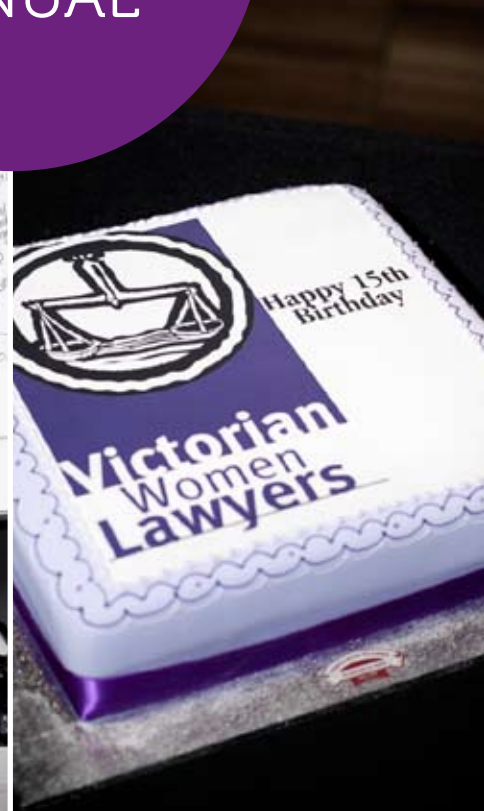


PORTIA

ANNUAL



2011

VICTORIAN WOMEN LAWYERS

Front Cover:

From Left to Right: Suzanne Kirton (Convenor, Women Barristers Association), The Hon Justice Marcia Neave AO and VWL's Kate Ashmor, Assisting Traumatized Clients Workshop, 15th Birthday Cake, VWL Executive members (L-R) Beth Hilton-Thorp, Astrid Haban-Beer, Kate Ashmor, Patricia Athanasiadis, Claire Carrucan, Michelle Florenini and Christine Melis, Mary Kostakidis, Women On Boards event, Kate Ashmor



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A Word from the 2011 Convenor, Kate Ashmor

Celebrating and Reaching Out in 2011



After fifteen years, let there be no doubt why Victorian Women Lawyers continues to exist and flourish. VWL truly has something to offer all members. Whether you're interested in networking with potential clients or fellow practitioners, whether you'd like to contribute to our research projects and submissions on important law reform proposals, or if you'd simply like to keep in touch with developments in the sector, VWL has it all covered!

In 2011, VWL has been committed to *reaching out* to members and potential members with more events, initiatives and opportunities to get involved than ever before. A smorgasbord of events was on offer for members to learn new skills, network with other VWL members, entertain clients and relax with colleagues and friends. A number of events were brand new, while other cherished favourites returned. Various events were held in conjunction with our valued allied organisations, offering members diverse opportunities to get involved.

In 2011, VWL:

- Co-hosted exciting events with Australian Women Lawyers, the Law Institute of Victoria, Women on Boards, the Australian Corporate Lawyers Association, Women in Finance (Vic) and the Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office, Lawyers for Animals, Deakin University Law School, the Geelong Law Association, the Women's Legal Service, the Women Barristers Association and the National Association for Women in Construction;
- Presented highly anticipated annual events including the Legal Laneway Breakfast, Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon, the Members and Guests' Evening, Coming to the Bar, the Sexual Assault Forum, the White Ribbon Day Luncheon and of course our Annual General Meeting and Christmas Party;

- Celebrated our fifteenth birthday with a sensational cocktail party at the Melbourne Museum;
- Welcomed over 130 pairs into this year's Law Student Mentoring Program, marking over 300 pairs that have participated in the Program since its inception four years ago;
- Via our Law Reform Committee, made submissions to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Australian Law Reform Commission, and the Commonwealth's Consolidation of Anti-Discrimination Legislation;
- Well and truly exceeded 600 members, smashing all previous membership records;
- Hosted law student interns provided by the Victoria Law Foundation, who worked on various VWL projects;
- Implemented internal governance policies regarding the use of members' funds and prudently invested some of those funds into bank term deposits, to maximise returns for members;
- Launched our own Facebook page which now has hundreds of fans, and
- Reaffirmed our commitment, in everything we do, to representing the interests of Victorian female legal practitioners and advocating for justice for all women.

WVL cannot do what it does without the wonderful ongoing support and guidance of our patron, the Hon. Chief Justice Marilyn Warren AC. We also salute the generosity of our sponsors: Allens Arthur Robinson, Blake Dawson, Clayton Utz, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, DLA Piper, Maddocks, Mallesons Stephen Jaques, Maurice Blackburn, Middletons, Minter Ellison and our principal sponsor, the Law Institute of Victoria. Furthermore, we thank the Australian Government Solicitor, Baker & McKenzie, the Department of Transport, DHP Lawyers, Freehills, Lander & Rogers and the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office for hosting events and Committee meetings this year.

May I take this opportunity to acknowledge the inspiring contribution of each and every member of the 2011 Executive Committee. I thank them for their support and service throughout what has been a hectic and challenging year! Congratulations to Jessica Saunders, Masha Lezaic and the Communications Committee for compiling this outstanding publication. Sincere thanks must also go to VWL's outgoing Administrator, Tracey Spiller, to whom the organisation is extremely indebted.

It has indeed been an honour and a privilege to serve as Convenor of Victorian Women Lawyers. I commend *Portia 2011* to you as an enduring record of our year of achievement.

Message from our Patron, the Honourable Marilyn Warren AC

Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria



In recent years, the need for professions to enhance and develop their communication with the wider community has increased dramatically. The legal profession is no exception, particularly in reaching out to women lawyers across the State. With the rise in online social networking and an ever expanding news media, now is the time for us as judges and lawyers to expand our level of engagement with those in our community and to cultivate a better understanding of the need for women lawyers in leadership roles.

Sadly, a gender imbalance still exists within our profession. Within firms and amongst senior levels of the Bar, women continue to make up an alarmingly small percentage of the key leadership positions. This extends to legal representative bodies and to both suburban and regional practices. For over 15 years, Victorian Women Lawyers has been at the forefront of breaking down this divide and have provided development programs to assist women in the profession. Given also the growing disparity between urban and regional areas, the profession must build upon its levels of communication to women lawyers throughout the State.

The VWL has recently instituted regional forums aimed at assisting women in practice and to eliminate discrimination in the legal profession, and they should be applauded for their achievement. This is but one example of an opportunity for those in leadership roles within the law, to take part in educational and professional programs for women lawyers from outside the metropolitan area.

The Supreme Court of Victoria takes an active approach to engaging the community in the court and criminal justice system, particularly when travelling on circuit to regional areas. The Court participates in numerous meetings with local community groups, school groups, civic leaders and local indigenous groups.

We are on the right path; however, much still needs to be achieved. Engaging with women lawyers across the State is imperative to furthering the cause for equality within the law. We should continue to promote such action and to reach out to all under represented groups for an equal and fair legal profession.

The Hon. Marilyn Warren AC
Chief Justice of Victoria

Message from LIV President, Caroline Counsel



Victorian Women Lawyers is to be congratulated on its theme of 'Reaching Out' as engagement in the legal profession is an important issue. Despite advances in technology, being connected these days is, in many ways, harder than ever before. There seems to be more and more demands on our time, leaving less space for meaningful engagement.

Just consider the number of emails you receive from your diverse affiliations on any given day. Then think of the many different forms of communication you participate in. Many professionals are members of LinkedIn or Facebook. There's tweeting, texting and blogging. Membership organisations such as VWL and the LIV vie with numerous other interest groups for attention and sometimes it's hard to be heard above the din. Being connected is a challenge that the legal profession must embrace.

Making connections and building networks is something that women are good at, and though faced with many challenges, there are more women in the law than ever before.

The feminisation of the law has seen the number of female law undergraduates in Australia rise to 60 per cent of the total. However, the number of women in the law gradually drops off as they face the competing pressures of work and family.

To look at this and other gender-related issues, the LIV established a Diversity Taskforce last year. With VWL involvement, this Taskforce has started to tackle the tensions women face when practicing law. The LIV is also working on a series of discussions it will have with universities in coming years. The focus of these discussions will be on what the legal profession can offer law graduates now, how we can better prepare them for the future and keep them in the profession. The law graduate of 2020 will be the beneficiary of today's talks.

The Diversity Taskforce has run events such as 'The All or Nothing Myth: Can Women in the Law Really Have it All?' The idea for this event came from past LIV Councillor Aurora Kostezky. A panel of women, including myself, led a discussion about the very real challenges of juggling life in the law and having a family.

The LIV recognises that we need to work together as a profession to share our best ideas about how to retain women in the profession and how to help female lawyers achieve their professional and personal goals.

Large law firms now see this as a major issue and many are sharing ideas to help create sustainable long term careers for their female employees and partners. For this reason, many of the large law firms have developed diversity policies and are meeting this challenge very successfully. In my meetings with various large law firms this year, one firm was able to report that they offered partnership to a female lawyer while she was on parental leave. These law firms are more aware of the need to work harder to retain their junior lawyers, particularly as the pull of overseas firms re-emerges as the global financial situation gradually rights itself.

Despite these endeavors and despite women outnumbering men graduating from law school for some years now, there is a trickle rather than a flood of women going into senior roles in large law firms.

It has been predicted that the way in which we practice law is likely to change more in the next ten years than in the last 200 years. The delivery of legal services may in fact offer greater flexibility in terms of how and where lawyers work. Those firms which embrace the technology that is already available to them may offer greater opportunities for women to perform as lawyers while balancing their personal lives and parenting.

To achieve the seamless provision of legal services with a flexible work place we need to find different ways of partnering with our clients. The lawyer and client can interact without the lawyer having to be available 24/7. We have an opportunity to change the dynamic in our client relationships in two major areas: tailoring of legal services that focus on clients' underlying interests and the way in which we cost legal services.

In the last few years, the legal profession has experienced significant challenges to the way in which it has done business with clients. The Global Financial Crisis brought about changing attitudes from clients in relation to both legal costs and services. Corporate clients are becoming cannier with their legal spend and are preferring lawyers become involved earlier in the piece, i.e. before the choke point that so often leads to litigation. The theory is that having inherent knowledge and continuity with corporate clients we are best placed to know where the potential is for things to come unstuck. Lawyers are also rethinking the cost basis of their relationship with their clients. Despite time-recording being intended as a management tool, this perversely became the way of billing. Value added billing will be adopted by an increasing number of law firms as they seek to deliver on the relationship aspect of working with clients and as they seek to retain junior lawyers. Time costing is one of the reasons many young lawyers say they struggle with the practice of law.

In his book 'The End of Lawyers', Richard Susskind posits that lawyers will always be needed but the commodification of legal services will mean that such services will eventually no longer be delivered in the way they are now. The challenge for younger lawyers is that corporate clients are increasingly less willing to pay for their involvement in their matters so they will no longer have the type and variety of work on which to cut their legal teeth at the early stages of their careers. The challenge for law firms is how to engage, train and retain lawyers without so much low-end work being available and how to recognise, reward and retain young lawyers when clients are refusing to pay for their services. Outsourcing will also present both challenges and opportunities.

The 2020 law graduate I mentioned earlier will become a type of lawyer we are only now beginning to characterise. She will work in a legal environment that is leaner but no less challenging, stimulating and central to society than it always has been.





Event Reports 2011

The Apartment: Members and Guests' Night, 10 August

Legal Laneway Breakfast

2 February

In 2011, Victoria Law Foundation presented the 8th annual Legal Laneway Breakfast on Wednesday 2 February. Patricia Athanasiadis, Assistant Convenor volunteered at the most inclusive networking event in the legal calendar.

Conceived as a non-denominational alternative to the traditional church services marking the start of the legal year, the Legal Laneway Breakfast hosted hundreds of guests from the legal sector and community. The breakfast was hosted in association with a number of other organisations including VWL.

The event attracted a huge audience and while room to move was limited, everyone still enjoyed the Breakfast with the fundraising raffle held to support the ALSO Foundation, a peak body for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer community.

VWL is proud to continue its association with the Victorian Law Foundation in hosting this event.

Biography of Mary Gaudron Launch

16 February

VWL, the Women Barristers Association and Australian Women Lawyers co-hosted the launch of a biography of retired High Court Justice Mary Gaudron on 16 February in the foyer of the Federal Law Courts in Melbourne.

Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia Diana Bryant officially launched the book and the author, Pamela Burton, also spoke.



Top: Barristers Jane Treleaven & Fiona McLeod SC Above: VWL Convenor Kate Ashmor, Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia Diana Bryant, author of The Mary Gaudron Story Pamela Burton and WBA Convenor Suzanne Kirton

Networking Business Luncheon: Women Making it Happen, 17 February

VWL, in conjunction with Women in Finance (Vic) and the Institute of Chartered Accountants held its inaugural joint networking luncheon on Thursday 17 February at the RACV Club in Bourke Street, Melbourne.



Top: Guests enjoying the lunch **Above:** VWL's Convenor, Kate Ashmor; Managing Director of Medibank Private George Savvides; Kelly O'Dwyer MP, the member for Higgins; journalist Alan Kohler; Alexandra Richards QC, leading company director Carol Schwartz and Women in Finance's Sandra Jacobs

The first of its kind between the organisations, Women Making It Happen featured Alexandra Richards, Queen's Counsel; Kelly O'Dwyer, Federal Member for Higgins; George Savvides, Managing Director of Medibank Private; and Carol Schwartz, distinguished businesswoman, and the event was moderated by respected financial journalist Alan Kohler.

With the event initially aiming to attract 250 attendees, the organisers were thrilled to greet in excess of 400 guests on the day. Our panellists provided a lively debate on current issues affecting professional women, the most topical being on the question of 'quotas' for female appointments to boards. This debate is clearly alive and well with Carol Schwartz ending the discussion with the comment, "...until we have the same number of mediocre women on boards as mediocre men, we will not have achieved equality."

The organisers hope that this event will be the first of many more to come which provide a forum for professional women across the legal, accounting and financial planning sectors to network and achieve mutual goals.

Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Lunch 4 March

Mary Kostakidis inspired hundreds of attendees with her insightful and eloquent address at this year's Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Lunch on 4 March at Zinc in Federation Square. Her speech addressed the Lunch's theme: The Price of Courage: Has Freedom of Information Gone Too Far?



Top: President of the Law Institute of Victoria, Caroline Counsel; special guest Mary Kostakidis and Convenor of Victorian Women Lawyers, Kate Ashmor
Middle: Mary Kostakidis, CEO of the Law Institute of Victoria, Michael Brett Young and LIV President Caroline Counsel **Above:** Mary-Jane Ierodiaconou, VWL Member and LIV Counsel Member

The Lunch was attended by many members of the judiciary including the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria and VWL's Patron, The Honourable Marilyn Warren AC, VWL members and lawyers across the sector. VWL was delighted to again co-host the event with the LIV and we thank the LIV's President Caroline Counsel and Events Manager Susan Long for all their efforts.

The Lunch celebrates the contribution of Dame Roma, Australia's first female QC, judge and State Governor. The Lunch also marks International Women's Day, which marked its centenary this year.

Progressive Law Network's Legal (r)Evolution Conference

19 March

On Saturday 19 March the Progressive Law Network (PLN) hosted the inaugural 'Legal (r)Evolution Conference', which promised to be 'a symposium of legal ideas for a better world.' The Conference sought to address the dominance of conservative politics and law schools' emphasis on corporate careers. It certainly did not disappoint! An impressive line-up of 14 academics, advocates, practitioners and politicians shared their experiences, insights and visions for the future. The day started off with a bang, with keynote speaker Adam Bandt MP sharing his thoughts on the rule of law and the shift away from substantive rights towards procedural rights. Adam spoke passionately about the need for equality to be given real meaning, for example, material equality for indigenous Australians, rather than just equality of opportunity.

The Conference continued with four panels, each addressing a key area of law 'overdue for change.' On the first panel, 'Seeking Asylum in the 21st Century', we heard from Julian Burnside AO QC, Professor Susan Kneebone and Brian Walters SC. Brian Walters spoke of the bipartisan approach being taken on the issue of refugees and the need for real leadership in the field. Julian Burnside was critical of government policy and offshore processing of asylum applications, and noted there has been little improvement since the Howard years. He identified indefinite detention as a key problem and suggested that initial detention should be for one month only to allow for medical checks. He further proposed that asylum seekers should be released into the country with the right to work, while their applications are being assessed. Susan Kneebone was also critical of the lack of integrity in the Australian immigration system and of attempts to exclude refugees from the rule of law.

The second panel, 'Environment for Change', included Professor Simon Molesworth AM QC, Senator Elect Larissa Waters and Professor Ian Lowe AO FTSE. Professor Lowe was critical of the way in which environmental law operates in practice, such that economic development may go ahead unless an underfunded community group is able to show that the consequences would be tragic for the environment. Simon Molesworth spoke of the initial barriers he faced in his early days as an environmental lawyer and encouraged Conference participants to never give up, despite any obstacles they may encounter. Larissa Waters spoke about the brave act of standing up for the 'little person', in this case the environment, which cannot vote and needs advocates to speak on its behalf. She urged law students to consider a career in the community legal sector and criticised the lack of fetters on a Minister's discretionary power to approve projects that will have a significant environmental impact.

The 'Gender (r)Evolution' panel provided insights into abortion law, same sex marriage and rape law reform. Professor Caroline de Costa provided an excellent overview of abortion law in Australia and emphasised the crucial need for reform to protect women's reproductive rights, particularly in Queensland, where Tegan Leech was recently charged with a criminal offence after procuring an abortion. Dr Bronwyn Naylor spoke about the way in which the criminal justice system is unable to address the needs of victims of sexual assault and canvassed her vision for a

restorative justice 'conference' model, which would allow victims to tell their story and receive acknowledgement of their pain and suffering from the perpetrator. Finally, Dr Paula Gerber provided a human rights analysis of same sex marriage. She called for the need to interpret international human rights law in light of the times and shared her view that there is a human right for same sex couples to marry.

The final panel, 'Indigenous legal (r)Evolution' was both moving and inspiring. Dr Stephen Gray and indigenous barrister Munya Andrews spoke, and Jill Prior and Paul Pitsaris represented the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service. With great eloquence and compassion, Jill shared the stories of two of her clients in order to illustrate the systemic nature of the racism and disadvantage suffered by indigenous Australians. Munya made a generous and warm speech, in which she shared some useful insights into cross-cultural communication and called for a greater sharing of cultures, noting that few Australians even know the word for 'Australia' in their local indigenous language. She offered a simple way forward: we must 'open our ears and hearts.'

The PLN is to be congratulated for hosting such an incredible Conference, which certainly inspired me to work in the community legal sector in order to tackle some of the most pressing legal issues of our times. In light of the increasing commercialisation of the law, a conference of this kind was well overdue. I thank VWL for providing me with the opportunity to attend.

Life as a Government Lawyer: A Conversation with Vanessa Twigg, 6 April

On 6 April VWL's Women in Government Committee hosted the successful lunchtime event 'Life as a Government Lawyer: A Conversation with Vanessa Twigg.' Angela Priestley, the editor of Lawyers Weekly, played the role of interviewer of Vanessa. Jennifer Patterson, Deputy General Counsel within the Department of Transport's Legal Division, made some opening welcome remarks. This was a forum to talk candidly about important issues relating to the career challenges faced by women lawyers in the government sector.



Top: Editor of Lawyers Weekly, Angela Priestley; Assistant Director, Office of Police Integrity, Vanessa Twigg; and Convenor of Victorian Women Lawyers Kate Ashmor
Above: A lighter moment

Vanessa is the Assistant Director at the Office of Police Integrity. She has 25 years experience in government. Her perspectives were certainly interesting, and we are grateful to both Vanessa and Angela for participating in the first of WIG's seminar events.

The event was held at the Department of Transport's Corporate Centre and jointly hosted by VWL and the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office. The event was well attended with about 80 attendees including a strong presence from both State and Federal government lawyers.

Women on Boards: To reform or not to reform?, 18 May

On 18 May, VWL, Women on Boards and Allens Arthur Robinson hosted an entertaining and informative panel discussion to ask why the number of women on boards is so low – currently sitting at 11.7% for ASX listed companies – and how this issue can be addressed, including whether or not quotas should be introduced.

Our speakers were Fiona Smith, past Deputy Company Secretary of BHP Billiton; Andrea Coote MLC, Parliamentary Secretary for Families and Community Services; and Dianne Jacobs, Founding Principal of The Talent Advisors and Women on Boards Coach and Mentor.

The event was facilitated by Wendy Peter, a partner in competition and regulatory law at Allens Arthur Robinson.



Top: VWL Law Reform Committee Co-Chairs Akane Kanai and Emily Hart; Dianne Jacobs of Women on Boards; panel chair Wendy Peter from AAR; Fiona Smith, past Deputy Company Secretary of BHP Billiton; The Hon Andrea Coote MP and VWL Convenor Kate Ashmor
Above: Attendees

The panel discussed the practical benefits of diversity within company boards, both economic and social, and the structural issues within companies that affect the number of women who are in a position to seek board roles. The event also explored the challenges that exist for women who are already on boards, and the opportunities available for women who want to get a start as a board member.

This sell out event gave insight into this topical issue from a broad range of successful women, and challenged attendees to take up the fight to ensure that the number of women on company boards increases and opportunities for professional development are provided to women within the corporate sector.

Women in Leadership: An In-House Lawyer's Perspective, 24 May

VWL proudly co-presented this panel discussion at DLA Piper, in conjunction with the Australian Corporate Lawyers Association.



Top: Kate Brown Above: The Panel- Crown Ltd's Debra Tegoni, NAB's Michaela Healey, Transport Safety Victoria's Iresha Herath and ACLA CEO Trish Hyde

A capacity crowd heard the NAB's Michaela Healey, Crown Ltd's Debra Tegoni and Transport Safety Victoria's Iresha Herath share their experiences and tips for getting ahead as a senior female lawyer, in-house. This free event was only open to ACLA and VWL members and was fully subscribed.

Geelong Networking Dinner 16 June

VWL hosted its Geelong Networking Dinner on Thursday 16 June.

The event was well attended by dozens of Geelong locals, lawyers working in Geelong and a few attendees who travelled to Geelong from nearby regional centres especially for the event. Guest speaker Dr Helen Szoke, then the Commissioner of the Victorian Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, inspired attendees with her entertaining address.

Law Student Mentoring Program Launch 22 June

Dozens of mentors and students met for the first time on Wednesday 22 June at the launch of VWL's 2011 Law Student Mentoring Program.

Middletons graciously hosted the event and the Hon Justice Marcia Neave AO encouraged attendees to make the most of their mentoring experiences and to value the opportunity to learn from each other. Two pairs from the 2010 Program, barrister Christine Melis and Monash University student Katerina Patras, and Department of Justice Civil Policy Lawyer Melanie Hodge and Melbourne University student Bethany Wellington, shared inspiring insights into their own experiences.



Top: Suzanne Kirton (Convenor, Women Barristers Association), The Hon Justice Marcia Neave AO and VWL's Kate Ashmor Above: Participants in the 2011 Law Student Mentoring Program

This year, more than 130 pairs are participating in the Law Student Mentoring Program, which aims to connect female law students with female legal practitioners, in order to provide students with valuable insights into life as a female lawyer. All five Victorian law schools are represented among the student participants, and mentors of all ages are drawn from private practice firms, as well as the government and corporate sectors. Many barristers also participate as mentors. More than 300 pairs have now completed the Program since its inception four years ago, with some former students now becoming mentors!

VWL gratefully acknowledges Her Honour Justice Neave's ongoing support of the Program. We also thank Middletons for their generous assistance with the Launch and the Women Barristers Association for encouraging the participation of women barristers as mentors. And, of course, a very big thank you to all the VWL members who participated in the Program this year.

Warrnambool CPD Event and Dinner

22 July

This year VWL teamed up with the Women Barristers Association to present two CPD/CLE sessions at Deakin University's Warrnambool Campus. The sessions on Ethics and Professional Skills were followed by a networking dinner at a fantastic local restaurant. About 40 people, including local VWL members and practitioners from Warrnambool, Colac, Hamilton and Horsham attended this pioneering regional event, a feature in our year of 'reaching out' to rural and regional lawyers.

VWL gratefully acknowledges the support of the Women Barristers Association, with special thanks to Convenor and presenter Suzanne Kirton, and presenters Anna Robertson and Alexandra Golding. VWL would like to thank all the local members for their attendance and Deakin University for graciously hosting the event.

Members and Guests' Night

10 August

The annual VWL Members and Guests' Night was held on Wednesday 10 August at The Apartment in Little Bourke Street. We were pleased that on such a rainy and cold night, 130 members and their friends attended.

Guests were entertained by 'Extraordinary Acts' opera duo Rebecca and John who, on the evening, were known as 'Roberta' and 'Fat Tony' from the underbelly of Melbourne. The crowd loved their mob routine and Roberta's voice could be heard down Little Bourke Street!

One guest was overheard suggesting that Roberta wasn't really singing but instead it was soprano Maria Callas on a CD. We can assure you that it was Roberta's fabulous voice and there was no lip-syncing involved!

The evening provided a great opportunity for women lawyers to get together in a relaxed and informal setting to network and to celebrate the important achievements of VWL. Members were encouraged to bring non-members along as guests to the event so that they could hear about the important work that VWL does and inspire them to become involved in the organisation and its work. Kate Ashmor, VWL's Convenor, provided guests with a snapshot of what VWL has achieved in the past 12 months and what is planned for the coming months.

Lucky guests received door prizes kindly donated by Jacqui E, Tate & Lawson shirt makers and Cat Hammill Jewellery.

Thank you to all guests who attended and made the evening so special. For those who missed out this year, we look forward to seeing you at next year's event!



Top: Attendees Above: VWL Executive members (L-R) Beth Hilton-Thorp, Astrid Haban-Beer, Kate Ashmor, Patricia Athanasiadis, Claire Carrucan, Michelle Florenini and Christine Melis Above: Kate Ashmor addresses the crowd Above: Fat Tony

Coming to the Bar

17 August

VWL, in conjunction with the Woman Barristers' Association, held the fifth annual Coming to the Bar event on Wednesday 17 August.

Attendees were able to mingle with members of the Victorian Bar, including Suzanne Kirton (Women Barristers Association Convenor) and Samantha Marks SC, while drinks and canapés were served at The Essoign. This was followed by presentations from Debbie Mortimer S.C., John Dever (Dever's List), Carolene Gwynn, Megan Fitzgerald and Kathleen Foley who all gave realistic and honest insights into life at the Victorian Bar, and their experiences as barristers.

Animal Law Breakfast

18 August

On the morning of 18 August, forty lawyers and students gathered for the inaugural Animal Law Breakfast, jointly held by VWL and Lawyers for Animals. It was an important day for animal law: as that same day, Federal Parliament debated the historic private members bill to phase out the cruel practice of live exports. With a 7.30am start, it was wonderful to see so many in attendance and the success of the event certainly reflects the growing interest in animal law in Victoria.

Maddocks generously hosted the event, providing a delicious and creative vegan breakfast, while the speakers delivered passionate and engaging presentations. Ruth Hatten, Legal Counsel at Voiceless spoke about how animal law advocacy is on the rise and outlined significant gains that have been made in this field. However, Ruth also reminded us that there is a long way to go, with many problems in animal law emanating from the legal classification of animals as 'property'.

Graeme McEwen, Chair of the Barristers Animal Welfare Panel, spoke about how animal law is a social justice movement that is just starting to engage the public consciousness, in the same way that the women's liberation movement did in the 1970s, and abolitionism did in the 19th century. He explained that the same arguments raised against animal rights and banning live exports - economic and trade reasons - were raised to counter the arguments of those campaigning to abolish slavery. Graeme also spoke about the work that the Panel is involved in, from animal cruelty cases to defending animal rights activists.

The Breakfast was a wonderful opportunity to hear from two visionary speakers who are committed to creating a fairer, more humane society that does not discriminate arbitrarily on the basis of species. We would like to thank Maddocks for hosting the event, and Nichola Donovan, President of Lawyers for Animals, who did a marvellous job as facilitator.

Assisting Traumatised Clients Workshop

24 August

On Wednesday 24 August, the Women's Legal Service Victoria, in association with VWL, held a special CPD seminar on Assisting Traumatised Clients. Lander & Rogers were our generous hosts for this event.

About 30 female lawyers from private practice, the community legal sector and the bar attended this highly informative and interactive session, featuring psychologist Ursula Benstead, principal lawyer Leanne Sinclair of the Women's Legal Service Victoria and its educator Allyson Foster.



Top: The workshop in action Above: WLS legal educator Allyson Foster, WLS principal lawyer Leanne Sinclair and psychologist Ursula Benstead

Attendees shared and compared their experiences working with traumatised clients, and strategies for obtaining instructions and avoiding vicarious trauma to lawyers were discussed. VWL warmly thanks the Women's Legal Service Victoria for partnering with us to deliver this important session.

The Road Less Travelled: Women in Partnership, 7 September

On 7 September, VWL held a special members-only, free lunchtime forum at Allens Arthur Robinson on Women in Partnership.

About 80 VWL members, including private practice lawyers and law students, attended as Nick Nichola, National Managing Partner at Middletons; Mary-Jane Ierodionou, Managing Partner at Justitia and Maryjane Crabtree, Executive Partner at Allens Arthur Robinson offered valuable strategic advice to partnership aspirants and shared their personal experiences. The discussion was facilitated by VWL's Convenor, Kate Ashmor.



Top: Mary-Jane Ierodionou, Kate Ashmor, Maryjane Crabtree, Nick Nichola
Above: Attendees

Among the issues canvassed were the value of identifying a mentor and 'champion' within your firm early on, the critical importance of personal skills and negotiating flexible work practices without being derailed from the partnership route.

VWL was proud to partner with Allens Arthur Robinson in hosting this frank and fearless discussion.

Knowing your rights: Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, 14 September

Every year VWL's Justice Committee holds a Sexual Assault Forum to highlight issues in relation to sexual assault. Sexual harassment is currently a hot topic in both the media and Australian workplaces, with recent research by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission showing that a third of young Victorian women have experienced workplace sexual harassment. Disappointingly, the same research reveals that women are more likely to resign from their job than make an official complaint.



Top: The Panel Above: Michelle Bissett, Kate Jenkins, Sara Summerbell, Pat Athanasiadis and Kerin Leonard

'Knowing your Rights – Sexual Harassment in the Workplace' was held on 14 September. We were very lucky to have such an esteemed panel, who shared their insights into this important issue. Kerin Leonard, Manager of the Legal Unit at the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, provided us with an overview of the issue and how the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010 operates in relation to sexual harassment. Commissioner Michelle Bissett of Fair Work Australia provided insights into the Federal Fair Work Act 2009 and adverse action claims. Our third speaker, Sara Summerbell, a solicitor in the Employee Relations group at Freehills, looked at both federal and state law and explained how sexual harassment cases operate in practice and how compensation is awarded. Kate Jenkins, partner in the Freehills Employee Relations group and the lead partner of the firm's national Equal Opportunity and Diversity practice, did a wonderful job moderating the event.

We would like to thank our speakers for such interesting and engaging presentations and Freehills for generously hosting the event.

Migrant Women Speaking Out

21 September

VWL's Justice Committee was delighted to have Marion Lau OAM JP and Azmeena Hussain speak on the experience of female migrants in Australia, particularly as migrant women, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds, are still subject to stereotyping and inter-generational culture clashes.



Top: VWL Assistant Convenor Pat Athanasiadis, Marion Lau OAM JP and Azmeena Hussain
Above: The audience

Both Marion and Azmeena identified key aspects of the role the legal profession and government play in supporting female migrants, including the need for trust between ethnic groups as well as active support and integration measures.

VWL thanks our speakers for their hilarious anecdotes of being a migrant and a first generation woman in Victoria as well the wonderful support of Maurice Blackburn for generously hosting the event.

Tips from the Trenches: Women in Construction, 27 October

On 27 October VWL in conjunction with the National Association of Women in Construction presented Tips from the Trenches: Women in Construction, a networking lunch and discussion forum exclusively for members of both organisations.

The event was a frank and fearless panel discussion addressing the challenges facing women working and succeeding in the construction industry, and featuring practical suggestions and stories from the trenches. VWL members were able to network and forge new contacts with women working in the construction industry.

VWL thanks the wonderful speakers and Clayton Utz for hosting this fantastic event.

A black and white photograph of a group of women at a social event. In the center, a woman in a dark, sleeveless dress with a wide belt is clapping and holding a champagne glass. To her left, another woman in a light-colored shirt and dark skirt is also clapping. To the right, two more women are visible, one holding a bottle and the other a glass, both smiling. The background is slightly blurred, showing other guests and glasses on a table.

15th Birthday Party

2 September

VWL celebrated its fifteenth birthday in style by hosting a party at the Melbourne Gallery at Melbourne Museum on Friday 2 September.

Over 100 guests in attendance, including many past members of VWL's Executive, enjoyed canapés amidst the elegant surrounds of the Gallery and myriad displays centering around Melbourne's history including a life-size replica of Phar Lap!

15th Birthday Party: 2 September

By Susan Pryde, Kate Ashmor and Claire Carrucan

VWL's Convenor, Kate Ashmor, reflected on the many achievements of VWL during its first fifteen years noting that the success and strength of VWL today is a tribute to the passionate and tireless efforts of the last fifteen Executive Committees, wonderfully led by our past Convenors. We were fortunate during the night to hear from the following past Convenors: Georgina Frost (1998), Jo Renkin (2003), Sarah Coffey (2004), Rosemary Peavey (2005), Christine Melis (2008) and Astrid Haban-Beer (2010) who all reflected with pride on their involvement with VWL and the personal and professional growth they had achieved during their year as Convenor.

1997

1997 was also marked by the launch of Australian Women Lawyers on 19 September and the addition of VWL's Justice Committee, whose inaugural Chair was our current LIV President Caroline Counsel.

1998

On 16 September 1998 VWL launched its first flexible work practice guide entitled 'Living & Working Together in the 90s.' This was to be the first of many important publications on flexible work arrangements that VWL would produce over the years.



Kate Ashmor provided a snapshot of some key moments and achievements over the last 15 years, including:

1996

The launch of VWL on 29 August 1996 at the Snail 'n' Bottle restaurant by inaugural patron Chief Justice John Phillips, Attorney-General Jan Wade and special guest Eve Mahlab. The inaugural committees were Networking, Work Practices, Mature Age Practitioners, Communications and the 1997 Legal Convention Committee.

1997

By 1997 VWL had signed on the following sponsors: Arthur Robinson & Hedderwicks, Coltmans Price Brent, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Deacons Graham & James, Dunhill Madden Butler, Holding Redlich, Maddock Lonie Chisholm, Mallesons Stephen Jacques, Minter Ellison, Phillips Fox and The Shell Company of Australia.

1999

On 21 April 1999, Chief Justice Phillips delivered inaugural Lesbia Harford Oration on 'Women in the Law, Progress and Challenge.'

1999

In May 1999, VWL published a framework report entitled 'Taking Up the Challenge, Women In the Legal Profession.' VWL also produced a practical childcare assistance kit that year as a guide for legal practitioner parents.

2000

The inaugural Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon was held in 2000 in conjunction with the LIV – now a cherished annual fixture on our calendars. Professor Hilary Charlesworth delivered the first address focusing on Australia's Human Rights record. The Luncheon has gone on to have a human rights focus every year since.

2000

In 2000, VWL's Taking Up the Challenge report rose to greater prominence at two special forums, including a major symposium at the State Library of Victoria. VWL's website was launched on 22 November 2000 and the Country Committee was introduced.

2001

In 2001, Justice Kirby delivered the Lesbia Harford Oration on 'Women and the Law – What's Next?' and VWL published another seminal report – 'A Snapshot of Employment Practices.' The Professional Women's Alliance was also launched – an informal network between VWL and the Institute of Chartered Accountants.

2002

By our fifth anniversary in 2002, and thanks to the sound stewardship of the Executive Committee, VWL was in solid financial shape.

2005

Among the busy calendar in 2005, VWL hosted a networking dinner in Ballarat, a Life in the Law networking event for practitioners in the eastern suburbs, an inspirational careers seminar and the Women's Achievement Awards.

2006

In 2006, VWL held ground-breaking events on Pathways to Partnership for women lawyers and their mental health and well-being. Kirsty Sword Gusmao, first lady of East Timor, presented the keynote address at the Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon.



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Total annual income in the 2001-2002 financial year was \$67,000, half of which comprised sponsorship fees, and a further \$23,000 came from membership subscriptions. These figures confirm how vital the support of our sponsor firms is to VWL's ability to fund events and publications for members.

2003

By 2003, the Lesbia Harford Oration had become important biennial event and a much anticipated highlight on the VWL events calendar. Professor Loane Skene from the University of Melbourne Law School presented the 2003 Oration on Women's Reproductive Rights.

2004

In 2004, a pioneering precursor to the Law Student Mentoring Program was launched. It was known as the Women's Mentoring Scheme and the Attorney-General delivered the keynote address at the launch event. This joint initiative between VWL and the Women Barristers Association involved 60 law students and was

2007

Aside from the usual array of fantastic events and initiatives, 2007 was dominated by the hearing of our tax case in the Federal Court by, as he was then, Justice French. Freehills acted pro bono for VWL and we were so very capably represented by Alexandra Richards QC and former VWL Executive Member Karen Streckfuss. In mid 2008, Justice French handed down his judgement, finding that VWL is a charity for income taxation purposes and taking on judicial notice that female legal practitioners suffer disadvantage.

2008

2008 saw the launch of the Law Student Mentoring Program, which was then the only organised initiative available for female law students from all Victorian law schools to be paired with female practitioners. Her Honour Justice Marcia Neave AO of the Court of Appeal has been a wonderful champion of the Program since its inception and over 300 pairs of female law students and practitioners have successfully completed the Program over the last four years.

15th Birthday Party: 2 September

By Susan Pryde, Kate Ashmor and Claire Carrucan

2009

In 2009 we held our inaugural networking dinner in Geelong with the Geelong Law Association (something we repeated in June this year).

2010

In 2010, VWL launched the Women in Government and the Law Reform Committees, our revamped website and the important 'Do You Manage' flexible work practices guide, as well as a scoping study into the alarming attrition rates among female practitioners. The Women's Achievements Awards were also held.

2011

And among the many initiatives so far in 2011, Mary Kostakidis delivered the Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon on Wikileaks and freedom of speech, we travelled to Warrnambool with the Women Barristers Association for a pioneering regional women lawyers networking and CPD event, we launched our presence on Facebook and we're working with the Law Council of Australia as the leading State contributing to a national strategy towards combating attrition among female practitioners.

The night was capped off by a toast and the ceremonial cutting of a birthday cake for VWL by Her Honour Justice Pamela Tate, who attended the event on behalf of our patron, Chief Justice Marilyn Warren AC.

Her Honour, who has long been a keen supporter of VWL, took the opportunity to comment on at least two recent instances which demonstrated the significance of women in the law- as recently as August of this year Her Honour sat on a full bench of the Court of Appeal composed entirely of women. This was the first time in the Court's 150 year history that a full bench had been constituted by three female judges. Her Honour also spoke briefly about the recent High Court case challenging the Federal Government's Malaysia solution. Whether or not one agreed with the majority decision, it was significant to note that the team of successful barristers was all female.

Her Honour's comments were reflective of those of Convenor Kate Ashmor, who noted that while VWL's focus has evolved during its first fifteen years with many challenges seemingly conquered, there are further challenges ahead. We look forward to the next fifteen years of VWL!



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3. WiG Co-Chair Astrid Haban-Beer and WMLIP Co-Chair Samantha Perussich 4. Michelle Florenini, Amanda Stevens and Jackie Gillies 5. Alicia Dyer 6. Networking Committee Co-Chair Claire Carrucan 7. Networking Committee Co-Chair Claire Carrucan and Assistant Convenor and Justice Committee Co-Chair Patricia Athanasiadis 8. The Hon Justice Pamela Tate 9. Happy Birthday! 10. Mandy Bede and Collete De Silva assist guests 11. Alicia Dyer, Vanessa McKay, Lucy Duncan, Ellen Grant 12. Susan Pryde and Jennifer Taylor



Committee Reports 2011

Members of the 2011 VWL Executive and Committee Co-Chairs



Communications Committee Report

Co-Chairs Jessica Saunders and Masha Lezaic

A new Communications Committee was formed in early 2011 to continue the production of VWL's publications, including the monthly newsletter Women Keeping in Touch, the annual publication Portia and the management of the fabulous new website. Liz Walter continued her role as Media Liaison Officer, Krystil Carter and Masha Lezaic were appointed as co-chairs, while Jessica Saunders took on the new role of webmaster.

Unfortunately Krystil and Liz both left the Committee during the year due to interstate opportunities. We thank them for their contribution to the Communications Committee and wish them the best of luck in their future careers.

We (Masha and Jessica) powered on with WKIT and updates to the website throughout the year and found that being involved with the Communications Committee was a great way to see the hard work of other Committees and keep up-to-date with the many exciting events taking place.

We broadened our reach to current and potential new members through a Facebook page trial which has been a great success! Anyone on Facebook can 'like' us to be kept up to date with events and photos posted on the page. The trial featured in the May issue of the Law Institute Journal article. We thank Kate Ashmor for pioneering this initiative and invite you to visit at <http://www.facebook.com/victorianwomenlawyers>.

Later in the year our Committee was joined by enthusiastic members Bree Ryan and Claire Roberts. We thank them for their assistance with Portia.

We would like to acknowledge the hard work of Kate Ashmor, Claire Caruccan and Beth Hilton-Thorp for all the work they have put into the website and WKIT in the past. A big thank you goes to our outgoing administrator Tracey Spiller who has been so helpful and supportive throughout the year.

Justice Committee Report

Co-Chairs Patricia Athanasiadis and Alexia Staker

The Justice Committee works on projects relevant to women, the law and social justice. The events are designed to inform our members and the public about areas of interest in the broad field of social justice, and to encourage debate in these areas.

The Justice Committee organised four fantastic events this year, including two brand new events! Justice prepared during the first part of the year then kicked off with its first event, the Animal Law breakfast in August which was held jointly with Lawyers for Animals. Then the annual the Sexual Assault Forum was held in September, this year focusing on sexual harassment in the workplace. Finally, two brand new events were held towards the end of the year: 'Migrant Women Speaking Out Forum' and the 'Religion and the Law: where to from here?' These two events were organised in the spirit of VWL's theme this year: 'reaching out' and were designed to educate lawyers about issues faced by women in the broader community, who may come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Patricia Athanasiadis and Alexia Staker were elected as Co-Chairs of the Committee for 2011 and were very happy to welcome a number of new members this year. The Justice Committee would like to thank all the Committee members for their hard work during the year. In particular, we are grateful for the support of Claire Humble, Kaylene Hunter, Janet Van der Kolk, Michel Margalit, and Emilia Michael. We would also like to extend our thanks to Jennifer Faulkner, who kindly stepped forward to take up the role of interim Co-Chair while Alexia was overseas in June and July. Jennifer did a wonderful job, particularly with helping to organise the Animal Law Breakfast.

Animal Law Breakfast

In keeping with this year's theme of 'reaching out', the Animal Law Breakfast reminded us that justice should be extended to all living creatures, not just human beings. On the morning of 18 August, forty lawyers and students gathered for the Animal Law Breakfast, held jointly by VWL and Lawyers for Animals. Despite the very early start we had a huge turn out, and it was heartening to see that animal law is attracting increasing interest and support in Victoria.

Sexual Assault Forum - 'Knowing your Rights - Sexual Harassment in the Workplace'

Every year the Justice Committee holds a Sexual Assault Forum to highlight issues in relation to sexual assault and how to tackle this ongoing problem. This year's theme was sexual harassment in the workplace.

We would like to thank our speakers for such interesting and engaging presentations and to Freehills for generously hosting the event.

Migrant Women Speaking Out Forum

The Justice Committee was delighted to have Marion Lau OAM JP and Azmeena Hussain speak on the experience of female migrants in Australia. Justice thanks our speakers as well the wonderful support of Maurice Blackburn for hosting the event.

Religion and the Law: Where to from here?

On 20 October the first VWL-organised discussion focusing on the intersection between religion and the law took place. Panellists included Magistrate Anne Goldsborough, Tasneem Chopra, Chairperson of the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights, Munya Andrews of Counsel and Maria Dimopoulos of Myriad Consultants.

The event focused on the role the legal profession plays in navigating through the tensions between human rights, criminal and civil law.

We thank our fantastic speakers and Mallesons Stephen Jaques for hosting this wonderful event.

The Justice Committee in 2012

2011 has been a fantastic year for the Justice Committee and we are looking forward to many exciting events for next year, some of which are already in the pipeline.

Alexia and Patricia will be stepping down as Co-Chairs at the end of the year, but will remain involved in the Committee and look forward to seeing the Committee flourish under the direction of the 2012 Co-Chairs.

If you would like to become involved in the Justice Committee, please log onto the VWL website for further details.

About the Committee

The Law Reform Committee is one of Victorian Women Lawyers' newest committees, and is dedicated to giving VWL a voice in law reform activities in Victoria and beyond. We aim to contribute to discussion involving women's rights, the prevention of discrimination, and areas of importance to our membership, women lawyers.

Melanie Hodge resigned her position as Chair of the Law Reform Committee at the end of 2010, and the Committee would like to take this opportunity to thank Mel for her hard work in setting up the Committee and encouraging us to explore myriad law reform opportunities available to us. Mel was succeeded by Akane Kanai and Emily Hart as Co-Chairs of the Committee for 2011.

This year has proved to be a busy and exciting one for the Law Reform Committee, which saw our numbers grow and our hard working Committee members take on a variety of projects.

Law Reform Submissions

- The year started with a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee's Inquiry into the Australian Law Reform Commission, which was seeking to review the ALRC's role, funding and governance. The Law Reform Committee prepared a submission focusing on the ALRC's role as an independent expert body with important monitoring and education functions, particularly in areas of interest and concern to Australian women. Following the receipt of our submission, the Law Reform Committee was invited to speak at a Hearing with the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. Jessica Saunders, Laura Vines and Emily Hart were able to elaborate on our submission before a number of Senators at a public hearing in February.
- The Committee continued its association with the Equality Rights Alliance in relation to the consolidation of Federal anti-discrimination laws ('the consolidation project'), following a meeting with the offices of the Attorney General and the Minister for Finance and Deregulation in Canberra in December 2010, which was attended by Akane Kanai and Prue Elleston on behalf of Victorian Women Lawyers.

In February 2011, the Committee made a submission on behalf of VWL, drawing on the experience of women lawyers in dealing with the current legislative framework and providing recommendations for a consolidated federal anti-discrimination law. In July, Emily Hart and Akane Kanai attended an Equality Law Conference run by the Human Rights Law Centre focused on the consolidation project, on behalf of the Law Reform Committee. A range of speakers explored the current framework and provided suggestions for the government to consider as part of the consolidation project.

A discussion paper was released by the Attorney General and Minister for Finance and Deregulation on 22 September 2011, which the Committee will respond to in 2012.

- In April 2011 the Committee partnered with the Women's Legal Service Victoria, Domestic Violence Victoria, inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health and the Asylum Seeker's Resource Centre to make a joint comment on the Australian Law Reform Commission's Issues Paper on Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws – Immigration Law.

The submission focused on the situation faced by migrant and refugee women and children experiencing family violence in Australia and called for a review of the Migration Act, Regulations and administrative framework to assist those immigrant and refugee women and children experiencing domestic violence.

Special thanks to Nerida Mulvey, Akane Kanai, Emilia Michael, Emily Hart and Noosheen Mogadam of the Women Migrant's Legal Information Project Committee for their assistance on this submission.

VWL has been asked (along with the other contributing organisations) to attend a teleconference with the ALRC in October to discuss the contents of our submission.

- A submission was made in August 2011 in support of the provision of funding to JobWatch Inc, which provides essential legal assistance to Victorian workers. In particular, Jobwatch advocates for improved working conditions for the most vulnerable Victorian workers, including women. Thanks to Emilia Michael, Akane Kanai and Emily Hart for preparing this submission.

Copies of these submissions can be found on the VWL website.

Women on Boards Event

The Law Reform Committee also helped to organise the Women on Boards Event held at Allens Arthur Robinson on 18 May 2011, held in conjunction with Women on Boards. A report on this event can be found at page 11.

A big thanks to the entire Committee for their hard work and dedication in arranging this event, which really was a team effort!

Akane and Emily would like to thank all our Committee members for a fantastic year, and look forward to a rewarding 2012 for the Committee.

This year has been excellent from a membership point of view with membership at an all time high.

The Membership Committee is responsible for:

- ensuring effective communication with members,
- broadening and expanding the membership base,
- maintaining information about the demographics of VWL membership,
- obtaining feedback from members, and
- pursuing initiatives for the benefit of VWL members.

This year applications and renewals have been able to be processed entirely online including payments. Although there have been system problems particularly with the renewal process, these have been addressed. Our membership database is now maintained as part of the online system and we are working to improve the capacity of the system to permit analysis of membership demographics.

This year has also seen changes in VWL's membership year. At the 2010 AGM amendments to the Rules were approved, which had the effect of aligning the membership year with the financial year. The change was made to simplify arrangements for members and for ease of administration. It also brought the membership year into line with the sponsorship year and the membership year for Australian Women Lawyers, the peak body representing State and Territory women lawyers' associations and of which all VWL members are automatically members. VWL members were given an extended period of membership until 1 July 2011- the start of the new membership year.

I am pleased to report that membership is healthy with a total of 666 members at 25 September. This compares favourably with a total membership of 548 in November last year - an increase in membership of 118 (21.5%) (table below refers). The comparatively large numbers in the Associate Member category reflects the requirement that students participating in the Law Student Mentoring Program must be VWL members. The number of Ordinary Members has increased by 140.

Membership	2011	2010	2009	2008
Ordinary	471	331	341	411
Associates	195	219	147	18
TOTAL	666	548	488	429

We continue to be primarily an association of practitioners from the CBD. However, engagement with regional practitioners is important to VWL and this was addressed at the numerous regional events held throughout the year.

Please contact Beth Hilton-Thorp at jthorp@bigpond.net.au if you are interested in becoming involved in the Membership Committee.

Networking Committee Report

Co-Chairs Claire Carrucan and Verity Shepherdson

VWL's Networking Committee aims to provide opportunities for professional friendships, support and exchange of ideas.

The Committee organises events that support professional development by way of career planning, mentoring, and learning about legal issues, and also 'meet and greet' and networking events. It also organises non-legal events which focus on issues of general interest to our members, and which provide networking opportunities.

The Committee had a very successful 2011, organising a number of well-attended and entertaining events.

Events organised by the Committee included:

- the inaugural joint networking event with Women In Finance and the Institute of Chartered Accountants, ***Women Making It Happen in 2011*** (see page 9 for a report and photos);
- VWL's Fifteenth Birthday Party (see pages 17 for a report and photos);
- a regional networking dinner in Geelong (see page 12);
- the Members and Guests' Night (see pages 13 for a report and photos);
- the annual Coming to the Bar event, organised in conjunction with the Women Barristers Association; and
- the VWL AGM and Christmas Party.

Continuing on from the success of the inaugural joint networking event with Women In Finance and the Institute of Chartered Accountants, members of the Networking Committee continue to work closely with these two associations to organise the next joint networking event to be held early in 2012.

The enthusiasm and creativity of Committee members ensured the success of events throughout the year. The Committee has several long-standing members who have enthusiastically volunteered their time over a number of years. We also welcomed a number of new members during the year, and they have thrown themselves into the work of the Committee with gusto and youthful enthusiasm.

The Co-Chairs of the Committee, Claire Carrucan and Verity Shepherdson, would like to thank each of the following members of the Committee for their hard work and enthusiasm:

- Mandy Bede
- Krystil Carter
- Michelle Florenini
- Lydia Kinda
- Susan Pryde
- Amelia Macknay
- Jennifer Taylor
- Jessica Kerr
- Natalie Devitsakis
- Jennifer Amy
- Collette De Silva
- Cari Lewis
- Lucy Duncan
- Vanessa McKay

Special mention must be made of the efforts of Krystil Carter who, albeit for a short time, made a fantastic contribution to the Networking Committee. Krystil departed for the warmer shores of Brisbane in June this year and we wish her every success in her future endeavours.

And as always, we thank VWL's outgoing Administrator, Tracey Spiller, for her fantastic support throughout the year.

Sponsorship Report

Jackie Gillies, Sponsorship Officer

The work of VWL would not be possible without the ongoing support of its principal sponsor, the LIV and its major sponsors: Allens Arthur Robinson, Blake Dawson, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Clayton Utz, DLA Piper, Maddocks, Mallesons Stephen Jaques, Maurice Blackburn, Middletons and Minter Ellison.

In 2011, our Convenor, Kate Ashmor, and Sponsorship Officer, Jackie Gillies, met with the managing partner or key VWL relationship partner of each sponsor firms to discuss the year ahead and VWL's planned agenda. During the year, VWL profiled a key female lawyer from each sponsor firm and acknowledged all female appointments in our monthly e-newsletter *Women Keeping in Touch*.

Our Executive members presented to several sponsor firms about VWL membership and initiatives. This year, the following major sponsor firms also hosted a VWL event on their premises:

- Allens Arthur Robinson hosted *Women on Boards* and *The Road Less Travelled: Women in Partnership* discussion forums;
- Middletons hosted the launch of the *2011 Law Student Mentoring Program*;
- DLA Piper hosted the *Women in Leadership Luncheon: An In-House Lawyer's Perspective*, an event held jointly with ACLA;
- Maddocks hosted the *Animal Law Breakfast*, an event held jointly with Lawyers for Animals;
- Clayton Utz hosted the *Networking Lunch for Women in Construction*;
- Maurice Blackburn hosted the *Migrant Women Speaking Out Forum*; and
- Mallesons Stephen Jaques hosted the *Religion & the Law: Where to from here?* discussion forum.

In addition, special thanks also go to:

- Lander & Rogers for hosting the CPD session *When Justice Takes its Toll: Assisting Traumatized Clients*, an event held jointly with the Women's Legal Service;
- Freehills for hosting the *2011 Sexual Assault Forum – Knowing Your Rights: Sexual Harassment in the Workplace*; and
- Australian Executor Trustees and Ord Minnett for hosting the *2011 AGM and Christmas Party*.

This year we would also like to especially acknowledge our Patron, Chief Justice Marilyn Warren AC for her support in attending lunches with our sponsor firms to discuss the issues faced by women in the profession.

Victorian Women Lawyers would like to thank its sponsors for their ongoing support throughout the year. We look forward to working alongside these firms during 2012 and beyond.

Treasurer's Report

Jacquie Browning, Treasurer

I am pleased to report that VWL finances are in a particularly good position as we draw towards the close of 2011.

This year has seen consolidation of membership numbers and continuation of sponsorship from existing sponsor firms and we appreciate yet again the support of our firms in 2011.

In addition, VWL has generated income from investment of its funds thereby consolidating and building upon a strong financial base and ensuring further funds are available to inject into even more exciting and invaluable events for members.

It has also seen VWL provide financial support for a number of key projects aligned with VWL aims and objectives highlighting this year's theme of *reaching out*. These include: the White Ribbon Day Luncheon, the Animal Law Breakfast, regional networking events and the Migrant Women Speaking Out Forum.

Funding also ensured that VWL was able to support the holding of its 15th birthday party event which was a significant highlight for the 2011 year.

Financially VWL will be able to continue to support the publication of Portia, events for members and guests, and projects aligned with its purpose and objectives well into the future, given the current level of memberships and sponsorships.

VWL's accounts and financial statements can be viewed in the 2011 Annual Report, published on VWL's website.

Women in Government Committee Report

Co-Chairs Sara Law and Astrid Haban-Beer

The Women in Government (WIG) committee is VWL's newest committee and was launched in November 2010. WIG aims to provide a forum for women lawyers working in and for the government sector to share experiences, learn about career progression for women in government and network with each other and the wider legal community. WIG is a network for all women lawyers (whether practising as lawyers or not) in local, State and Federal government firms, agencies, departments and statutory bodies.

In 2011, the WIG Committee has grown to include members from Federal and State government law firms, departments and agencies. We are aiming to increase the diversity of the Committee with representatives from local government bodies and smaller departments.

The government sector remains an important focus area for women lawyers and WIG is keen to increase the dialogue about issues faced by women who work in government and for government. The substance of legal issues in government is often tricky and government lawyers are often involved in very public, high profile matters. The nexus between policy and law is also an aspect that draws a lot of professional interest in public law.

Events in 2011

We thank the contribution of the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO) and the Australian Government Solicitor (AGS) for hosting and supporting our two substantive events this year.

In May we held a successful event, *'Life as a Government Lawyer: A Conversation with Vanessa Twigg'* hosted by VGSO with support from the Department of Transport. Vanessa Twigg is the Assistant Director - Police Integrity, Strategic Projects, Education and Legal Services of the OPI. Angela Priestly, editor at Lawyers Weekly hosted the conversation and discussed Vanessa's personal experience and her management of women lawyers in a well-attended lunchtime session. Further details and photos from this event are available on page 11.

In October, a panel forum discussed the glass ceiling specifically in relation to working in government. Panellists include Peter Stewart, the newly appointed Victorian Government Solicitor; Naomi Hodgson, barrister and former government solicitor; Susan Pryde, former Senior Executive Lawyer and Director at the Australian Government Solicitor; Alexandra Merrett, Principal Lawyer, Trade Practices Legal Unit, ACCC; and Amanda Stevens, Workplace Diversity consultant and former principal lawyer at ASIC.

Sara Law and Astrid Haban-Beer thank the Committee for their work and contribution over the past year. We acknowledge that new initiatives can often be a little more difficult to manage, but WIG is thriving and continues to garner support. The year ahead should be a very positive one for WIG.

2011 WIG Committee members:

- Sara Law
- Astrid Haban-Beer
- Penina Berkovic
- Kate Ashmor
- Christine Melis
- Claire Rennie
- Dina Ross
- Emma O'Neill
- Isabel Parsons
- Fiona Batten
- Danielle Wooltorton
- Hayley Petrony
- Sarah Daniell

Women Migrants Legal Information Project Committee Report

Co-Chairs Philippa Darlow and Samantha Perussich

The Women Migrants' Legal Information Project Committee (WMLIP) is VWL's only project based committee. WMLIP's agenda is to draw upon the expertise and resources of its members to make legal information more accessible to migrant women.

Migrants are often unaware of their legal rights because:

- Australia's legal system is different and unfamiliar;
- They may lack English proficiency; and
- They may lack knowledge of or be reluctant to access support services available.

WMLIP primarily aims to reach the most vulnerable migrant women, being those who are newly arrived in Victoria and from emerging migrant groups, such as the Afghani, Assyrian/Chaldean, Burmese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Iranian, Iraqi, Sudanese and Somali migrant populations. These migrants are least likely to have established networks, which are a means of obtaining legal information and connecting with legal support services.

Whilst both men and women in these migrant groups have problems accessing justice, for women the difficulties can be compounded for reasons arising from lower levels of education, employment, English proficiency and financial independence.

Currently, the Committee is working towards airing a series of radio broadcasts on multicultural community radio stations, focusing on the areas of law which have been identified as being of concern to migrant women. The broadcasts will address areas such as:

- Access to the legal system
- Migration law
- Domestic violence
- Family law
- Workplace rights
- Consumer law

Research indicates that migrants can often have difficulty identifying when their problem is legal in nature and they require legal advice. The Committee plans to adopt the 'story telling' approach which will involve telling a story about a fictional character with a legal problem. This has been shown to be an effective tool for conveying legal concepts to migrants.

The WMLIP Committee is made up of senior and junior lawyers as well as law students. It is supported by marketing professionals working in the legal industry. It is currently chaired by Philippa Darlow and Samantha Perussich, with Emilia Michael and Noosheen Mogadam having also Co-Chaired the Committee until early 2011.

The Committee is supported by the Victoria Law Foundation which provides the Committee with an intern law student annual. Our 2011 intern, Merinda Petersen, is a law student in her penultimate year at Melbourne University. During her internship Merinda identified radio programs specifically about migrant and women's issues that WMLIP will target for its broadcasts. Merinda has also assisted in forging relationships with key partner organisations.

In 2012 WMLIP hopes to secure further funding and launch its series of broadcasts.

WMLIP Committee meetings are held once a month. The Committee always welcomes new members as it is only with their skills and contributions that the Committee can advance its cause. WMLIP is presently seeking expressions of interest from female practitioners who are proficient in one or more languages spoken in the following communities: Afghani, Assyrian/Chaldean, Burmese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Iranian, Iraqi, Sudanese and Somali.

If you are interested in contributing to the project please email:

Philippa (philippa.darlow@westminsterlaw.com.au) or
Samantha (samantha.perussich@gmail.com).

WMLIP Through the Eyes of an Intern

My name is Merinda Petersen and I am in my penultimate year of a BA/LLB degree at the University of Melbourne. I have been placed as an intern with VWL as part of the Victoria Law Foundation ('VLF') Legal Sector Internship Program. I have had the wonderful opportunity to be involved in the work of the Women Migrants Legal Information Project Committee (WMLIP). WMLIP's main role is organising projects which aim to disseminate easily accessible legal information to migrant women, and to provide them with legal community referrals. This year the WMLIP changed direction, organising two projects which involve airing legal scripts on community radio stations.

Part of my role has been to assist with determining the scope and details of the projects and to investigate how project goals can best be achieved. The projects will primarily focus on family law and domestic violence and are aimed at Arabic-speaking migrant women in Victoria as many migrant groups the WMLIP aims to reach speak Arabic- such as the Iraqi, Eritrean and Sudanese communities. Based on findings in the report '*Addressing the Unmet Legal Needs of Migrant Women in Victoria*', compiled by previous VLF intern

Sarah Spottiswood, the WMLIP decided to focus on family law and domestic violence as these are areas of particular relevance and concern to migrant women. Currently, the WMLIP is working towards producing informative radio scripts which address these legal issues. Translated scripts will be recorded professionally and distributed to various community radio stations with Arabic programs to be aired as community service announcements.

WMLIP intends to incorporate the findings from the pilot project into a larger-scale project targeting migrant women from many culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. WMLIP especially aims to reach out to new migrant groups, as research suggests that it is those groups that are most vulnerable.

In addition to dealing with family law and domestic violence, this project will also cover the following areas of law:

- Rights at Work
- Migration Law
- Consumer Law
- Access to the Legal System

Working on the project has been enjoyable and involved a wide range of tasks such as identifying and creating a comprehensive list of relevant radio stations with programs in the targeted languages; learning about the processes involved in producing radio segments; helping draft radio scripts which provide legal information; preparing a grant application and fostering ties with people in the community radio sector. One of the highlights for me was attending the 'Migrant Women Speaking Out' event held at Maurice Blackburn. It was an interactive and engaging presentation regarding the challenges that migrant women face, and the ways in which lawyers are able to help.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Philippa Darlow, Samantha Perussich and Tracey Spiller, for their continuous support and guidance.

The Work Practices Committee's focus is on retaining women in the legal profession, improving flexible working arrangements for lawyers generally and assisting with increasing the number of women in senior leadership roles in Victorian law firms, in house roles and government. To that end, we explore the issues facing women in workplaces, publicly comment on these issues and formulate ways to address these issues. 2011 has been a busy year for the Work Practices Committee with work being undertaken on the following matters:

The Attrition Study

The Scoping Study for an Attrition Study of Victorian Lawyers (Scoping Study) was completed in late 2010. The Scoping Study was prepared by Dr Sara Charlesworth and Iain Campbell of the Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT University in conjunction with VWL. The Scoping Study sets out a number of findings about the career trajectory of both male and female lawyers in Victoria and was based on de-identified practising certificate data provided by the Victorian Legal Services Board.

In short, the Scoping Study highlighted that significantly more men than women hold principal practising certificates and that a considerable number of women leave the profession between the ages of 30 and 40. The Scoping Study was always intended to form the quantitative basis for an Attrition Study that would (qualitatively) examine the reasons behind the Scoping Study findings.

During 2011, the Work Practices Committee has been reviewing the Scoping Study, considering the purpose and scope of the Attrition Study and considering ways to get the Attrition Study off the ground. To that end in September 2011 we organised a planning day with a number of leading academics in the area of women in the legal profession and flexibility. The participants were:

- Professor Margaret Thornton- The Australian National University
- Associate Professor Sara Charlesworth- University of South Australia
- Dr Joanne Bagust- Deakin University
- Nadine Levy- Coordinator Young Workers Legal Service
- Fiona McLeod SC- Law Council Australia
- Emma Hlubucek- Law Council Australia
- Amanda Stevens- VWL
- Francesca Steele- VWL
- Laura Simmons-Strempel- VWL
- Fiona Knowles- VWL

The day was a very productive planning session and has given the Work Practices Committee a clear agenda for moving forward with the Attrition Study. The Attrition Study will be a national study and

the first of its kind in Australia. It will help the legal profession better understand the reasons why lawyers leave the law. We are now working in conjunction with the Law Council of Australia to prepare funding applications for the Attrition Study.

Development of training based on the 'Do you Manage?' report

In October 2010, Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick launched the Work Practices Committee's 'Do you Manage?' report at the Law Institute of Victoria (Report). The Report is aimed at partners, managers and employees in any practice area and in any firm. It contains practical tools on how to implement and manage flexible work arrangements and a guide to their use.

We have recently engaged Katie Spearritt from Diversity Partners to develop the Report into a training program for partners in law firms. Our own committee member, Amanda Stevens from Segovia Consulting, will assist Katie with the development of the training. We are currently developing the training and hope to be in a position to offer the training to law firms by the end of this year.

Towards Success in the Law- Relaunch Your Career

On 22 and 23 September 2011, the Law Institute of Victoria in conjunction with a number of groups, including VWL held a two day conference called 'Towards Success in the Law- Relaunch Your Career- restart, reshape and re-energise' The Conference was aimed at legal professionals who are returning to work, seeking to explore other opportunities within the law, at a cross-road or in a rut and anyone who wants to get more out of their legal career.

A special thanks to Francesca Steele who was the main driving force behind the Conference and did much of the preparation and organisation of all aspects of the conference on behalf of the Law Institute of Victoria and VWL. We also acknowledge the participation of two Work Practices Committee members being Alina Humphries, who featured in a panel discussion about the realities of returning to work part time and Amanda Stevens who presented on marketing yourself and negotiation. On behalf of VWL, Kate Ashmor participated in the steering committee which planned the Conference.

Law Institute Journal- According to Merit Articles

Throughout 2011, the Work Practices Committee has written bi-monthly articles for the According to Merit column in the Law Institute Journal. A special thanks to Committee member Amanda Stevens for her high level of involvement in drafting these articles. Alina Humphries and Alice MacDougall have also contributed to the writing of these articles. The articles written were as follows:

1. A little less conversation a little more action: suggestions of actions that can be taken to improve women in leadership positions - November 2010
2. Take Stock of Diversity Initiatives, law firms would do well to follow the ASX's lead on gender diversity - April 2011
3. From Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace to Workplace Gender Equality: A new name and focus for EOWWA - May 2011
4. Merit demand quotas, research suggests it makes good business sense to have legislated quotas for women on company boards - June 2011
5. Part time of what? - for part time arrangements to work we need to be honest about what a full time lawyer role entails. - August 2011

2012

Next Year we hope to:

- Progress and possibly complete the Attrition Study,
- Roll out the Do You Manage training workshop to all sponsor firms (firms that sponsor VWL) and then to other firms through the LIV,
- Continue to draw attention to issues of importance via articles in the According to Merit column of the Law Institute Journal, and
- Undertake some new projects that may include an event on how to ask for a pay rise and more...

The Committee would like to acknowledge the hard work of Francesca and Laura in leading the group this year and undertaking the essential coordination role. Laura and Francesca would like to thank all of the members of the Work Practices Committee for all of their hard work and commitment during 2011. We look forward to a successful and rewarding 2012 for the Work Practices Committee.

Australian Women Lawyers Representative Report

Christine Melis



Back L to R: Kim Knights (WBA, Vic), Amy Challans (SA), Sara Wedgwood (ACT), Sue Oliver (NT), Christine Melis (Vic), Susie McNeil (Qld) Front L to R - Mary Anne Ryan (Tas), Rebecca Lee (WA)

WWL is a recognised organisation of Australian Women Lawyers (AWL). As a member of WWL you are also automatically made an individual member of AWL under its constitution. Like WWL, AWL is primarily concerned with issues relating to the practice and advancement of women in the legal profession but with a national focus. As a recognised organisation, WWL occupies a seat on the AWL Board. Other representatives include: Tasmanian Women Lawyers, Women Lawyers Association of the Australian Capital Territory, Women Lawyers Association of New South Wales, Women Lawyers Association of Queensland, Women Lawyers Association of Northern Territory, Women Lawyers Association of Western Australia, Women Lawyers Association of South Australia and Women Barristers Association (Vic) (WBA).

Historically, in order to ensure that each state and territory had an equal vote on the Board, the Victorian vote alternated between the WWL representative and the WBA representative. This year the AWL Constitution was altered to give every State and Territory two votes, giving the two Victorian representatives each a vote and the ability to stand for an office bearing position on the Board, simultaneously.

I have been WWL's representative on the AWL Board for the last three years. Now in my fourth year I will also be assuming the role of Vice President of AWL. The Board composition for the 2011/12 year is as follows:

President – Rebecca Lee (WA)

Vice-President – Christine Melis (Vic)

Treasurer – Kim Knights (Vic)

Secretary – Sara Wedgwood (ACT)

Director – Susie McNeil (Qld)

Director – Sue Oliver (NT)

Director – Amy Challans (SA)

Director – Rebecca Barry (NSW)

Director – Sandra Taglieri (Tas)

The AWL Board holds monthly meetings by teleconference with anywhere between one or two face-to-face meetings, including its AGM, each year in an agreed state or territory. AWL's Patron is the Honourable Chief Justice Bryant.

AWL 2010/11 – a snapshot

The 2010/11 year has really been focused on getting things done in preparation for the 2011/12 year. Our president was Mary Anne Ryan of Tasmanian Women Lawyers. AWL has invested in the design and 'revamp' of a new website which is to be launched shortly. A sub-committee of the Board, the Legal Conference sub-committee, was formed with representatives from each state and territory, including for the first time ever a representative from New Zealand, to begin preparations for AWL's national biennial legal conference in August 2012. AWL published its annual newsletter, *Themis*, which provides an interesting read on topics of national interest and an update on the activities of all constituent bodies of AWL. You can view *Themis* online via the WWL website. AWL also has a seat on the Law Council of Australia's Equal Opportunity Committee which was this year chaired by barrister and former AWL President, Fiona McLeod SC. Representatives on that Committee are working with their own state bodies looking at ways relevant to their own jurisdictions, whether in private practice or at the Bar, to address matters arising from the Gender Appearance Survey. The Gender Appearance Survey was a joint survey conducted by the Law Council of Australia and AWL in 2010.

Nationally, there were three main findings of the survey:

1. Female barristers appear in statistically the same proportions as they exist at the Bar (about 20% on a national basis);
2. On an average, male barristers appear for significantly longer periods of time when compared to female barristers (3.8 hours for males and 2.8 hours for females); and
3. When compared to other entities such as government agencies, private law firms are more likely to brief male barristers.

In response to the survey, the Law Council of Victoria developed a strategy for advancing appearances by female advocates in Australian courts. A practical guide was later developed for implementing the strategy, the 'Suggested Best Practices Action Plan'. The Action Plan is designed to assist Australian bar associations to develop strategies and initiatives aimed at recruiting, retaining and advancing female barristers. You can access both the strategy and the Action Plan on the Law Council of Australia's website.

AWL 2011/12 – a snapshot

The Legal Conference will be held between 10-12 August 2012 in our nation's capital. Lexis Nexis is once again assisting AWL in the organisation of the Conference which is titled '*Women Lawyers in a Public Place*'. It will be held at University House, Australian National University, Canberra. A number of concurrent sessions will be offered relevant to construction law, criminal law, intellectual property, corporate governance and social media. In addition there will be a number of plenary sessions and a Q&A session chaired by a well known and respected media personality. The Conference is hoped to attract a number of national dignitaries and members of the judiciary to our nation's capital. Place the dates in your calendar and watch the WWL website and WKIT for further updates and early bird specials.

Next year also marks the 15th anniversary of AWL. It promises to be a great year of celebration.



Portia Articles 2011



The Impact of Time Norms, Gender Bias and Work Commitment on the Lives of Young Women Lawyers: Thesis by Nadine Levy

Nadine Levy, LLB (Hons), BA (Hons) is the current Coordinator of the Young Workers' Legal Service in South Australia. She has a strong passion for social research and the ways it can promote gender equity. Nadine's full thesis can be viewed on the VWL website at <http://www.vwl.asn.au/?page=publications> under 'Other Publications'.

Last year as part of my Honours year at the University of Adelaide I conducted a study about the experiences of young women lawyers in South Australia. The study explored the difficulties young women lawyers face in relation to time allocation and in particular the ways in which the legal profession's culture and institutions impact on young women lawyers' lives, both at work and outside of work. The study also examined the issues of gender bias and long hours and discussed the strategies participants adopted in dealing with these issues. Twelve women under the age of 30 participated in this study. A mixture of data-collecting methods was used - qualitative semi-structured interviews and time use diaries - and a range of significant findings were discussed.

Among these, the study found that participants felt they needed to sacrifice their personal commitments when required and offer constant diligence and conscientiousness to their workplace. They explained feeling as though they ought to be willing and able to drop their personal commitments and family responsibilities when circumstances demanded it and place their work first. This expectation manifested in the attitudes of participants' superiors, coworkers and clients. It also formed part of a broader narrative that seemed to exist in the profession, one which views endurance, total commitment and long hours as a sign of machismo and as something to be celebrated.

Unrelenting work commitment was perpetuated through the ideas of 'free choice' and 'agency'. Participants discussed their long hours and self-sacrificing practices as if they were a product of their own choosing. They rarely linked these practices to the profession's norms, or a masculine notion of what it means to be a professional. Most participants felt that females had achieved equality in the profession and that gender bias was no longer a continuing issue. Without a recognition of structural inequality, participants found it hard to entertain the possibility of changing or resisting the profession's culture, norms and expectations.

It was clear that the profession's time norms had a significant impact on participants' relationship to free time. Participants found it hard to find the time to engage in fulfilling hobbies and pursuits outside of work and when they did have time available to them they worried they were not using it in the most useful and effective way. Participants experienced an internal struggle: their constant desire to be productive and useful often made it impossible to experience the relaxation and restoration they needed. Most participants were concerned about how the profession's high standard of work commitment would impact on any future decisions they make in relation to a family. They did not feel that existing 'family friendly' initiatives would support their needs into the future and many saw no other option but to exit the profession to look for a more supportive work environment.

Another concerning issue reported by participants was that of workplace sexual harassment, bullying and sexism. A number of participants reported experiencing some form of mistreatment at work. Participants reported both direct and indirect forms of sexism, including negative attitudes towards women advancing in the profession, the persistence of gender stereotypes, and the existence of exclusive all-male social gatherings.

These findings should prompt us to ask some hard questions about the profession's culture and practices if women are to gain equal status in the practice of law. One priority should be to move beyond the idea of formal equality and to look to the more tacit and insidious forms of gender bias underpinning the profession. There is also clear need for action to eradicate gender related mistreatment. In particular, women lawyers who decide to complain about mistreatment need protection and support. Additionally those in senior positions need to be educated on ways to minimise direct and indirect forms of bias and on strategies they can use to seriously address the needs of women within their workplace.

What drives Lizzie O'Shea

Author: Lizzie O'Shea

Lizzie has worked with Reprieve, an organisation that represents indigent prisoners on death row in Louisiana and at the International Labour Organisation assisting to draft minimum labour standards. She now runs the Social Justice Practice at Maurice Blackburn assisting a variety of people, including refugees who have suffered in detention, Aboriginal people to exercise their land rights and those unfairly targeted by national security legislation. The aim of the Social Justice Practice is to use the law, in the public interest, to challenge the excesses of government or business and champion the rights of those that are disadvantaged.

Being passionate about what you do is one of the most important things in life. It can be anything: from a particular area of law to travelling the world or having a family. Whatever it is, find a way to do as much of it as you can. You only have one short but potentially wonderful life, it is up to you to make the most of every single day.

I am driven by a strong sense of justice for people who do not have a voice in society. I do not see the law as simply an exercise in pure advocacy. There is no point in being an advocate unless you have a purpose; there is nothing laudable about being a gun for hire. You are, by definition, on a side, so there is little use pretending you are morally neutral. And if you don't feel that way about your particular case or job, there is plenty of work out there that can be described in these terms and we need good people doing it. It is one of the ways I try to return some of the favours life has given me, including a happy home and high quality education. Once you see the law in these terms, it can be an immensely rewarding profession.

The social justice work we do is often considered controversial or thought of as not very glamorous. But we take great pride in helping people through the mystifying and sometimes demoralising experience of going to court. It is a privilege to tell their stories that have traditionally been ignored and by doing so hopefully create some change in the world so that their injustice is not repeated.

Lady Luck has been very kind to me in my career and I'm the first to admit it. It is also an enormous help, practically and emotionally, to be surrounded by excellent colleagues who share similar objectives. The people at Maurice Blackburn share similar values and motivations to me and it is a source of inspiration and comfort to be working alongside them every day. But if I was to humbly offer some suggestions to other women lawyers, especially those just starting out, they would be those set out below.

Speak up

You have to commit to your ideas, aspirations and plans as this is the only way to give yourself the best chance possible at achieving them. For me, that often involves speaking up in situations where it can be terrifying to do so. I have had to challenge senior counsel, I've had many heated tussles with senior colleagues and plenty of arguments with my friends. Remaining professional is key, because you may not always be right. But you have to fiercely stand by your beliefs and your client's best interests. Staying silent is the express route to ethical oblivion.

One of the interesting ways I have found some discipline in this respect is on Twitter. I am proud to say that one of my most popular tweets was something I posted after reading about the celebrations in the wake of the execution of Osama Bin Laden. I posted a quote: 'It is the job of thinking people not to be on the side of the executioners (Albert Camus)'. After working with death row inmates, I firmly believe that extra-judicial execution has no place in a society that respects the rule of law. But posting something like that to hundreds of people was controversial (let alone the retweets to thousands of others). Twitter, if used carefully, is a great forum for engaging in discussion on such topics and working out where you stand. It also demonstrates that one person piping up, even in a hostile environment, can sometimes be a catalyst for others finding the courage to do the same.

Get busy

If you have a goal or a dream, you have to fight for it. That may mean fighting in court or fighting to be considered for a job at your chosen organisation. I realised early on that no one hands out opportunities, you have to spend huge amounts of time looking for them and planning how you can make the most of them when they pop up. So I am always talking, writing, reading, learning, thinking and meeting people. I put my hand up to do lots of things, sometimes they are big and exciting, often they are not. But I rarely regret it, as you never know what comes of it. Enthusiasm wins you friends and takes you places.

Learn to fail

Lawyers tend to be perfectionists. This can mean you miss out on enjoying your achievements, or a fear of failure prevents you from taking the plunge when you see an opportunity. Courage is scary but it also gets you places.

I have had plenty of criticism and quite a bit of failure. The test is how you recover from that. There will always be someone who is more successful than you, and they usually manage to do it at a younger age and are better looking. But equally, there is almost no chance that you will be the worst at your chosen endeavour.

'Two of Us'

Authors: Christine Melis and Katerina Patras

Women often suffer from a lack of confidence that is wholly, mysteriously, blissfully lacking in their male counterparts. You are up against men who think they are the good at what they do. Who is to say you are not even better?

Box clever

Learning about your strengths and how to use them is always time well spent. Women often struggle in the profession for a variety of pretty obvious reasons, but our socialisation and gender can be a help too. Women are generally better at empathising and communicating with clients and building and maintaining relationships - all essential skills for a lawyer. You can be very effective if you are willing to put your ego to one side, something that many men struggle to do.

Boxing clever also means being practical. Fortunately, I do not care too much about money, but I understand why some people do. I also know that I would never have been able to do the things I have done without being careful financially. Equally, my career has relied heavily on a robust and generous emotional support network of family, friends and colleagues. It is vitally important to look after yourself emotionally as you are no use to anyone if you burn out.

The VWL Law Student Mentoring Program has been running since 2008. Portia spoke to two participants about their experiences participating in the 2010 Program. Student and mentor applications for the 2012 program will open early in 2012.

Katerina Patras, law student

I am in my final year of Law at Monash University. I completed my Bachelor of Arts in 2009, majoring in International Studies, and am finally at the tail end of my university life. I am currently undertaking the Honours Research Unit which requires me to write a thesis on a topic I have set for myself, whilst also completing my final semester. My thesis discusses whether there is a need to introduce an action for breach of privacy in Australia, and if so what it will look like. I couldn't have chosen a better topic this year with the News of the World scandal recently making headlines. I am specifically discussing whether introducing privacy laws or extending Australia's current law will adequately protect sportspeople and celebrities. The topic is very interesting and I've thoroughly enjoyed researching it. It is a good way to end my law degree.

Whilst studying at Monash for the past six years, I have also taken part in many extra-curricular activities. In 2009 I was the Cultural Officer of the Monash Hellenic Students' Society, and I have actively taken part in the Monash Law Students' Society's (LSS) activities over the years.

In 2010 I joined VWL and this is one of the best decisions I made in my time at university. By chance I was reading an LSS newsletter and saw that VWL was accepting applications from female students for the Law Student Mentoring Program. I quickly applied! I firmly believe that this program changed the outcome of my degree.

I must admit that at the start of 2010, before signing up to the Law Student Mentoring Program, I had heard a lot of things about the whole clerkship process. Being in my penultimate year, I knew I would have to apply for clerkships soon but I had no idea how to go about it. Once I was paired up with Chris, it was refreshing to speak with someone who had been in my shoes and could offer some practical wisdom. Chris became someone for me to go to with any insecurities I had about the future of my Law degree. Having someone to speak to about those silly questions made all the difference.



Law Student Mentoring Program pair Katerina Patras and Christine Melis

Chris supported me in many ways; from helping me write cover letters, to just having a laugh and learning to relax about the daunting feeling of 'my career'. Chris taught me many invaluable lessons. She exposed me to many different people in the legal profession and taught me the value of networking and building strong relationships. Above all she taught me to believe in myself. Throughout the pressures of uni life and the harsh competitiveness of securing a position in a firm, I forgot what my strengths and abilities were. I can't thank Chris enough for all her support and encouragement. I really couldn't have asked for a better outcome and am really looking forward to being apart of the profession next year.

Participating in the Law Student Mentoring Program has been such a positive experience for me and has made such a big difference in my life. When I am admitted to practice in the near future, I will definitely be putting my name on the list of mentors so I that I too can make a positive impact on the life of other female law students. It feels good hearing that someone who has 'made it' was once in your shoes too.

Christine Melis, barrister and mentor

I've been at the Bar for three years. I was previously an Associate in the Supreme Court and in private practice. When I began my articles in 2004 I was invited by some solicitors of the firm to join the Work Practices Committee of the VWL. I was young and inexperienced in the legal profession however I could clearly see that inequities existed between men and women in the profession. To this extent, I could see the relevance of an organisation such as VWL.

I threw myself into the work of the Work Practices Committee. I was in awe at the relentless push by the group and the organisation as a whole to change attitudes and practices affecting women in the profession. Within VWL I found a network of colleagues, friends and mentors. I progressed within the organisation, becoming a Co-Chair of the Work Practices Committee, occupying a seat on the Executive Committee before assuming the role of Assistant Convenor and ultimately Convenor in 2008. I have remained on the Executive ever since and I continue to involve myself in all the many and varied activities VWL has to offer.

One activity which I am very proud to support is the Law Student Mentoring Program. It was launched four years ago and I have volunteered to be a mentor to law students every year since. I have mentored four students under the program. Each student has been very different and had different aspirations for their careers. One of those students was Kat.

Kat is a Monash University law student. The first thing I noticed about Kat was that she was Greek like me! We often joked about the nuances of our culture. When I first met Kat I knew instantly that she was fun loving but also a very hard working student. She lacked one key element though – confidence in herself and her abilities. Kat reminded me how competitive our professions can be. As we progress from primary school to high school to university and ultimately into the workforce we lose those reassurances we received from teachers or parents about how we were progressing; it is ultimately left to us to figure things out. That's where mentoring becomes so important.

I found out what Kat was interested in and introduced her to people I knew in the profession whom she could talk to about their work if she wished. I could tell that Kat's confidence grew as she met more people and had greater confidence in applying for clerkships and traineeships. I was so proud when she told me of the number of interviews she had for clerkships. Kat has secured herself a traineeship with Slater and Gordon next year. I couldn't be happier for her. It makes the merits of the Mentoring Program all the more worthy when you see your mentee succeed where they initially thought they wouldn't.

I now have another mentee. This does not mean that Kat and I will not keep in touch. She knows she can contact me whenever she wishes and I will assist in whatever way I can. I hope to see her at lots of future VWL events. I'm collecting quite a bevy of mentees through this program. Next year I think I will organise a five-year reunion with all of them!

Women Lawyers in the Information Age

Bree Ryan, Communications Committee

For many decades communication consultants, academics and professionals have discussed the need for a public space to share ideas and influence the future direction of society. But what does this public space look like in the modern information era for women lawyers?

No doubt you have considered the changes to the ways in which you now receive your news, legal alerts and communicate about law reform. You have thought about the technology and abundance of content coming at you through the web and social networks. This is inescapable, given that on average 75,000 new blogs are created everyday with 50,000 blog updates every hour in a blogosphere that doubles every six months.¹ But have you thought about the broader context of this new media for society and more particularly the role that you will play in this new era?

The increased use and convergence of the internet and mobile communication is seen by some experts as a development as significant as the introduction of the electrical grid to industrial society.² We are now in a so-called information age: an era concerned with the development of knowledge and the creation of networks that are capable of restructuring social norms and flattening hierarchies. Whilst the web remains part of a culture which emphasises profit, speed and efficiency, it also has the capacity to enable individuals to develop a political or cultural response in a rapidly changing world, by engaging with technological change, globalisation and gender politics.³

Seeing online networks as a public space for democracy and the development of social norms means participation is less about climbing up a ladder and more about weaving your ideas and participation into the fabric of the modern network era. That is, if you see online technology less as a digital tool and more as a social construction or public space, the importance of participation in the online realm is clearer. Partaking in this sphere directly contributes to the production of cultural understanding. Amongst many other benefits this can include challenging accepted social constructions around women in the legal profession.

From its early beginnings the public sphere has been imagined as an independent public domain free from dominant parts of society — the ideal public place where people come together to discuss social dilemmas to reach a consensus for the public good.⁴ Although historically, public debate excluded a vast majority of the human population and in particular, women. As time rolled on academics talked about the importance of understanding electronic media as a separate space where disadvantaged minority classes can have greater influence on the roles, norms and behaviour of society: a space where splintered identities can be reintegrated.⁵ It is argued that the new electronic public sphere enables greater influence of disadvantaged groups because influence on the net is based upon people who appeal to others because of knowledge, authority and leadership, rather than hierarchical or institutional power.

Our networked digital sphere should be envisioned as more than another medium for creating and building a transportable resume (although this is important too). It is a new social setting which can be responsible for broader societal change. That social change can be

campaigning on a particular issue or advocating for the rights of others. Another less overt aspect is that online presence in itself can have great impact on the recognition and identification of the role of professional women. Because our online space is less restricted by dominant social classes, structures and organisations and instead focused on knowledge and appeal⁶ it allows a more diverse range of influencers across geographical, cultural and time barriers. Studies have found though that women continue to be in the minority of internet users, marginalised by the cultural dominance of masculinity online.⁷

Today understanding the impact of social media tools available for use on the web is a necessary part of professional development and many law firms have a social media presence managed according to the strategies of communications professionals. But in the current era the web is equally a space for the individual. The online rule of thumb known as the 'one percent rule'⁸, tells us that in a group of one hundred online users content is generally produced by one, commented on by further 10 and read by the remainder.

In this information age the platform for public debate is a series of horizontal networks that are reliant on participation and take-up by peers; not reliant on the dissemination of information up or down a single axis. For highly literate women involved in the implementation of law and policy, the online space is an opportunity to interrupt the dominant ways technology and femininity have become encoded within modernity.⁹ Feminists such as Sadie Plant argue that the weaving nature of the web allows the development of autonomous, interconnected communities without a governing core; offering an ability to rethink shared identities.¹⁰

The digital sphere can be a space for *cyberfeminism*. Individual women in the law, who may be time poor and case management focused, can foster professional and political networks for the development of new social meanings. Participating — that is writing, subscribing, liking, linking, or commenting — within online information networks involving women, is not only the employment of digital tools for professional advancement, it is also participation in the public sphere having an influence on the continuous production of cultural meanings in this information age.

Bree Ryan is a Knowledge Support Lawyer at Maurice Blackburn and studying Media Culture in a Masters of Global Communication, La Trobe University.

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Reaching out through the law

Author: Various Victorian Women Lawyers

We approached the following Victorian women lawyers and asked them to share their experiences with 'reaching out' through the law.



Wendy Brooks

Head of Business Development,
Philanthropy at The Trust Company

I am Head of Business Development, Philanthropy at The Trust Company. This national role combines my passion for civil society, charity law and business. I advise philanthropists on their giving strategies, taxation and investment issues and the establishment of Private Ancillary Funds, Public Ancillary Funds and testamentary charitable trusts. I also advise civil society organisations (NFPs and charities) on their fundraising, governance, management and investment strategies. Prior to joining The Trust Company I had a 15 year career in marketing and fundraising in the health, tertiary education, arts and welfare sectors. During this time I was also a freelance violinist as my first degree was a BMus (Melb). It wasn't until my muscles deteriorated to the point where I needed to use a wheelchair that I realised I needed to reinvent myself. This was when I decided to study law. It was a wonderful day when on 24th August 2011 our daughter, Catherine, moved my admission to practice.

A strong civil society provides a counterbalance to private enterprise and government and helps to ensure that our world is fair and just. The combination of my life experience, commitment to civil society and legal training compels me to reach out. My interactions with civil society continue to inform and inspire me. Through my engagement with hundreds of clients, I am constantly learning how we can make our community stronger. As a volunteer I am engaged as a Board Director and member of Ministerial Advisory Committees with a wide range of disability, arts, health and environmental issues. Using a wheelchair has also opened my eyes to the barriers facing people living with disabilities. It has brought me in touch with people who, despite their invisibility to most of the community, face their challenges with courage and dignity.



Fiona McLeay

Executive Director,
Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH)

As the Executive Director of the Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH), connecting is at the heart of what I do. PILCH exists to help needy Victorians get free legal assistance by connecting them with pro bono lawyers who will assist them for free. We do this in partnership with law firms, barristers and individual lawyers, as well as institutions like the LIV and the Victorian Bar, community legal centres and Legal Aid, government and philanthropy.

Our clients often come to us feeling confused, powerless and disconnected. One recently said "I feel as if we have been wandering in the wilderness for years. I was ready to walk away from it all". Offering them assistance and connections that they couldn't otherwise get is incredibly rewarding. We de-mystify the law and remove barriers which perpetuate injustice. We reach out to lawyers who are passionate about access to justice and human rights and give them opportunities to use their legal skills in partnership with like-minded colleagues. We also think critically about the laws, policies, systems and structures that cause people to need our help in the first place. And we try to bring about change, so that disadvantage is not perpetuated and dignity and equality are not denied.



Joh Kirby

Executive Director,
Victorian Law Foundation

I am Victoria Law Foundation's Executive Director. Prior to my appointment as Executive Director I worked as the Foundation's Grants Manager and as a lawyer at Corrs Chambers Westgarth. As Executive Director of the Victoria Law Foundation I oversee an organisation with a focus on helping Victorians understand the law.

The Foundation reaches out to the community through delivering programs directly to the community through its publications and education programs and supporting others to do the same through our grants program.

My work has a strong theme of reaching out across the Victorian community. The law is undeniably complex and as a lawyer it can be hard to remember just how difficult it is to understand.

The Foundation develops legal resources and education programs with the aim of enhancing Victorians' understanding of the law, strengthening legal literacy, and ultimately improving knowledge across the informal support networks upon which many people rely on when faced with a legal problem. Not only are our programs tailored to meet the specific audience's needs but we aim to take the programs out to the community delivering programs across Victoria.



Jacqui Parker

Lawyer, Victoria Legal Aid,
Wimmera Regional Office, Horsham

Since writing about my attendance at the Australian Women Lawyers third annual conference for Portia in 2010, I have finished my traineeship, was admitted to practice and now work as a Victoria Legal Aid lawyer in Horsham.

I was thrilled to return to my hometown, and now find my average week as varied as it is challenging. I have appeared in the Magistrates' and Children's Courts at just about every location within a 110km radius. I conduct regular advice clinics for the general public and inmates of Ararat Prison. Being a new lawyer, I have a constant flow of practical legal education and training in between my other duties.

As a legal aid lawyer, reaching out means helping clients who are poor, marginalised and vulnerable to exploitation. As a young lawyer, it is about asking for help from more experienced practitioners when I need it. As a small-town lawyer, it comes back to embracing opportunities to network and socialise locally. As a woman lawyer, I try to chip away at the glass ceiling by briefing equitably and being a supportive colleague. As for being a remote lawyer, the resources and opportunities of the city are 300 kilometres away, but distance is no tyranny. Videoconferencing puts much within easy reach, and the occasional drive to Melbourne can even be enjoyable.



Professor Anne Rees

Head of School, School of Law,
Deakin University

As Head of the School of Law at Deakin University I have a commitment to supporting rural and regional legal practice and to ensuring access to law studies for people for whom this might otherwise not be possible. I grew up in Newcastle and studied law at Macquarie University as an external student (there being no law school in Newcastle at the time) so well appreciate the difficulties of studying at a distance.

Deakin's School of Law will celebrate 20 years next year. It was the first law school in Victoria located outside Melbourne. The School started in Geelong but also offered its programs in Burwood and off campus. Since 2007 the School has taught a law feeder program at Warrnambool. From next year we will expand this from two years to three.

We hope that in teaching law at Warrnambool and in giving students the opportunity to work with the local profession, students may be attracted to practice in regional and rural areas.

Deakin's commitment to regional and rural practice is further exemplified by the establishment this year of the Centre for Rural Regional Law and Justice. Its first publication, *Postcode Justice*, by Richard Coverdale, highlights the disadvantage suffered by regional and especially rural Victorians in relation to the administration of the law simply by virtue of their place of residence.

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Our Objectives:

- to provide a common meeting ground for women lawyers.
- to foster the continuing education and development of women lawyers in all matters of legal interest.
- to encourage and provide for the entry of women into the legal profession and their advancement within the legal profession.
- to work towards the reform of the law.
- to participate as a body in matters of interest to the legal profession.
- to promote the understanding and support of women's legal and human rights.
- such other objectives as the Association may in General Meeting decide.

The Association also adopts the objectives of the Australian Women Lawyers and is a Recognised Organisation of that Association:

- achieve justice and equality for all women.
- further understanding of and support for the legal rights of all women.
- identify, highlight and eradicate discrimination against women in law and in the legal system.
- advance equality for women in the legal profession.
- create and enhance awareness of women's contribution to the practise and development of the law.
- provide a professional and social network for women lawyers.

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Reaching Out



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