

# portia

2022

THE ANNUAL JOURNAL AND REPORT  
OF VICTORIAN WOMEN LAWYERS



## ABOUT THIS EDITION OF PORTIA

The theme for Portia 2022 is 'leading'. This vibrant edition celebrates the contribution of women as leaders in the profession, in the community, and in the world. We set out to show that leadership takes many forms, and is not confined to the workplace, or to those in positions of power. Anyone can be a leader, and leadership can come from surprising and unlikely places.

In the following pages you will find interviews with women in the judiciary, women in partnerships, women who have lead, during, through, and despite adversity.

We feature a particularly moving interview with Judge Sheela Zarefi Hassas of Afghanistan; an article considering the impact of the media on women in politics; an article on the role of children in climate change movement and litigation around the world; an interview with a newly appointed partner of a law firm, an interview juxtaposing leadership for a junior and senior judge; and an op ed on work/life balance in the time of the great resignation.

The Arts section contains book reviews including Dianne Reid's *Love and Virtue*, *The Yield* by Tara June Winch, and *Bodies of Light* by Jennifer Down (respectively the winners of the 2020 and 2022 Miles Franklin Literary Award). Recommendations which are not included in this year's edition but are noteworthy include novel *The Sentence* by Louise Edrich, book titled *Seeking Asylum: Our Stories by the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre*, podcast *Womanica*, and films *Strong Female Lead* and *Suffragette*.

Portia is also a memento of the many popular events and impactful projects run by VWL in 2022, including the 2022 Warren Moot, the Law Student Mentoring Program, the Return to Work Guide Launch, a book launch of 'Empowering Women – From Murder & Misogyny to High Court Victory' co-hosted by VWL and sponsor firm Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, and the Conscious Leadership & the Law Workshop hosted by Clarence – Workplaces for Professionals.

We are ever grateful to publish the finalist portraits of the 2022 Portia Geach Memorial Award, Australia's most prestigious portraiture award for female artists. Our front cover features Kim Leutwyler's portrait of Georgia Frew. The stunning works of other finalists fill the following pages. You can read more about the Portia Geach Memorial Award on page 6.

### Editors and Co-Chairs of The Publications Committee

Annaleise Vulin and Greta Marks

### Publications Committee

We extend our deep gratitude to our tireless and talented committee members who have all contributed to this edition of Portia. Thank you to Nancy Abdalla, Skye Cody, Liz Main, Alana Morgante, Andree Pianta, Shifa Shaikh and Amy Stagg. We are so proud of your efforts, and how this edition has come together.

### Victorian Women Lawyers Executive Committee 2022

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### Front cover image

Kim Leutwyler, *Georgia Frew, Hella Tender (2021)*  
 Oil on canvas, 18" x 24"

Georgia is a dreamer. Powerful and ridiculous. Fluid and reflective. Blithe and intrepid. Scruffy and a ratbag (yes, there's a distinction between the two). Mutable but not malleable. A bit mischievous. Hella strong, and hella tender.

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Footnotes available upon request.





## Portia 2022

MESSAGES .....	4	FEATURES .....	7
From the President .....	4	LAW ARTS .....	37
From our Patron .....	5	COMMITTEES .....	45
About the Portia Geach Memorial Award .....	6	EVENTS .....	53

IMAGE: JO BERTINI, *THE WAY I SEE IT*



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

STEPHANIE PASHARIS

I am so proud to have led Victorian Women Lawyers in 2022 as President, as we transition back to in person events and projects after two difficult years of lockdown restrictions.

This year, VWL's theme was *'leading'*, recognising that whilst women comprise of more than 50% of legal practitioners, we still do not yet have gender equality in leadership positions within the legal profession.

In 2022, VWL led conversations exploring the structural and social barriers faced by women in reaching and maintaining leadership roles. We held a number of events in line with this theme, including an interactive workshop on conscious leadership, and events focusing on pay, promotions and performance reviews, and the different pathways to leadership. I am also delighted to have worked alongside Justitia Lawyers and Consultants to develop the Women Law Firm Owners and Leaders special interest group, which aims to provide women with the opportunity to meet other law firm owners and leaders and share their knowledge.

VWL continued to lead the profession to work towards addressing the disproportionate number of women barristers at the bar through our annual Warren Moot and the launch of our inaugural Witness Examination Competition. VWL continued its partnership with the Women Barristers' Association to hold the Barrister Networking Lunch Series, a networking event working towards equitable briefing at the bar. We also met with legal organisations to discuss their equitable briefing policies.

VWL members were also given the opportunity to inspire the next generation of women lawyers through our Law Student Mentoring Program, a program which is particularly special to me, as it was how I was introduced to VWL, having signed up as a student member in order to participate in the program many years ago.

VWL worked to ensure that our events were accessible to all lawyers in the Victorian legal community, not just those lawyers practising in Melbourne's CBD. For the first time, VWL's annual Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Lunch was livestreamed, and many of our other events were recorded. We also worked with law associations across the State to promote our initiatives, including our Professional Mentoring Program, which this year matched almost 70 mentees and mentors, including many from regional areas.

VWL continued its strong advocacy work on issues relevant to women lawyers, making submissions to the Australian Human Rights Commission on the development of a National Anti-Racism Framework, and to the Australian Government in the review of the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984*. VWL's advocacy work is an important step in achieving equality for women in the legal profession and eradicating discrimination against women in law and in the legal system.

This year, VWL partnered with many organisations to plan and deliver many exceptional events, with the aim of expanding and diversifying our audience. Along with the Industrial Relations Society of Victoria and the Law Institute of Victoria, VWL co-hosted an event exploring flexible and hybrid work, burnout and harassment, with a focus on gender equity. VWL also partnered with The Funding Network to hold a crowdfunding event, which saw three organisations each of whom work towards building a brighter future for women and girls in Victoria, pitch for funding and support. We also worked with Build Homes Not Prisons to develop an event educating the public on how the current incarceration system impacts women.

Of course, the work of VWL would not be possible without our many passionate volunteers. I thank our dedicated Executive Committee and Committee co-chairs for their hard work throughout the year. I would also like to thank our 2022 sponsors: Allens, Brave Legal, Clayton Utz, College of Law, Coulter Legal, Ethos Migration Lawyers, Foley's List, Justitia Lawyers and Consultants, K&L Gates, KHQ Lawyers, Maddocks, Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, MinterEllison, Nicholes Family Lawyers, Stuart Family Lawyers, Svenson Barristers and the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO).

Lastly, I would like to sincerely thank VWL's Patron, the Honourable Professor Marilyn Warren AC QC, a true inspiration and leader of VWL. Professor Warren continues to support and guide us in developing our events and projects, and her commitment to our organisation is truly inspiring.

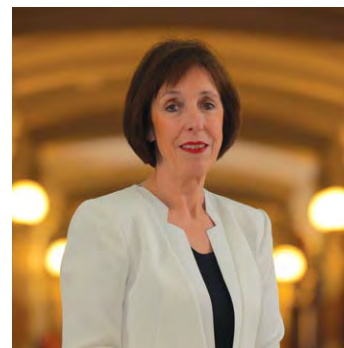
I hope you enjoy this year's edition of Portia, and that it inspires you to lead the next generation of women lawyers.

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## MESSAGE FROM OUR PATRON

THE HON MARILYN WARREN AC KC

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### Leading the Way

We hear a lot these days about leadership and suggestions that it is a textbook skill that can be learned through reading “how to” texts or studying business management courses. Sometimes such an approach helps. I found a lot can be learned from watching the performance of leaders, even in walks of life beyond the law. A lot may be observed from the success, solutions and even mistakes of leaders. Yet often for women the challenge lies in the absence of a female paradigm. What do you do if you are the first female leader in a particular position of responsibility?

Traditionally leadership has been recognised through a gendered, indeed, masculine prism: demonstrable qualities are nominated in discussions of strength, courage, determination, boldness, authority and assertiveness.

However, in the last decade women have demonstrated leadership in extraordinary ways, for example in initiating and maintaining the #MeToo movement, shining the spotlight on historic sexual harassment and calling for accountability and in guiding workplaces, families and the community through the pandemic.

To do those things women have had to be organised, articulate, consistent, resilient, flexible, collaborative and confident. They have delivered in spades. To challenge and confront historic sexual harassment, especially where significant public figures are involved, takes breathtaking strength, courage, determination, boldness, authority and assertiveness, all traditionally masculine qualities. Yet the challenge and confrontation requires more. It requires collaboration, support, empathy, inclusiveness and calmness. Indeed, those qualities, and they are significant qualities, are demonstrated continually in the daily lives and workplace experiences of women when they run their families, workplaces and community engagements. They are feminine qualities.

The feminine leadership style, in my experience, is special and effective because it involves taking time to allow the participants to express their views and explain their experiences in such a way that they have a sense of understanding and ownership of decisions. It also involves collaboration by inviting participants into the implementation process. The feminine style of leadership makes a difference.

It is also important as a leader to be prepared to take advice, weigh up the options and solutions and, after consultation and careful listening, to be decisive. In various ways we are all constantly being leaders within our family, workplace and community bringing our feminine qualities of leadership to the fore. We practise leadership all the time. Thus when women face the challenge of being the first woman in the leadership role they may take quiet comfort and have confidence that they will be able to perform well because they have been preparing for the role for a long time: it is now their time to perform.

Now is a time in the legal profession of significant gender impact. Women are commonly managing and senior partners and in positions of leadership. It is essential in those roles to reach downwards, extend the supportive hand and pull up other women to follow them. It is important too for senior women to discuss the concept and practice of leadership with younger and more junior women lawyers, in other words, to explain how they do it, what worked and what did not work.

As an institution, Victorian Women Lawyers has demonstrated consistent gender leadership. VWL has well and truly kept gender on the agenda. Its leaders and members over nearly a quarter of a century have led women lawyers in advocacy, promoting opportunity and equality. The VWL leaders have worked tirelessly for women lawyers while meeting the demands of their own legal practice. Such practice has extended from managing the emotional challenges of representing and protecting women in family violence contexts to protecting the rights to justice of First Nations women to regular litigation in the courts and tribunals. I acknowledge and applaud their powerful work and commitment to women in the law and VWL.

This edition of Portia is a classic to be read and re-read through the year to remind ourselves that we are all leaders with clear, articulate voices speaking for and about women. So much was brought home by Elizabeth Broderick AO at the Dame Roma Mitchell Oration hosted by VWL in 2022.

My congratulations to VWL on a magnificent year with more to come and loud applause to the Publications Committee of Portia for this outstanding edition.

*The Hon Marilyn Warren AC KC,  
Vice Chancellor's Professorial Fellow,  
Monash University*



## ABOUT THE PORTIA GEACH MEMORIAL AWARD

S.H. ERVIN GALLERY

Established in 1961 by Florence Kate Geach, in memory of her sister, artist Portia Geach, the Portia Geach Memorial Award recognises an Australian female artist for the best portrait painted from life of a man or woman distinguished in art, letters or the sciences.

Born in 1873 in Melbourne, Portia Geach studied with John Singer Sargent and Lawrence Alma-Tadema in London and was also a lifelong activist for women's rights. She established the Housewives Progressive Association of New South Wales, *The Housewives Magazine* in 1933 and the *Progressive Journal* two years later to promote issues such as equal pay for women and the right to hold public office.

The judging panel for this year's award comprised Ms Anita Belgiorno-Nettis AM, Trustee of Art Gallery of New South Wales, Ms Natalie Wilson, Curator of Australian and Pacific Art at The Art Gallery of New South Wales and Director of the S.H Ervin Gallery, Ms Jane Watters.

On behalf of the judging panel, Jane Watters, Director of the S.H. Ervin Gallery said: 'The judges were delighted with the standard of submissions and their diverse approach to portraiture in this year's award. We believe that the selection reflects contemporary Australian life and recognises the important contribution of Australian female artists make to portraiture.'

Some of the sitters for this year's award include performer Tim Ferguson, comedian Judith Lucy, philanthropist Judith Neilson, gallery owners Campbell Robertson-Swann and Dianne Larter, centenarian skiing legend Frank Prihoda, artists Julie Rrap, Atong Atem, Mario Ramesh Nithiyendran and Fiona Lowry, and drag queen Portia Turbo.

The 2022 winning portrait is a portrait of Eloise de Silva by Lynn Savery, titled *Kindred Spirits* and appears on page 6. VWL is extremely proud to promote the Portia Geach Memorial Award and pay homage to Portia Geach as a pioneering woman in her field and feminist. VWL would like to thank the S.H Ervin Gallery and the finalists, whose pieces appear in this edition of *Portia*, for kindly allowing us to reproduce their works. Finally, VWL congratulates Savery on her striking portrait.



IMAGE: LYNN SAVERY. *KINDRED SPIRITS*



## Features

More to Life .....	8	Pathway to Partner .....	21
Leading on the Bench .....	10	Penny Locaso on Delivering a Kind 'No' .....	24
Escaping the Graveyard of Empires: Judge Hassas' Journey to Australia .....	14	Remarks of the Honourable Associate Justice Ierodionou .....	28
Kids In Court on Climate Change .....	16	Delegitimising Discourse Deployed Against Female Leaders .....	31

IMAGE: ESTHER ERLICH, ATONG

# MORE TO LIFE: MUSINGS ON THE GREAT RESIGNATION, QUIET QUITTING, FLEXIBLE WORK, BURNOUT AND PASTA

BY GRETA MARKS

When I look back on the hard lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, a few things come to mind. I handmade a lot of pasta, taught myself how to crochet, and got plenty of reading done.

I also worked a lot. Not because anyone expressly demanded it of me, but more because my laptop was within about 5 metres from me at all times, I had nothing better to be doing at 9pm on a Wednesday, and the work was just *there*. Every day my entire team was in my office, where I lived, and I wasn't allowed to leave. Work became an increasingly pervasive part of life in a way that it was not before the pandemic, and there it has stayed.

In late August 2022 a Big 4 consulting firm made headlines in the aftermath of the tragic death by suspected suicide of a 27 year old employee on the premises. Without wishing to further engage in speculation about the young woman in question and specific circumstances, there was a notable preparedness in the discussion that ensued to attribute this (at least in part) to a culture of 70–80 hour work weeks, pressure of output, and a general lack of regard for employee wellbeing in the name of billable work.

Suffice to say, similar observations can be, and are, regularly made about careers in the law.

As we attempt to put the pandemic to one side, we are now hearing about trends in the way we work (and when I say *we*, I am predominantly referring to those of us in professional services – we who live by our keyboards and cling to our phones as though they are extensions of our arms).

The news has been obsessed with The Great Resignation, being that people are realising that there is more to life than billable hours and are following their true passions. The latest phenomenon has been Quiet Quitting, or the rejection of 'hustle culture' and going above and beyond for your employer. Of course, there is also the ongoing conversation about Flexible Work, what that means, what that can look like, who is offering it, and who is not.

Common sense would suggest that if you are not enjoying what you are doing, or the people that you are doing it with or for, then chances are it is not the right job for you. The question is then what needs to change? Is it you, or the job? Or is it something at a systemic level?

The legal market has become a strange beast, and it is suddenly very unclear what 'the market' is actually doing in terms of the money on offer. All else being equal, if someone can change jobs, be doing the same thing elsewhere, for significantly more money, what is the downside? Other people are having epiphanies. Perhaps you have realised that, actually, working long hours for The Man is not all that appealing, you have lost all sense of self, and really want to re-think this whole situation you have gotten yourself into. Maybe it is time to pack up, move to Italy, and pass your days eating pasta and mispronouncing words because you chose to do a law degree instead of learning Italian.

As an employment lawyer, I reflexively balk at the phenomenon of 'quiet quitting', and think the idea of choosing to do the bare minimum at work is risky business, particularly if you get the balance wrong. It also seems to fly in the face of everything I thought a career in law was supposed to be. Then again, when you look at the state of mental health in professional services, it makes a lot of sense. What do we owe our jobs, other than the contracted hours (plus 'reasonable additional hours' when lawfully and reasonably directed to do so(!))? What about... you know... all the other *stuff* you enjoy in life?

Identification of priorities and adjusting one's lifestyle accordingly is not a new concept. Similarly, it is very difficult to generalise about what is happening in 'The Legal Profession' when there are so many different areas, different hours, different clients, different performance metrics. That said, allow me to generalise. Stereotypes tell us that law involves any combination of long hours, tight deadlines, demanding clients, competitiveness, scary partners, and Type-A personalities. On one hand, stereotypes exist for a reason, and there does seem to be an element of this just being what a career in law is, and you are either fine with it, or not. On the other, as a profession it seems there is finally some push back against the idea that it needs to be that way, and increasingly lawyers are asking: *What's in it for me?*

It seems unlikely that the stereotype will shift significantly any time soon, (and yes, yes, 'not all law firms'), but the alarming rates of burnout, mental health issues, substance abuse, bullying, harassment, discrimination, and people deciding they just need to get out of there are well overdue for dismantling. It is an oversimplification, and blatantly obvious, but at the heart of it, nobody should be in a position where they have to choose between their mental health and their career. The two are not mutually exclusive.



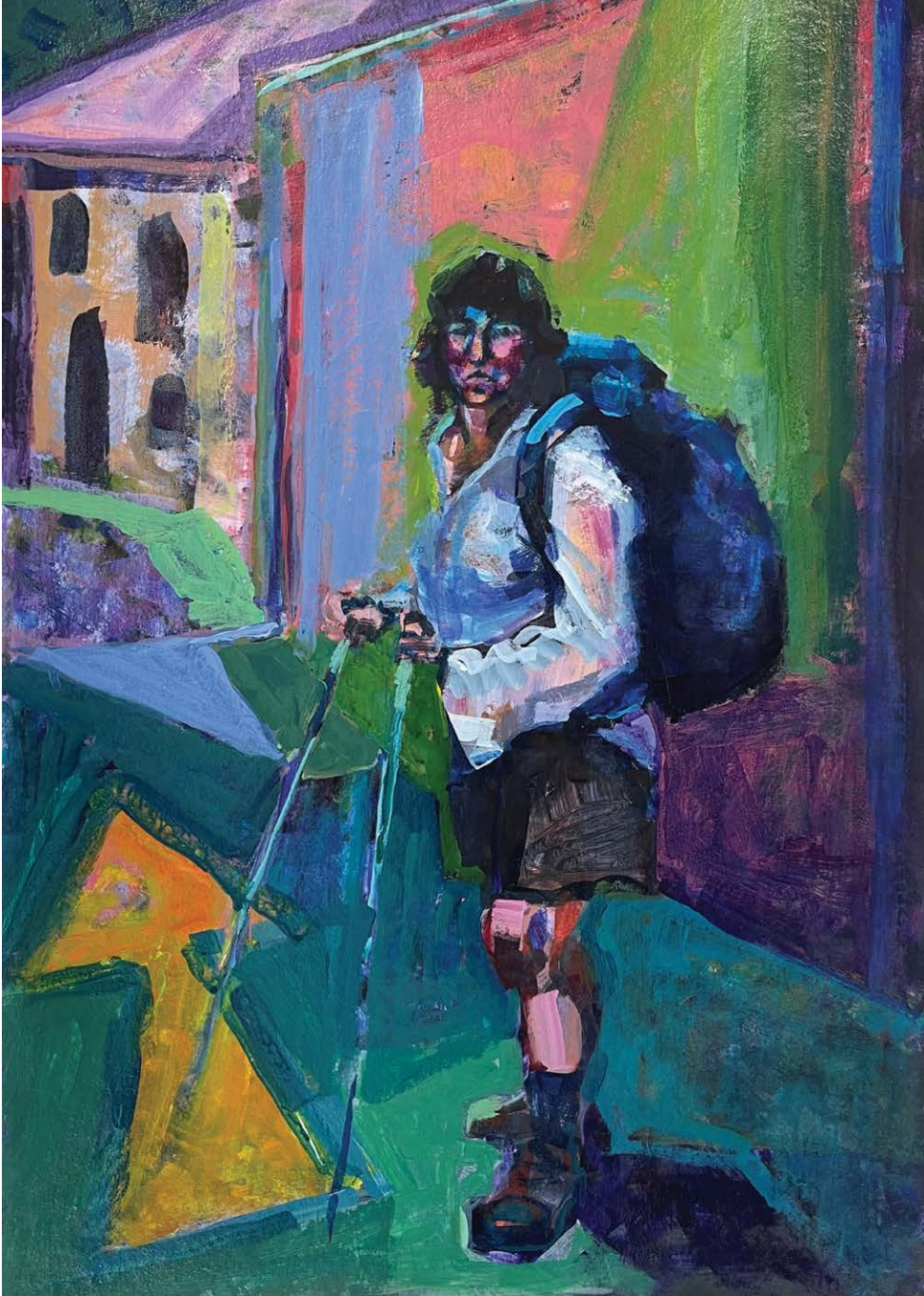


IMAGE: FRANKIE MORGAN, *PILGRIM*

I am one of the lucky ones. I like my job (hello, partners reading this!), I'm well supported, and I usually am not on the verge of an existential crisis. The hours are still long, the deadlines still tight, the demands are still high, but I signed up for those parts.

For those of you who are experiencing something you did not sign up for, there has to be more to life than that. And for those workplaces out there who treat their staff like anything less than real people who exist outside sky prison: You have been warned. You know better than that, do better, (and a branded cupcake on R U OK Day isn't going to cut it).

*If you are struggling, consider getting in touch with your workplace's Employee Assistance Program provider, or call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or beyondblue on 1300 224 636.*

## LEADING ON THE BENCH

LIZ MAIN AND ANDRÉE PIANTA



HER HONOUR JUDGE ANNA ROBERTSON



HER HONOUR JUDGE ELIZABETH GAYNOR

Two judges from the County Court of Victoria have shared pearls of wisdom on the importance of mentoring, leadership and taking risks in your career.

Starting as an article clerk in 1979, her Honour Judge Liz Gaynor had no mentors, no female role models and no support.

'I was one level below the coffee machine when it came to importance,' she says.

'It was totally male dominated. There weren't many female solicitors and I felt like even the secretaries, who were inevitably female, resented me. It was like I'd upset the order of things. There was a bit of female misogyny to it.'

Despite working at her father's law firm, her father had passed away just before she started work.

'I didn't really have mentors and I wish I had. I've made a lot of effort to do as much mentoring as I can because I just know how valuable it is.'

By the time her Honour Judge Anna Robertson began her articles in 1994, support for young women in the deep end at work helped to grow her confidence.

'It was not uncommon for him to take a call and tell me to continue running a meeting with a room full of senior silks or high-profile clients. Being thrown in like that, you have no time to second guess yourself. You just have to do it.'

On other days, she would arrive at work only to be told that she was expected to appear in the Supreme Court in half an hour.

'There was no time to worry. I just had to do it because it had to be done.'

'It taught me to be brave and that there were always people willing to help me if I didn't quite know what I was doing.'

Judge Robertson became a barrister in 2001. She was named Mentor of the Year by the Women Barristers' Association in 2020 for mentoring readers and junior lawyers. But Judge Robertson says mentoring is a two-way street.

'Mentors aren't just people who are more senior than you. They are your colleagues and peers. Now, for me, the junior practitioners who are coming through are mentors to me also. I don't want to lose touch with the new generation of people coming through the profession.'

What she lacked in mentors, Judge Gaynor made up for with a strong network of female friends in law. When she went to the bar in 1985, swapping horror stories about difficult judges soon became a source of comfort and laughter with her friends.

'I'd tell a friend what had happened with a judge and she'd say, "Oh my god, yes, it was the same for me." Law is a demanding, taxing career and you really need that emotional support.'

## Don't hang back

Both judges were emphatic that women in law should trust themselves to try things they think are beyond their expertise.

'You won't succeed at everything you do but it gets easier and easier the more times you try. The earlier in your career that you can try new things, meet new people, voice your opinion and get used to doing that, the easier it gets,' says Judge Robertson.

Judge Gaynor recalled the excitement and fear she felt when she was briefed to run her first trial.

'Don't hang back. The first time you do a new thing is often scary and revolting, like my first trial. As soon as I got it, I thought, "Yeah! I've got a trial" and then, "Can someone else do it for me please?" The new steps are always terrifying.'

## Going to the bench

A strong sense of fairness in the playground could have foreshadowed that Judge Robertson would one day become a member of the judiciary.

'At school, it upset me when people weren't listened to and weren't able to articulate what their grievance was,' she says.

In 2021, she accepted the appointment to become a judge. She strongly felt that it would send a message to other women in the profession that they too should strive for leadership positions.

'I think it is important for junior members of the profession to see not only that there are women who are practicing in the law but also progressing in law. The presence of women at high levels is really fundamentally important.'

In 2002, Victoria's Attorney-General Rob Hulls was on the hunt to appoint women as judges and offered Judge Gaynor the position. After 'working like a demon' as a criminal barrister for 17 years, Judge Gaynor was ready for the next step in her career.

'I probably jumped the queue because I was one of the few senior women criminal barristers around,' she says.

## Think quick

Working as a barrister trained Judge Gaynor to be a decisive leader, a crucial skill she has continued to hone over her 20 years on the bench.

'In court, my leadership style tends to be pretty chatty, and I encourage conversation but I'm good at making decisions. Because I've been doing it so long, I don't have a lot of trouble making up my mind. Once I make a decision, bang! I make it.'

'But I always give people a lot of opportunities to talk (when I let them). I talk too much in court. Always have.'

Judge Robertson says being a collaborative leader helps her get the best out of the people she is working with.

'There is something that every lawyer you work with brings to the table whether they be senior or junior. I like to give the people I work with a great deal of autonomy so they can work in the best way that suits them.'

## Leadership inequality persists

More than half of the law students that graduated with Judge Robertson in 1993 were women.

'Everyone used to say, "It's just a matter of time until women will start to be leaders of the profession and promoted at the same rate as men." That wasn't my experience,' she says.

Despite the high rates of women in junior positions at firms, such as paralegals, graduates and junior lawyers, there were no female Supreme Court judges and very few female partners at law firms when she graduated. It would be another three years before the Honourable Justice Rosemary Balmford was named as the first female judge of the Supreme Court in 1996. Progress since then has been slow.

In 2022, women made up almost two-thirds of law graduates, but just 32.1 per cent of law firm partners are female, according to a 2022 survey by *The Australian Financial Review*.

At this rate, women and men will not be equally represented in partnership positions until 2031, according to the survey.

The number of female barristers has grown by just 2 per cent over the past decade and they represent less than one third of all barristers in the state.

'We need women in senior leadership roles in law firms, governments, and the courts. In all legal roles, we need visible senior legal women,' Judge Robertson says.

Increasing affordability of childcare, giving more support to the second caregiver of children and encouraging work-from-home arrangements are all ways to support women as they move up the ranks of the profession, she says.

Judge Gaynor's opinion on the best way to advance female leadership has evolved over time.

'I never thought I would say this – I really believe in positive discrimination. The trouble with merit-based appointments is it is usually men deciding who deserve it and they have an unconscious bias. They will often see men as more meritorious than women, so I really believe in positive discrimination.'

'I think what [Attorney-General] Hulls did in his years of appointing a lot of women judges has transformed the face of many courts.'

Judge Gaynor also called on female solicitors to brief more female barristers.

'I know that it's still harder for women to get the big, senior-heavy briefs. The bias tends to be towards men. So, you have to be really conscious that women need support and need the chance. You have to be proactive in giving that to them.'





IMAGE: SOPHIE FRESHWATER, CURTIN CALL – KERRI SIMPSON

### Keep striving

One in three lawyers have been sexually harassed at work, according to a report released by the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner (VLSBC) in 2019. In response, an independent review of sexual harassment in Victorian courts and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) was conducted in 2021, leading to 20 recommendations for ways to eradicate sexual harassment in these workplaces. The courts have begun implementing these recommendations. In the same year, the VLSBC launched an online tool for lawyers to anonymously report sexual harassment.

While awareness of the rampant sexual harassment in the legal profession has increased since Judge Gaynor came to the bench, it has by no means been eliminated.

'We've still got a long way to go. Women are still being preyed on by men in the industry. Sexual discrimination may not be as obvious as it was in my day, but it's still there, it's just more subtle. Women just have to keep striving, keep striving.'

*Liz Main is a Judge's Associate at the County Court of Victoria and former journalist at The Australian Financial Review.*

*Andrée Pianta is a law student at Swinburne University of Technology and former occupational therapist.*

*If you wish to confidentially discuss an incident of sexual harassment by a lawyer or make a complaint, contact the VLSBC by calling (03) 9679 8001 or emailing [harassmentcomplaints@lsbc.vic.gov.au](mailto:harassmentcomplaints@lsbc.vic.gov.au).*

## CLAYTON UTZ



### How do you make tough decisions as a leader?

Often the toughest decisions are those that have an impact on people and money. The assessment in relation to money is relatively straight forward because it is quantifiable. But the assessment is more difficult when it impacts the livelihoods of people and requires an evaluation of your values. Ultimately, you have to be comfortable that the decision accords with your values so that when you reflect on that decision later, you can say "I made the right decision that I was willing to live by".

There is also a tendency to find the perfect solution. As a leader, the problem has already been considered at length by a number of other people that have found the decision to be difficult before it arrives at your desk. So the problem is unlikely to have a perfect solution. If you accept that your decision might never be perfect, you can consider the problem with greater confidence and find the "better" decision. The better decision will at least exclude the bad decisions and improve the problem.

### Why is empathy and vulnerability important in leadership?

I am a firm believer of connecting with people on a personal level and will never ask anybody to do what I am not prepared to do myself. In building relationships, I think that when you go one level deeper than everyone else to open up to that person and show that you genuinely care and are grateful for the contribution of that person, the perception of that person changes. The junior lawyers in my team are able to relate to me, they trust me and are more motivated to produce high quality work. It is particularly important during stressful periods, where my team is under a lot of pressure to deliver a large amount of work in a short timeframe for our client – and often the stakes are high. Notwithstanding the pressure, my team members are ready to roll up their sleeves to assist me and work together to deliver a good outcome, because I have built a team based on trust and common understanding.

Vulnerability is a trait that I don't automatically associate with leadership skills. However, over the years, I have come to realise that it is essential to be comfortable with being vulnerable in order to promote innovative ideas and lead with courage. As lawyers, we are hard-wired to identify all the issues and risks and to question every action and decision. The self-doubt in our vision and strategy is relentless. In those situations, you are left emotionally exposed but I keep reminding myself to embrace that vulnerability in order to have the courage to lead with my ideas.

### What advice would you give to the next generation of leaders?

There is no one style of leadership. When I started as a young impressionable lawyer, I would simply try to mimic the leadership skills and approach of the senior lawyer or partner and aspire to have the skillset of the stereotypical corporate leader. But often that style of leadership did not suit me and was ineffective.

In your career, you will observe different skillsets from different people. My advice is to find your own leadership style and selectively adopt the leadership skills that align with your strengths and that reflect your personality and purpose. That way, your leadership will come more naturally and be more effective on others.

*Lisa Vo, Clayton Utz, Special Counsel*



IMAGE: YVONNE EAST, *THE DAY I TOLD MY TRUTH*

## ESCAPING THE GRAVEYARD OF EMPIRES: JUDGE HASSAS' JOURNEY TO AUSTRALIA

NANCY ABDALLA

We all remember last year's heartbreaking images of terrified Afghans clinging to the undercarriage of planes leaving Kabul, crowds of desperate people swarming Kabul airport and parents passing their babies and children to foreign troops over barbed wire fences hoping they would be taken to safety. It was 16 August 2021, one day after the Taliban had taken Kabul. Earlier that same year, President Biden announced that US troops in Afghanistan would effectively be withdrawn by 11 September 2021 – the 20th anniversary of 9/11. The short timetable for withdrawal occurring after two decades waged on the "war on terror" ended in an avalanche of recrimination and the Taliban's ultimate takeover of Afghanistan.

Within hours of the Taliban coming to power, women lawyers and judges were forced to leave their jobs and to go into hiding. Many of them faced reprisal from men whom they had convicted and imprisoned and who were subsequently freed from prison during the Taliban takeover. The Honourable Judge Sheela Zarefi Hassas was one of 270 female judges who was forced to surrender her title as a judge and go into hiding with her family.

Two months before the Taliban seized Kabul, Judge Hassas tells me that she was on her way to work when her car was stopped by two strange men who threatened her if she did not stop working. On another occasion, she was picking up her child's birthday cake in Kabul city when again she was approached by a strange man and was warned to cease working immediately. At the time, she truly believed Afghanistan's military and security forces were strong enough to resist and overcome any Taliban attack and that the threats she was facing were merely a tactic to instil a false sense of the Taliban's strength. She continued to go to work however began travelling to work in a different taxi every day, taking different routes as a safety precaution. On the day she left her judge's chamber for the last time, she cried the entire way home, realising that her career was over and life as she knew it would never be the same.

Judge Hassas remained in hiding with her four children, her husband and her mother from 15 August to 21 October 2021. During this period, she never left the house. Her husband would leave infrequently to purchase essential supplies, wearing low-profile clothing that covered his face and giving out a false name when questioned by strangers. They couldn't access any of their money in their bank accounts as banks across the country went into lockdown. The day they fled; they each carried a single change of clothing. They didn't tell anyone where they were going. With the assistance of the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ), they were evacuated from Afghanistan and travelled to Australia via Greece. The IAWJ assisted 16 other female judges and their families to evacuate from Afghanistan and travel to Australia.

'We are so thankful and grateful to be safe here,' she tells me. 'We are thankful to the Australian government and the community for welcoming us and giving us a chance to move on. But we worry about the family and people we left behind. We cannot be at peace until we know our family is safe – we call them every day for reassurance that they are ok.' Two weeks after Judge Hassas and her family went into hiding, they received reports that a group of men arrived at their former home and interrogated their neighbours in relation to their whereabouts and the whereabouts of other family members. 'Our family is not safe there and we hope to be able to bring them to Australia one day. It is hard to describe how we feel about everything that has happened,' she says. There is an Afghan proverb which translates to: *the power of fire is felt where the fire is burning* – unless you've been through the experience, you cannot comprehend the ordeal of it.

Judge Hassas was appointed as a judge in 2015 after completing her judiciary studies (a two-year degree completed after the law degree in Afghanistan). She then went on to work at Afghanistan's Public Security Court which has a broad jurisdiction dealing with matters such as fraud, crime, unauthorised arms and ammunition smuggling, money laundering and assault of public service officers. She tells me it is a busy court, where she would often have ten to fifteen hearings a week. The work was tough, but she loved it. For her, the ability to serve her country and do work that she knew helped protect her community made her happy. Female judges need to be a perpetual component of the Judiciary in Afghanistan she says. Women bring a different perspective than men through their lived experiences – it is also easier for a woman to tell her story to a female judge than a male judge, and in any event, *'why shouldn't a woman be a judge' she asks?*



Even before the Taliban gained control of Afghanistan, Judge Hassas' views on the role of women in the legal profession, and society in general, were considered progressive. The small gains made to women's rights and freedoms by western intervention in Afghanistan were always fragile. She explains that girls and women face various obstacles in education compared to men; in many parts of Afghanistan, girls can only go to primary school and must cease their education once they reach puberty. A lack of female teachers, low access to educational institutions and girls-only schools, and fear of harassment are some of the reasons why gender inequality in education is an issue. However, Judge Hassas hailed from an educated family – her father was a police officer, her brother worked in the public security sector, one of her sisters is a writer and poet and her other sister is a university teacher. Judge Hassas' family always supported and encouraged her to obtain an education, take on additional classes and excel academically. When Judge Hassas commenced her university studies, she was one of 43 female law students in a class of 150. In her second year of university, her first daughter was born. By the time she graduated, she had her second child.

Afghanistan's geo-political and strategic location make it a hot spot that foreign governments have long used as a tool for their own interests. In a public speech given on 16 August 2021, President Biden addressed the situation that was unfolding in

Afghanistan at the time, reaffirming his administration's decision to withdraw US forces from Afghanistan. The tragic events the world watched materialise was proof, he stated, that foreign military forces could never have delivered a stable, united and secure Afghanistan. As President Biden described it, Afghanistan was a *graveyard of empires*. However, Judge Hassas' Afghanistan is something entirely different. She tells me her homeland consists of unspoiled landscapes and dazzling valleys nestled amid stark mountains with snowy peaks. Its people are the most hospitable and vibrant and there is a strong sense of community and kinship between the people of each province. 'I miss my family, my job, my homeland,' she says. I miss it all.'

Judge Hassas is currently taking English classes and hopes to enter the legal profession in Australia. She hopes to see the Australian government assist in bringing many other Afghans to safety, including other female judges whose circumstances remain dire in Afghanistan. Judge Hassas also wishes to be reunited with members of her immediate family who remain in Afghanistan.

This article was based on an interview conducted with Judge Hassas on 11 July 2022, with the assistance of an interpreter.



IMAGE: KATHRIN LONGHURST, NAZ

## KIDS IN COURT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

NANCY ABDALLA

Scientists have spoken about the negative effects of fossil fuel burning and increased carbon dioxide emissions on the Earth's climate for decades. Yet climate change remains the subject of considerable public debate and political controversy.

Governments around the world have been slow to react to the climate crisis, causing frustrated citizens to first turn to the streets in protest, and, now more increasingly, to the courts in litigation. Amongst those leading the charge to the courts are children and young adults – creating a youth led climate change movement across the globe.

In 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recognised the role of litigation in affecting 'the outcome and ambition of climate governance'. The IPCC is an international body established to assess the science related to climate change and provide governments at all levels with information published in periodic 'assessment reports' that can be used to develop climate policies. In August 2021, the IPCC stated that climate change is already affecting every inhabited region across the globe, warning that with every additional increment of global warming, changes to the Earth will intensify. It takes several decades before the Earth responds to increases in GHG emissions. Consequently, the climate change impacts we experience today are due to the emissions of past generations, while the climate change impacts of our present-day actions will be felt by generations to come. As argued by Greta Thunberg and 15 other child plaintiffs in a petition to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, children will bear the burden of life-threatening harms associated with climate change far more extensively and far longer than the current day adults.

Children are also uniquely positioned in the climate justice movement – they cannot exercise their voices at the polling booths, but they can bring their claims before the judiciary. The world's current children have grown up during a time of increasing public awareness of climate change, have learned about it in school and have seen the effects of climate change in media coverage or experienced it first-hand. It should therefore be unsurprising that there has been a recognised increase in youth-led climate change litigation. What is remarkable, however, are the outcomes of many of these youth-led cases. For example, in 2021, nine teenagers and young adults in Germany successfully argued before Germany's Constitutional Court that certain provisions of the country's *Federal Climate Protection Act 2019*

(FCP Act) were unconstitutional on the basis the provisions violated their current and future fundamental rights, including the right to life, physical integrity, personal freedom and right to property (see *Neubauer et al v Germany*). Specifically, they argued that Germany's emission reduction target of 55 percent by 2030 was insufficient to meet Germany's obligations under the Paris Agreement and contended that the FCP Act did not set out concrete reduction measures beyond 2030. The Court unanimously declared parts of the FCP Act unconstitutional and ordered the federal government to reconsider its targets up to 2030 and clarify its reduction measures from 2031 onwards. Mere months after the judgement was issued, the German government approved raising its climate mitigation target to 65 percent by 2030 and net-zero by 2045.

In another case, 25 youth plaintiffs successfully claimed that Colombia's failure to reduce deforestation of the Amazon amounted to a violation of Colombia's obligations under the Paris Agreement (see *Future Generations v Ministry of the Environment and Others*). The Colombian Supreme Court found that ongoing deforestation of the Amazon poses an 'imminent and serious threat to current and future generations' and impacts the plaintiffs' fundamental rights to life, water, clean air, and a healthy environment. The Court ordered the federal government to propose a plan to reduce deforestation in the Colombian Amazon with the aim of reaching net-zero deforestation.

In another notable case, four children and two young adults have taken on 33 European states in a petition to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) alleging the states violated their human rights due to inadequate efforts to cut GHG emissions and sought an order requiring the states to take more ambitious action (see *Duarte Agostinho and Others v. Portugal and 32 Other States*). The plaintiffs argue the climate crisis affects youth disproportionately and as young people they stand to experience the worst effects of climate change. In December 2020, the ECtHR fast-tracked the application citing the 'importance and urgency of the issues raised' and in June 2022, the ECtHR determined the case should be heard by the court's Grand Chamber which comprises of a bench of 17 judges. The case is currently pending but is already remarkable in a number of respects – firstly, it is the first time a group of youths have brought a claim to the ECtHR; secondly, the plaintiffs are ambitious with respect to the number of states they seek to hold accountable; and thirdly, the ECtHR's treatment of the case by fast tracking it recognises that the human rights implications alleged warrant a speedy decision.



IMAGE: SYMONE MALE, *MY SEEDING HEART*

Australia is also seeing its fair share of youth-led climate change litigation. In May 2021, Justice Bromberg of the Federal Court of Australia found that the Minister for the Environment owed young people a duty of care when deciding whether to approve a coal mine extension project (see *Sharma by her litigation representative Sister Marie Brigid Arthur v Minister for the Environment*). The case was brought on behalf of eight children by their litigation representative. In coming to its decision, the Court made a number of significant findings of fact regarding the ‘catastrophic’ impacts of climate change on Australia and its youth. Justice Bromberg found that a ‘business as usual trajectory’ would result in a ‘fundamentally altered world, with the lives of today’s children profoundly affected by climate change’. The decision that a duty of care should be imposed on the Minister was overturned on appeal. However, the Full Federal Court of Australia dismissed the Minister’s challenge to the factual findings about climate change made in the decision at first instance. This means the factual findings still stand and can be used to inform future climate change litigation in Australia. The Queensland Land Court is currently determining another important case in Australia relating to an application by Waratah Coal Pty Ltd (a subsidiary of Mineralogy Pty Ltd, which is the parent company of Clive Palmer’s corporate group) for a mining

lease to develop a thermal coal mine. Youth Verdict, a coalition of young people based in Queensland, filed an objection to the application on the basis that the mine would contribute to climate change and would therefore be incompatible with a number of human rights, including the right to life and the rights of children.

Numerous other youth-led cases have been determined or are being heard all over the world, including in the United States (see *Juliana v United States*, *Held v Montana* or *Aji P et al v State of Washington*), Alaska, (see *Sagoonick et al v Alaska*), Hawaii (see *Navahine F v Hawai’i Department of Transportation*), Canada (see *La Rose v Canada* or *ENVironnement JEUnesse v Canada*), Pakistan (see *Ali v Pakistan*), India (see *Pandey v India*), South Korea (see *Do-Hyun Kim et al v South Korea*), Peru (see *Alvarez v Peru*) and Mexico (see *Jovenez v Gobierno de Mexico*) to name a few.

In late 2019, Australia experienced an ‘unprecedented’ bushfire season, now coined the Black Summer fires, that enveloped much of Victoria and New South Wales in smoke. Earlier this year, record-breaking rainfall deluged parts of Queensland and New South Wales causing ‘unprecedented’ flooding. Unprecedented – but not unexpected. The severity of this year’s floods and the Black Summer fires are stark and urgent reminders of the need to decarbonise society. However, as repeatedly argued by





IMAGE: ANTHEA DA SILVA, *PORTIA DOES PORTIA*

youth-plaintiffs in their cases, the Earth is being remade each and every day at a speed and scale difficult to comprehend. What is unquestionably clear is that climate change presents as one of the world's most profound and complex challenges, caused by conscious human activity and described by Justice Bromberg of the Federal Court of Australia as the 'greatest inter-generational injustice ever inflicted by one generation of humans upon the next'. The past is no longer a guide to the future and children around the world have determined they cannot wait any longer for the world's leaders to muster the political will to take the drastic actions required to prevent dangerous levels of global warming from occurring. If the above cases tell us anything, it is that the longer the politics needed to abate climate change are nowhere in sight, the more innovative and demanding children will be in their pursuit of climate justice.

*References to case law in this article are in accordance with the relevant international legal citation. References in accordance with the Australian Legal Guide to Citation are available upon request.*

## SPONSOR

# COLLEGE OF LAW



## What are the most important features or qualities of a leader?

To understand your values and live through those values in your interactions and in the way you conduct yourself. Leadership can be tough! Often leaders are put into positions where they must have difficult conversations with their teams, and/or, make decisions which are beneficial to the business but not necessarily popular with individuals. By consistently aligning your working practice, interactions, and behaviours to your values, you can lead with authenticity and integrity. This ultimately improves the quality of your relationships as it increases consistency and sets expectations within others as to how you are likely to respond to future situations.

## What do you see as the role of mentorship in leadership?

I strongly believe that one of the key responsibilities for leaders is to succession plan. This means you have developed a strong team of capable people who are given the autonomy to carry out their roles and the encouragement to grow and challenge the status quo, to innovate. The best test of success in this area is whether your business functions as well when you are absent as it does when you are there! Mentoring and coaching your direct reports and instilling the same methodology in them, leads to the mentoring and coaching approach filtering down to their direct reports and so on. Mentoring becomes systemic, cascading across the business.

## Why is empathy and vulnerability important in leadership?

Demonstrating empathy and putting yourself in a position where you are prepared to show a degree of vulnerability helps to build positive relationships with the team you are leading and illustrates that you are open to personal growth. It demonstrates to others that you care and that you understand the challenges they are facing. However, it can be tricky getting the balance right as to how much empathy and vulnerability you share, particularly for women in leadership roles and for women in male-dominated businesses.

*Fiona Turner, Executive Director, College of Law*

## ALLENS

**How do you champion women in leadership?**

At a firm level, actively promoting development opportunities for women and ensuring that all women at the firm have access to resources to support their career journeys. It also involves spotlighting those already in leadership roles, and fostering networking and mentoring opportunities.

We must also acknowledge and actively seek to remove structural barriers that have existed, and still do exist, that prevent women from achieving their career goals and from moving into positions of leadership. At Allens, part of our strategy involves reaching and exceeding targets for representation in management and executive roles. After achieving a previous target of 35% female partners by 2022, the firm has set a new target is of at least 40% female partner representation in 2025.

In a more general sense, championing women in leadership is multifaceted and requires supporting the individual as well as the collective. We recognise and promote the role that normalising flexible work arrangements has in achieving gender equity to ensure that all members of our team are able to develop their careers whilst balancing personal commitments. Further, creating and promoting formal and informal mentoring networks, listening to those already in leadership roles and seeking ongoing feedback on how we can improve firm culture and development opportunities.

**How do you encourage women to become leaders?**

In order to build a culture of genuine inclusion, there needs to be equitable access to leadership and development opportunities and resources, both formal and informal. Allens has created opportunities for all members of the firm to seek out and undertake leadership roles. This includes structured career and skill development opportunities, networking and mentoring programs. The Women@Allens Committee is a centrepiece of this work. The membership offers a clear leadership opportunity for both junior and senior members of the firm to work together and develop a strong sense of community. For example, regular coffee catch ups are organised by the Committee to connect women across different seniority levels and practice groups, and through this we aim to create inclusive spaces that foster connections amongst women at the firm and women who already are, or are seeking to become leaders at the firm. Equitable access to career opportunities such as secondments, skills workshops, training and resources is also key and is managed formally through the Allens Career Deal as well as through professional connections with supervisors and mentors.

*Anjali Iyer, Lawyer, Allens*

ETHOS  
MIGRATION  
LAWYERS**What does leadership mean to you?**

Everyone is a leader, in their own way. At its core, leadership refers to the ability to influence others to achieve both collective and individual goals. It involves teaching, promoting shared values and ideas, taking initiative, and demonstrating ethical and transparent approaches to practice. Personally, I like to approach every situation as an opportunity to display by example the values I stand for. It is not possible to practice as a leader when shared values and beliefs have disintegrated. Thus, I constantly strive to provide support, with a strong focus on honest, prompt, and efficient communication and feedback. I ensure my colleagues are always supported in their professional and personal life, and make it known that when challenges arise, these are to be confronted not individually, but collectively as a team.

**What are the most important features or qualities of a leader?**

Having the understanding that everyone is equal, even though their needs may be different. Equally important is to encourage staff to think and act independently, and to promote an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding of the different needs and backgrounds of your peers.

**What should be the top priorities for leaders today?**

In the words of Marcus Aurelius –

*It is the responsibility of leadership to work intelligently with what is given, and not waste time fantasizing about a world of flawless people and perfect choices.*

The top priority for leaders today would be to support change. We live in a society which is constantly in flux, whether it be the rapid rate of technological advancements or the socio-economic leaps and bounds which are taking place. It is important to embrace empathy, diversity, and inclusion. Implementing strategic plans which are adaptable goes a long way in ensuring further development and success. Whilst it can be daunting, executing a shift in organisational structure and processes in order to accommodate various situations, such as allowing work from home days, or providing extra compassionate leave when required, shows support to staff through tumultuous times and the ability to adapt.

*Zefy Souvlakis, Lawyer, Ethos Migration Lawyers*

## NICHOLES FAMILY LAWYERS



### What does leadership mean to you?

For me, leadership is about proactively – with heart and head – making things better. Better for the people around, beside and behind you. Better for the communities we serve.

It is about creating connections, opening doors, building launch pads and giving back. It is about generously sharing experience, insight, vulnerability, strength, courage and spirit in a way that fosters hope, enthusiasm and a “can do” attitude in others. Leadership is about taking people on a journey and then seeing them navigate their own way forward with the power, confidence, and optimism I have instilled in them along the way – helping bring someone else’s dreams to life!

It is about leveraging the life skill, connections made and experience gained on the front line to fight for change – like eradicating the stain of family violence and throwing light on issues that need airing – like equality for our LGBTQIA+ communities. Like Sheryl Sandberg says: “Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence.”

### What advice would you give to the next generation of leaders?

There are several gold nuggets of advice that I would give to others:

- Write your own rule book for leadership – do it your way but ask for feedback and be brave enough to flex and adapt – and to admit when you have got things wrong.
- Treat others as you would like to be treated. Be loyal. Be kind. Be human.
- Have a vision that is contagious because of the way you impart it, believe in it, dream it and are committed to it.
- Stay true to yourself – believe in yourself, in your empathy and compassion. Be proud of it all. Own it.
- Leaders are there to set people on a journey. To empower, guide and inspire people and to see them truly fly.
- Know that there will be tough times and when they come, harness them, learn from them, share them and then get back up again and don’t listen to the self-doubt, the internal voice or the misgivings of others.

### What are the most important features or qualities of a leader?

For me, the most important qualities are:

- The ability to listen and hear – especially to voices that do not necessarily accord with your own.
- The ability to get knocked down and get up again – resilience.
- Having awesome people around you who tell it like it is to your face.
- EQ. Integrity. Compassion. Positivity. Drive. Dedication.
- A vision and a hope that you truly believe in – a sense of the big picture and the detailed map to get you there.
- A passion for learning and naturally curious.

*Sally Nicholes, Managing Partner, Nicholes Family Law*



IMAGE: ANN CAPE, MY FRIEND CHICK, PORTRAIT OF CHICK GORDON



# PATHWAY TO PARTNER

WITH NICOLE WILSON

BY ANNALEISE VULIN



Partnership remains one of the most highly regarded and respected roles within the legal profession. The title embodies experience, judgement, expertise and investment in client relationships. It indicates that the holder has a seat at the decision-making table.

Some have their eyes on partnership from the beginning. For others, it's an opportunity that presents itself down the road. For every new partner, there's a different partnership journey, but that journey is often shrouded in mystique. Let's clear the fog by looking at what exactly is involved in becoming partner. How does it happen and what do those who aspire to have the title need to consider?

In 2021, Nicole Wilson was promoted from Special Counsel to Disputes Partner at CIE Legal. Graduating law school with a 5 week-old baby and a background working as a Security Guard at Pentridge and Port Philip Prison, Nicole's perseverance was evident from the outset. Before becoming a partner, Nicole worked at a variety of law firms as a senior lawyer in litigation and was a barrister's clerk at Greens List. VWL interviewed Nicole to gain her insights on how becoming a partner is a journey, not an event. The journey after getting the title is just as, if not more, important than the journey leading up to it.

## Where the journey started

Nicole's journey to law began with studying Arts at La Trobe University. 'I always wanted to be a lawyer' she says, 'but I didn't get the right grades to study law straight from school, so I studied another course on the basis that I would transfer. That didn't work out and so I left and was unemployed for a while.' As part of receiving unemployment benefits, Centrelink enrolled Nicole in a security guard course where she worked within the courts and at prisons. After leaving the prison service, she became a legal secretary. One of her principals convinced her to study law. 'Being a mature age student was difficult, but I knew I'd found my place; this is where I wanted to go' she recalls.

It did not get any easier from there. Nicole entered the legal profession around the time of the Global Financial Crisis. On top of that, it was difficult to complete articles whilst looking after her child. 'I was pregnant while doing articles and was not given the option of deferring them. I then studied at College of Law online at home so I could be with my daughter.' Admitted in 2008, Nicole then worked for boutique firms, where she developed a specialisation in dispute resolution.

In 2017, Nicole was approached by two clerks at Greens List to join and worked as a barrister's clerk there until 2020. When coronavirus hit, Nicole was made redundant from Greens List and joined another boutique firm before being approached by CIE legal.

## Applying to become Partner

At CIE Legal, Nicole found her home. Nicole was invited to join the partnership after a year at the firm.

Nicole consulted many people for guidance in making the decision:

'I spoke to my accountant to get the right structuring advice. I spoke with a mentor of mine, Teresa Bisucci who was a partner at a previous firm I had worked at, as well as her husband, Robert Cugno who is a career coach (Future U Coaching). I spoke to my friends and asked them if I was crazy and if I could do this as a single mum with 4 kids! I also spoke to my kids about it because I knew that it could have an impact on my availability to them.'

Partners at CIE Legal also gave Nicole a different perspective on the role and provided an honest account of life as a law firm partner. Nicole found this invaluable and her advice to any prospective partner is to consult internally and externally to ensure that they understand the risks, liabilities and benefits, as well as the future of the firm and whether it aligns with their career aspirations.

### **Can being a Partner also provide work life balance?**

The perception of partners is that they work round the clock, so it was interesting to hear Nicole's thoughts on work life balance at the partner level. Nicole said that the partners at CIE Legal value maintaining a work life balance but that being a business owner has its own stresses. 'For example, we are encouraged to take annual leave, but I do need to ensure that I have systems in place for when I'm away so that the work still gets done and I am able to have a proper break.' One benefit Nicole has seen from COVID-19 is the legal industry adapting to flexible working arrangements, 'people now realise it's not just parents who have a need for flexible working arrangements, it may be those who have elderly parents or other things in their life that they place importance on, who also value flexibility.'

### **Was there anything you found to be unexpected?**

'I had an understanding that I would be responsible for managing staff, business development and financial issues, but I didn't anticipate how big the load was going to be initially. It was a steep learning curve but the support of my fellow partners has helped me to transition quickly.'

### **Business development**

One aspect that distinguishes a Partner from another senior legal professional is their responsibility to obtain work for the firm: after all, they are business owners. Nicole recommends turning your mind to building relationships and networks from the start of your career, 'one day you will have to draw on those relationships when the time comes. Networks are important for the firm's longevity, and there is a certain amount of responsibility to ensure that new work is coming in and of a certain quality.'

We discussed how bringing in work in litigation is different to transactional work because of its nature:

'No one likes being involved in a dispute. It's a stressful time, which means you really have to become the client's trusted advisor. It's common for clients to feel that they are not in control, to be stressed and anxious. It's my role to travel the journey with them, providing realistic and honest advice. All of this means that I develop new disputes work, not by hunting for the next piece of litigation, but by approaching things as an adviser who works with the client on their journey. I have a relationship with them, I understand the context and I work to get the best result with that in mind.'

Nicole says the benefit of being part of a partnership is the ability to refer other partners within the firm to clients. 'The fact that I've got other partners that I can promote and draw from their skills is helpful.'

### **Do you think your coaching and mentoring style has changed now that you are a Partner?**

'I'd like to think my style has not fundamentally changed – it has just developed as I have developed. I look at it as, when you move up the ranks you need to impart your knowledge onto others. I always ask for feedback from juniors. I was only Special Counsel for about a year, so it's important for me to get that feedback. Everyone is different; for example you might want sit down have a chat about the file first, or review the documents and ask questions later.'

### **Was there anything missing in your training that you'd like to train in lawyers now?**

'The support. In my early days, I don't know if it was the firms I was at, the GFC, or because I had a little bit of knowledge as a former legal secretary, but I felt like it was a sink or swim. I wish I had a bit more support. That's why at CIE Legal we have regular catch ups with staff instead of relying mainly on annual reviews. I'd like to think I'm supportive and make myself available – my door is always open.'

### **Were there any sacrifices you had to make in taking on this role?**

'When I first was asked to join, I took the kids out for dinner. My daughters were proud, giving me high fives, my boys said "so you're a boss now?" I explained to them that they would have to help out a bit more at home. I'd like to think I've shown them that if you put your mind to something, you can do it. Being a parent isn't as big a hurdle as it used to be to get to the top, and I'm teaching them that they can achieve things they want to. But yes, I've had to make sacrifices, because it is hard for them and for me to balance it all. They live with me 8 out of 14 days, my time with them is precious to me and so our lives have become quite structured now. I schedule weekly one on one time with each of them to make sure we still have a chance to connect. It's their choice whether we go for a walk, bounce on the trampoline or watch a favorite tv show.'

### **What is your advice on managing family commitments when you become a partner?**

'Having a family is a normal part of life. It's not unusual. But it does require some careful planning at times, to be present as a parent and as a partner. There needs to be a discussion at some point about what's expected. I hope COVID-19 has shown that we can be productive outside of sitting in the office in front of the computer from 9am to 5pm. Although I work full-time, I don't see why you can't be a part time partner: like anything else, it just requires open communication, planning and structured thinking to make it work.'

### **What do you think is your greatest power and responsibility?**

'Funnily enough, I think the two are linked. My power: well, I'm empathetic, I understand other people's perspective and put myself in their shoes. My responsibility? To grow and develop the next generation of lawyers. One of my roles at CIE Legal is staff partner, so being empathetic is important. As a business owner at a small firm, it's a balance for us to weigh up individual needs and desires for flexibility plus making sure that staff are mentally well and engaged. Junior staff need to be supported and mentored appropriately, not just by the partners, but also by other senior lawyers. Everybody brings something different and has value. Even on your very first day as a lawyer you will bring value in a way different from everyone else. To me it's important that we make sure all the staff feel supported and valued.'

Being a partner might not be for everyone, but for those who are considering partnership, know that there are as many paths to the top as lawyers who reach it.



IMAGE: GABRIELLE MARTIN, *THE ECOLOGIST*



IMAGE: MICHELLE BELGIORNO, *JUGGLING ACT*

## SPONSOR

# COULTER LEGAL



### Women are our future leaders.

Not one woman was appointed CEO in any of the ASX 200 companies in 2021.

Not a single woman.

Men named Peter or Andrew were more likely to be appointed a CEO in an ASX 200 company than a woman!

The statistics on women being appointed into senior roles continues to outrage and disappoint, and more often than not, the advice we receive to improve our career positions in workplaces relies on women themselves making changes in our own lives to move up that corporate ladder.

Australia has a long way to go to improve gender equality in workplaces, and to promote the development of women. We need to make fundamental changes to the very fabric of our workplaces, to ensure women can achieve the lofty success that many of our male counterparts enjoy today.

At Coulter Legal, we are a firm of 80% women. Our leadership team is made up of 60% women, and in our most recent round of promotions, 70% of applicants were women. We promoted two women into more senior positions while they were on maternity leave. Our incoming graduates are 85% women, which makes sense, as women are outnumbering men in studying law.

The challenges on making workplaces work for women are not the responsibility of a woman on her own. It takes committed workplace structural change to enable women to feel supported at work. It takes leaders who understand and take seriously the responsibility of removing common and complex barriers that prevent women from fully participating in the workforce, including at senior levels.

Encouraging women to be leaders is crucial in developing workplaces of the future. Ensuring leadership roles can be structured to work flexibly, including part time, and taking away the expectations of being at a desk for eight plus hours a day is vital to the success of women in leadership roles.

At Coulter Legal, our people come first, and all our leadership team work flexibly including on a part time basis and for varied hours to pick up children from school. Role modeling that way of working shows we care about how we lead the way for the people that follow us, and for women to develop their leadership careers into the future.

*Belinda Perisic FCPHR, General Manager, Coulter Legal*



# DELIVERING A KIND 'NO'

PENNY LOCASO



When was the last time you said yes to something you didn't want to do? For most of the people I meet, unfortunately, this is a daily practice. A practice that impacts our energy and our ability to create the space to live the life we want.

Why do we do this? Well, I can speak for myself on this front because I have suffered from 'people pleaser syndrome' for years, and I'm slowly skilling in the art of 'no'. Why? Because I have experienced how saying 'no' creates the space for me to do meaningful and impactful work and realise my dreams quicker without burning out in the process.

After spending the last few years surrounding myself with inspiring entrepreneurs pursuing positive impact, one of my greatest learnings has been that the people who seem the happiest and most successful, are the ones who have mastered the art of saying 'no' with kindness, and they practice this art daily.

Did you know that every yes you give away unconsciously and without due consideration, is like adding bricks to an invisible wall between you and your aspirations?

So how do you learn to deliver a 'no' with kindness and use it to create the space to live a life true to yourself and your legacy?

## 1. Change the language of 'no'

If you want to become an expert at 'no', the first place to start is to consider how the language you use impacts your ability to make change. Words help frame in your brain your sense of control. According to James Clear's article entitled 'A Scientific Guide To Saying No', the words you use create a feedback loop in your brain that impacts your future behaviours. For example, every time you tell yourself 'I can't say no', you create a feedback loop that is a reminder of your limitations. You're effectively programming your brain to believe that you're not capable of exercising your 'no'. Why not try reframing your language when you need to exercise your 'no' to consciously saying 'I can say no'. This resets the feedback loop in your brain, to remind you that you have control and the power to influence the situation.

## 2. Get clear on what you want

Warren Buffett would have to be considered one of the most successful self-made investors of all time, and he's also a strong advocate of the power of saying 'no'. He's developed a simple two-step process to eliminate and say 'no' to time-wasting distractions.

- Step 1: Write down your top 25 life goals, then circle the five most important to you. I would personally argue going a step further and circling just three, to really narrow your focus and move yourself closer to success quicker.
- Step 2. Now, completely eliminate the other 22 goals you have listed. That's right, cross them off. All of these additional goals are going to distract you from achieving the three that you have determined are most important to you.

## 3. Create your 'no' selection criteria

So, you've reframed your language and created a clear set of priorities, now you need a simple checklist to help you 'consciously' evaluate every opportunity or request that comes your way. These are your non-negotiables, the criteria that must be met for a 'yes' to be given. What would this look like? Let me share with you the list that has changed the game of 'no' for me.

My single-minded mission is to teach ten million humans how to intentionally adapt in order to future-proof happiness by 2025. In order to stay focused and realise this dream, I use the following criteria to assess every opportunity:

- Does it positively impact the lives of others?
- Does it support the progress of one or more of my top three priorities?
- Will it be fun, and are the collaborators value-aligned?
- Will it make money or provide access to a new growth market?  
Note: There is no shame in making money. Often our relationship with money is a complicated one, but here's the thing, the more you make, the greater the impact you can have.

## 4. Get your 'no' on

Start practicing how you deliver a 'no' using the following framework:

### Acknowledge

Show the person you have listened to their request, e.g. 'I understand that you are asking me to...'



IMAGE: MICHELLE ZUCCOLO, DR JANET DAVEY, THE FORENSIC EGYPTOLOGIST WITH THOTH

### Own it

Be honest in your response, e.g. 'I'm on a mission to achieve X which means I need to be single-minded in my focus, to create the space to realise the impact I seek. Unfortunately, this opportunity is not a fit with my priorities at this point in time, but thank you for considering me.'

### OR

If you are saying 'no' to someone you work for because you have too much on your plate, try this: 'These are the top three priorities I am focusing on at the moment... If you feel this is a higher priority can you please advise which of the other three priorities you would like me to put on the backburner, to create the space for your request?' Now, whilst this is not a direct 'no', it demonstrates that you can prioritise, and puts your boss in a position to decide what is most important for the business at that point in time.

### OR

If you're saying 'no' because you feel ethically or morally compromised by what you are being asked to do, consider stepping into vulnerability and putting your 'why' on the table, e.g. 'I am not comfortable accepting this request because I feel it is not aligned with my values which are..., and this is why.'

This is a powerful way to demonstrate what you believe in; imagine how this will impact that feedback loop in your brain that we spoke of earlier.

### Say 'no'

Plain and simple state it, e.g. 'Therefore, at this point in time I will need to say no' or 'I will have to decline your offer' or 'I can't commit to that right now.'

### Consider a connect

Consider how else you might be able to help this person. Is there someone else you can connect them to that may be able to help? Is there a resource you are aware of that might assist them in planning the delivery?

### Don't apologise

So often I hear people apologise for their 'no'. Here's the thing: you don't need to be sorry for giving yourself permission to focus on what matters to you. You should be doing the complete opposite, and high-fiving yourself. So, be firm in the language you use and be confident in your 'no'. Trust me, every 'no' you deliver moves you closer to where you want to be and makes the next 'no' a little easier.

## 5. Turn the 100 NOs upside down

I have spoken many times about the brilliant concept that is '100 NOs' and how this process creates a basis to practice micro-bravery, and ask for all the things you want. What if we reversed the '100 NOs'? What if your goal was to deliver 100 intentional and meaningful 'no's? Every 'no' you give in response to an opportunity or request, that does not align to your goals or selection criteria above, becomes a little celebration, moving you closer to creating more and more space to focus on what fills you up. Start your reverse '100 NOs' today by grabbing a large piece of butcher's paper and writing 100 'no's on it. Put it somewhere visible to remind you daily to be conscious in your 'yesses'. Every time you say 'no' to something that is not aligned, tick off a 'no' on your '100 NOs' chart.

## 6. Create a Celebration Menu

Now, this is something a little new that my business coach shared with me. Write a Celebration Menu. What's that you're asking? I want you to write a menu of actions you can undertake to celebrate your practice in delivering a 'no'. Then, every time you hit 10 out of your 100 NOs, go to your Celebration Menu and pick a reward. Rewarding good behaviour is a great way to embed change.

If having difficult conversations and delivering a 'no' is an ongoing challenge you'd like to work through in more detail, why not explore jump on over to [hackinghappy.co](http://hackinghappy.co) to find out more about my coaching services.

If you have a friend or a following who could use a little help with their 'no' feel free to share this article.

## About the Author

Penny Locaso is the world's first Happiness Hacker on a quest to teach ten million humans by 2025 how to flourish in life. Voted one of the most influential female entrepreneurs in Australia, Penny is her own ongoing experiment. A little while back she turned her life upside down in pursuit of happiness. She left a 16-year career as an executive, relocated her family from Perth back to Melbourne, left an 18-year relationship, and started her own purpose-driven company called [HackingHappy.co](http://HackingHappy.co). With over 20 years' experience in enabling adaptability, Penny's calling is to empower people to release their fear of uncertainty, find their flow, and flourish. Penny works with governments, corporations, and educators to build a more intentionally adaptable society. She has partnered with the likes of Google, Microsoft, Booking.com, Salesforce, Deloitte, and LuluLemon, to name a few. Penny created The Intentional Adaptability Quotient®, a world-first psychometric tool and education program that decodes the skills required to not only navigate but flourish in complex and uncertain change.

Alongside Penny's entrepreneurial endeavours, she is the published author of *Hacking Happiness*, a Harvard Business Review contributor, a passionate yoga teacher, a faculty member at the esteemed Singularity University, and a student completing her Graduate Diploma in Psychology.



IMAGE: TRISH TAIT, SELF PORTRAIT WITH ROSALBA



## BRAVE LEGAL



### How do you encourage women to become leaders?

Promotion, promotion, promotion. A common experience of female leaders is that they had to push themselves forward into leadership positions – often pushing aside or delaying other commitments or passions to take on a leadership role. Stories of being actively mentored and promoted by senior leaders are rare – generally speaking. I consider we have an obligation to do things differently.

My own practice is to identify talents in the women working around me and start by simply bringing them into any opportunity that may enhance their own leadership qualities. This can be as simple as including someone on an email and making it clear that they are an equal contact for a client; or co-presenting; or creating 'subject matter experts' where that person is considered the internal leader for specific projects or issues. That is how we sow leadership seeds.

To encourage the seeds to grow, we must then promote the achievements of the women we are working with – as law firm leaders we are often the 'face' of the firm and the default image when the firm is successful. Look at your team working with you today – where are the emerging female leaders and how are you promoting them in incremental ways?

### Why is empathy and vulnerability important in leadership?

I believe that leading with empathy is one of the most effective ways to establish connections with your team and your clients for three reasons – sharing your own experiences and being curious about the experiences of your team or client brings balance to the traditional lawyer/client and Partner/lawyer power dynamic; demonstrating your own vulnerability normalises that experience in the workplace and by default creates a safe environment for others to be vulnerable; and promoting empathy in conjunction with technical skills ensures you are helping create well-rounded, balanced legal staff and future leaders.

Leading with empathy and vulnerability is not being weak or submissive – it is about being curious as to the emotional needs of your team (and yourself) and being brave enough to share or deliver your own emotional experiences as a person, a lawyer, a friend, a leader. Creating this culture (Harvard tells us<sup>1</sup>) can reduce workplace stress, increase trust, improve citizenship and productivity. For all these reasons, I consider leading with empathy and vulnerability is the new leadership superpower.

1. Turkle, S, Empathy Rules, Harvard Business Review, 17 February 2022

*Bree Knoester, Principal Lawyer and Founder, Brave Legal*

## FOLEY'S LIST



### The importance of strong leadership and the role of mentorship in leadership.

Effective and strong leadership is one of the most essential parts for an organisation to sustain their business. At Foley's List we encourage, influence, and motivate each other by strengthening a positive organisation culture, not only for our colleagues and List Members, but also to the wider legal community. Foley's List promotes a transparent policy where we encourage employee autonomy, mentoring, and are open to everyone's concerns.

The transition to the Bar can be challenging for Readers and even for experienced practitioners, life at the Bar can present challenges and opportunities at any stage in a career. Having a strong leadership and mentorship component at Foley's List plays a crucial role in supporting and assisting List Members to establish and grow their practices. Our List Mentoring Program assigns a junior mentor, practicing in a similar practice area, to all new Readers. The mentor provides guidance and support to the Readers during their first years at the Bar. For more senior members of the List, the Clerking Team provides a range of opportunities for Practice Area sets and like-minded Members to engage with other Members as mentors or as professional networking groups.

### Why is empathy and vulnerability important in leadership?

A big misconception and assumption are that it is a weakness. We view empathy and vulnerability as a source of hope, courage, authenticity, and accountability by encouraging honesty – genuine conversations both professionally and as real humans – and embracing imperfections as it is something to learn from and build upon rather than something to hide.

### Priorities of leadership.

The changing of the times goes hand in hand with evolution and adaptation of different priorities.

At Foleys List current priorities, we find of utmost importance are diversity, equity, and inclusion; as well as employee/member well-being/mental health. This can be demonstrated with Foleys being the first list in Victoria (1999) to introduce an equitable briefing policy for our members and our commitment to the elimination of practise and attitudes which discriminates against members of the List based on their gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, parental status, marital status, religion, age.

*Dak Kuirthoi, Barristers Clerk, Foley's List*

# REFLECTIONS ON MENTORING

HONOURABLE ASSOCIATE JUSTICE MARY-JANE IERODIACONOU

## Remarks of the Honourable Associate Justice May-Jane Ierodiconou given at the launch of VWL's Professional Mentoring Program, held on 28 July 2022 at the College of Law.

When I was a third year solicitor in a large law firm, a second year solicitor who I was mentoring came to me. She sought my advice on how to have a discussion with human resources about getting a pay rise. I asked her how much she was being paid. To my astonishment, she was being paid the same amount as me.

I then gathered information from my peers. I spoke to another lawyer in my year level and found that we were being paid the same amount. Like me, she had not thought about negotiating a pay rise. I spoke to one of my male peers. He had negotiated a pay rise and was open in sharing what he was being paid – significantly more, even though we had both met our budgets. I spoke with peers outside my firm. One peer provided me with a report from a recruitment firm on industry-wide pay standards. I shared that with my mentee, and we then practised how to have a conversation on negotiating a pay rise. My mentee and I subsequently both obtained a pay rise.

From this I learnt three important lessons.

Firstly, know your value and be prepared to negotiate. Do not just assume that you will be paid appropriately.

Secondly, you can be guided by a mentor and also learn from those you are mentoring. As Norah Breckveldt, a leadership coach, writes in her book *Me and My Mentor*:

Positive mentoring is built on a foundation of equality, where the relationship is reciprocal and enriching for both the mentor and mentee. Even where a mentor may be the more senior person, they are open to learning from their mentee, using the relationship to reflect on her own learning and development and the insights and knowledge her mentee provided.



The third lesson I learnt is to pay it forward. Breckveldt writes:

Great mentees are driven to become mentors themselves, passing on the gifts and benefits they received to others, so that a mentoring community is formed and becomes self-perpetuating.

The gender pay gap continues to be a topical issue.

In a report prepared by the Nous Group for the Victorian Bar in March 2018, it was reported that the average annual income in the 2015–16 financial year for male barristers was \$388,000 compared to \$214,000 for female barristers. That is a gender pay gap of about 55%. This pay gap appears worse, by far, than any of the other occupations identified in government agency reports at that time. The Nous report identified that a major cause of gender pay disparity at the Bar is that male and female barristers typically undertake different work, in different areas of practice. The three practice areas with the lowest average incomes (Criminal Law, Family Law and Children's Court matters) are those in which female barristers are most strongly represented (39%, 49% and 63% respectively).

Have we reached pay equality in the years since?

The Law Council of Australia's Equitable Briefing Policy Annual Report for 2019–20 reported that 69% of briefs went to male barristers and 31% to female barristers. However, male barristers earned 77% of the fees while female barristers earned 23%.

What about solicitors and others within the legal sector?

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency obtained data from over 70 law firms and legal bodies across Australia. The latest figures show that the gender pay gap in the legal sector is 21.2%. This is worse than the national pay gap of 13.8%.

A recent report warns that progress in Australia to close the gender pay gap has stalled. That report states that discrimination continues to be the single largest contributor to the gender pay gap.

We can conclude that equitable remuneration remains an issue ripe for discussion between mentors and mentees. These discussions might include the mentor coaching the mentee on how to negotiate a pay rise. They might also include discussion of how to eradicate systemic barriers to equal pay at an organisational level. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency website contains many practical suggestions and useful toolkits. The Agency recommends taking concrete steps.



IMAGE: JACQUILINE HENNESSY, *THE JUDGING SELF PORTRAIT*

These include:

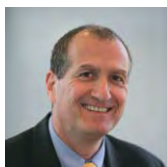
- (a) conducting an analysis to determine whether there is gender pay equity;
- (b) providing transparency of salary bands and identifying gender pay equity gaps;
- (c) considering the terms and conditions of employment contracts – because gender-biased terms and conditions can result in unequal allocation of roles and remuneration;
- (d) implementing policies in relation to gender pay equity; and
- (e) reporting against pay equity targets.

In my career, I have benefited from mentors. They have given me perspective, encouragement and practical strategies for navigating the workplace. I have benefited, too, from mentees. Mentees have also given me perspective, along with fresh ideas and positive energy.

Invest in your mentoring relationship. Build a relationship of trust. There are mentors here who are generous and open-hearted. There are mentees who are prepared to listen, reflect, and share. Mentees who are prepared to take up the mantle of mentor one day, and pay it forward. This is all a recipe for a successful mentoring program.



## K&amp;L GATES

**What can young people teach us about leadership?**

Our role is to improve the future for generations to come.

Young people in our firm inspire me to stay on course to improve the firm for the future. I am energised by their curiosity, their energy and their varied perspectives of the world as it is now and what is needed in the future.

They have the courage to speak up for themselves and others when they identify a need for improvement and are very much in touch with the community and social changes and its impact at work. They have taught me to listen, to alter my perspectives and to acknowledge their points of view.

They are dynamic in their thinking and perform much better when they are given the scope to expand their horizons. What can often be construed as the 'me' generation (what can you do for me), is in fact a request to better align their experience and future opportunities at the firm with who they are as a person and what they value and care about.

**Why is vulnerability and empathy important?**

*'The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek'* - Joseph Campbell

Over many years working as a legal practitioner and Managing Partner, I have come to appreciate that the rewards come when we take a risk and step outside our comfort zone. However, for many people self-doubt ensures that, putting themselves in a situation where there is little certainty coupled with a high chance of facing adversity before the vision is realised, can be a difficult path to take without support. Having a mentor in your corner can be an invaluable asset to encourage and support you to take the risk and enter the cave.

I am passionate about mentoring. I take my mentoring role very seriously as I work with others who are travelling the path I once did (albeit in very different times). I try to encourage appropriate risk-taking whilst emphasising that I too have faced some very challenging experiences. It is important throughout your career to have people you trust in your corner who you know will act with integrity and accountability.

In summary, leadership is about dedicated stewardship and making improvements for the next generation, including building a diverse and inclusive culture. It is about demonstrating one's belief in the potential of others, providing support and guidance as required, and working with the next generation to design a future firm with aligned values.

*Nick Nichola, Managing Partner, K&L Gates Australia*

## KHQ LAWYERS

**What are the most important features or qualities of a leader?**

For me, leadership is often about strength and vision. But there are other aspects of leadership that are also important; good communication, empathy, freedom of thought, inclusivity, and emotional intelligence. Women naturally have many of these characteristics, which can make them inherently great leaders. Women are also able to balance both their work and professional life well, and appreciate the personal lives of their colleagues, which can have a significant impact on culture. They are also frequently active mentors, which also assists with great leadership and a successful team environment.

**What advice do you have for female leaders?**

Whilst gender alone should not determine leadership abilities, the reality is that there are more men than women in leadership roles. This needs to change. One of the significant impediments to women reaching their career goals can come down to the attitudes of those around them. To promote change we need to encourage conversation around gender and leadership and look for opportunities to promote change; and provide access to training and mentoring for women at all stages of their career. Another significant impediment to career progression for women is simply due to the practical aspects of life noting that women still bear the more significant burden of childcare/child rearing and home management. COVID-19 lockdowns thankfully, showed many businesses that working from home can be effective, not only for women, but for all employees and working parents. The promotion of work life balance eases the burden of working full time and having a family, whilst at the same time improving culture and engagement.

We all need great role models to inspire us and show us how it can be done, but vulnerability is also important. "Having it all" takes hard work and sacrifice, and we don't always get it right. Resilience is also something that is essential to leadership.

**What advice would you give to the next generation of leaders?**

To the younger generation of leaders coming through, I would encourage them to focus on building relationships. If you can find a mentor early in your career, this can change the entire course of your future. There are so many women who have so much to contribute, and would be happy to do so.

*Monica Blizzard, Director, KHQ Lawyers*

# DELEGITIMISING DISCOURSE DEPLOYED AGAINST FEMALE LEADERS

SKYE CODY



IMAGE: TANIA WURSIG, UNNAMED

Journalism and politics have historically been dominated by men, rendering the perpetuation of patriarchal tropes against women politicians within both spheres as not unexpected. Australia's first female prime minister, Julia Gillard, was subjected to sexist vitriol both within the political sphere and in media portrayals throughout the three years she served as federal leader, between 2010 to 2013.

The 2021 SBS original documentary *Strong Female Lead* compiles archival media and parliamentary footage to recapture and reflect upon the denigration and gendered language deployed in reports and attacks on Gillard, and to highlight the disparate treatment of male and female politicians.

## Femininity-competence double-bind theory

An assessment of representations of female leaders through the lens of feminist theory foregrounds the connection between language and patriarchy, and the way in which the understanding of women's position in society influences media depictions. Of particular assistance is Kathleen Hall Jamieson's femininity-competence double-bind theory. Feminist double-bind theory posits that society perceives 'feminine' traits and 'leadership' traits as mutually exclusive; traits associated with leadership, such as assertiveness and ambition, are deemed as masculine. Hence, the irreconcilability of femininity and competence results in the critique and ostracisation of 'women leaders' for their transgression.

## Perpetuation of gendered discourse against Gillard

The initial excitement incited by Australia's first female prime minister is captured in *Strong Female Lead*, as Australian women celebrate the 'big step for women' Gillard's appointment represented. Characteristics that distinguish Gillard from the traditional expectations of women merely amplified the significance of her political ascent, with one tweet noting that an 'unmarried, childless...woman' becoming prime minister marked a 'proud day for Australia'.



IMAGE: WENDY SHARPE – SELF PORTRAIT, *VANITAS AFTER PEREDA*

Irrespective, the manner in which Gillard had assumed the prime ministership invoked wrath amongst the journalistic and political spheres. As denoted by former Labor Senator Cheryl Kernot, Gillard had not 'wait[ed] her turn' as is expected of women. Instead, the display of ambition that deviated from complacency required castigation, including comparisons to, and depictions as, Lady Macbeth and Marie Antoinette – distinct from the historical representation of male politicians who had removed prime ministers as strong leaders who had taken affirmative action.

Former Prime Minister John Howard condemned Gillard's leadership as lacking authority which he attributed partly to her participation in the removal of Kevin Rudd. This condemnation aligns with the positive correlation between depictions of Gillard as 'unlikeable' and criticism of her failure to exhibit the demanded femininity, or direct criticism of her transgression of gender norms, that emerged in articles in publications inclusive of *The Age* and *The Australian* published during the 2013 leadership-spill. Gillard's 'unlikability' was described as a lack of sincerity and a failure to attain 'authenticity'.

The connection between Gillard's position as a woman leader and a lack of trust and authority evidences the disjuncture between femininity and perceptions of competent leadership that the double-bind perpetuates, as well as the suspicion imposed upon women that do not adhere to expectations of femininity. Further, the association of Gillard with masculine qualities in 'tough and ruthless' and 'wood' underscores the connection the double-bind constructs between exhibiting leadership traits with a 'coldness' and 'lack of 'natural' feminine warmth'. Similar portrayals of Hillary Clinton have been propounded for her violation of gendered binaries.

The media also placed a disproportionate emphasis on Gillard's appearance, attire and personal life. The delineation of media throughout Gillard's prime ministership in *Strong Female Lead* is punctuated by scrutinisation of her marital status and criticism of her clothing choices, including by eminent Australian feminists.



Whilst such topics are evidently irrelevant to Gillard's capabilities as a leader, the extremity of the disrespect shown toward Gillard and other female leaders is exacerbated in instances of violent and demeaning language. These instances escalated throughout Gillard's term, leading journalist Catherine Fox to observe that Australia had 'become a bit desensitised' to discourse denigrating women since Australia had a female prime minister.

Following the implementation of the carbon tax, Gillard was represented as lacking autonomy and acting at the behest of her male colleagues via the label 'Bob Brown's bitch', whilst misogynistic catchphrases such as 'ditch the bitch' or 'witch' called for her downfall. Explicitly violent and degrading language was deployed predominantly by members of the Australian public; however, what former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull labelled as an outdated culture of a lack of respect toward women in Parliament was evidenced in the willingness of parliamentarians to associate with persons propounding such sexist rhetoric, as depicted in Strong Female Lead.

The portrayal of female politicians through patriarchal stereotypes and sexist discourse delegitimises women in position of power, thus perpetuating the historical disjuncture between women and leadership. Indeed, articles during the 2013 leadership-spill also demonstrated the propensity of the media to perpetuate the idea that Gillard was the perpetrator of her own victimisation, and simultaneously condemn Gillard for promulgating division on the basis of gender. Gillard was labelled as 'divisive' for her 'unnecessary rhetoric on...gender', whilst it was also intimated that Gillard instigated her demise through 'gender politics' and 'gender war'. As demonstrated in the media's dissemination of the same narrative to delegitimise the merit of Gillard's 2012 misogyny speech, it is necessary – to maintain the femininity-competence double-bind – for political reporters to deny the patriarchy's role in Gillard's downfall by depicting it as her individual failing.

It is evident that women are dissociated from positions of leadership when the media and political spheres continue their alignment with the femininity-competence double-bind by deriding women leaders on the basis of their 'unlikability' and perpetuating excessive discourse on their clothing and personal lives. However, as women leaders become more prevalent and more prominent, the disintegration of the femininity-competence double-bind is inevitable. In the words of Julia Gillard, 'it will be easier for the next woman'.

This article contains information and excerpts previously submitted in an academic context. A copy of the article with footnotes is available upon request.

## SPONSOR

# STUART FAMILY LAWYERS



## What can young people teach us about leadership?

The young lawyers that I have worked with throughout my career have taught me to lead in a way which encourages a passion for the law. Working as a family lawyer in private practice is a demanding job. Most family lawyers have chosen this career path with a desire to help other people and a love of the law. This job would be impossibly hard if you are not passionate about what you do.

I have worked as a family lawyer for over a decade. I am now a Principal of Stuart Family Lawyers, a boutique family law firm in Melbourne. I assist clients going through a separation with the division of assets, spousal maintenance, arrangements for children and child support. I still consider it a privilege to do the work that I do. I enjoy the intellectual rigours, the new challenges and problems I get to solve each day and the rewarding relationships with clients and colleagues.

The energy and passion of the young lawyers I work with continues to remind me of the pride of settling my first case and the excitement running my first trial. It also reminds me that at one stage in my career I was confused about when to stand up and when to sit down in Court, and the discovery that a good PA is the best friend and asset you will ever have in the office. It reminds me as a leader to celebrate my good days and reflect upon and learn from my bad days, just as I did as a junior lawyer. It also reminds me as a leader to prioritise the two-way communication of my mentoring relationships and to be grateful each day that we get to assist our clients and do the rewarding work that we do.

*Katrina Stuart, Principal, Stuart Family Lawyers*

## VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT SOLICITOR'S OFFICE



### 1. How do you champion women in leadership?

Our organisation, Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO), has a great track record of championing women leaders (with impressive results too, women making up 78% of our executive leadership team). We do this in a few ways.

**Training** – over the last three years we have delivered high-quality, externally-provided leadership training to all our people leaders, including our emerging leaders. We also train the whole organisation on respect in the workplace, aimed at tackling unconscious bias and teaching techniques to avoid discrimination and develop a more inclusive environment.

**Fostering a genuinely flexible culture** – we know this can be especially important to women who often have additional caring responsibilities. Moving to a flexible and hybrid work environment has been a journey and we're not done yet, but around 30% of our people leaders work part-time (including myself). Choosing to work flexibly will not prevent you from achieving promotion. I'd expect the acceptance of part-time leaders will only continue to grow as we embed our flexible work culture post-pandemic.

**Sponsorship** – sometimes women need more than training or mentorship to step up, and more positive action is required. VGSO operates a Gender Equality Action Plan under the *Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)* as a tool to reinforce our commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace with opportunities for all.

**Transparent success and development profiles** – we have a documented capability framework including what you need to do to step up to the next level. This structure helps give emerging women leaders confidence that unfair bias won't influence their opportunities.

My own efforts to champion women in leadership come down, fairly simply, to properly discharging my leadership responsibilities. This means being generous with your time, making the effort to learn a person's strengths and appreciate any particular obstacles they face to achieve their potential, regularly checking in and providing opportunities for others to take on leadership tasks and develop the behaviours they'll need to step up in the future.

### 2. What do you see as the role of mentorship in leadership?

I'd say it's unlikely there is an effective leader out there who hasn't had the benefit of mentoring. In the corporate world (before joining VGSO), I was often the only woman in the room. Sometimes I found it intimidating, being the odd one out, and I remember practising techniques to create more of a physical presence in meetings!

I was fortunate to have some respected, senior women leaders (and men too) who generously took time to encourage me to create a vision around what I wanted to achieve and where I was going. These people, through their mentoring, gave me some great gifts. First, they challenged any self-limiting assumptions by consistently asking me (sometimes subtly, sometimes directly) why I thought the dumb things I did. Secondly, they helped me develop more self-awareness and appreciate that your value proposition as a leader includes the way you 'show up' each day. Thirdly, they helped me accept feedback more constructively (which I've almost gotten good at). It's usually easier to accept feedback from a mentor you trust, than a peer or manager doing your performance review.

Mentorship is a process of inviting another trusted and experienced perspective on your thoughts and decisions. What diligent leader, or aspiring leader, wouldn't want that?

I support and get involved in mentoring programmes myself, including VWL's, but 'unstructured' mentoring is fine too. Don't be afraid to approach someone whose style and approach you admire and ask for mentoring.

### 3. Why is empathy and vulnerability important in leadership?

As the saying goes, people may not remember what you say, but they will remember how you made them feel.

Now more than ever, as we grapple with what work looks like post-pandemic, leaders need to put themselves into the shoes of the people they lead. When people feel there is respect for them and an appreciation of their unique circumstances, they're less likely to leave their role, particularly important in our current employee market. They're also more likely to work productively, giving back that extra discretionary effort.

Being empathetic not only helps you connect with and motivate people, but it helps you solve problems too. If we're constantly in advocacy mode - and let's be honest, lawyers can struggle with when to switch that off - then we can miss solutions which are found when we consider the problem from another's perspective or actively invite other perspectives in.

Vulnerability is the mindset that allows you to be empathetic. Being open with yourself and others about when you don't know the answer or didn't handle something well, isn't a sign of weakness but rather a way of building trust with people around you. It's an opportunity to learn and showing others your vulnerability permits them to do the same.

This stuff all sounds great on paper, but what if vulnerability and empathy is just not you? You've been conditioned not to show weakness or you feel uncomfortable when you don't know the answer. If vulnerability and empathy don't come naturally to you, don't worry, you can fake it till you make it. Learn simple techniques to make you look vulnerable and empathetic and soon you'll be doing it for real. You can learn these behaviours.

*Rebecca Radford, Lead Counsel, Victorian Government Solicitor's Office*



IMAGE: LIZ STUTE, *BIRD IN THE HAND FOX IN THE BUSH*

## SPONSOR



## JUSTITIA

### Leadership

Strong leadership requires trust. Leaders must both trust their people and their people must trust them. This sounds like an obvious statement, but too frequently, leadership is reliant on power, status and control. These leaders are followed out of fear, or an unquestioned acceptance of a firmly entrenched hierarchy. The problem with relying on this authoritarian style of leadership is that it builds a culture of fear and distrust, where the focus becomes individual gain and, often, survival. In contrast, a high-trust environment encourages collaboration, and provides security that allows people to take risks and innovate, to be their best and support those around them to be their best as well.

There's the old maxim that trust must be earned, that it takes time to build. This may be true where someone has had their trust broken, and their default becomes distrust unless they are proven otherwise. These individuals are often seeking predicative trust – the trust that comes through knowing and engaging with someone time and time again, so that you can predict their response and know them to be consistent and reliable. There is safety and security with this kind of trust.

Yet there are some leaders who give trust willingly, who can create relationships of trust after a handful of interactions. This trust is based on vulnerability and connection. It requires leaders to listen, understand, empathise and show that they too are fallible. In turn, this creates a culture where it is ok to admit you made a mistake, without fear of punishment or appearing weak, and where asking for help is encouraged. These cultures foster innovation and encourage diversity of thought.

It is heartening to see that leadership qualities such as vulnerability and empathy, both essential to high trust environments, are now recognised as desirable leadership skills. I recall female leaders I worked with earlier in my career who appeared to wear a carefully cultivated suit of armour for fear of being seen as "soft"; back then, vulnerability was considered by many to be antithetical to strong leadership. In those environments, any display of empathy was behind closed doors - it was in the best interests of all involved. Now, these traditionally "female" traits are increasingly sought after and celebrated in all leaders, irrespective of their gender. And while there are still many of the old guard firmly entrenched at the top, particularly in the legal profession, I am seeing the next generation of lawyers and leaders embrace empathy and vulnerability. They seek high-trust environments, where they can be their authentic selves and realise their full potential. And our industry is the better for it.

*Melissa Scadden, Managing Partner Justitia Lawyers*





## MADDOCKS

I have been fortunate to work at Maddocks since summer clerking with the firm and then joining the firm as a graduate, and my own leadership style has been shaped by some of the partners and other leaders I've worked with and learned from during that time. I'm now in many different leadership roles, firstly as a partner in the Employment, Safety & People team, as a member of the Executive team as Head of the national Employment, Litigation & Disputes team and as a graduate recruitment partner.

When I think about what leadership means to me, the word mentor immediately comes to mind. My role as a leader is to help the people I'm leading through mentoring and teaching. Being a good leader is demonstrating how to walk the walk and talk the talk by taking the time to show people how to do it, and not just provide the answers. As a female leader, I see being open and transparent about some of the challenges I've faced and how I've overcome them (as well as the opportunities I've embraced) is really important to role model to other women that they can get to positions of leadership, even if they have caring responsibilities or competing obligations outside of work.



IMAGE: ANDREA WILSON, NICOLA PAIN

In my day-to-day work with team members, peers and clients, I support other women by encouraging them to come up with their own solutions and ensure they understand that what works for me won't necessarily be the same tools they need to develop and progress. I've come to understand that it's not a one size fits all for how you make things work as a female leader with the competing demands you often have. I try to encourage them to find their own solutions to then develop the skills, expertise and relationships to move into leadership roles.

Imposter syndrome is something particularly unique to women and it's important that women are confident that they're supposed to be where they are, they are supposed to be in the room, they are supposed to have a seat at the table, and they are supposed to hold the leadership position or title they have. My observation over the years is that everyone has a different approach; while it might not be the same approach as what we saw in business 10 or 20 years ago, women bring diversity of thought and different perspectives to problem solving, innovation and wellbeing which are just as effective (and sometimes more effective) in leading to firm performance and success.

Leadership does mean making tough decisions. I take the time to think about things very carefully, ensure I have all the information I need but ultimately the most important thing is to actually make the decision, that's the key. We face tough decisions every day and leaders in particular do. The worst thing is to not make the decision by avoiding it or delaying it. Once the decision is made you need to communicate with clarity and empathy. I've had experience over many years that often the outcome is the best for all concerned and once I even had a person say thank you, 'thank you for saying that out loud as it's changed the way I was thinking about things.' To quote Brene Brown, 'Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind.'

*Lindy Richardson, Partner, Maddocks*



## LawArts

<i>Love &amp; Virtue</i> by Diana Reid .....	38	<i>The Yeild</i> by Tara June Winch .....	41
<i>Bodies of Light</i> by Jennifer Down .....	39	An All Time Favourite Recipe from Shannon Martinez .....	42
<i>The Mother Wound</i> by Amani Haydar .....	40	<i>Suffragette</i> by Sarah Gavron .....	44

IMAGE: VR MORRISON, *LAST FLIGHT FROM EDEN*

## LOVE & VIRTUE BY DIANA REID

### BOOK REVIEW BY ALANA MORGANTE

*'...there was also the world in my head and the world in his. And although we visited the same secret space, these were not, and never would be, the same.'*

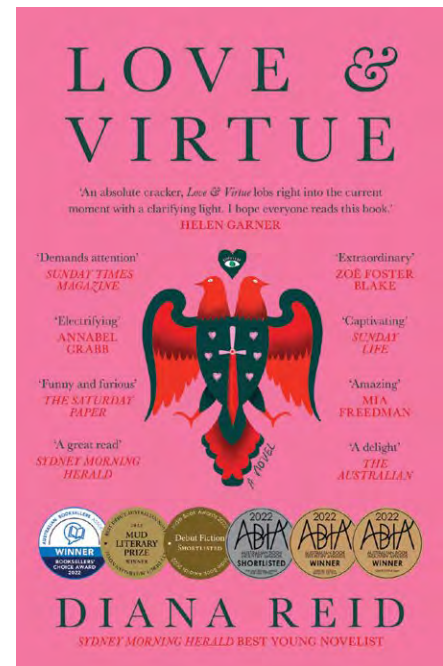
Diana Reid's debut novel *Love & Virtue* is utterly brilliant. Written with understated awareness and informed humour, this is a modern novel that explores the stark realities of rape culture within Australian universities.

The novel centres around Michaela and Eve, two intelligent, forward, young women who become friends when they attend the same prestigious residential college in Sydney. They navigate the college landscape, spending their time moving between challenging classes and cheap pubs. Michaela, who was from Canberra and new to Sydney, makes sharp observations of her college experience as she studies her undergraduate degree. Despite her constant academic successes, she feels that she must achieve acceptance by her peers to truly succeed at university.

The intellectual bubble in which Michaela and Eve exist is interrupted when an Orientation Week incident resurfaces, raising questions of morality that ripple throughout the university. This incident brings to light the stark contrast between the ways in which Michaela and Eve justify their own actions and how those actions affect both themselves and their peers. The novel refreshingly explores the blurred distinction between morality and goodness, and whether we do things for ourselves or for others, through the eyes of these two young, headstrong women.

What reads as a coming-of-age story has its foundations strewn with commentary on its underlying themes — privilege, education, societal class, intellectual class, feminism — from a new angle. The novel's main characters study philosophy, as did Reid herself, and Reid so naturally weaves this into the plot that the reader ends up engaged in extensive philosophical reflection.

Reid's writing is so easily digestible that I flew through this in a few days, but since reading this in January this year, I am still thinking about it. When friends ask me to recommend to them a book that is both easy to read but thought provoking, I almost shove *Love & Virtue* into their hands.





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## **BODIES OF LIGHT BY JENNIFER DOWN**

### **BOOK REVIEW BY GRETA MARKS**

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The well-deserved winner of the 2022 Miles Franklin Literary Award, and nominee of the Stella Award, *Bodies of Light* has cemented Jennifer Down as one of the greats.

After the success of her debut novel *Our Magic Hour* (aptly named after the big rainbow sign in Cremorne, visible from Punt Road just before crossing the river), Down's second novel is no less heartbreaking, and is even more brilliant and thought provoking.

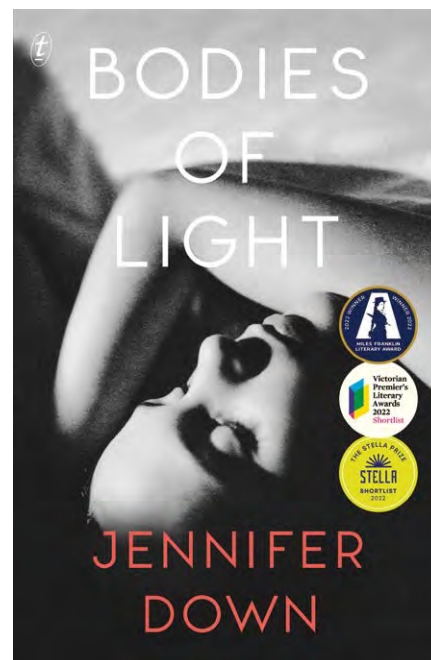
Suffice to say, any recommendation of this book should, at a minimum, come with loud trigger warnings for child sex abuse, death of babies, drug-use, rape, and domestic violence.

I had initially chosen *Bodies of Light* for my book group on the recommendation of the woman I trust the most at my local bookstore. I then read the book and realised what a wildly inappropriate choice it was, given one of the women in the group had recently had a baby. I messaged her, saying not to go anywhere near it for a while.

The story follows Maggie, from ages six to sixty, and redefines resilience and survival. *Bodies of Light* delicately balances trauma and tragedy without slipping into gratuitous exhibitionism. While it may seem the story is heavy-handed with the pain heaped on its protagonist, Maggie's start to life, paired with some horrible luck, makes the rest seem credible, and almost inevitable.

The reader is constantly challenged with the concept of how much a person can withstand in a lifetime, as Maggie reinvents herself over and over, despite falling again and again. Then again, it is far easier to shake your head in disbelief when you haven't had to survive it yourself.

Despite the themes she explores, Down's style is somehow warm and engaging, with Maggie recounting her story in a way that makes it impossible to look away. I was both desperate not to reach the end, and have to leave the book behind, but also to hear her tell me that it all works out okay in the end.



## THE MOTHER WOUND BY AMANI HAYDAR

### BOOK REVIEW BY ALANA MORGANTE

Amani Haydar was five months pregnant when her father killed her mother, Salwa, in an act of domestic violence. In her memoir *The Mother Wound*, Haydar reflects on the surrounding circumstances in an attempt to make sense of the incident that changed her life. Not only about her life after the incident, but her understanding of her life experience leading up to that point.

The book's opening prologue depicts Haydar giving birth to her first child in hospital. Her daughter is born, and in her post-delivery haze, Haydar is questioned by the midwife as to the whereabouts of her own mother. Haydar writes that, upon hearing this question, '[her] neck stiffened and [she] felt herself returning to [her] body.' Haydar simply tells the midwife that her mother was murdered four months earlier by her father. While Haydar's mother has been killed by her husband, Haydar is not afraid that she has just given birth to a daughter. Rather, she states 'I am so happy to have a daughter. I am from a family of strong women.'

Thus sets the book's tone; despite being pregnant with her first baby when her mother was murdered, Haydar is remarkably strong when it comes to motherhood. Haydar finds strength in motherhood, through her experience both as a daughter and as a mother, and seeks to share this through her memoir.

In addition to motherhood, *The Mother Wound* presents Haydar's ruminations on a variety of life-altering experiences and their connection to her mother's death. She explores the effects of intergenerational trauma through recounting the experience of her

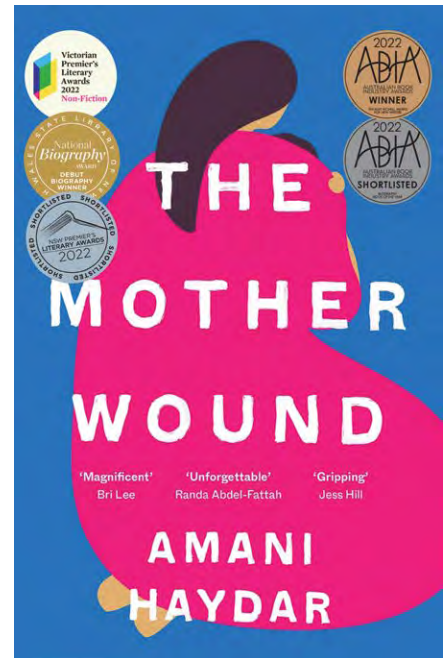
grandmother's death in the 2006 war in Lebanon. She studies her cultural identity and familial relationships, reflecting on the relationship between her parents – the product of an arranged marriage within the Lebanese community, Haydar's mother wedded Haydar's father who was 13 years her senior, and they were married for 28 years.

Haydar's account of witnessing, and giving evidence in her father's trial is harrowing. A lawyer by profession, Haydar understands the legal mechanics but feels helpless when it comes to ensuring that her mother's experience as a victim of domestic violence is accurately presented. As a result, Haydar extensively contemplates the shortcomings of the justice system in terms of family violence and domestic abuse.

While the reader learns Haydar's life story from the perspective of knowing about her mother's death, Haydar astutely communicates the feeling of shock following this incident, and the experience of re-analysing her life experiences in an attempt at identifying signs of what was to come.

While the subject matter is heavy, this book is a gripping and gratifying read, mainly due to the grace with which Haydar writes. The events underpinning the book are undisputedly tragic, but Haydar turns her tragedy into something empowering. She sets out to spread resilience among other survivors through sharing her story and her reflections.

*Amani Haydar is an award-winning writer, visual artist, lawyer and advocate for women's health and safety based in Western Sydney.*



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## THE YIELD BY TARA JUNE WINCH

### BOOK REVIEW BY AMY STAGG

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Tara June Winch, Wiradjuri author, invites readers to visit the remote town of massacre plains, home of the Gondiwindi people, to share a captivating tale of people versus progress.

It has been a while since I had picked up a book of any genre other than 'chick lit'. As a practicing family lawyer, fictional reading is a reprieve from the weight of the words I read on a daily basis. My book of choice is not usually a novel containing multiple languages, addressing important or political topics, or rooting into Australian history.

I am so glad that I took the time and care to read *'The Yield'*, to devour Winch's rich and detailed account of the lived experiences of the Australian indigenous peoples, and to immerse myself in the Wiradjuri language and culture from cover to cover.

The story is shared by protagonist, August Gondiwindi, a young woman returning to country for the first time in ten years; by August's beloved poppy, Albert Gondiwindi, through the careful examination of native words; and by the penmanship of Reverend Ferdinand Greenleaf, religious leader of the Prosperous Lutheran Mission, the land upon which the tale unfolds.

Winch's writing takes you to the heart of Massacre Plains, a fictional town on the Murrumbidgee River, where the Gondiwindi people lived long before Australia's colonisation. August and her family live on the land of what was once Prosperous Mission, and what is soon to become a commercial tin mine. August battles with the past, the present and the future of what the local council has in store for her people, all the while struggling with the loss of her sister, her poppy, her mother and all the Gondiwindi before her.

Once you have been transported to the banks of the Murrumbidgee, to the fields of Prosperous and the childhood experienced by August and her family, it is impossible not to become protective of sacred land and the Gondiwindi people. You are left with nothing but respect for the Massacre Plains community, their reverence for the land, the animals, the native plants and their elders.

Following his own experience of discrimination at the hands of power, Greenleaf poses a fundamental question that has stuck with me, that is, 'What right did I have to say one belief begets another? What right does any person? What has man done to man?'

*The Yield* implores you to look beyond yourself, your own story, and your own views and to consider that of another. This is a practice we can all afford to explore more often, particularly in our field of work.





## AN ALL TIME FAVOURITE RECIPE FROM SHANNON MARTINEZ



Shannon Martinez is well and truly underway in her mission to change the way the world perceives plant based dining and changing the way people eat. This time, it's coming from a different perspective. Being a meat eater gives this mega talented chef the capability to create unique tastes and textures unlike anything on the market today, ones that truly replicate meats, cheeses, and good old family recipes. Meat eating, paired with a lifetime of cooking experience (literally since she can remember), outside the box methods, and the willpower of a freight train, she will stop at nothing to try everything, and perfect her recipes until they're suitable to her own extremely high standards.

Armed with a strong hospitality network, and proven tenure in her industry with great success in plant-based dining, Shannon has a foundation for veg food to be taken seriously in some of Australia's most meat-driven kitchens, with some of Australia's most unconvinced carnivorous chefs.

Shannon has been cooking in kitchens for the past 22 years in Melbourne and is the Owner of Australia's two most prolific plant-based businesses, Smith & Daughters and Smith & Deli.

This has led to her becoming the author of best-selling books:

*Smith & Daughters: a cookbook (that happens to be vegan)*

*Smith & DELicious: Food From Our Deli (that happens to be vegan),*

*Vegan With Bite: Because Taste Matters*



### CHICKPEA, SILVERBEET & TORN PASTA BROTH

**Serves 4–6**

**3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**

**1 large brown onion, sliced**

**1 bulb fennel, cored and sliced,  
fronds reserved and chopped**

**3 large garlic cloves, minced**

**1 teaspoon chilli flakes**

**1 × 400 g (14 oz) tin chickpeas,  
drained and rinsed**

**1 bunch silverbeet (Swiss chard),  
stalks sliced, leaves shredded**

**250 g (9 oz) flat pasta  
(broken lasagne sheets work well)**

**1.5 litres (51 fl oz/6 cups)  
chicken or vegetable stock**

**Finely grated zest and juice of 1 lemon**

**1 handful chopped flat-leaf  
(Italian) parsley leaves**

**1 handful grated parmesan,  
plus extra to serve**

Heat the oil in large shallow saucepan over a medium heat, add the onion, fennel and a big pinch of salt and cook for a few minutes until they begin to soften and turn a light golden colour. Add the garlic and chilli flakes and cook for 1 minute. Add the chickpeas and silverbeet stalks, then reduce the heat to medium-low and cook for another 2 minutes. Toss through the silverbeet leaves and cook until they begin to wilt. Add the pasta and stock and bring to the boil. Season well, then reduce the heat to low and cook, covered, for 10 minutes. Remove the lid and stir through the lemon zest and juice and half the parsley. Cook uncovered for another minute or two to slightly reduce the liquid. Add a good handful of parmesan and stir through until melted. Add the fennel fronds and remaining parsley and check the seasoning. Ladle into bowls and serve garnished with plenty more parmesan.



IMAGE: SINEAD DAVIES, *GARETH JENNIFER AND OLIVIA WITH MR MANCHEGO CAT*



IMAGE: LORI PENSINI, *NOURISH*

## SUFFRAGETTE

### MOVIE REVIEW BY SKYE CODY

Directed by Sarah Gavron, 2015 film *Suffragette* examines the sacrifices of working-class women in their struggle to win the right to vote.

Featuring eminent actresses' Helena Bonham Carter, Meryl Streep, and Promising Young Woman (2021) lead Carey Mulligan, *Suffragette* is set in early 20th century London – a time when disillusionment with the government's apathy and lack of action prompts increasingly extreme and militant action by the suffragettes. In doing so, the women risk their jobs, their families, their

safety and their lives. The film predominantly focuses on the experience of working-class women, however also explores the manner in which women from a variety of backgrounds contribute to and support the suffrage movement.

Through the fictional protagonist, laundry-worker Maud Watts, viewers are exposed to the manifestations of legal and social inequality that dictated the course of 20th century women's lives. It is these inequalities that precipitate both abominable working conditions and vitriolic responses from men who regard themselves as emasculated by the

agency of the suffragettes. As the suffragettes are ostracised from their workplaces, families and society, the necessity is evidenced for the women to rely only on each other and their determination, and not institutions such as the government and police, which only serve as barriers to the equality sought.

Ultimately, and most importantly, *Suffragette* serves as a reminder that women's suffrage was not given, but won.



IMAGE: ZUZA ZOCHOWSKI, *I PROTESTED TODAY SELF PORTRAIT WITH STILL LIFE* 2021

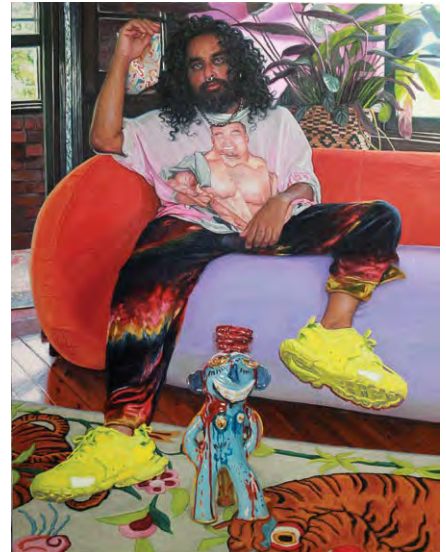


IMAGE: KIRTHANA SELVARAJ, RAMESH AND THE GUARDIAN





# COMMITTEES

Special report from the Sponsorship Officer .....	46	Outreach Committee .....	49
Special report from the Treasurer .....	47	Women in the Public Sector Committee .....	50
Diversity and Inclusion Committee .....	48	Publications Committee .....	50
Justice Committee .....	48	Law Reform Committee .....	51
Networking Committee .....	49	Work Practices Committee .....	52

IMAGE: TSERING HANNAFORD, JUSTICE KELLY

## SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORT FROM THE SPONSORSHIP OFFICER

BRONWYN MONTGOMERY

As Sponsorship Officer I would like to extend Victorian Women Lawyers' sincere thanks to our sponsors for their outstanding support in 2022.

VWL is grateful to its longstanding sponsors, Allens, Clayton Utz, College of Law, Coulter Legal, Foley's List, Justitia Lawyers and Consultants, K&L Gates, KHQ Lawyers, Maddocks, Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, MinterEllison, Nicholes Family Lawyers, and Svenson Barristers for their continued support of VWL. In addition, this year VWL welcomed several new sponsors; Brave Legal, Ethos Migration Lawyers, Stuart Family Lawyers and the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office which VWL is delighted to be working with.

VWL was able to host many more in person events for its members in 2022 than in the last two years, and its sponsors were as enthusiastic as ever when it came to bringing those events to life. In particular, VWL takes this opportunity to thank its sponsors for making the following events possible this year:

1. Allens for hosting the Emerging Technologies Innovation and Law event and the Cultural Diversity and the Law event.
2. Clayton Utz for hosting the Pathway to Leadership in the Legal Profession event.
3. College of Law for hosting the Professional Mentoring Program and Launch event, and the inaugural Expert Witness Examination Competition.
4. Coulter Legal for hosting the Confident Conversations: Pay and Promotions event.
5. Justitia for hosting the inaugural Law Firm Owners and Leaders Special Interest Group event.
6. K&L Gates for hosting the Law Student Mentoring Program and Launch event.
7. KHQ Lawyers for hosting the Tough Talks: How to Approach Difficult Clients and Tricky Conversations event.
8. Maddocks for hosting the 2022 Warren Moot and Launch event, and preliminary Moot rounds.

9. Maurice Blackburn for hosting the Return to Work Guide Launch event and partnering with VWL to hold the Empowering Women Book Launch.
10. Nicholes Family Lawyers for hosting the Multi-Disciplinary Approach to the Provision of Legal Services event.
11. The Victorian Government Solicitor's Office for hosting the Diverse Legal Career Pathways in the Public Sector and the Gender Equality Act 2020: Reflections on Implementation and Applying Intersectionality events.
12. Svenson Barristers for hosting the Networking Makes its Comeback and Women Barristers' Networking Lunch Series.

VWL would also like to thank the following event sponsors for their significant support:

1. Gatehouse Legal Recruitment, for sponsoring the Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon and our Members and Guests Evening.
2. Lex Medicus, for sponsoring the inaugural Expert Witness Examination Competition.

VWL could not have achieved what it has in 2022 without its engaged and committed sponsors. Each year, VWL's Executive and Committees work closely with sponsors and stakeholders to create events and projects which benefit women in the law. VWL's ability to provide excellent quality and value membership for its members and to benefit the broader community is thanks in large part to the financial and nonfinancial support it receives from its sponsors. VWL congratulates its sponsors on a successful 2022 and looks forward to what 2023 brings.

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# SPECIAL REPORT FROM THE TREASURER

LIZ COOPER

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## 2021-22 Update:

The 30 June 2022 financial year saw VWL record a deficit of \$7427.06, down from \$23,665.00 the previous year. This is a pleasing result which reflects the VWL executive committee to continue to provide quality online and in person events while reducing or removing altogether costs for member attendees. Function expenses were \$63,563.29 while function revenues were \$25,798.77. Overall member numbers stayed constant, and members were given a 10% discount in their membership fees as a recognition of the impact of COVID-19 on all. VWL also welcomed new associate sponsors which helped to offset those losses. When the accounts are viewed over the two prior years, VWL recorded a surplus of over \$15,000, which is excellent given those two years were impacted by the pandemic.

Interest income again reduced even though invested funds stayed constant, due to the extremely low rates on offer for invested funds, driven down by the underlying cash rate from the Reserve Bank, currently set at 0.1%, and having been at historically low levels throughout the last few years.

Seminar revenue was also lower as functions moved online and more events were offered free of charge to members and non-members. Function expenses were still incurred but did decrease (in line with revenues), and gifts were not purchased as seminars were held online. VWL's accounting fees remained constant and administration expenses increase compared to the prior year, reflecting the engagement of a bookkeeping service. Even so, administration costs were below those that were experienced in years when bookkeeping was performed in-house and office expenses have been halved, as most stationery costs are included in the bookkeeping fee.

As committees did not meet much throughout the year, and planning moved online, committee costs also dropped. Most other costs remained constant or increased in line with CPI, except for subscriptions (software subscription costs increased), website expenses (continuing improvements in VWL's website to manage our increased online presence) and increased publication expenses associated with *Portia*. There was a small brand expense, incurred developing VWL's 25th anniversary logo.

It is pleasing that VWL managed to continue to deliver relevant, useful and popular functions and seminars, during a difficult period.

## Focus areas for 2023

The 30 June 2023 financial year will see VWL's executive committee focus on reconnecting, in person, with Victoria's legal profession and expanding VWL's membership and sponsors.



IMAGE: SALLY RYAN, NATALIE TRAN



## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

STEPHANIE VEJAR & SHIVANI PILLAI

### Diversity and inclusion

The Diversity and Inclusion Committee champions the rights of, and promotes equality and opportunities for, lawyers who identify as:

- Culturally and linguistically diverse;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander;
- Having a disability; and/or
- LGBTQIA+.

Importantly, the above is a non-exhaustive list and we recognise that often, lawyers' intersectionality fit various of these categories.

### 2022 Achievements

In May 2022, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee launched the second virtual event of a two-part series - 'Women in the Law with Diverse Abilities', addressing the issues faced by women in the law who have a visible disability or illness. The event was proudly held in partnership with the Disabled Australian Lawyers Association (DALA).

In September 2022, the committee hosted 'Cultural Diversity and the Law' hosted by Allens who generously sponsored this event. Four women in the legal sector with backgrounds in academia and gender violence, the corporate sector, private practice and the Victorian Bar shared their personal journeys including cultural barriers faced, solutions to address unconscious biases and aspirations for the future of intersectional diversity in the law.

In early 2022, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee published a piece for the Law Institute of Victoria's monthly VWL Diversity column titled, 'According to merit? / Considering Intersectionality' authored by Stephanie Vejar, Co- Chair.

### Special mentions

We extend our sincere thanks to our panellists who contributed their personal insights, valuable time at the above events. We also thank our committee members who made these events possible: Elin Teo, Winning Wang and Andrea de Silva.

### Reflection

The Diversity and Inclusion Committee looks forward to 2023 and hosting events addressing the experiences of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women lawyers and those in the LGBTQIA+ community within the legal sector. We will continue to advocate, educate and contribute to creating a more inclusive legal sector.

## JUSTICE COMMITTEE

AMANDA EMONSON & ANITA NAIR

### Role

To bring attention to human rights issues that impact women by holding events and initiating projects to explore these issues.

### 2022 Achievements

In 2022 the Justice Committee was able to continue to be able to work alongside inspiring individuals to support and create actions to address human rights campaigns for women. In 2022 the committee ran and supported two events. The first event being the DPFC – Stop the Expansion Panel Discussion which looked at the correlation between public housing and the cycle of female incarceration. The second was the book launch of 'Empowering Women: From Murder and Misogyny to High Court Victory', written by Dr Susie Allanson and Lizzie O'Shea, which explores the establishment of safe access zones around abortion clinics in Victoria.

### Special mentions

We would like to thank our panellists and moderators whose passion for social justice continues to drive change and whose bravery to stand up for the rights of women provides inspiration and courage to fight for what we believe in. We would also like to give special thanks to our committee members for their commitment and understanding towards the various issues faced by females and female identifying persons and their willingness to advocate and facilitate for a better future where the impact of social justice issues is minimised, if not eliminated.

### Reflection

We are proud of the work done this past year and look forward to re-engaging in hands-on outreach and fundraising projects in 2023 to support social justice for women and gender diverse individuals. We will also continue to facilitate discussions with knowledgeable speakers on topics of importance to our members and the broader community.

## NETWORKING COMMITTEE

JYOTI HAIKERWAL & RHIANNON ZARRO

### Role

The Networking Committee's role is to create opportunities through which women in the legal profession, or who are about to enter the profession, can build strong professional relationships and connections in a supportive environment. We do this by hosting a number of interesting and engaging networking events and panel discussions throughout the year, which aim to highlight the value of forging and maintaining networks for one's career development.

### 2022 Achievements

The Networking Committee held its first in-person events since 2019 and we could not have been more excited! We kicked off the year with Networking Makes its Comeback where we had Emily Barnes, Founder and Mediator at Dewberry, and Anna Svenson, Director of Svenson Barristers, speak about building a brand and networking in this new post-COVID-19 world. We thank Emily and Anna for sharing their wisdom and insights with us.

We also held our annual Members and Guests event at Garden State where we had Penny Locaso, author of 'Hacking Happiness', contributor to the *Harvard Business Review* and a TedX speaker, speak about work life balance and what that means for each individual. It was a wonderful night with great atmosphere and new connections made. We thank Penny for speaking and sharing her thoughts about a topic which is so important.

### Special mentions

The Co-Chairs, Rhiannon and Jyoti would like to say a very big thank you to all of our wonderful Committee members. Their enthusiasm, imagination and hard-work was the reason that the events held by the Networking Committee were a huge success. We look forward to working with them again in 2023!

## OUTREACH COMMITTEE

ALANNA ATTARD & JACINTA LEAREY

### Role

The Outreach Committee aims to strengthen VWL's engagement with regional, suburban and other members with limited access or connection to Melbourne CBD or the profession, with a focus on enhancing VWL's online offering. The composition of the Outreach Committee is a representative model, comprising members of the profession from across Victoria and at various stages of their legal career.

### 2022 Achievements

We continued the Confident Conversations series in 2022, with the online event on 'Pay and Promotions' offering the more than 75 attendees practical advice and tips on preparing for performance reviews and negotiating pay rises, promotions and other work arrangements.

### Special mentions

We wish to thank our committee members for their time and support. We also wish to thank Nicole Davidson, Tess Aberline and Bonnie Phillips in helping deliver an important discussion on pay and promotions. We hope to bring more to you on this topic in 2023.

We also wish to acknowledge and thank the work of VWL's Executive and other committees in helping to further to aims of the Outreach Committee. As we moved towards a resumption of in-person events in 2022, there continued to be an offering of online and hybrid events to enable VWL members, regardless of their location and circumstances, to attend and remain involved.

## WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR COMMITTEE

AYAN HURUSEH & CATHERINE DENT

### Role

The Women in the Public Sector Committee's (WIPS) primary role is to promote women lawyers in the public sector by supporting career planning, facilitating networking opportunities within government, and fostering engagement on topical issues.

### 2022 Achievements

Following a structural revamp and changes to work settings, WIPS was thrilled to bring in-person and virtual opportunities to public sector lawyers to connect.

For the first time, WIPS was proud to partner with a Public Sector sponsor, the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office. We look forward to continuing this strong partnership.

We hosted three insightful events:

- *Networking in the Public Sector* with keynote Louise Glanville, CEO, Victoria Legal Aid;
- *Diverse Legal Career Pathways in the Public Sector* a panel event which included a keynote Kylie Kilgour, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission; and
- *Gender Equality Act 2020: Reflections on implementation and applying intersectionality* with panellists Entsar Hamid, Board Chair, Gender Equity Victoria, Dr Niki Vincent, Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner, and Ro Allen, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner

### Special mentions

Thanks to our dedicated committee members: Natalie Plumstead, Jessica Fitzgerald, Cassandra Tanner, Karly Banks, Stephanie D'Rozario, Mahi Joshi, Humaira Dad, Nicole Spicer and previous members.

### Reflection

We are inspired to continue to build on what has been a prosperous and fruitful year into the future.

## PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

GRETA MARKS & ANNALEISE VULIN

### Role

To coordinate, prepare and publish the annual journal for VWL – Portia, a memento by which VWL members and the wider community are able to enjoy.

### 2022 Achievements

The 2022 edition of Portia is vibrant and colourful. From the artworks throughout, thanks to the SH Ervin Gallery's Portia Geach Memorial Award, to the topical and thought-provoking feature articles written by the publications committee members. Our arts section is filled with interesting reads, podcasts and recipes. After nearly a 2 year hiatus in Victoria from COVID-19, VWL has been able to run 30 events this year and we are delighted to share some highlights of those moments.

### Special mentions

We are very proud of this year's content and must thank our committee members who have been so proactive and dedicated – Nancy Abdalla, Skye Cody, Liz Main, Alana Morgante, Andree Pianta, Shifa Shaikh and Amy Stagg. We would also like to thank the VWL President and Vice-President for their assistance.

### Reflection

The start of 2022 posed a question mark. Was it going to be another year of uncertainty or were we on an upward trajectory of new opportunities in a post COVID-19 world? Whilst the economical and political landscape around us remain uncertain, society could not be more certain about what they now want out of life. What we hope to demonstrate throughout Portia is that leadership can take many forms, through promotions at work, choosing yourself over anyone else, or fleeing from a place that was once home. Despite all setbacks, it is inspiring to see how society can bounce back and focus on the next chapter.



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# LAW REFORM COMMITTEE

STEPHANIE KOUMBARAKOS & DR ANDREA DE SILVA

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## Role

To work towards law reform and promoting the understanding and support of women's legal and human rights by preparing submissions, participating in and encouraging discussion in matters of interest to the legal profession.

## 2022 Achievements

The Law Reform Committee has had another successful year.

In 2022, the Committee prepared a number of submissions and articles including the following:

- A submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission on the proposed National Anti-Racism Framework;
- A submission to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet Review of the *Members of Parliament Staff (MOPS) Act 1984 (Cth)*;
- A response to the consultation draft on the National Principles to Address Coercive Control; and
- An article titled '*Addressing Workplace Inequality*' published in the September 2022 edition of the Law Institute Journal.

The Committee's 2020 submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence was cited in the following reports:

- In January 2022, the Victorian Inquiry into economic equity for Victorian women Final Report, Department of Treasury and Finance; and
- In December 2022, the Victorian Law Reform Commission: Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences: Supplementary Report on 'Grab and Drag' Conduct.

The Committee's submission to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet Review of the Members of Parliament Staff (MoPS) Act 1984 (Cth) was also cited in the final report from the Review of the MoP(S) Act released on 7 October 2022.

The Law Reform Committee submissions and publications are available on VWL's website.

## Special Mention

A special mention to our Committee Co-Chair, Dr Andrea de Silva, who is stepping down in 2022. We thank Andrea for her contribution to the success of the Committee and look forward to welcoming a new Co-Chair in 2023.

We would like to thank our Committee Members who have contributed their time to drafting submissions including Stephanie Koumbarakos, Dr Andrea de Silva, Quynh McGrath, Casey Guilmartin, Louisa Ashton, Sharlene Kuruppuarachchi, Sophie Lloyd, and Sophie Lefebvre.

## Reflection

In 2022 the Law Reform Committee members had an opportunity to reconnect in person, which seems unremarkable unless viewed in the context of the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. The Committee has welcomed new likeminded members in 2022. We look forward to another successful year of contributing to legislative change with a particular focus on women issues.

Please join us for an exciting year ahead.



IMAGE: HELLIE MAHONY, VIGNETTE

## WORK PRACTICES COMMITTEE

ISABELLA ARMAO & NINA MILNER

### Role

To examine the impact of employment practices on women lawyers, with a particular focus on flexibility, discrimination in the workplace, pay equity and transparency, parental leave policies, part time work, and the career progression of women lawyers, including into leadership positions.

### 2022 Achievements

With a return to in-person events, the Committee has worked hard to advance a number of key projects. We formally launched the 'Parental Leave in Practice: A "How To" Guide for Lawyers' with our sponsor Maurice Blackburn Lawyers. The launch of the Guide featured leading lawyers (and parents) from government, private practice and the judiciary who all provided their experiences and tips on juggling work life and being a parent. The Committee also launched the VWL's Professional Mentoring Program, sponsored by the College of Law and featuring our Program Patron the Hon. Associate Justice Ierodiaconou as well as hearing from a mentor and mentee from last year's program who reflected on the role that mentoring has played in their professional development and careers. The last event for 2022 was the 'Tough Talks' interactive event, where experienced members of the legal profession provided their perspective on having difficult conversations, including dealing with discourteous clients, asking for a pay increase or flexible working arrangements.

### Special Mentions

We would like to sincerely thank all the mentors who have participated in the 2022 VWL Professional Mentoring Program. We are incredibly grateful that people took the time to share their own experiences, insights and personal learnings. The relationship between a mentor and mentee can shape a junior lawyer's career, and in turn can be equally as rewarding and insightful for a mentor. We would also like to thank our supportive, thoughtful, and dedicated committee members who have significantly contributed to our projects and events this year, with the return of in-person events.

### Reflection

The Work Practices Committee acknowledges that this year has brought some normality back to the legal profession. However, women in the legal profession continue to face a myriad of challenges. This includes balancing home and work responsibilities with flexible work, sexual harassment issues, and as Associate Justice Ierodiaconou highlighted in her speech at the VWL's Professional Mentoring Program Launch, the gender pay gap in the legal profession. The Work Practices Committee aims to continue to develop projects that support women to successfully navigate the particular challenges faced by women.



IMAGE: MARGARET ACKLAND, SELF PORTRAIT THE YEAR MY MOTHER DIED



## Events

Parental Leave In Practice .....	54	Women in Law Doing Law Differently .....	61
Networking Makes Its Comeback .....	54	Diverse Legal Career Pathways in the Public Sector.....	61
Stop The Expansion Of The Dame Phylis Frost Centre.....	55	Warren Moot Launch.....	62
Dame Roma Memorial Lunch.....	55	Lesbia Hardford Oration .....	63
Members And Guests.....	56	Cultural Diversity And The Law .....	64
Emerging Technologies, Innovation And The Law .....	56	Pathways To Leadership In The Legal Profession.....	64
A Multi Disciplinary Approach To Resolving Family Violence .....	57	Gender Equality Act 2020: Reflections On Implementation And Applying Intersectionality....	65
Empowering Women Book Launch .....	57	The Funding Network .....	65
Diverse Abilities - Part 2 - Visible Disabilities.....	57	Law Firm Owners And Leaders Special Interest Group .....	66
Networking In The Public Sector.....	58	The Inaugural Expert Witness Examination Competition .....	66
Confident Conversations: Pay And Promotions .....	58	Fear(Less) You .....	67
Gender Equity: Flexible And Hybrid Work, Burnout And Harassment Panel.....	59	Tough Talks – Navigating Difficult Conversations In The Workplace.....	67
Student Mentoring Program And Launch.....	59	Warren Moot Grand Final .....	68
Conscious Leadership And The Law Workshop....	60	Women Barristers Networking Lunch Series .....	68
Professional Mentoring Program And Launch .....	60		

IMAGE: DEBORAH WALKER, WRITING I JUDITH



## PARENTAL LEAVE IN PRACTICE

### 6 APRIL 2022

On 6 April 2022, VWL's Work Practices Committee held a panel discussion which explored the challenges and experiences faced by parents going on, and returning from, parental leave. The event launched the incredibly practical 'Parental Leave in Practice. A 'How To' Guide for Lawyers' which can be accessed via VWL's website. The event was approached from an inclusive perspective, including by recognising that parents and carers can be of any gender or sexuality.

The discussion first covered preparing to take parental leave – including communication with work, giving notice, and navigating progression points. Next, the panel discussed what to do while taking leave, including adjusting the time away, flexible work, CPD requirements, 'keeping in touch' days, and promotions and career changes whilst on leave. The return to work section of the discussion considered flexible arrangements, feeding children, court and litigation, managing sleep deprivation, childcare, and career progression with young families. The importance of a non-birth parent or carer taking parental leave was also discussed. We are grateful to our panellists for generously sharing their personal experiences and advice across each of these topics.



VWL was grateful to the host and sponsor firm Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, the panellists Her Honour Judge Claire Quin, Jayne Parker, Catherine Brooks and Daniel Victory, along with the fantastic moderator, Natalie Campbell.

## NETWORKING MAKES ITS COMEBACK

### 7 APRIL 2022

On 7 April 2022, after two years in the making, the Victorian Women Lawyers' Networking Committee held its first in-person networking event for 2022, 'Networking Makes its Comeback'. And indeed, it did! This sold out event was quite a spectacle-upon arrival, 100 guests were greeted by 100 colourful balloons, which served as a game for guests to find others with the same coloured balloon. This was a fantastic way to get around the room, start conversations and get networking.

Guests were treated to delicious canapés, drinks, and were given pre-paid coffee cards from Rosso Espresso Bar, as a way to encourage them to meet up with their balloon buddies—or anyone else they want to network with—following the event. After a warm introduction from VWL Networking Committee Member Jessica Jacaj, the Keynote Speaker Emily Barnes, Founder of and Mediator at Dewberry, led an intimate conversation, first by telling her own story and encouraging attendees to build their own authentic brand, then by answering a whole manner of interesting questions from the guests. It was clear why Emily is known for her fearlessness, enthusiasm and honesty. The wonderful Anna Svenson, Director of Svenson Barristers, then joined Emily for an inspiring and educational Q&A session.



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## STOP THE EXPANSION OF THE DAME PHYLIS FROST CENTRE

### 20 APRIL 2022

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On 20 April 2022, VWL's Justice Committee hosted a free webinar which discussed how the incarceration system impacts women and the reasons why there should be support towards stopping the expansion of the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.

VWL was fortunate to be joined by a panel of speakers including Vicki Roach, Jill Prior, Sara Stilianos and Karen Fletcher, who shared their experiences and insights into our current prison system and its impact on women.

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## DAME ROMA MITCHELL MEMORIAL LUNCH

### 28 APRIL 2022

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On 28 April 2022, VWL and the Women Barristers Association held their annual Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Lunch, proudly sponsored by Gatehouse Legal Recruitment, which commemorates the inspirational Dame Roma Mitchell: the first Australian woman to be appointed as Queen's Counsel, a Supreme Court judge, chancellor of an Australian university and the State Governor of South Australia.

This year's lunch was attended by close to 400 people, making it VWL's largest event of the year. VWL's President, Stephanie Pasharis, opened the lunch with a biography of Dame Roma Mitchell and an overview of her remarkable legal career.

Guests then heard a discussion between Elizabeth Broderick AO, former Sex Discrimination Commissioner, and Michelle Cheng of the SBS, focusing on the topics of leadership and equality. Elizabeth spoke about the challenges

facing women lawyers in reaching and maintaining leadership roles, particularly for women of colour or women with a disability, her current role as United Nations Special Rapporteur, and her time as Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner.

Elizabeth noted that whilst we are making progress with gender equality, advocacy is still fundamental. In her view, globally, gender equality is at a crossroads, being tested in ways that it has not done. Fundamental human rights such as the right to live free from violence, and women's reproductive rights are not universal. She warned that unless we speak up, step up our advocacy, and take strong action on gender equality, we are at risk of regression.

Elizabeth also spoke about sexual harassment in the legal profession, noting that Australia has one of the prevalence rates of sexual harassment in the profession. Elizabeth acknowledged structural issues, such as power asymmetry, means that law is a high risk environment for harassment. Elizabeth acknowledged the recent shift in the environment of reporting, with more

women feeling empowered to speak, but cautioned law firms that if they are not hearing of reports of harassment, it does not mean that it is not happening within their organisation.

Elizabeth ended the luncheon with a discussion on self care. In her view, being well, both physically and mentally, is the ultimate act of empowerment and in some countries, the ultimate act of defiance. Elizabeth warned that if we do not prioritise self care and look after ourselves, we will not be effective in creating a future we want to see for everyone.

Further pictures from this event are on page 69.



## MEMBERS & GUESTS

### 5 MAY 2022

On 5 May 2022, VWL hosted their popular Members and Guests event, where VWL members brought themselves and a guest (non VWL member) to network and form lasting connections in the legal industry, while also being introduced to VWL as an organisation.

Members and Guests has always been a popular annual event; however, this one was particularly special due to a 2 year COVID-19 postponement. In fact, the VWL networking committee originally toured and chose the venue in early 2020! After such a long period of exclusively virtual networking opportunities, it was a welcome delight to speak to members and their guests in an in-person capacity, with a complimentary drink on arrival and delicious canapés

to accompany the conversations. Rhiannon Zarro introduced the night's speaker, Penny Locaso, who is the author of 'Hacking Happiness', contributor to the Harvard Business Review and a TedX speaker. She spoke on the topic 'The busy shall inherit the future but the intentionally adaptable will shape it' and encouraged attendees to reject busyness for busyness's sake, and to instead step out and change their circumstances to create an adaptable schedule and work life that serves them. As so many of us are starting to return to the office and re-evaluate our working situations, this was a welcome reminder and was very well-received by the attendees. Thank you to all who attended the event. A huge thank you also to the VWL networking committee for organising this event and to Gatehouse Legal Recruitment for being an incredible sponsor.



## EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, INNOVATION AND THE LAW

### 10 MAY 2022

VWL and the Digital Law Association held a panel discussion on emerging technologies, innovation and the law.

The panellists were some of Australia's brightest legal and entrepreneurial minds in this space being Joni Pirovich, Principal Blockchain & Digital Assets Pty Ltd, Samira Tollo, Chief Technology Officer and Co-Founder of Elbaite, and Elyse Adams, Partner, at Allens in the Technology and Data practice.

The speakers discussed the many interesting legal and ethical issues surrounding emerging technologies, including blockchain, and whether the law can play catch up with the rapid developments in this space. They also shared their personal experiences around the challenges and opportunities of working as technology lawyers and entrepreneurs.

Thank you to Oriana Torcasio for organising and moderating the panel, and to Allens who sponsored this event.





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## A MULTI DISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO RESOLVING FAMILY VIOLENCE

### 17 MAY 2022

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On 17 May 2022, As part of law week, VWL and Nicholes Family Lawyers hosted a webinar on how psychological and legal service providers can work together to respond to family violence.

VWL would like to thank moderator and Managing Partner, Sally Nicholes of Nicholes Family Lawyers for leading the discussion and Helen Matthews, Acting CEO of Women's Legal Service Victoria, Jane O'Hanlon, Support Worker at Women's Information and Referral Exchange, Julie Borninkhof, CEO of PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression

Australia) and Emma Morgan, Manager of Strategic Projects and Engagement at Safe and Equal for Attending.

Thank you to Nicholes Family Lawyers for sponsoring this event.

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## EMPOWERING WOMEN BOOK LAUNCH

### 23 MAY 2022

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On Monday, 23 May 2022 VWL partnered with Maurice Blackburn to launch *Empowering Women: From Murder and Misogyny to High Court Victory*.

The book is an inspiring story of activism in action and how the death of one man, security guard Steve Rogers, helped change the future of women's rights in Australia, ultimately leading to the decriminalisation of abortion and introduction to safe access zones throughout Australia.

Jen Kanis of Maurice Blackburn hosted a panel with authors Dr Susie Allanson, Lizzie O'Shea and Fiona Patten MP,

who championed the introduction of safe access zones. The panel discussed the campaign and the landmark High Court decision regarding Australian women's entitlement to reproductive autonomy.

VWL also provided copies of the book to VWL members as part of our International Women's Day book giveaway in March 2022.

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## DIVERSE ABILITIES – PART 2 – VISIBLE DISABILITIES

### 25 MAY 2022

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This was the second part of a two part series, focusing on both physical and invisible illnesses or disabilities and the experiences of disabled women in law via an online panel discussion.

Attendees heard from a panel of women lawyers who have visible disabilities and their experiences in the legal profession. The event was held in partnership with the Disabled Australian Lawyers Association (DALA). The panel consisted of co-founders of DALA, Natalie Wade, Abbey Dalton and ASIC lawyer Rebecca Wong. Each panellist discussed their

personal experiences and achievements in working in law, and the greater need for presentation and inclusion of disabled people in the legal profession. The panellists further discussed how universal design must be reviewed to be able to create an accessible and efficient profession for all.

## NETWORKING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

### 26 MAY 2022

On 26 May 2022, the Women in the Public Sector Committee hosted a virtual Networking in the Public Sector event for current and aspiring government lawyers.

The event began with an inspiring and thought-provoking keynote address delivered by Louise Glanville, Chief Executive Officer of Victoria Legal Aid. Themes of the discussion included career opportunities, leadership and women in the law. Louise spoke of the links between using legal practice to inform policy development, reform and strategic litigation. Louise also explored our roles in the legal assistance sector and the justice system more broadly.

Guests then broke out into smaller breakout rooms on Zoom, where hosts from Committee facilitated an ice-breaker activities and discussions about working in the public sector. We rotated the breakout rooms for more conversations and greater connection.

Through sharing reflections on work as a government lawyer and meeting new peers and connections, guests left with greater insights, reflections and ambitions in working as a government lawyer or in the public sector.

## CONFIDENT CONVERSATIONS: PAY & PROMOTIONS

### 27 JUNE 2022

The Outreach Committee continued the Confident Conversations series in 2022 with an online event about all things pay, promotions and performance reviews on 27 June 2022.

The Confident Conversations events are aimed at providing practical advice and building confidence to support empowered decision making and career development.

Bonnie Phillips from Coulter Legal facilitated the discussion and was joined by speakers:

- Nicole Davidson from Nicole Davidson Negotiation, a negotiation specialist and commercial mediator; and
- Tess Aberline from Coulter Legal, a senior lawyer and project coordinator.

The panel discussed the context of their conversation – the gender pay gap and the lack of career progression opportunities for women – and the need for leaders to recognise and help remove the barriers for women. Nicole provided advice on negotiating work arrangements and preparing for a performance review, including discussing how to add value and common mistakes. Tess provided honest insights from her own career experiences and tips that she learnt along the way. Nicole, with the assistance of Tess, also conducted a model pay negotiation for attendees.

This event was sponsored by Coulter Legal.

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## GENDER EQUITY: FLEXIBLE AND HYBRID WORK, BURNOUT AND HARASSMENT PANEL

### 28 JUNE 2022

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On 28 June 2022, VWL in partnership with Industrial Relations Society Victoria (IRSV) and the Law Institute of Victoria's (LIV) Workplace Relations Committee held a panel discussion about flexible and hybrid work, burnout and harassment, with focus on general equality.

Former Fair Work Ombudsman, Partner at Deloitte and newly appointed secretary of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Natalie James was a panellist, together with VWL's Vice President, Sophie Lefebvre, Virginia Willis from IRSV and Allana Smith from the LIV also contributed. Natalie discussed Deloitte and Swinburne Edge's recently released report "Reset, Restore and Reframe - Making Fair Work FlexWork", and the impact of flexible and hybrid work on women. The panel then had the opportunity to ask Natalie questions about the report's findings.



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## LAW STUDENT MENTORING PROGRAM

### 18 JULY 2022

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This year, VWL, in collaboration with Women Barristers Association, ran the Law Student Mentoring Program for its 15th year running, matching a total of 180 mentees and mentors. The program provides women law students with the opportunity to gain insight into working in the law, develop valuable networks and share ideas with mentors in the legal profession.

To launch the program, sponsor firm K&L Gates hosted a mentoring workshop on 18 July which focused on building and maintaining effective and motivating mentoring relationships. The discussions were facilitated by K&L Gates' Clare Monger (Associate Director of Human Resources) and Carla Di Vincenzo (Human Resources Manager), who drew on their joint experience working with lawyers at all career stages and shared unique techniques based on neuroscience, philosophy and motivational behaviour.

Mentees and mentors alike left the session with valuable structured mentoring plans and an increased understanding on how to drive action and build fruitful mentoring relationships. VWL thanks K&L Gates for their ongoing support and sponsorship of the Law Student Mentoring Program.



## CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP AND THE LAW WORKSHOP

### 21 JULY 2022

VWL's Conscious Leadership & the Law Workshop took place on 21 July 2022.

The workshop was presented by conscious leadership coach and consultant, Artemis Evangelidi (Founder – Aipeia Consulting), and explored the

theory and practice of conscious leadership. The workshop also provided tools and practice for emerging conscious leaders in the law seeking to increase their connection, self-awareness, personal accountability and responsibility as leaders in the profession.

Thank you to Artemis Evangelidi and Clarence – Workplaces for Professionals for hosting this event.

## PROFESSIONAL MENTORING PROGRAM AND LAUNCH

### 29 JULY 2022

On 29 July 2022, the College of Law hosted the launch of the 2022 VWL Professional Mentoring Program. The 2022 program matched 68 mentees and mentors.

The program was launched by the Honourable Associate Justice Ierodionou who gave an insightful speech on the value of being a mentee and having a mentor. The Honourable Associate Justice Ierodionou has courteously consented to her speech being published in this year's edition of Portia.





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## WOMEN IN LAW DOING LAW DIFFERENTLY

### 24 AUGUST 2022

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On 24 August 2022, Victorian Women Lawyers held our Women in the Law Doing Law Differently panel discussion and networking event.

In a panel discussion moderated by Sounita Viravout, we heard from four women leaders in law who have founded and designed their own NewLaw practices - Laura Vickers, Dr Maree Livermore, Fiona Bowd and Marianne Marchesi. They are legal innovators and disrupters in law, who have dared to do law outside the traditional model, transforming the delivery of legal services and the legal industry and by doing so they have paved the way for many other lawyers to also do law differently.

Our panellists spoke openly and candidly while sharing their experiences and insights into doing law differently helping people to be aware and understand other ways to do law in order to have a career in law that is more sustainable. It was incredible to hear the panellists discuss why they are doing law differently, the importance of doing so whilst also sharing the challenges.

Here is what our members said about this event:

*'The panel members were very generous with their thoughts, opinions and tips which was refreshing and enlightening.'*

*'I love this event format with women being honest about 'experiences.'*



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## DIVERSE LEGAL CAREER PATHWAYS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

### 31 AUGUST 2022

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VWL and VGSO co-hosted a breakfast panel highlighting the Diverse Legal Career Pathways in the Public Sector.

Guests heard from our keynote speaker Kylie Kilgour, (Deputy Commissioner, Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission). She outlined that career opportunities open up when you are known as someone who is willing to give anything a go.

Our excellent panellists discussed their varied careers on the way into law, including Natalie Plumstead (Managing Principal Solicitor, Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions) discussing her role as a former architect.

Natalie spoke about 'finding your north star' and knowing what 'makes you sing' to determine whether certain opportunities or career choices are right for you. Humaira (Maira) Dad (Legal Counsel, Western Health) discussed the challenges of building a network upon graduating and the tenacity required to seek out opportunities and mentors to guide you throughout your career. Pip Mitchell (Partner, Public Law, Clayton Utz) spoke of seeking out growth and the joy of working with people who really love the law.

All of our panellists agreed that mentors have been fundamental in helping shape their careers, and that they all find job satisfaction in working for government

clients and contributing to work which impacts peoples' lives.

We're very grateful to our speakers, VGSO and our VWL's Women in the Public Sector committee for making it happen!



## WARREN MOOT LAUNCH

### 1 SEPTEMBER 2022

The Warren Moot is a landmark event in VWL's calendar, which attracts a diverse cohort of participants, ranging from law students to senior members of the legal profession. The Warren Moot provides participants with an opportunity to test their advocacy skills and engage directly with respected barristers and members of the Judiciary, with a view to providing solicitors with an insight into a career at the Bar.

The 2022 Moot was launched by the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Honourable Marilyn Warren AC KC, the President of the Court of Appeal of the Supreme Court of Victoria, Justice Emerton and Justice Rofe of the Federal Court of Australia. Their Honours engaged in a candid panel discussion of their experiences as advocates and judicial officers. Guests walked away with some practical tips and encouraging stories from leaders in the profession.

VWL would like to thank Maddocks' Anna Scannell for her opening remarks and to Maddocks for their ongoing support of the Warren Moot, including hosting the preliminary Moot rounds. VWL would also like to thank the members of the judiciary who kindly volunteered to adjudicate the 2022 Warren Moot.





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## LESBIA HARFORD ORATION

### 8 SEPTEMBER 2022

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On Thursday, 8 September 2022, VWL was pleased to hold its biennial Lesbia Harford Oration, which honours its namesake with a presentation by an eminent speaker on issues of importance to women.

Lesbia was a champion of workers' rights and a pioneer of women in the legal profession. Lesbia wrote volumes of poetry, much of which articulated her concerns with the oppression of women and sexuality. The oration gives a platform to our contemporaries who, like Lesbia, are contributing to our social fabric through their research, activism, questioning and their hard work in putting issues of equality on the agenda.

Held at the stunning State Library of Victoria, the speaker for this year's Oration was Antoinette Lattouf – media personality, diversity advocate, author and mum of two girls.

Antoinette is a multi-award-winning journalist and is the co-founder of Media Diversity Australia, having worked across numerous media platforms.

Antoinette spoke candidly about her own immigrant journey and her tapestry of experiences which culminated into the publication of her first book, 'How to Lose Friends and Influence White People'.

The audience was challenged to think practically about issues of diversity and inclusion, and the policies and practices currently in place, which can at times feel tokenistic, and amplify feelings of exclusion and marginalisation.

We were also provided with tips on how to have the difficult conversations with those around us, and what true allyship looks like.

It was truly an inspirational morning to hear from a fierce changemaker, who isn't afraid to be her true authentic self, and who uses her voice and platform to amplify conversations regarding intersectional diversity, inclusion and equity.

VWL thanks Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Perry Wandin who performed a Welcome to Country sharing with attendees his reflections on strong women of the Kulin Nation.

## CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION

### 27 SEPTEMBER 2022

The panel was sponsored by Allens and moderated by Stephanie Vejar, co-chair of the Diversity and Inclusion committee and included the following panellists:

- Molina Asthana – Principal of Swarup Asthana Lawyers and Business Advisors and Vice President of LIV

- Rabea Khan – Barrister, previously solicitor and senior solicitor at the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (NSW)
- Akuch Anyieth – PhD Candidate in crime, justice and legal studies. Akuch is also the author of her memoir, 'Unknown' a story of her migration to Australia.
- Monisha Saqueria Partner at Sponsor Firm Allens in the Disputes and Investigations teams.

The panellists offered their insights and experiences of being culturally diverse women in the legal profession and the barriers they initially faced. The event also included a discussion on strategies and practical steps and changes that have positively impacted culturally diverse women in the law. The event sought to reflect on the progress made within the legal profession regarding cultural diversity and the intersectionality of women in law.



## PATHWAYS TO LEADERSHIP IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

### 4 OCTOBER 2022

On Tuesday, 4 October 2022, VWL, in line with its theme for the year, held an event focusing on leadership.

Panellists Lucy Terracall (Partner, Clayton Utz), Sara Dennis (Assistant Victorian Government Solicitor, Victorian Government Solicitor's Office) and Geoffrey Still (Director, Innovative Knowledge Development) spoke about their pathways to leadership and what lawyers can expect when transitioning to the next level of their careers. The panel was moderated by VWL President, Stephanie Pasharis.

Lucy and Sara spoke about building a 'business case' to support your progression to leadership, as well as business development and 'winning work'. Geoffrey emphasised the importance of taking ownership of your career, fighting your 'inner critic' and the benefit of developing your leadership skills through training. The panel recognised that generally, women are not as forthcoming to speak about their strengths, and when presented with leadership opportunities, or are acknowledged for their excellent work, either say that they were 'just lucky' or praise the hard work of their team, and downplay their own contribution. Guests also had an opportunity to ask questions to the panel, and network after the event.

VWL thanks Clayton Utz for sponsoring the panel discussion.





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## GENDER EQUALITY ACT 2020: REFLECTIONS ON IMPLEMENTATION & APPLYING INTERSECTIONALITY

### 6 OCTOBER 2022

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The Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO) and Victorian Women Lawyers (VWL) were pleased to together host a night of networking and thought-provoking discussion on gender equality in the public sector at the 'Gender Equality Act 2020: Reflections on implementation and applying intersectionality' panel event on Thursday 6 October 2022.

To open the evening, we heard from Ayan Huruseh, Co-Chair of the Women in the Public Sector Committee at Victorian Women Lawyers and Matthew Hocking, Victorian Government Solicitor about the excellent partnership between the VWL and VGSO working in collaboration for our shared values.

We heard from our esteemed panel Gender Equality in the Public Sector Commissioner, Dr Niki Vincent (she/her), Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commissioner Ro Allen (they/them) and Entsar Hamid (she/her), Board Chair, Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC), facilitated by Sara Dennis, Assistant Victorian Government Solicitor.

The panel discussed the development of the *Gender Equality Act 2020* (Vic) (Act), implementing the Act in practice, how the Act might drive change in the workplace and wider community, and challenges in achieving gender equality.

Throughout the discussion, the panel focused on intersectionality in recognition of the fact that gender inequality may often be compounded by other forms of disadvantage or discrimination experienced due to other characteristics.

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## THE FUNDING NETWORK

### 11 OCTOBER 2022

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On 11 October 2022, VWL partnered with The Funding Network to promote funding for the Prison Network – a network that supports women and their families in Victorian Prisons, HerSpace – an organisation that offers free wellbeing and mental health recovery services to women survivors of modern slavery in Australia, and the Fitzroy Learning Network – an organisation working to reduce inequality and promote social cohesion in their local community.

As a result of the funding raised via individual pledges:

- 30 women that have experienced different forms of modern slavery will be supported through wellbeing and mental health recovery services
- 500 hours of employment will be provided to women from ethnic and migrant backgrounds
- 7 women exiting prison will be provided ongoing support to find and sustain suitable employment.

## LAW FIRM OWNERS AND LEADERS SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

### 13 OCTOBER 2022

Victorian Women Lawyers and Justitia Lawyers and Consultants, held the inaugural meeting for our Special Interest Group for Law firm owners and leaders in October 2022.

The Special Interest Group is a unique offering for our members and we are delighted to work with Justitia Lawyers and Consultants to provide a forum for Principal level lawyers and business owners in the law to discuss the challenges and successes faced by members in the group, to celebrate wins, share ideas and make recommendations or to just feel connected and supported.

The Principal level lawyers and business owners in the group come from all different backgrounds with varying years of experience in law and in business. Some have recently started out as a law firm or business owner or elevated to the Principal/Partner level, some are thinking of scaling and others are planning for the next successors.

VWL looks forward to working with Justitia Lawyers and Consultants in developing the group and holding future meetings in 2023.

## THE INAUGURAL EXPERT WITNESS EXAMINATION COMPETITION

### 18 OCTOBER 2022

VWL launched its inaugural Expert Witness Examination Competition on Tuesday, 18 October 2022. Four teams participated in the competition, and were faced with a 'slip and trip' negligence scenario. Real-life orthopaedic surgeons took the stand as witnesses, and the teams examined them on a mock expert report kindly provided to us by Lex Medicus. The competition was adjudicated by the Honourable Judge Carlin and the Honourable Judge Riddell of the County Court, who also provided the teams with invaluable feedback regarding their advocacy.

The teams conducted stellar examinations-in-chiefs and cross-examinations of the expert witnesses, asking them about their credentials, and about intricacies of the report they "prepared". VWL congratulates competition winners, Zoe Lineham & Alana Ticchi, Lawyers at Clayton Utz.

VWL sincerely thanks Lex Medicus for connecting us with our fantastic expert witnesses - orthopedic surgeons Mr Stephen Doig and Dr Nathan Donovan - as well as providing us with a sample expert report to use in the competition. Thank you also to The College of Law for hosting the competition at their Melbourne office.



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## FEAR(LESS) YOU MASTERCLASS

### 25 OCTOBER 2022

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VWL was thrilled to welcome back Penny Locaso from our Members and Guests Evening in April 2022, who joined us again, hosting a masterclass and interactive workshop.

The workshop inspired and equipped women in law to use fear to create the change they seek in work and life, focusing on creating an action plan, improving confidence, creating a set of tools to tackle fear, clarity, a new positive language and deeper level of trust.



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## TOUGH TALKS – NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

### 10 NOVEMBER 2022

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In collaboration with KHQ Lawyers, VWL's Work Practices Committee presented the Tough Talks event. The event discussed occasions when practitioners found themselves navigating difficult conversations; from communicating with discourteous client, negotiating a pay increase, to addressing workplace bullying, and disclosing a mistake to the employer.

The event was moderated by Danielle Pastoors, an Acting Senior Sergeant and practicing solicitor with Victoria Police, and featured four panellists: Rutendo Muchinguri, Barrister, Elsie Loh, Co-General Counsel of the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), Gemma Carroll, Senior Associate in the Workplace Relations and Safety team at KHQ Lawyers and Menoz Bowler, Accredited Specialist in Criminal Law.

Over 50 people registered their attendance and engaged in an interactive workshop, drawing on the experience and problem-solving expertise of the panellists.

Hearing the stories and reflecting on the experience of more senior practitioners gave confidence to the more junior members to know their options when addressing a workplace issue.



## WARREN MOOT GRAND FINAL

### 21 NOVEMBER 2022

The Grand Final of the 2022 Warren Moot was able to return to the Banco Court of the Supreme Court of Victoria in 2022 after two years of online competition.

At time of printing the finalists have been named as:

- VGSO Graduates, Darcy Powell, Shenpaha Ganesan, Evangelia Diamantopoulos and Vanessa Wilson (for the Applicant); and

- Catherine Zhou, Mary Nguyen VanderLinden, Wei Wen Phang and Felicia Leong (for the Respondent)

VWL wishes the finalists the best of luck as they appear before the Honourable former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Marilyn Warren AC KC.

## WOMEN BARRISTERS NETWORKING LUNCH SERIES

VWL, the WBA and Svenson Barristers were thrilled to resume the Women Barristers Networking Lunch Series after two years of lockdown restrictions.

The objective of the VWL and WBA Networking Lunch Series is to provide women barristers with the opportunity to meet and network with senior solicitors with briefing power in their relevant practice area. It provides a forum for women barristers to promote their skills and highlight their capabilities, with a view to building relationships with solicitors who may brief them in the future.

The first lunch on 10 May 2022 saw 15 senior solicitors with briefing power, and 15 women barristers practising in commercial law speak about current trends in commercial law and the briefing of women barristers in Victoria. The discussion was moderated by Alison Umbers, with opening remarks provided by Her Honour Justice Catherine Button.

The second lunch held on 3 August 2022 focused on connecting senior family law solicitors with junior family law barristers. Guests were thrilled to hear from Her Honour Alison Burt, at the commencement of the lunch with introductory remarks on Her Honour's career path, tips on making appearances and the challenges that women face at the bar. Sounita Viravout, Principal and Founder at Onside Family Lawyers, moderated the lunch which allowed an honest and candid conversation between barristers and solicitors.

The final lunch of the series held on 12 October 2022 focused on connecting senior solicitors with junior barristers whose practice areas are primarily property law, building and construction.

The session was opened by her Honour Judge Burchell, who shared updates with attendees regarding County Court pilot programs, the Building List Practice Note, and how the County Court and VCAT are adjusting as we move away from Covid restrictions.

VWL's Vice President, Sophie Lefebvre, facilitated an honest and candid conversation over the lunch which touched on topics such as; challenges flowing from a backlog of cases before the court, the merits and problems of online appearances as well as equitable briefing practices.





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## ADDITIONAL PHOTOS FROM DAME ROMA MITCHELL MEMORIAL LAUNCH

28 APRIL 2022

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IMAGE: ALEX THORBY, *BESTIES*

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