127 157).

The annual Christmas Party will follow the AGM, from 6pm. [Click here](#) for further details including how to register.

EVENTREPORTS

VWL Religion and the Law, 20 October

On 20 October the Justice Committee held the inaugural VWL Religion and the Law event at sponsor firm Mallesons Stephen Jaques.

A diverse and talented panel was assembled including The Hon Magistrate Anne Goldsborough (the Magistrate responsible for multicultural and diversity issues within the Victorian Magistrates Court jurisdiction), Maria Dimopolous (a leading national expert in the provision of cultural awareness, workplace diversity and management of cultural change and policy formation) and Munya Andrews, a Barrister well versed in traditional laws, customs and practices and in the development and delivery of cross-cultural workshops for the judiciary on indigenous legal issues, racism and gender bias. The session was moderated by Tasneem Chopra, a cross cultural consultant specialising in diversity training and Chair of the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights.

The cosy and informal setting provided a relaxed environment allowing for free and interactive discussion with panel members. Participants reported feeling comfortable enough to disclose personal stories and ask questions that in other circumstances they may have chosen not to for fear of giving offence. It was acknowledged that there are many issues that are difficult to manage in legal practice such as wearing of the headscarf or burqa when giving evidence in Court, and the appropriate use of sacred books such as the Koran when administering an oath.

The intimate number of attendees meant that everyone was engaged in the Q and A and generally agreed that it was a very useful discussion, with scope to develop a further exchange of ideas and resources. There is strong support to hold this event again next year.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Australian Women Lawyers Amend Constitution

The peak national body for Australian women lawyers amended its constitution on 10 October 2011 to allow the Association's two Victorian representatives to be directors of the association at the same time without diluting the equal voting rights of each State and Territory at Board meetings.

Prior to the amendments being made, each State and Territory had one vote on the Board of Australian Women Lawyers (AWL). Victoria is unique in the fact that it has two representatives on the Board - one from the Women Barristers Association (WBA) and one from Victorian Women Lawyers (VWL). To ensure each State and Territory enjoyed equal voting rights, the Victorian representatives alternated the right to vote at each annual general meeting. Having the vote under the AWL Constitution means you are also a Director of the Board.

At the meeting on 10 October 2011, the appointment as Director of the nominee of Victorian Women Lawyers pursuant to the amended Articles of the Association was confirmed, giving both VWL and WBA equal voting rights for the first time in AWL's history. As a consequence of these amendments, the Board of AWL has, also for the first time, two Victorians serving as Vice President and Treasurer on the Board's Executive; Christine Melis and Kim Knights, respectively.

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 **Claire Humble**, Lawyer/Mentor at the [Leo Cussen Centre for Law](#) and the newly elected 2012 Co-Chair of VWL's Justice Committee

I became a lawyer because... I met Articled Clerks in one of my first jobs at the Public Curator's Office in North Queensland and thought 'I could do that job'. We all used to meet at the Stamps and Titles Office daily. I was subsequently accepted in the old system of 5-years Articles of Clerkship at Wilson Ryan and Grose in Townsville. My parents had to sign me up as I was under 21 at the time. We worked a 40-hour week and sat 19 exams during that time. Most of us also worked part-time to supplement our \$23 a week income.

I am really proud of... the positive influence and experiences I can provide to my four children through my work, in particular the human rights aspect- teaching them to stand up for themselves and others, increasing their understanding of diversity and disability and, not least, developing their cooking skills at an early age.



You can have it all... but only if you take the time to set it up and have the support of your spouse, children, parents, in-laws, a network of fellow mums and your cleaning lady.

I am extremely grateful for... the wonderful time I spent at Villamanta Legal Service- a specialist Community Legal Centre representing people with disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities. I am indebted to the clients and staff for their patience and generosity in working with a mainstream lawyer who started with a desk and a phone and their invaluable assistance in developing my human rights focus and strategies for connecting with clients as a casework lawyer.

A key mentor who influenced my career is... there are two that stand out - John Backhouse, partner at Andrews and Backhouse (now Harwood Andrews) and Allana Goldsworthy, Barrister. John always made time to support and encourage me when I worked with him in the family law department. He always treated clients with dignity and respect and every client's case was important to him. Allana offered me opportunities to develop my family law skills and was a role model for many female lawyers as one of the first partners in a regional law firm at a time when we were still being told we couldn't wear trousers or multi-coloured stockings to court and were paid considerably less than our male colleagues.

If I wasn't a lawyer... I would be in hospitality as I love contact with people and sharing a meal and beverage.

Before I started at my current workplace... I worked in the Equity, Diversity and Disability units at universities in North Queensland and Victoria. I began with a nine month contract and ended up staying for seven years in various roles as a Disability Liaison Officer, Special Projects Officer for Placement and a Unit Co-ordinator. I stepped into a very different environment and culture working with staff and academics to build the aspiration of students from the Equity groups to attend higher education, developed accessible materials, assisted in curriculum design and developed assessment strategies for students with disabilities and those experiencing mental health difficulties. The combination of experience in mainstream law and the community and university sectors has set me up for the training and mentoring position in Leo Cussen which I love.

The best advice I ever received was... be honest and strive to always provide explanations to your client in the most accessible way. You are on a journey with them whatever the outcome.

One of the key legal initiatives I am involved in... is with the Law Institute of Victoria Mental Health Working Party which looked at guidelines, strategies and support for lawyers making disclosure at the time of admission or who subsequently experienced disability or mental illness during his/her legal career.

Outside of the law... I do my 'hospitality' thing at home with a new kitchen and family and friends, some post graduate study, reading, travel and gardening.

SPONSOR UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

This month we profile **Kathryn Howard, Senior Associate** at **[Corrs Chambers Westgarth](#)**:

I became a lawyer because... I love words, people and analytical thinking, all in the context of resolving a client's problem. Corrs truly embraces these values, with engaged and committed teams who value their clients, their work and their colleagues.

I am really proud of... that following a recent hearing, the Managing Director of my client told me how much he had enjoyed the hearing. He explained that in business he often feels alone but that during the case he had felt part of the Corrs' team.

You can have it all... except sleep.

I am extremely grateful for... my parents, who sacrificed so much to give me the opportunity to enter a profession I love.

A key mentor who influenced my career is... is too hard to choose. I learnt a guiding principle of my career from a current justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria, who challenged me never to put on a colleague's desk what I would not put on a client's desk. Several remarkable women have also played a significant role in mentoring me, from Jennifer Batrouney SC who took an interest in me as a first-year law student to Janet Whiting, a senior partner at Corrs and with whom I currently work most closely. I have learnt much from them, and I hope that one day I am able to provide as much support, encouragement and guidance as I have been so generously given.

If I wasn't a lawyer... I would be a world-class painter of nude portraiture. Lucky I have my day job!

Before I started at my current workplace... I lived in Tokyo and London working in international arbitration.

The best advice I ever received was... was 'this too shall pass', while running through the grounds of an ancient Roman ruin before the first day of a hearing. An ancient proverb which, if it settles into your bones, can both ease the pressure of the day and remind you to enjoy the moment.

One of the key legal initiatives I am involved in... is the Corrs' Women in Business program. This program is designed to foster relationships between women of diverse backgrounds, from both within and outside the law. This is one of many initiatives that have contributed to Corrs being awarded the EOWA Employer of Choice for five years running (2007-2011).

Outside of the law... I enjoy reading, food, travel, theatre and - of course - art!



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.