

An oil painting of a woman in Victorian-era clothing lying on a striped pillow with a red blanket. The woman is wearing a light pink short-sleeved blouse with a large white lace collar and matching lace cuffs. A vibrant green scarf is draped around her neck. She is also wearing a blue skirt with a black leopard print pattern. Her hair is dark and styled with a pink and orange headband. She is looking upwards with a serene expression. The background consists of a pillow with bold red, blue, and white stripes, and a bright red blanket is visible at the bottom.

Portia

2023

*The Annual Journal and Report
of Victorian Women Lawyers*

About this edition of Portia

The 2023 theme for Portia is 'community', mirroring the theme of VWL in 2023. As members of a diverse and brilliant legal community, we unite and support one another amongst obligations, challenges, triumphs and goals. In this edition, we seek to explore, showcase, and celebrate a range of communities, however defined.

This edition features an important, vulnerable, and generous piece by Holly Harris, an account of her experience as both a law student and complainant in an alleged sexual assault case, and how it has evolved the way she views the law. This year's other features take on the theme of community and consider what it means in different contexts, including an interview with Ms Julie Dodds-Streton KC and Ms Amber Harris of Counsel who drafted the Judicial Conduct Guideline on Sexual Harassment; everything you wish you knew about making the move to the Bar; and articles exploring how online communities have changed the world and how we interact with it, and how networking through non-professional communities can impact your career.

In our Arts section, we celebrate the women in the arts including a number of books written by woman authors, such as *How Many More Women* by two acclaimed human rights lawyers, Jennifer Robinson and Keina Yoshida, and a review of the contemporary reimagining of the timeless tragic play 'Romeo and Juliet', '& Juliet'. Complementing Holly Harris' article, we also have a review of Suzie Millar's play 'Prima Facie'.

Portia also serves a record and report on the activities of 2023 and celebrates the many popular events and impactful projects run by VWL, including the Ninth annual Warren Moot, the Law Student and Professional Mentoring Programs, Managing and Preventing Vicarious Trauma in Law and Managing Difficult Conversations in the workplace and more.

As always, we extend our gratitude to the talented artists who are the finalist portraits of the 2023 Portia Geach Memorial Award, Australia's most prestigious portraiture award for woman artists. Our front cover features striking portrait by Suzanne Lawson, and the stunning works of other finalists fill the following pages. You can read more about the Portia Geach Memorial Award on page 6.

Note: This year's edition contains material that relates to sexual harassment or assault and may be upsetting to readers. If you or anyone you know is a victim of sexual assault, professional support is available at:

National Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Helpline – provides confidential information counselling and support service. Phone: 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)

Beyond Blue – Counsellor Service 1300 22 4636

Editors and Co-Chairs of the Publications Committee

Annaleise Vulin and Greta Marks

Publications Committee

We are endlessly appreciative of our wonderful committee members who have all contributed to this edition of Portia. Thank you to Alana Morgante, Amy Stagg, Andree Pianta, Lilli Rand, Liz Main, Nancy Abdalla, Shifa Shaikh, Skye Cody, and Rachel Matulis for contributing an article alongside her role as a committee co-chair in VWL. We are so proud of your efforts, and how this edition has come together.

Victorian Women Lawyers Executive Committee 2023

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- Joanna Abraham, Vice President
- Stephanie Pasharis, Immediate Past President
- Elizabeth Cooper, Treasurer
- Linda Hart, Secretary
- Roxanne Talyor & Alexandra Liodvigova, Communications Officers
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- Stephanie Vejar, Special Projects Officer
- Megan Lawton, Community and Member Engagement Officer

Front cover image

Suzanne Lawson

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Footnotes available upon request

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Message from the President

I have left writing this “President’s Message” to the last moment. A classic procrastination move for when a task feels so overwhelming it seems impossible to begin.

This overwhelm comes not from the enormity of the task but from the magnitude of my feelings about Victorian Women Lawyers (VWL) and all we have achieved this year.



AUTHOR
Sophie Lefebvre

One of the presidential perks of VWL is the opportunity to choose a theme for the year a focus point that all events, projects and publications will reflect. In reflecting on all that VWL meant to me; connections, a sense of belonging and a network of peers the theme became clear - “community”.

In these pages you will see a record of the matters of interest, events and achievements that shaped our community this year. It amazes many people to learn that VWL is an entirely volunteer lead and run organisation and that the women who sit on our Executive Committee and nine sub-committees do so in their own personal time. The achievements of VWL as an organisation are due to the dedication and commitment of these volunteers alongside their professional and personal lives and all the successes, struggles and commitments that entails.

You will read in this edition of Portia about some incredible events. These included large gatherings with cross-sections of the profession to celebrate the Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Lunch for International Women's Day, and 'Briefing for Balance' the largest equitable briefing event of its kind ever held in Australia, hosted with the Women Barristers' Association to drive greater gender equity in the briefing of counsel. Alongside those large occasions were smaller but just as impactful events like a seminar on recognising and reducing vicarious trauma for lawyers, a panel discussion on the impacts of women's health in the workplace and the return of our popular 'Tough Talks' interactive workshop.

In this journal you will also find a record of the projects of our various committees. In 2023, we created a dedicated Mentoring Committee to take ownership of our existing mentoring programs with a focus on providing support to mentors and mentees beyond pairing them up. Our Law Reform Committee made submissions to various government bodies advocating for law reform to improve the lives of women who interact with the legal system.

The discussions of the Executive Committee at the start of this year centred on our plans and goals, working towards the ambitious aim of eradicating gender barriers in the law. Removing inequality feels like a mammoth and emotionally draining task, but the reality is (much like starting to write this message) it gets more and more achievable with each small step we take. I feel confident in saying the work of the 2023 volunteers will be remembered as part of the existing VWL legacy and I feel sure that the VWL of the future will continue to advocate for change and will eventually remove all barriers for women in the law.

It is a cliché to say that serving as the President of Victorian Women Lawyers has been an honour and a privilege, but it is the truth. I would like to acknowledge the wonderful women of VWL who I have worked alongside, to thank our sponsors for their support and to recognise the leaders of other law associations who I have had the opportunity to meet and collaborate with this year. Finally, I would like to thank our wonderful Patron, the Honourable Marilyn Warren AC KC, for her guidance and support this year.

Please enjoy this edition of Portia a snapshot of our community as it continues to grow.



Message from our Patron

In August 2023 I had the privilege of giving the University of Melbourne Law School annual Flos Greig Lecture. Flos Greig was the first woman to graduate in Law from the University and the first woman to be admitted to practice as a lawyer in Australia in 1903 following the enactment of the Legal Profession Practice Act. Prior to the Act only men could be admitted as lawyers. Flos Greig was the groundbreaker for all of us.



AUTHOR

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

In my remarks I spoke about the fact that in the century following Greig's admission, the pathways of women in the legal profession had been littered with obstacles and locked doors. I noted that despite fine female role models and significant numbers of women within the profession it changed very little and men remained dominant right up until the 2000's. I argued that despite brilliant individual achievements by women within the Law, collective action had been necessary to move the unmoveable so as to achieve equality for women lawyers. I highlighted the significance of the collective action of a group of women lawyers on 19 August 1996 when Victorian Women Lawyers was launched.

Over a quarter of a century, VWL has been extraordinary in its reach, power, influence and gender representation. It now has committees on publications, justice, law reform, public sector lawyers, networking, outreach, work practices and diversity and inclusion. It conducts substantial mooted competitions to build the experience and confidence of women as advocates. It operates as a body of advice and influence for the legal profession, governments, regulatory agencies and the media. By functioning collectively VWL has achieved significant change in female representation, recognition and gender rights across the profession. VWL has given its membership the courage to ask the necessary questions: why is that the best person for the role is not a woman? Why is it that women are under-represented in senior positions? Why is it that women are paid less than men? How is it that women are sexually harassed and abused in the legal workplace and do not feel safe?

In this excellent edition of Portia, VWL once again demonstrates its leadership capacity by confronting the difficult subjects that women face in the Law and the legal profession. Here in Portia, VWL provides a forum to stimulate discussion and awareness of gender issues within the legal profession by firmly creating a sense of legal community where women lawyers are heard, promoted and protected. Let us all celebrate being part of that community.

I congratulate VWL on another year of providing Portia. As we explore this beautiful publication we are reminded of the force of acting collectively, as a community, in keeping gender on the agenda.

I wish VWL and its membership every success in the year ahead.

The Portia Geach Memorial Award

First awarded in 1965, the Portia Geach Memorial Award was established by Florence Kate Geach in memory of her sister, artist Portia Geach. Perpetual is trustee of the Award and as per the direction of the will, it is presented annually to an Australian female artist for the best portrait painted from life of a man or woman distinguished in art, letters or the sciences.

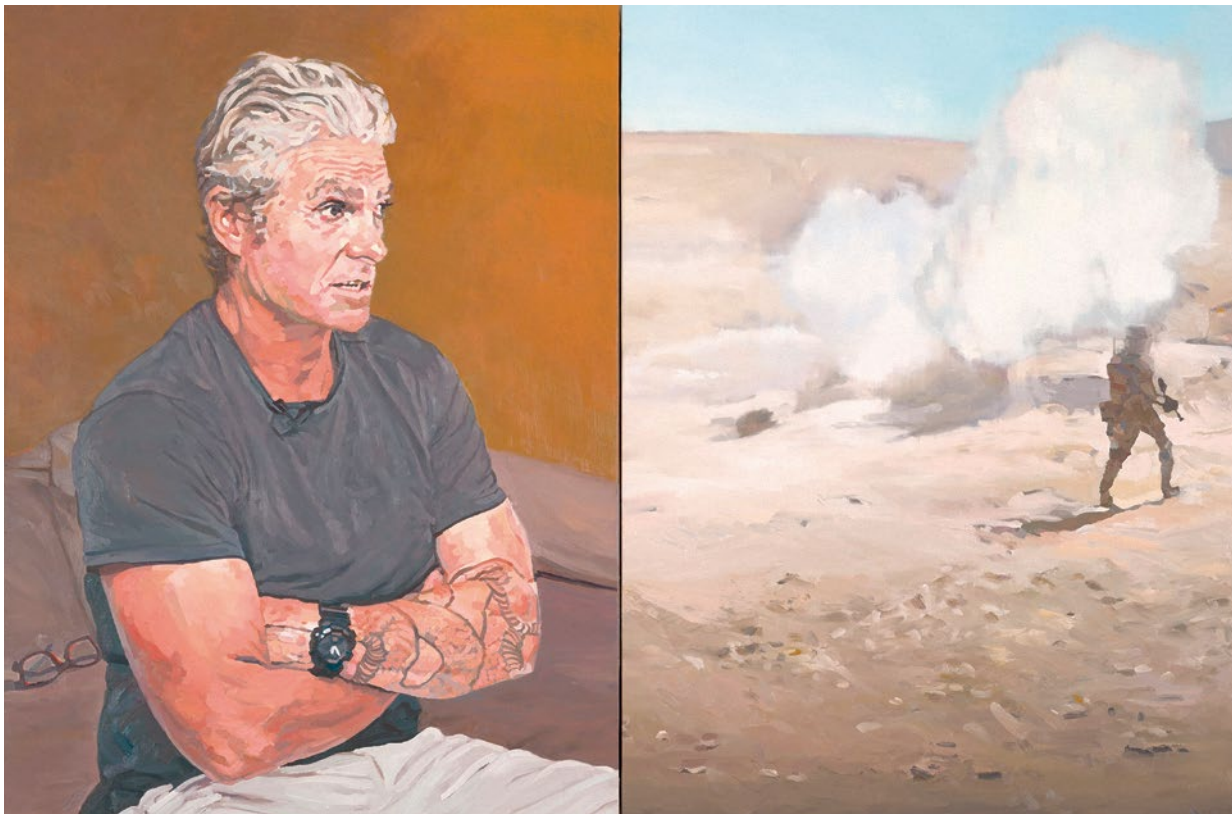
Born in 1873 in Melbourne, Portia Geach studied with John Singer Sargent and Lawrence Alma-Tadema in London and was also a lifelong activist for women's rights. She established the Housewives Progressive Association of New South Wales, The Housewives Magazine in 1933 and the Progressive Journal two years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

The judging panel included Katherine Roberts, Senior Curator, Manly Art Gallery & Museum; Natalie Wilson, Curator of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and Jane Watters, Director, S.H. Ervin Gallery. The judges selected 57 works from 374 entries received from female artists across Australia. The panel commented: 'The judges appreciated the diverse approaches to portraiture from the traditional to conceptual depictions in order to capture their subject. In the final judging the high standard of the finalists was evident, and they would like to acknowledge the artists for their efforts.'

Kate Stevens has been announced as the winner of the 2023 Portia Geach Memorial Award. Her portrait, *The Whistleblower*, depicts David McBride, a military lawyer who served in Afghanistan with Australia's Special Forces appears below on this page.

On Kate Stevens portrait, the judging panel said: 'The painting confidently demonstrates the artists painterly skills as well as evident empathy with her subject. The judges admired the intensity and authenticity of the subject as depicted by the artist and responded to the powerful narrative of the two-panelled work.'

VWL is extremely proud to promote the Portia Geach Memorial Award and pay homage to Portia Geach as a pioneering women 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 Kate Stevens on her powerful portrait.



Kate Stevens

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Kim Leutwyler

Subscribed to the anti-community: Will the truth win out?

*Community as our
grandparents knew it is
changing, but is it alive
and well on the internet?*

AUTHOR
Nancy Abdalla

The rise of online media and social network platforms mean that people appear more accessible than ever, and connecting with like-minded individuals has become as easy as a click of a button. We cannot help but wonder, has the relationship between ones' community and technology become so interconnected that the source and driver of that relationship has lost all visible roots?

The word community is derived from the Latin word 'communitas', meaning 'the same'. Traditionally, the word community may evoke images of a collective of people living in harmony, in a place governed by its own laws for its own benefit. Disagreement within the community is resolved through democratic debate. Each person in the community having a role to play, each mattering to the whole and each benefit in some positive way from the union. Community can also mean a group of people with shared values, a shared background or those who congregate over similar experiences.

Online communities present a similar offering for individuals. The chance to, despite physical separation, join virtual spaces where we can gather, matter, voice opinions, make a difference, and feel supported. But as our dependence on big tech increased over the years, search engines and social media companies became more powerful and our traditional understanding of community has shifted to mean something less tangible, less relational.

The offer of online platforms for those seeking out community is masked by ulterior purpose. We already know that tech firms collect and track our personal data for profit. We also know that social media addiction can lead to negative mental health impacts with unhealthy and unrealistic dependency on "likes", "comments" and "shares" as a form of social validation and acceptance. Our brains have become wired to absorb information in content that is 60 seconds or less, reducing our attention spans. Democratic debate is increasingly being reduced to child-like he-said, she-said with the truth being less important than clicks. The power of big tech means that our thoughts and opinions are merely commodities that are part of the algorithm's machinery. Algorithms themselves are designed with retention in mind. Online platforms track our behaviour to know what we're doing online, where we spend our time

online and how much time we spend there. Platforms tailor our newsfeeds to echo our interests, creating a feedback loop of confirmation bias with those stories that outrage us getting the most interaction and repetition, keeping us coming back for more. It is all about keeping us online for as long as possible so companies like Google and Meta make money off our attention, and the advertisements they can sell us, or the information they can on-sell.

The spread of false viral content in online communities, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, further spurred global concerns regarding harmful false digital material online termed 'misinformation'. In February 2020, the World Health Organization's Director-General, Dr Ghebreyesus described the spread of fake news associated with the COVID-19 pandemic as "fighting an infodemic", the spread of which was "just as dangerous" as the virus. Misinformation circulating about the COVID-19 pandemic related to conspiracy theories about all aspects of the virus, including how it originated and its causes and treatment. The inner workings of the algorithm on digital platforms meant that the more you engaged with stories or videos claiming the pandemic was a hoax, the more you would see that content appear on your social media newsfeed, closing the feedback loop and solidifying beliefs.

The problems with disinformation in online communities existed long before the pandemic. The Federal Government states that the risks posed by disinformation in online communities is a threat to the safety and wellbeing of Australians, as well as to our democracy, society and economy. In early 2023, the Australian government proposed new law to provide the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) with powers to combat online misinformation and disinformation. The government's proposed law would not provide the ACMA with the power to request specific content or posts be removed from digital platform services, or empower ACMA to determine what is true or false information. Instead, ACMA would be able to draw on powers to register enforceable industry codes with penalties for non-compliance, should digital platforms fail to act or combat misinformation and disinformation. Digital platforms would continue to be responsible for the content they host and

promote to users. The purpose of the proposed law is to shift away from digital platforms self-managing misinformation/disinformation and allow the ACMA to step in where the self-regulation is considered inadequate.

Despite the proposed law, the power and influence that big tech wields seems unlikely to abate anytime soon. The algorithm is to big tech what the trident is to Poseidon. The ability to influence and manipulate human behaviour en masse via algorithms gives big tech godlike powers. So, when we join an online community, whether that be on Instagram, Reddit, or LinkedIn, how much is it a genuine and personal choice? What value do we contribute (or derive ourselves) from that community when the algorithm has been designed to amplify or reinforce our pre-existing beliefs in a closed system insulated from rebuttal? How much control do we wield over the information we are exposed to when the determinators of the information that is prioritised on our screens is commercially motivated? Are we actually subscribing to isolation from opposing views, to some form of anti-community: one that defies the rules that usually governs communities? Because when you're on Google, Google is the law of nature, the force that drive us down rabbit holes towards conspiracy theories and extremism. When you're on Meta, it is Meta that



Jane Guthleben

“

The offer of online platforms for those seeking out community is masked with an ulterior purpose... We also know that social media addiction can lead to negative mental health impacts with unhealthy and unrealistic dependency on “likes”, “comments” and “shares” as a form of social validation and acceptance.

”

has the power to flood or smite its community of users with infectious disinformation leading to an infodemic. It is Instagram that decides who gets to be heard, whose voice is amplified and who is silenced. Big tech can build the tools to censor the content a nation might wish to amplify or sway voter outcomes for elections that certain political communities may wish to manipulate.

This does not mean we are all absolved from responsibility or accountability when it comes to how we engage with our online communities. But it does beg the question of what the enduring benefit of these online spaces is if we continue to have no say in the algorithmic rules that govern them. Because the systems that designed these online communities are not broken. They are working exactly as they were designed to work.



Sophie Hann

Women's Legal Service Victoria's *It Starts With Us* Framework - Steps towards safety and equity in the legal community

In September 2023, the VWL Work Practices Committee partnered with the Women's Legal Service Victoria to raise awareness of the It Starts With Us Framework launched by the Women's Legal Service Victoria in response to the Victorian Government's Free From Violence strategy, a state-wide coordinated effort to prevent violence against women.

AUTHOR

Isabella Armao, Ninawa Milner, Mary Quinn

The Framework provides legal and justice sector workplaces with 'how to' guidance and resources on the practical steps organisations can take to prevent gendered violence in the workplace. It focuses on changing attitudes, behaviours, cultural norms and systemic and structural conditions that underpin gendered violence.

The requirement for the Framework is clear when we consider the vast research (including the Starts With Us 2022 report on gender and intersectional inequality) shows that gender inequality and other forms of discrimination work together in the legal and justice sector to compound experiences of sexism, racism, ageism, homophobia, and ableism.

There persists in our profession gender disparity in leadership despite more women than men entering law. The financial data alongside reported personal experiences shows entrenched preferential treatment of men in hiring and promotion, discrimination against women perceived to be of 'childbearing age', and a gender pay gap of 16 per cent.

The prevalence of sexual harassment in the sector is high, with 61 per cent of women in the legal profession reporting having

experienced sexual harassment in a Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner (VLSB+C) report. Perhaps even more troubling than these incidents occurring is the problematic way in which the legal profession has addressed sexual harassment. In that same VLSB+C report, of those who reported an incident of sexual harassment, 28 per cent were labelled as a troublemaker, 24 per cent felt victimised or ostracised and 26 per cent resigned from their jobs.

The Framework can be used by small legal practices, large corporate law firms, member-based organisations, peak bodies and associations, statutory agencies and community legal centres, and those who interact with the court system, such as barristers.

Victorian Women Lawyers is proud to have participated on the Steering Committee for this project and of the work that is being done to make workplaces in the legal profession equitable and safe.

The Framework can be reviewed on the Women's Legal Service Victoria website.



Deborah Walker



LUCIA MiG

Sponsor

Ethos Migration Lawyers

The importance of community in the legal profession and building a supportive community

It is evident that workplaces underrepresent gender diversity, particularly women. We need spaces where women can be truly heard and understood. Encouraging a positive and inclusive community within the legal industry can aid in bridging this gap as we work alongside a large range of clientele.

My role as partner with boutique law firm, Ethos Migration Lawyers, has given me the opportunity to provide support to women working in the legal profession throughout their careers, in particular lifting women into senior positions.

Making this space available and encouraging the community around me has proven to be instrumental to the progression of women in law. At Ethos Migration Lawyers, women are not restricted in what they can and cannot do in the legal industry and that, in turn, sets an example for other organisations in Australia.

I am well aware of how daunting the legal profession can be to law students and young legal professionals. A challenge I have personally faced is the rapidly changing landscape of migration law. Often we get so caught up in our fast paced work lives that we forget to stop and check-in with our internal communities and how that can benefit us.

I ensure that I lead by example within the legal industry in how I navigate these changes. This opportunity brings harmony and passion to my organisation and the legal industry. It is imperative that we begin to build a strong community within our own organisations first so it can slowly and effectively integrate into the legal community as a whole.



AUTHOR

Zefy Souvlakis, Principal

Sponsor

Stuart Family Lawyers

What Community means to Stuart Family Lawyers

When I was studying at university, there was a heavy focus on completing clerkships and practising in commercial law. I had very little interest in this area of law, did not personally know any lawyers and felt like a complete imposter.

I began practising in Family Law when I was admitted to practise. I immediately found the nature of the work incredibly rewarding and I loved working directly with real people. In 2020, the lawyer who I worked for, Katrina Stuart set up her own firm, Stuart Family Lawyers, with myself and our PA. We are a boutique Family Law firm, and over three years later we have now expanded to a team of five and are looking for a keen young lawyer to join our team. I am so proud of our dedicated and collegiate team. It is a privilege to work beside such brilliant and inspiring colleagues, who work so hard every day to make meaningful change for our clients. This unique group of people is my community in the legal profession. We share so much – a launching pad for ideas and what to do next on a file, a support group during lockdown, or as simple as morning tea and discussing what we did on the weekend. Our Principal Katrina is not only incredibly dedicated to helping her clients, but is invested in mentoring the junior lawyers in her team and helping them build their own practices.

I have been a member of VWL since I was a university student, and in 2022 I joined the VWL Executive Committee. I was immediately surrounded by like-minded individuals who were passionate about supporting and advancing women in the legal profession. I reflect, almost 5 years on since I was admitted as a lawyer, that I am now a part of an incredible community of people. I have made so many meaningful connections not only in Family Law but also the legal profession more broadly, both as colleagues but also as lifelong friends. I have a number of people I can turn to if I need help or support, and I now have a sense of belonging in an important community.



AUTHOR

Roxanne Taylor, Senior Associate



Leave it at the Door: A Complainant's Experience of Justice

I've wanted to work in the legal profession since I was a child. To me, the world of law held an alluring charm, one painted with images of crisp suits, towering offices, and passionate courtroom debates - a world crafted as much by television dramas as by my own aspirations.

AUTHOR
Holly Harris

Law school teaches you that this shiny façade is just that - a façade, but this didn't taint my love for the law and my fascination was only further fueled, as each semester went on. I loved the complexity of it, the occasional uncertainty of it and following how legal doctrines evolved over time, in line with societal attitudes. In my first semester of university, my understanding of the legal system was shaped by textbooks and lecture halls, I had little idea that my biggest lessons would come not from the safe cocoon of university, but from personal experience.

One night in late 2018, I was followed home after a night out and the person who followed me snuck into my bedroom while I was in the shower. What happened next was the subject of a criminal trial four years later before a jury, at which the person involved was not found guilty of any crime, and which has been the subject of not inconsiderable media attention. The years between what happened and the criminal trial dramatically shifted my perspective, and I found myself navigating the same system I was studying, not as a student but as a complainant in an alleged sexual assault case.

I was no longer an observer but a participant, thrown into the labyrinth of the legal process. The realisation that every word I spoke carried immense weight, was constantly at the forefront of my mind. I had to tread carefully, aware that anything I said could be picked apart, tested, and potentially used against me. For four years, the case consumed my every thought.

My understanding of the system's design - to protect the accused and ensure no innocent person goes to jail - clashed with my personal journey through it. I recognised and respected the rigorous testing of evidence. Yet, when on the receiving end, the emotional impact of being dissected by the defence felt painfully cruel. Every word, every action had to be measured and precise, for fear that a misstep would tarnish my credibility. This was the ugly side of the system I had to confront, even as my academic self understood its necessity.

While in the courtroom, I confronted a profound conflict between my lived experience and the defence barrister's remarks. She acknowledged ongoing and prevalent societal conversations about consent and women's safety, then swiftly urged the jury to 'leave all that at the door.' Her words created a fissure in my understanding. On the one hand, every individual deserves a fair trial and an open-minded jury—these are cornerstones of our justice system. On the other, I felt a sharp sting in her dismissiveness.

In her remarks, the 'current climate' was framed as a fleeting trend, the discussions about consent and safety dismissed as overhyped buzzwords. But this 'trend' is an enduring reality, a path that countless individuals navigate daily. Her attempt to diminish the importance of these societal changes felt like a dismissal of our collective call for justice, a trivialisation of the 'we believe you' that serves as a beacon of hope for survivors long silenced.

The plea to 'leave all that at the door' sought to extricate the trial from its societal context, but can such issues be neatly compartmentalised? The conversations about consent and safety are real-world issues affecting daily lives, informing attitudes, behaviours, and yes, courtroom judgements. I'm not suggesting that societal attitudes should preordain trial outcomes. But they do exist, and they're changing for a reason—to rebalance the scales of justice that have tipped away from survivors for too long.

'We believe you' is not a threat to a fair trial, but a promise that we are striving towards a future where survivors' voices carry weight. We're working towards a future where our stories are acknowledged, not dismissed. Even in acknowledging the need for a fair and impartial trial, I felt a pang of disappointment at the barrister's words, which seemed to undermine the significant societal shift towards supporting survivors. Courtrooms should echo, not dismiss, the conversations on consent and safety. They aren't mere societal trends or buzzwords, but fundamental tenets of justice, empathy, and respect—the principles that should underpin the legal system itself.

Her words raised an important question: Should these conversations on consent and safety be left at the door, or should they echo within the courtroom? The reality we grapple with is that the legal system is a human-made structure and, like anything human, it isn't perfect. Navigating the delicate balance between a fair trial and ensuring that survivor's voices are heard, believed, and respected is a significant challenge. Yet, it is a challenge we must face, because the stakes are high - they involve individuals' lives, their dignity, their sense of justice.

We, who are within the legal system, understand its nuances, complexities, and the formidable task of reform. Openly disagreeing with certain aspects of it does not equate to a dismissal of its value. Rather, it is a commitment to its evolution, a promise to make it more responsive to the needs of those it serves. After all, aren't the complexities and intricacies of the legal system the reason so many of us love working in it?

Q&A With Julie Dodds-Streeton KC and Amber Harris

The 2020 Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts led by former Commissioner of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Dr Helen Szoke was a touchstone moment for gender equality in the legal profession recognising the prevalence of sexual harassment and the need for action alongside a continuing dialogue.

AUTHOR
Rachel Matulis

In accordance with the report's recommendations, in 2022 Ms Julie Dodds-Streeton KC, former Judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria and Federal Court of Australia, completed the Review of Recruitment and Working Arrangements Report in respect of court staff who work in a primary relationship with judicial officers. Separately, and in response to Dr Szoke's review, Ms Amber Harris of the Victorian Bar was instrumental in the drafting of the Judicial Conduct Guideline on Sexual Harassment, published by the Judicial Commission of Victoria.

VWL's Rachel Matulis had the opportunity to discuss this important work with Ms Dodds-Streeton KC (JDS) and Ms Harris (AH), and what they perceived the impact was on the legal community including future-facing opportunities to harness greater equality.

Victorian Women Lawyers' theme for 2023 is 'Community'. Community has been described as a group of people who share an identity-forming narrative. That shared story archetype built in our sense of self. How do you feel your participation in the 'legal community' fits within your own personal identity narrative?

AH: I was young when I started working in the law and went to the Bar, to some extent I feel I have grown up in the law, so being a part of the legal community is certainly connected with my personal identity. What I have

observed over the years is that lawyers often share similar values and belief systems such as a strong sense of justice, equality, and fairness. In my view our personal identity narrative is inseparably intertwined with our values. As a legal community I think it is often the combination of shared values and experiences that unite us.

My values have been influenced by the people within the legal community that I have observed, looked up to and worked with over the years. This in turn has contributed to the connection I feel not just to those people, but to the legal community more broadly.

I also consider the sense of camaraderie and collaboration that exists within the legal community has been significant for me, as it created a sense of being part of something bigger and of making a contribution to system that is fundamental to the wider community. That drive to make a contribution is certainly something that is central to my personal identity.

While the notion of community is morally neutral, events happening within any community can be positive or negative, and in turn impact the perception of those who identify within that cohort. Do you believe the delivery of the sexual harassment review impacted the public's perception of the legal community?



Kathrin Longhurst

JDS: I think that the general community now increasingly acknowledges and owns its social problems, including sexual harassment. By that I mean we as a community accept that we should be drivers of change rather than merely reactive to it, particularly, for example, following the 'Me Too' movement and in the community response to the revelations of historical child sexual abuse. However, the community, at an earlier point in time, greatly reinforced the problem. In many cases people knew about a problem, but covered up for and protected perpetrators, and loyalty was owed primarily to institutions, rather than to the individual.

There is remorse for this in the wider community, which is positive thing, and forms an integral part of the ownership of the problem; that is, recognition that it is everybody's obligation to do something, whether that is to call out behaviour, provide meaningful support or otherwise.

The recent revelations of inappropriate sexual conduct in the legal profession including in the courts, and by some judicial officers, while shocking, reflect that this profession is a microcosm of the wider community, but with distinctive risk factors.

In conducting the recent review I was moved to hear of the depths of pain that such misconduct by a superior within a legal hierarchy can inflict on the targeted person. Sexually inappropriate conduct is often unwitnessed, but even where it is, when the perpetrator is a powerful person in a hierarchical workplace, subordinates and even peers have been reluctant to intervene or show their disapproval. I learned that young people working in Courts were upset not just by individual offensive conduct on the part of a judicial officer, but particularly when other judges were passive when the situation called for action.

However, on the whole, following the sexual harassment review into the legal profession, we have become much more cognisant that we all have an active role to play in preventing harassment, in all its forms.

Legal professionals (of all genders) are considered intelligent, self-sufficient and therefore capable of advocating for themselves should the need arise. Do you feel that this perception by both the public and legal community affected the ability for and safety of women in participating in the review into sexual harassment?

JDS: Making a complaint about sexual misconduct or even participating in a review is an act of courage. Young legal professionals may perceive that they have a lot to lose in raising concerns or complaining. There is a strong, entrenched hierarchy within the

judiciary and the legal profession. One reason why sexual harassment in the profession has previously been unaddressed and persistent is that it attracts similar-minded people with ambitions, who are frequently stoic, with the result that negative behaviours are endured. There is a perception that complaining or resisting a powerful professional superior will forfeit long-term career benefits, their reputation or a hoped career trajectory.

AH: I think even the most intelligent, articulate and capable people can find it difficult to speak out about sexual harassment in the workplace. It would be unfair and incorrect to assume that a victim of sexual harassment (or any other inappropriate behaviour) is better able to advocate for themselves because they are a lawyer. Many instances of sexual harassment considered by the review occurred in the context of a power imbalance. Power imbalances are a common feature of the hierarchical nature of the legal profession and often lead to concerns about reporting. These concerns often relate to the impact reporting the behaviour might have on their future career prospects and professional reputation. As the review highlighted, the impact of sexual harassment on victims can be devastating and long lasting. I think it is more likely that these factors influenced whether or not people participated in the review.

In light of your work delivering the Sexual Harassment Review in Courts, and noting the precursor Szoke Review, what initiatives do you see as most critical to ensuring that voices within the profession that need to be heard are exemplified?

JDS: In the longer term, a better and more nuanced understanding of the true extent and nature of the problem within the profession is needed. That can only be achieved through higher quality data, which will require ongoing work. The current relatively deficient data partly reflects that complainants have not felt that it is safe to report conduct, due in part to the power disparities discussed in the Szoke report and the Courts Review. We need data capturing expressions of concern or discomfort that extend beyond merely extreme or overt examples of sexual harassment, and about which targets are not willing to lodge formal complaints.

Amber, you were instrumental in the drafting of the Judicial Conduct Guideline on Sexual Harassment. Can you tell us about that work, and in what way/s do you consider judicial leadership can lead to harm reduction?

AH: Producing a judicial conduct guideline on sexual harassment was one of the recommendations made following the review.

It marked a significant development in addressing sexual harassment within the profession. The guideline was endorsed by all heads of jurisdiction. In doing so they reinforced the clear message that sexual harassment is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in the courts or VCAT.

The guideline explains that sexual harassment is a breach of the standard of conduct expected of judicial officers. It sets out the standard of conduct expected of judicial officers, as well as behaviours that would constitute sexual harassment and the possible consequences for judicial officers who engage in those behaviours. Importantly the guideline also addresses the issue of bystander conduct and the expectation that judicial officers should act if they witness sexual harassment or if it is reported to them, and that a failure to do so may also breach the standards of conduct expected.

Judicial leadership is fundamental to addressing sexual harassment within our profession. The behaviour modelled by judicial officers, including how they react to inappropriate conduct, is critical. It can have a direct impact on how safe people feel to complain about sexual harassment. If people know sexual harassment is condemned in the strongest terms at the highest levels of our profession, they are less likely to be concerned that reporting it will have a negative impact on their career and reputation.

The importance of leadership in this area is not limited to judicial officers. If we are to eliminate sexual harassment, appropriate behaviour must be modelled by leaders across the profession including, within the Bar, private practice and government organisations. Change requires consistent messaging from the top down.

What can any of us (regardless of gender) do to support members of the legal community in identifying and speaking out against sexual harassment in the legal profession?

AH: The most important thing we can do as a profession is to keep having open conversations about sexual harassment and other inappropriate behaviour. If we can normalise identifying, condemning and speaking out about this behaviour, victims are more likely to report it and feel safe doing so.

There have been several catalysts for these conversations in recent years, the review was one of them. Significantly it followed the public acknowledgement of occurrences of sexual harassment within the highest level of our profession.

The fact sexual harassment is being openly discussed is an important development within the legal community which historically has appeared reluctant to discuss or address these issues. It is crucial that these conversations continue. When our leaders actively condemn inappropriate behaviour, it sends a strong message of support to those people who experience or witness the behaviour that it will not be tolerated and that it is safe to speak out against it.

On a concluding note, are you hopeful that we as a legal community are treading a productive trajectory towards the elimination of sexual harassment in the profession?

JDS: I am genuinely optimistic for the future of our profession. In Australia, there has been widespread recognition of the problem, and the legal community and the courts have started the process of addressing it and healing. The current profession is unrecognisable from what it was when I first started my legal career. There is still much work to be done, for which ongoing conversation and action – both individual and collective – will be fundamental.

AH: There have certainly been positive steps in the right direction over the past few years. These include the initiation of the review and the implementation of many of the recommendations including the introduction of mandatory sexual harassment training in many settings across the profession. These developments demonstrate progress and a commitment to addressing sexual harassment.

It cannot be forgotten that many of these developments were due to the courage of people who spoke out against sexual harassment. Their actions set in motion changes the likes of which our profession has not seen before. I hope that other people will benefit from their bravery and be encouraged to speak out against sexual harassment they witness or experience.

Sexual harassment is no longer just an open secret with little or no consequences, it is now part of an ongoing conversation driving change. While we still have a way to go to eliminate it, there is every reason to be optimistic that the culture within our profession is shifting and will be more positive for the generations that follow.

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I think even the most intelligent, articulate and capable people can find it difficult to speak out about sexual harassment in the workplace. It would be unfair and incorrect to assume that a victim of sexual harassment is better able to advocate for themselves because they are a lawyer.

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Jacqueline Hennessy



Tania Wursig

Sponsor

Clayton Utz

The role of community for women in the legal profession and how Clayton Utz contributes

Community is beneficial for everyone, but it plays a particularly pivotal role for any group facing inequality. For women, as a group who have not yet achieved equality on many levels in the legal profession, community greatly assists in overcoming the unique challenges we face.

Law firms can contribute to this by encouraging groups and committees to form and flourish, with the intention of providing guidance, support and opportunities for groups (like women) yet to reach full equality. Clayton Utz has done just this, supporting the involvement of its employees in our diversity and inclusion network, "Momentum". Momentum has become a community within Clayton Utz and is the vehicle through which many of our gender diversity initiatives are implemented. Through Momentum, we run firm events, national committee meetings, and panel discussions on topics such as career progression, parental leave and equitable briefing. Supporting a community like this is a very tangible and valuable way for a law firm to promote and support the women it employs.

While at law school I took up an informal mentorship with a barrister, Chris, who recognised the value of community. Chris introduced me to a group of his mentees, consisting of lawyers from different graduate cohorts over a number of years, each of whom joined the group in their penultimate year of law school. The group met, and continues to meet, throughout the year to support the newest mentee, including through the clerkship process. When I joined as the newest mentee, one of the group members was a Senior Associate at Clayton Utz who had joined as a graduating mentee some years prior. She and the rest of the group supported me through the clerkship and graduate process at Clayton Utz, where I have now worked for four years, and continue to support me through decisions I make about my legal career.

Although this group is a very small community, it is a community nonetheless and as someone with no family background or prior connections in law, it has been invaluable to me at turning points in my career. Each member of the group has their own external connections and networks, which we rely on to support one another to achieve our full potential.



AUTHOR

Rebekah Glover, Employment Lawyer

Sponsor

Brave Legal

Fostering a legal community at Brave Legal

In last year's edition of Portia, I had the opportunity to reflect on leadership and how one encourages women to become leaders. I reflected that a common experience of women leaders was that they had to push themselves forward into leadership positions and that active mentoring or promotion by senior leaders could be rare. This is exactly why creating and fostering your *own* legal community is so important – because the solitary, unsupported drive towards leadership (of the past?) must be replaced by a supportive legal community holding up and pushing women forward.

But what does this look like? At our firm, one of our lawyers actively connects lawyers of similar experience and practice areas together to ensure they have a safe community in which to share experienced, ask for help and obtain peer guidance. In this way, she is creating an inter-firm community in which support and assistance are paramount and promotion and encouragement of its' members occurs organically. From this work and referrals flow within the group.

The law can be a lonely profession at times, particularly for women who traditionally may work different days or hours to their colleagues due to family commitments. Growing your own community can be an antidote to this experience and give you a platform to share and shine, outside of your own firm.

The challenge of building or contributing to a legal community is how time poor we find ourselves. Once we have worked a full day on multiple devices, perhaps cared for family, cooked and eaten three meals, travelled, cleaned, exercised and drunk enough water, the energy to make connections can be lacking.

Herein lies a challenge for law firm leaders – encourage your team to be developing their community. You can do this by taking an interest, offering assistance by way of time or resources, encouraging connections and simply offering praise when you see engagement or development of a micro-legal community just as done by the lawyer at Brave Legal.

The upside of this is huge. Connection is the antithesis of loneliness. Helping your team be connected to a legal community *outside* of your firm is a step towards resilience, better health (says Harvard) but also creates an environment where there is opportunity for mentorship, self-promotion, support and, often, fun. The latter not often associated with a life in the law!



AUTHOR

Bree Knoester, Principal

Sponsor

Foleys List

Community's importance for women in the legal profession and its role at Foley's List.

The historical challenges of women entering and progressing their careers in the legal industry has been well documented and since so much progression has occurred, it is imperative that women continue to be provided with the tools and space to promote inclusion and leadership.

At Foley's List, we acknowledge the importance of equal opportunity. As a clerk, we receive many enquiries requesting advice and representation across all areas of law. We work hard to ensure that all barristers are equally represented and that nobody is held back on the basis of their gender, disability, race, parental status, sexual orientation, religion or age. We also recognise that women may experience different challenges at the bar and we are proud to invite all women barristers to join our internal group, Women on Foleys, and offer support, mentoring and networking opportunities at each stage of their career. By coming together, this ensures that each barrister achieves both personal and professional success.

The sense of community in the profession extends to VLA and pro bono work and many of our barristers work tirelessly to provide advice to disadvantaged members of the community, allowing them to make positive changes for their particular circumstances.

As a third (or more) of each business day is spent at work, it is imperative that workplace culture is a positive and inclusive environment for all. In addition to social functions, mentoring and our open door policy, our marketing team works diligently to ensure that all barristers (in particular, new readers) are ably supported by offering opportunities to produce podcasts and prepare external presentations to establish their name and practice.

For the times when an employee or barrister is having difficulty either personally or professionally, we take the time to check in with them to see if they need any additional help or just someone to talk to. If the person does need additional help, then they can be directed to appropriate work related resources or, if needed, counselling services.

While we are still striving for equality, we are living in a time where women are the most educated they have ever been and by continuing to collaborate and support each other, I'm excited to see what the next generation of women will achieve.



AUTHOR

Donna Bilke, Barrister's Clerk

Sponsor

Coulter Legal

The role of community for women in the legal profession and how Coulter Legal contributes

At Coulter Legal, we believe that flexibility, to support caring responsibilities, is an important part of our contribution to our community. Raising a family or supporting elderly parents should be celebrated and supported. Our people can access a wide range of flexible working options to support the variety of circumstances we find ourselves in as life changes over the years.

To support vulnerable members of our community, we offer additional paid leave under our Family Violence Leave policy for employees who need support through this time of crisis, as well as an extensive list of support available. We have a responsibility to support our people and to impact the broader community to improve the lives of as many people as possible.

Our extensive and generous Parental Leave policy, with 18 weeks paid parental leave, superannuation paid on unpaid parental leave up to 12 months and paid leave for pregnancy loss and fertility treatments also supports the broader community by supporting families. Women are still most often left with the responsibility of raising children, which many of us know as we experience parenthood that is takes a village to do so. Our Parental Leave policy has no primary or secondary carer labels, and we are proud of challenging the historical notion that only women are primary carers.

Paying superannuation on unpaid parental leave supports our community into the future, by ensuring that women are not financially disadvantaged in retirement. Women approaching retirement have 23% less superannuation than men of the same age. At that time, it is too late to try and bridge the gap, so acting earlier, such as paying superannuation on unpaid parental leave, can have a significant impact later in life and improve the lives of women in our community.

Mentoring and role modelling flexible ways of working is an important way law firms can create a community for women to demonstrate the variety of ways we can now work and bring diversity and inclusion to the law.

Law firms can play an active role in fostering a supportive and inclusive environment. By promoting diversity, providing mentorship, advocating for gender equality, and offering resources and support, law firms can contribute to the long term success and well-being of women in the legal field.



AUTHOR

Belinda Perisic Fellow and Certified Practitioner of the Australian Human Resources Institute (FCPHR), General Manager



In conversation with Her Honour Justice Patricia Anne Matthews of the Supreme Court of Victoria

On 14 June 2023, Her Honour Justice Patricia Anne Matthews was appointed as a Judge of the Commercial Court of the Supreme Court of Victoria. This appointment followed two and a half years of service as an Associate Judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria (from 15 December 2020 to 14 June 2023), and prior to that, nearly four years of service as a Judicial Registrar at the Supreme Court of Victoria (from 23 January 2017 to 15 December 2020).

AUTHOR
Shifa Shaikh



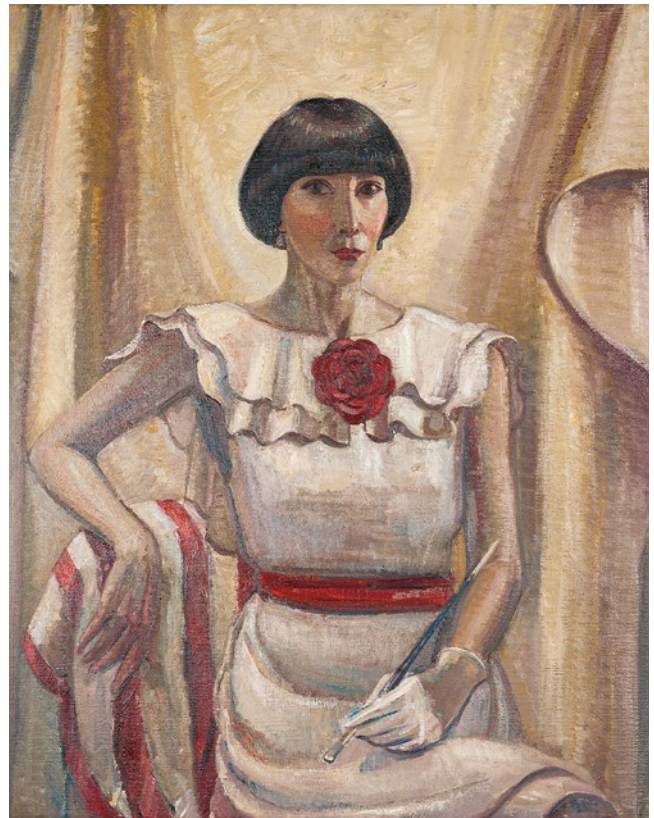
Jenny Rodgers

Before her judicial roles, Her Honour was Special Counsel at King & Wood Mallesons, which she joined in March 2002 and where she worked for almost fifteen years. Justice Matthews has been extremely generous in providing VWL correspondent Shifa Shaikh with an intriguing insight into her life in law and beyond. We are pleased to share this with our readership.

The eldest of three girls, Justice Matthews was born and grew up in Vermont. Her Honour's mother and father left school early to pursue dressmaking and carpentry respectively, but impressed upon their children the importance of an education and were intent on their daughters completing their schooling before going on to make their way in the world. Making her parents proud, Justice Matthews sailed through all her academic endeavours with flying colours, finishing school with a perfect hundred percent score in History, graduating her Bachelor of Arts degree at Monash University with First Class Honors, and later, being awarded the esteemed Supreme Court prize for her law degree. Before giving in to her natural inclination towards law and studying at The University of Melbourne Law School (where she later worked as a senior fellow teaching the course on Shareholder Rights and Remedies in the masters program), Her Honour held the following roles: a History and Mathematics teacher to secondary school students at St Aloysius College (then an all-girls school run by the Sisters of Mercy), a teachers' union representative, and later, a full-time industrial officer at the Independent Education Union (IEU). As part of this role as an industrial officer at the IEU, she attended tribunals and appeared on behalf of teachers often against barristers; as part of this role there was also an opportunity to work on a variety of matters including unfair dismissals, enterprise bargaining disputes and award negotiations.

Justice Matthews' career path has in no way been a typical or linear one, and sets a prime example of how one can have a different journey to the judicial Bench rather than a traditional one that involves going to the Bench from the Bar. When Her Honour decided she wanted the next chapter of her legal career to be at Court, she did not first go to the Bar as many of her peers did, but directly applied to an advertised position for a Judicial Registrar at the Supreme Court of Victoria. She was soon elevated to the rank of Associate Judge and then Judge. Her Honour mentioned that there are now several Judicial Registrars who have similarly been elevated, such as Her Honour Julie Clayton, who moved from being a Judicial Registrar at the Supreme Court of Victoria to being Judge of the County Court of Victoria, as well as His Honour Julian Hetyey, His Honour Ian Irving and Her Honour Fiona Steffensen, all of whom were elevated from Judicial Registrars at the Supreme Court of Victoria to Associate Judges of this Court. Her Honour Justice Matthews is however the first to go through all three tiers at the Supreme Court of Victoria, showing that with the right combination of aptitude, faith and determination, it can be done.

Throughout her career, Justice Matthews has been involved in numerous high-profile and large-scale commercial cases involving complex and novel issues that she has thoroughly enjoyed grappling with. As a solicitor, inter alia, she worked on litigation arising out of the Longford explosion, for major banks in enforcement matters, on several cases involving insolvency and trusts, and on class actions. More recently, as an Associate Judge, she has overseen privilege claims in the Essure contraceptive device class action and the Uber class action. When asked about her most memorable cases however, Her Honour's mind immediately turned to cases involving a human story; she recounted as if they took place yesterday, cases involving family businesses and fallouts between relatives that she worked on as a solicitor, demonstrating that contrary to popular belief, commercial cases too can involve a human element. Working on such cases, and navigating their intricacies and idiosyncrasies, is work that Her Honour has found the most fulfilling.



Yvette Coppersmith

Despite having a very busy work schedule as a commercial lawyer at King & Wood Mallesons, Her Honour ensured she made time for a wide and varied pro bono practice that involved providing legal representation to the most marginalised and disadvantaged individuals within the community, including the homeless and refugees among many others. Justice Matthew's love for the law and her admirable humility in the light of extraordinary achievements shines bright, as does her burning passion to give back to the Victorian community. When asked about her experience presiding over cases, she described it as "solving a puzzle", with "a lot of different issues and fact finding required", adding that the role of Judicial Registrars, Associate Judges, and Judges also requires one to pragmatically draw the line when arguments are not really advancing a case and to encourage parties to move ahead where possible. "It is also a huge responsibility", she noted, adding that "for the Judge and the lawyers involved, it may just be another trial, but for the parties, it may be the only time they come into contact with the court system, often at a very disruptive period in their lives".

Regarding the unique challenges faced by young women in the law, Her Honour had the following observations to make: "One of the things I think is particularly difficult for young women lawyers is that the time around when they are typically going down the promotion path or going to the Bar, is often around the same time they would be having children, and it is quite challenging to combine those things and find a way that works for both your workplace and your family. My daughter was four when I started working at Mallesons and so, one of the things that I think made a difference for me was that I always had personal commitments in addition to my professional ones. I was fortunate in that my employers were good in recognising that I had a young child and additional priorities", she recalled, adding that "it would be very hard to combine a burgeoning legal career with having a young family without really good

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It would be very hard to combine a burgeoning legal career with having a young family without really good support around and without having a workplace that recognises the long-term benefit in supporting lawyers with children.

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support around and without having a workplace that recognises the long-term benefit in supporting lawyers with children". "They're not always going to have a baby, you know", Her Honour quipped light-heartedly, "that baby's going to grow up at some point". Justice Matthew noted that there are people in the profession who are willing to accommodate others' personal priorities if they are made aware of these. "I think law firms and members of the legal profession have come a long way in terms of equity; I've noticed a big change in the time that I've been in the law, but I think there's still quite a way to go", Her Honour said. "You do have to be vigilant, and work to ensure that the gains that have been made remain and that we keep making progress because we're still not there yet; you walk into a Courtroom and as a Judge, one of the things you notice is if the Bar table is entirely male, and it is surprising how often that is still the case", she observed, adding that "continuing the good fight is really important". Noting the rise in remote working arrangements in the post-COVID-19 era, Her Honour observed "Having the boundaries between work and home so blurred now aids

flexibility but I worry about the effect on people's mental health in that they are not getting real time away from work, especially when some of the work that people do can lead to vicarious trauma". Her Honour is however convinced that provided lawyers, law firms and other legal workplaces are conscientious and careful, a career in law is a great one that she would fully encourage anyone to go for if they have the calling like she did.

Towards the end of the interview, in classic teacher style, Her Honour imparted some pearls of wisdom for lawyers, both budding and seasoned alike. She emphasised above all the importance of being respectful and reasonable in one's conduct as a lawyer. "You might be having a heated argument within a matter but that does not stop you from being polite and courteous and giving ground where you need to. If someone needs an extra day or two to do something, don't rush off to the Court about that, be sensible, because you might need that the next time", she advised. "Have a fight when you need to have one but otherwise work it out", "don't ruin your good points by putting them among bad points" and "aim to narrow the issues in dispute" formed part of Her Honour's golden advice for lawyers. Decades may have passed since Her Honour's schoolteacher days but she has retained her drive to help shape the youth and their futures. In her time as a solicitor, Her Honour was known to mentor and guide junior lawyers and now, as a Judge, is committed to providing mentorship and guidance to her Associates. Her Honour also frequently interacts with Year 11 and 12 VCE Legal Studies students and invites them into her Courtrooms to observe hearings, undoubtedly inclining many towards a career and life in the law. Leading through example, Her Honour's illustrious career has charted a path for many who aspire to follow in her footsteps.



Yvonne East



India Mark

The Benefits of Community Engagement for your Development as an Early Career Lawyer

Being a third or fourth year lawyer can be a challenging. You know a lot, but you are still learning every day, regardless of what area of the law you are practicing in. You are no longer a graduate, first or second year lawyer, but you are not quite at senior level.

AUTHOR
Amy Stagg

The hours can be long, and whilst you have more autonomy over your time, you don't quite own it yet. At times it can feel like you are banging your head against the wall with little to show for it in terms of career progression.

In her podcast series 'Rose Tinted Law', career mentor Rose Inglis asks her guests the question – "Does success in the law come from what you know, or who you know?" The answers are varied, but there is much to be said for the "who you know" argument made by the legal professionals interviewed.

It is important that at all stages of your career you work to hone your Business Development skills. Building a strong network of professional connections is just as important as developing your technical skills in your chosen practice area through further study and hands on experience. The exercise of attending one networking event each month, enjoying the appetisers and a complimentary glass of bubbles, whilst very enjoyable, is rarely enough to satisfy expectations of Business Development, as it was in your first years of practice and is unlikely to deliver tangible outcomes. To truly take control of your legal career, it becomes necessary to broaden the professional net you are casting. At this

stage of your legal career, it helps to think creatively about how you can become the lawyer that is front of mind for potential colleagues, clients and referrers.

Taking responsibility for the shape and style of your legal career is something that you are likely to need to focus on more as you take steps towards more senior roles. Legal careers can take many different paths. To some, building a personal brand as a lawyer will not be as important as focusing their efforts on the academic aspects of day-to-day work. Some lawyers thrive working on the drafting, problem solving and solo aspects of the profession. Others may find their ability to build an incredible referral network is what sets them apart from their colleagues.

Some strategies for business development include public speaking opportunities, publishing articles on LinkedIn, undertaking pro-bono work or attending networking events. While these are all great strategies to increase your professional visibility, there is an opportunity to broaden your network organically and effortlessly, by joining communities (online or in person) that align with your own personal interests.



Joanna Braithwaite



Caroline Zilinsky



Claire Martin

It is important for legal professionals to have interests and hobbies outside of their career to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Making the effort to pursue your interests in a formal and social environment can also increase your referral networks in unexpected ways. A recent survey on how Australian's spent their time conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that adults today spend 28 minutes less per week socialising and out in their communities than we did 17 years ago. Post-pandemic, we are more isolated than ever – there is a loneliness epidemic. It is becoming increasingly rare for adults to participate in hobbies – activities outside of work simply for fun. Whether the reason, whether it be a lack of time, money or confidence to try something new, it seems the value placed on building and maintaining a sense of community in our personal lives has taken a back seat.

Joining a sports team, yoga studio, meditation class or historical society (or whatever interests you personally), can be beneficial not only for your mental and physical health, but also for your career. You may meet another professional in a parallel field who becomes a strong cross-

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As an early career lawyer, your time is precious, and you should try to invest it in ways that bring you fulfilment and where you are giving back value.

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referral source. Another person you meet may contact you in five years' time and become a client, remembering the field of law you worked in and reaching out. You will organically be front of mind when a teammate from ten years ago is in a position to recommend lawyer to a family member or friend.

Becoming involved in communities within the legal profession can also build your professional network, if you are an engaged and active member. It is critical to be selective with the working groups, committees, and societies you join in the legal profession. There is little benefit to joining five committees and failing to actively participate or contribute to any, leading to assumptions you are unreliable or dispassionate. You may find you become so fatigued from being involved in so many committees that you do not have the energy to have any hobbies outside of work. As an early career lawyer, your time is precious, and you should try to invest it in ways that bring you fulfilment and where you are giving back value.

Your workplace is also a community you should invest time and effort in, after all we spend so much time working it should be a happy and productive environment. Getting to know your colleagues in different practice areas and making the time to meet with them socially should be a priority developing a cross referral network can be an excellent source of work and career advancement. By looking for ways that you can capitalise on your personal strengths to build your professional brand within your workplace you can become front of mind for education, mentoring or even leadership opportunities. In today's world where we are unlikely to stay in one role forever former colleagues may also be a source of referral opportunities or lead your next role. It is important that you create connections and build a strong repertoire during your time working together.

For some early career lawyers, networking and business development can be the most challenging aspect of their legal career. For others, it will come more naturally. Whichever camp you fall in, building a professional network is a critical aspect of success in a legal career. If you find yourself stuck with how to move forwards and build a strong legal community, it may be helpful to invest in career coaching, one-on-one, or within an online group.

In the competitive professional services and job market we now find ourselves in, being a candidate who can evidence a broad legal network, will make you stand out from the crowd. Provided of course that in all your professional endeavours you are genuine and act with integrity.

Hear more from Rose Inglis' podcast 'Rose Tinted Law' at <https://rosetintedlaw.com.au/rtl-the-podcast>

Sponsor

Nicholes Family Law

Bridging gaps within communities and promoting increased inclusivity for women in the legal profession

Lawyers undertake work that touches almost all areas of society and the communities within, be it via our work in family law, criminal law, consumer law, workplace relations, human rights, access to justice and more. We also possess unique skills and experience which we use in conducting this work. As a result, we are very well-placed to help bridge gaps within communities and help promote increased inclusivity.

With this in mind, I have always felt that not only do lawyers have a responsibility to their clients and the Court, but also to broader society and the many and diverse communities that make up the world in which we live.

On a local level, one of the ways I seek to work with others to bridge gaps within communities and help promote increased inclusivity is through the work I - and other lawyers from Nicholes Family Lawyers - do with organisations such as the Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE). We provide a free fortnightly family law legal clinic to WIRE clients, who include women, non-binary, and gender diverse Victorians.

At a national level, my work includes being an active member of the Australian Federal Police-led Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) Prevention Stakeholder Group. I, along with other members of the stakeholder group, work in support of ACCCE to drive a collaborative national response to counter the exploitation of children in Australia.

Internationally, my work includes being the Deputy Chair of the World Congress on Family Law & Children's Rights, of which I am also a Board member. I recently returned from the United Kingdom where I and the Chair of the World Congress, The Honourable Diana Bryant AO KC, were working on the upcoming World Congress conference, which will be held in Cambridge in July 2025. The conference brings together experts from all over the world to enhance, promote and protect the human rights of children and young people globally.

There is always something we can do to help others.

Community between women allows them to collaboratively, collectively, and therefore more effectively work towards supporting and empowering others.

This belief informs the work I do with organisations including WIRE, the ACCCE and the World Congress on Family Law & Children's Rights, and, more recently as a Board member of Voice of Change (VOC).

VOC was co-founded by Shaynna Blaze and Neva Morrissy and uses the arts to amplify the voices of victim-survivors of abuse, and to change the cultural attitudes that underpin family violence.

The first project of VOC was to produce and promote the family violence awareness-raising movie "The Fort", which tells the story of a mother and son living with family violence and which addresses wide-ranging themes including physical, emotional and financial abuse and the cycle of abuse through generations.



Jennifer Rosnell

As we know, there is never any excuse for family violence but, on average, one woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner, while one in four women have experienced violence, emotional abuse, or economic abuse by a cohabitating partner since the age of 15. These statistics are chilling and completely unacceptable.

The work of VOC - and the many other organisations working in response to family violence - well illustrates what women (and men) can strive to achieve when they work as a connected community in response to serious social issues which must be addressed.



AUTHOR

Sally Nicholes, Founder and Managing Partner

Going to the Bar: Everything You Want to Ask

If you have ambitions to become a barrister, you're not alone, there are many of us motivated to join the profession because we were addicted to courtroom dramas on television. The number of women lawyers heading to the Bar is on the rise. Women now represent 33% of Victorian barristers, up from just 5.5% in 1980, according to the Victorian Bar. Women barristers comprise 43.4% of barristers who have been at the Bar for 15 years or less.

AUTHOR
Liz Main

But the barriers to entry loom large. Perhaps you're afraid of public speaking, but secretly dream of conducting a cross examination. Maybe you're unsure of how much money to put aside to start your practice. Or maybe a fear of failing the entrance exam is holding you back.

These are all incredibly common thoughts but should by no means deter you. After all, you studied law, and you are incredibly capable. Portia spoke with four women who recently joined the Victorian Bar to answer your burning questions.

'I've decided to study for the entrance exam. Where should I start?'

To become a barrister in Victoria, you need to pass the entrance exam for the Bar Readers' Course. One of the biggest mental blocks to studying for the exam is not knowing where to start.

'How you start might depend on how you learn,' says Sheeana Dhanji. For example, you may retain information by reading a textbook, taking notes and applying it to a practical scenario. Or you may learn best by discussing topics with others.

Sheeana became a barrister in 2022 and practices across general commercial, public and administrative law.

Sheeana suggests as a first step, gathering together the materials you will need for the exam, including the exam's sample reading guide from the Victorian Bar's website, as well as copies of the examinable legislation, past exam papers and textbooks.

As the exam is open book, you will also need to prepare exam notes. Sheeana suggests asking someone who has previously sat the exam for a copy of their notes, adapting them to suit your exam technique.

But having the right materials won't be enough to get you over the line.

'Mindset is everything' says Lucy Dawson. Lucy has been a barrister since 2018 and works in general commercial law, wills and estates, trusts, equity, and costs law.

'Studying for the entrance exam can be a rollercoaster full of sleepless nights, pressure and anxiety, and it goes without saying that you need to dedicate yourself to learning the materials,' Lucy says.

'But embarking on that journey without cultivating a confident, positive and compassionate mindset will make it all the more difficult.'

'What if I fail the entrance exam?'

You may find yourself procrastinating because you're afraid you may not pass the entrance exam. It's a very common fear, but one that shouldn't put you off.

'As highly motivated and driven individuals, we are often afraid of failure. Don't let this worry or dissuade you from sitting the exam. The reality is, nothing turns on it,' says Sheeana.

Even if you have to sit the exam multiple times, once you're at the Bar, you will never be asked how many times you sat the exam.

'There's even an upside to not passing the first time,' says Anna O'Callaghan.

'You will now have more time to add to your savings for when you do get to the Bar, and more time to develop your legal skills in your pre-Bar job, and your contacts list!'

Anna has been a barrister since 2018 and works in commercial and public law, with a particular interest in the intersection of civil jurisdictions and criminal law.

'I've always wanted to be a barrister but I'm afraid of public speaking.'

It may sound counterintuitive, but many experienced barristers and judges detest public speaking.

'Speaking from my own experience, there is a big difference between public speaking and being an advocate in court. The former still strikes fear in me, but the latter has become a pleasure (albeit sometimes a stressful one),' says Lucy.

Appearing in court is just a conversation between yourself and the judge, and sometimes a witness or jury. That is a world apart from delivering a speech to a large group of people.

'Appearing in court can be intimidating, but like all things it is a skill which requires practice, the Bar Readers' Course and your experiences at the will provide you ample opportunities to practise and develop confidence', Lucy says.

'How much money should I save?'

Going to the Bar is an expensive endeavour which will require you to save a substantial nest egg. While each person's financial circumstances vary, most people who plan to go to the Bar save approximately half a years' salary. There is no doubt that this financial hurdle makes going to the Bar more attainable for some people than others.



Janine Dello

'The main thing to ask yourself is what kind of buffer you need to feel confident you can handle the financial unpredictability of the first few months at the Bar,' says Shakti Nambiar. Shakti was called to the Bar in 2023 and practices in commercial and public law.

'Having that buffer will help you feel more secure in your decision to become a barrister – which means you'll be better placed to enjoy all the new experiences you'll have in your first year!'

A general rule of thumb is to save enough money to cover expenses for your first six months at the Bar. This will need to include your day-to-day living expenses, paying the Readers' Course fee which was \$7,000 in 2023, robes which cost about \$2,000, and anything else to set up your new business, such as a new laptop, insurance or an accountant.

'Ultimately, it's unpredictable when you'll first get paid for a brief,' says Anna. 'Even if you get a brief on your first day after signing the roll, you may not receive payment until many months after!'

'What does a mentor do and how should I pick one?'

Once you pass the exam and before you start the Readers' Course, you will need to pick a mentor. A mentor is a barrister who has at least 10 years' experience. They will supervise you and share their chambers with you (rent free) for the first nine months you are a barrister. You are their 'reader' for that period.

In deciding who to approach to be your mentor, you should think about what you would like to get out of the relationship.

'Some new barristers pick mentors who are leaders in their chosen practice area, while others pick a mentor because of a pre-existing relationship or because of the social support they can offer,' says Lucy.

'You should consider which of these aspects are most important to you, and do your research to find out which barristers might be suitable.'

And if you don't know any barristers who you would like to read with, you can look online at junior barrister's biographies on the Victorian

Bar's website and see who they read with. Use this to make a shortlist of potential mentors to reach out to.

'The Bar is a very open and collegiate work environment, and many barristers will be happy to sit down with prospective barristers and chat about their practices' says Lucy.

Further information about how to become a barrister can be found on the Victorian Bar's website.

Liz Main is a barrister at the Victorian Bar.

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Tsering Hannaford

Big Swiss

Jen Beagin

"I spent a lot of time alone, but I was rarely lonely because I like my own brain."

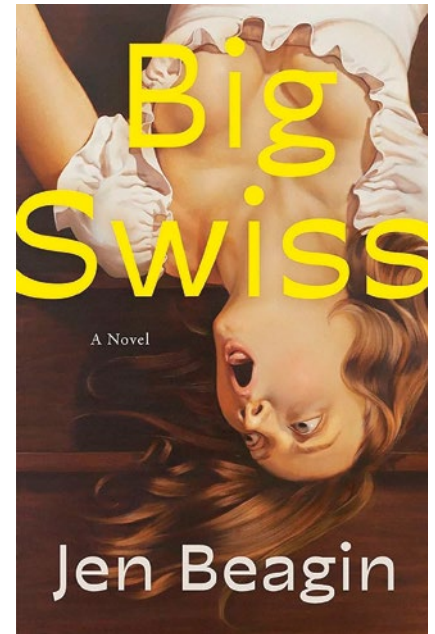
AUTHOR

Book review by Greta Marks

The most unsettling thing about this book, among many things, was that I share a name with the protagonist. But then again, she goes by Rebekah for much of the story, so that made matters easier.

Greta has had a series of jobs, the latest of which is as a transcriptionist for an unconventional sex-therapist who is writing a book. She lives in a ramshackle house in upstate New York that is full of bees, with her dog and a housemate who always seems to be up to something.

When Greta begins translating the sessions of FEW, a Swiss woman, she is intrigued by the woman's voice and cold demeanour. She thinks of her privately as Big Swiss. This is all relatively harmless (if a little creepy), until she bumps into Big Swiss at a local dog park.



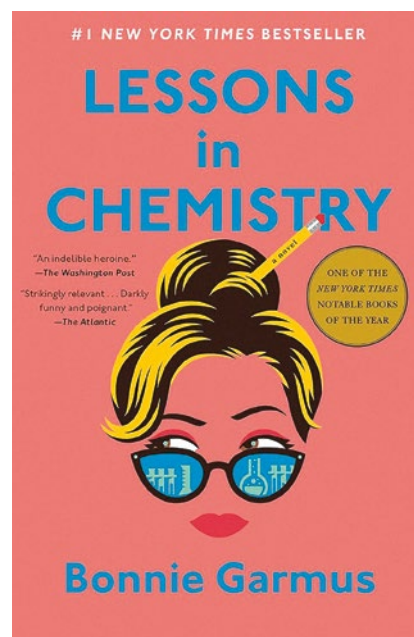
The catch is that Big Swiss' thinks Greta's name is Rebekah, and Big Swiss starts telling her therapist about her salacious affair with Rebekah, while Greta transcribes.

Some of the similes are a little off, and some of the quirky details are jarring when immediately followed by far more serious themes, but the story is so wonderfully unhinged and darkly funny that one can look past that.

Big Swiss touches on grief, trauma, attachment, attraction, adultery, drug-addiction, stalking, sexuality, professional ethics, among a million other topics. It dances on absurdity, with the reader experiencing increasing dread as the walls start to close in on Greta and her lies catch up with her.

Lessons in Chemistry

Bonnie Garmus



“Whenever you start doubting yourself, whenever you feel afraid, just remember. Courage is the root of change and change is what we’re chemically designed to do.”

AUTHOR

Book review by Greta Marks

The year is 1961 and Elizabeth Zott is the star of a cooking show for housewives: ‘Supper at Six’. Elizabeth, although brilliant beyond her years, and destined for greatness, was fired from her job at a prestigious college as a research chemist, simply put, because of men and misogyny, and women who didn’t support her when they had the chance.

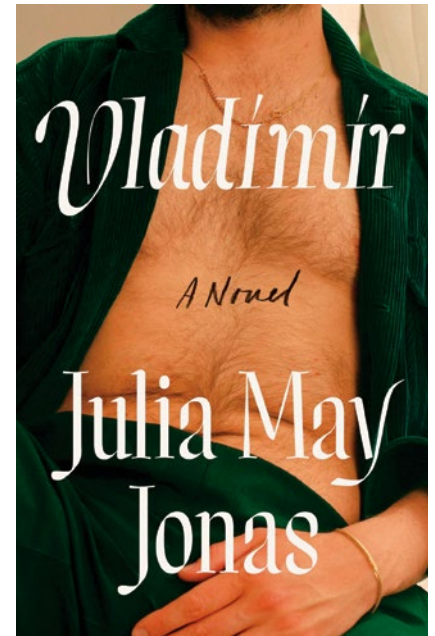
Lessons in Chemistry presents a razor-sharp and deadpan protagonist in Elizabeth. In her cooking show, she refuses to placate the male studio executives by catering to what they think women want. She converts her kitchen into a laboratory, she teaches recipes through the lens of what she knows best, chemistry. In doing so she empowers the women watching at home to question gender roles.

The story jumps back and forth between the 50s and 60s, covering Elizabeth’s rich backstory; her early college days, the men who mentored her, the men that held her back, her magically perceptive dog, her precocious daughter, her passion for rowing, her unceremonious dismissal from the college, her relentless rejection of casual misogyny, her revenge against those who have wronged her and stood in her way.

Above all, this book champions women, and pays homage to the trailblazing women who paved the way for the waves of feminism to come, while giving a respectful and mournful nod to the women who were unjustly ignored, sidelined and forgotten despite their strength and talent.

Vladimir

Julia May Jonas



“He is asleep in the chair, and the hair on his left arm (the one that I have not shackled) glows in the afternoon sun. The sight of that arm hair, ablaze in the sun, sends a sob down my spine”

AUTHOR

Book review by Greta Marks

The aptly named *Vladimir* feels like a modern take on Vladimir Nabokov's classic *Lolita*, with undertones of Stephen King's *Misery* and a #MeToo backdrop.

As the narrator grapples with her indifference about the seven public allegations of sexual misconduct against her husband (another professor at the college) made by students, she develops a longing for Vladimir Vladinski, a junior professor who has recently joined the faculty.

The disturbing obsession, and the moment where the narrator begins to unravel and go full Annie Wilkes are enough to make this book a captivating read.

Vladimir explores the relationship between morality and art, and the nuances of the #MeToo movement. A core tenant is the question of whether it is anti-feminist to assume that young women cannot consent to relationships with older men.

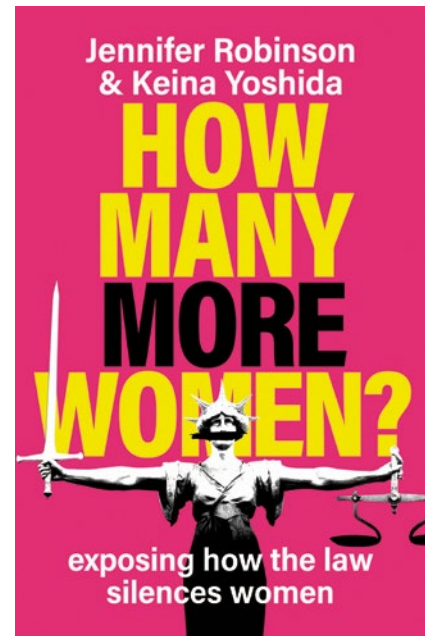
Her husband, having engaged in a number of consensual and open affairs with students (while she herself was aware and accepting of them), the narrator laments: *“Now, however, young women have apparently lost all agency in romantic entanglements. Now my husband was abusing his power, never mind that power is the reason they desired him in the first place.”*

The flipside of this is of course the question of whether the narrator could be accused of being anti-feminist for standing by her husband, or for her feelings toward the women now accusing him of misconduct. Rather than taking a side, *Vladimir* poses these questions, and leaves you to pick up the pieces and gather your own thoughts.

Vladimir is provocative, at times frustrating, and often a train-wreck-can't-look-away uncomfortable read.

How Many More Women?

Jennifer Robinson and Keina Yoshida



“How many more women:

*Have to be raped or
abused before we act?*

*Need to accuse him
before we believe her?*

*Will be failed by the
criminal justice system?*

*Need to say something
before we do something?*

*Will be sued for
defamation for speaking
out?*

*Will be contracted to
silence?”*

AUTHOR

Book review by Lilli Rand

Written by two acclaimed human rights lawyers, Jennifer Robinson and Keina Yoshida ‘How Many More Women?’ is a challenging, yet inspiring read that provides a discerning indictment on the legal systems around the world aimed at protecting women against gender-based violence, but instead keep them silent.

On the cover of the book appears an image of Justitia (otherwise known as Lady Justice) which serves as a reminder of the constant balancing act the law must engage in. Powerfully, the authors describe the tension between *“his right to privacy and reputation against her right to free speech, and the public interest in reporting that speech”* and it is their assertion that the scales have tipped in favour of protecting alleged perpetrators, resulting in the silencing of women and the subsequent discourse that is necessary to end gender-based violence.

With no narrative structure, the authors instead examine case studies of women silenced around the world, at times it is an uncomfortable read. I had to take large breaks throughout the book due to the confronting and heavy nature of the material. Whilst it may not be a book that leaves you eagerly turning pages, its power lies in the message.

Somewhat symbolically, there is one chapter within the book on a recent high profile rape case, still in the judicial system at the time of publishing, that has been almost completely

redacted. The intention being once the case was finalised, the pages would later be published. Unsurprisingly, and in an almost self-fulfilling prophecy demonstrative of the systematic silencing highlighted throughout the book, it is unlikely that these pages will ever be made public due to an event that took place during trial.

Beyond its relevance to the legal field, this book will resonate with any women striving for success in a male-dominated industry as it encourages readers to embrace their ambition and challenge societal expectation.

I cannot recommend this book more highly as understanding the issue is vital for effecting change, *“we cannot act if we do not know”*, and this book takes on that critical role of raising awareness on behalf of those who cannot. As such, its impact extends beyond the legal community to society at large by shedding light on the injustices faced by women. It is a crucial read that implores us to work collectively toward a future where every voice is heard and valued. Suffice to say, however, that this recommendation comes with a content warning for sexual abuse, rape, and gender-based violence.



Rachel Robb



Kim Shannon



Michelle Hiscock

& Juliet

& Juliet is brilliant, sugary, camp, a pop delirium, and about 10,000 other synonyms for joy that won't fit in this review.

Step aside Shakespeare, this contemporary reimagining of the timeless tragedy 'Romeo and Juliet' delivers a refreshing and dynamic take on the age-old tale of love and fate with a feminist and intersectional twist. Set against a modern backdrop, this play successfully blends the essence of the original narrative with modern sensibilities, offering a thought-provoking exploration of love, gender roles, identity, and the influence of societal norms, all while remixing some of the greatest pop songs of the last few decades.

Directors David West Read and Luke Sheppard flip the narrative to ask "what if Romeo's demise was Juliet's beginning" as she is portrayed not merely as a lovestruck teenager pining over Romeo, but as a strong-willed, independent young woman who grapples with her own desires and societal expectations. The character of Romeo is also reimagined as he breaks away from traditional stereotypes and offers a fresh perspective on masculinity and vulnerability. Despite historically being the ideal heterosexual love story, & Juliet embraces queerness and feels inclusive and accessible to all, no matter where you sit on the gender binary.

In some ways the narrative seems to serve as a vessel for its incredible soundtrack in this unlikely jukebox musical. You may not know who Max Martin is, but you sure know his songs, the Swedish pop songwriter has written hits for Backstreet Boys, Britney Spears, Jessie J and Katy Perry amongst others. When Shakespearean dialogue meets pop hits, it creates a musical mashup that is as unforgettable as the love story itself.

& Juliet is a hilarious and heart-warming adventure that proves love and laughter are timeless, no matter what century you're in. If you're a Shakespeare lover or simply looking for a good time, don't sleep on this!

AUTHOR

Theatre review by Lilli Rand

Prima Facie

"There is no real truth, only legal truth."

I was lucky enough to attend Prima Facie in March 2023. Just a few months prior, the ACT director of public prosecutions had announced that it was "no longer in the public interest to pursue" a high-profile rape prosecution in light of "the ongoing trauma associated" with the prosecution, which was presenting "a significant and unacceptable risk to the life of the complainant".

Prima Facie, written by a former Australian lawyer Suzie Miller, tells the story of brilliant, young, ambitious criminal defence barrister, Tessa Ensler (played by Sheridan Harbridge). Tessa specialises in defending men against accusations of sexual assault, but finds herself in the witness stand after having been assaulted by a colleague and close friend.

The play opens with Tessa's masterful cross examination of a complainant, thriving on the thrill of the "game of law". We hear only her questions, as she ducks and weaves. Followed by her celebrations with her male contemporaries (and competition), the other barristers in her chambers, all friends with each other, largely a boys club that she has fought tooth and nail to be a part of and respected in.

"A good lawyer just tells the best version of their client's story. Nothing more. Nothing else. Just the storyteller, the voice piece. Never judge, never ever judge. Never decide. The minute you do that, you're fucked. You have lost, you are lost."

The mood of the play changes when we then watch Tessa experience a sexual assault. After, she sits in the shower, and immediately begins to cross examine herself knowing the facts she would state if she was acting for the accused. She invited him over. She had a relationship with him. They were drinking. The audience having experienced the law from the barrister's point of view now see how things might play out for a victim-survivor.

There is a particularly striking moment at the end of the first act where Tessa tries to take the first taxi at a cab-rank, but the driver won't take her as the trip is not worth his while. She berates him about the cab-rank rule, a rule barristers are all too familiar with, and finally, pleadingly, tells him it's not fair. She then asks him to take her to the nearest police station, where she is cross-examined once more.

One in three women worldwide will experience sexual and physical violence. Nine out of every ten sexual assaults are not reported to police. Of those few that are reported, nine in ten end up with no conviction.

In the face of this, *Prima Facie* throws up a lot of open questions, with few clear answers. How can women be better supported to report assault? How can we believe them while maintaining the presumption of innocence? How can cross examination be safer for victims? How can the truth come to light when there are only two people in the room?

The play ends with a chilling call to arms.

"Something has to change."

AUTHOR

Theatre review by Greta Marks

Sponsor

Justitia Lawyers and Consultants

The role of community for women in the legal profession and how Justitia contributes

I have almost always worked in women-dominated workplaces, with women leading at senior levels. So the notion of working within a community for women was the default. But I know outside of my glorious little bubble, this is not always the case.

So what do I mean by community here?

For me, it is a collection of individuals, bonded together by a sense of a shared experience and sadly, at times from a shared sense of exclusion. It conveys solidarity and belonging. It works towards creating connections which are relational, not simply transactional. Forming, nourishing and sustaining a community is effortful, takes time and is an ongoing process. Embedded in this concept of community can be a sense of loyalty to members, even if there does not seem to be an immediate benefit to the individual.

When I think about a community of or for women, it is important to acknowledge that there is of course immense diversity within any community of women and intersectionality can indeed create complexities and, at times tension, to the notion of community.

So is it possible to create these features of community in a professional setting such as the legal profession?

In the context of the legal profession, a community of women can be empowering, motivating, validating and create a forum to exchange practical tools to thrive in the profession.

I have seen at Justitia that law firms can contribute to this community building. The firm takes pride in being women-led and supporting the advancement of women in the profession. We have seen important value to creating platforms for women to network and share their valuable knowledge and experiences. For example, Justitia has hosted events for our networks for International Women's Day such as 'Building support networks - How to thrive as an outlier' with our panel of women speakers talking about their pathways in male dominated industries.

But the benefits of community building among women in my mind extends beyond the benefits to the individual in terms of their professional advancement. For me, it can be deeply existential. There is something so relaxing and reassuring about being in the company of people with a shared lived experience - where you can get those good vibes from being amongst those who just get it. And that carving out these precious spaces can indeed be, in its own way, an act of everyday resistance.



AUTHOR
Korina Leoncio, Associate

Sponsor

KHQ Lawyers

KHQ's Perspective on Community in the legal profession and how it contributes to a sense of community.

We will encounter innumerable challenges throughout our careers, as we build our legal, professional and practice management skills, and navigate our way through legal practice. This might include dealing with demanding clients, meeting challenging/competing deadlines, juggling family commitments, or managing expectations and workload.

As we navigate our way through these challenges, it is often our community and support systems that help us to grow and thrive in our careers. Communities are essential to our development as practitioners, in that they provide us with the opportunity to observe and connect with others on both a professional and personal level. I believe that connecting with other lawyers through sharing knowledge and stories helps practitioners to better manage all facets of their practice and to ultimately enjoy it.

Law firms and legal organisations have a responsibility to provide development opportunities and to facilitate a culture whereby practitioners feel nurtured and supported by colleagues, mentors, and leaders alike. Firm initiatives such as mentoring programs, leadership training, business development training and networking events provide practitioners with opportunities to develop valuable people and practice management skills.

Fostering a nurturing environment enables practitioners to realise their career goals, including reaching leadership positions, while also achieving work life balance. With an increasing number of women pursuing a legal career, it is important that firms continue to create leadership opportunities for women and foster an environment whereby women can achieve their goals.

KHQ Lawyers fosters an environment where all employees feel supported and have the opportunity to connect with their colleagues, both personally and professionally. We do this via a range of activities designed to build connection and collegiality - such as through hosting professional networking events across various practice areas (and VWL events!), various social activities each month, our mentor and buddy program (which connects each employee with both a mentor and a buddy from other teams), and our graduate program. Our open office plan facilitates ease of collaboration both within and across teams. We also have an open door policy, whereby employees of any level are encouraged to reach out to senior leaders across the firm, to tap into their wealth of experience. These initiatives enable our people to observe, listen, develop and have more conversations, which creates a strong sense of connection across the firm - something of which we are inordinately proud!



AUTHOR
Molly Richardson, Lawyer

What's on our VWL bookshelf?

Tom Lake

Ann Patchett (2023)

In 2020, Lara's three adult daughters are back home living on the family cherry orchard. To pass the long, hot days spent picking cherries, they ask their mother to tell them the story of her romance with famous actor Peter Duke, taking Lara back to her summer on Tom Lake. A perfect spring-time read, both soothing and poignant, Patchett delivers a subtle meditation on family, relationships and home.

Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow

Gabrielle Zevin (2022)

Sadie and Sam meet as children and form a deep connection over a shared love of video games. Readers follow their relationship over a span of 30 years, seeing them go from brilliant students attending Harvard and MIT to famous video game designers following the success of their game, Ichigo. They are faced with the challenges of navigating fame, relationships, creative freedom and, above all, their love for one another. A beautiful story about love in all its forms.

Romantic Comedy

Curtis Sittenfeld (2023)

Sally, a sketch writer for a Saturday night live-television comedy show, notices an ongoing trend of her dorky male colleagues routinely dating beautiful, talented women. Annoyed by this, Sally almost laughs at how perfect-looking popstar, Noah Brewster, is when he comes into the studio as this week's guest-star, thinking he'd never date a woman as average-looking as she considers herself to be. We all know where this is going... a fun read that explores dating and love in the modern age, with unexpected bonus insight into the world of comedy sketch-writing.

The Light Years

Elizabeth Jane Howard (1990)

The first installment in Howard's The Cazalet Chronicles series, *The Light Years* presents a tableau of 1930s Britain. While William and Kitty Cazalet's four adult children and their families spend another summer at the family's idyllic Sussex estate, the atmosphere shifts and war looms. With elegant prose and an exquisitely crafted cast of characters, Howard paints a vivid picture of British aristocratic life in the years leading up to the Second World War.

Lessons

Ian McEwan (2022)

As an 11-year-old at boarding school, Roland Baines is seduced by his piano teacher, Miss Cornell. Years later, Roland's wife suddenly abandons him, leaving him with their newborn child. At a loss, Roland begins to unravel his past in an attempt to understand his wife and, eventually, himself. Set against a backdrop of political events, taking us from post-World War II Britain to the fall of the Berlin Wall, this is a reflection on how history shapes people as much as people shape history. A harrowing story, masterfully told.

Song of the Crocodile

Nardi Simpson (2020)

Three generations of the Billymil family have lived in a tiny community on the outskirts of Darnmoor, a rural town. While the town is undergoing a period of rapid change, the Billymils are often visited by their ancestral spirits. A lyrical, descriptive story that portrays the intergenerational effects of living among the impacts of violence, racism and colonialism.

AUTHOR

Book reviews by Alana Morgante



Sally Dunne

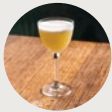
Glou Sustainable Wine Bar + Shop

'At the end of the day, we need to adapt, change and innovate. We're starting with wine and hospitality - because that's what we know best.'

PHOTOGRAPHY
Ron Goldmann-Davis

Rahel Goldmann, co-founder and managing director of Glou Sustainable Wine Bar + Shop is originally from Berlin (Germany) and has worked for the last 14 years in upscale wine bars, restaurants and cafes across both hemispheres, until she and her husband Ron Goldmann-Davis opened Glou in 2020. 'We're here to bridge the environmental gap between how we make, sell and drink wine in Australia. We work directly with winemakers to take wine from the barrel straight to Glou and then to you in bottles that can be refilled and are interchangeable in size, or to be enjoyed at Glou with a snack and good company.'

Glou's method cuts out single use vessels, labels, corks, caps and more than halves emissions associated with transportation and packaging. It also means you won't be wasting a drop - whether it's a school night or a weekend.



Take Thyme

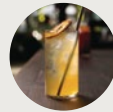
(Makes 10 serves)

Ingredients

- 700ml vodka of your choice
- 100ml Autonomy Davo Plum
- 100ml lemon juice
- 100g sugar
- 100ml water
- One bunch lemon thyme

Method

- 1 Infuse vodka with half the bunch of Lemon Thyme for 48h at room temperature.
- 2 Lemon Thyme syrup: Add water, sugar and the other half bunch of Lemon Thyme into a saucepan and simmer for 20 minutes. Take off the heat and infuse for 48h in the fridge.
- 3 Once infused, take the Lemon Thyme stalks out of the vodka and syrup.
- 4 Add 60ml Lemon Thyme vodka, 10ml of lemon juice, 10ml of Autonomy Davo Plum and 5ml Lemon Thyme syrup to a shaker with ice. Hard shake, double strain into a coup and enjoy.



Cardamom, Lime & Bitters

(Makes 6 serves)

Ingredients

- 100ml water
- 100g sugar
- 10 Cardamom pods
- 3 limes
- Angostura bitters

Method

- 1 Simmer cardamom pods in water for 25 minutes, then strain cardamom pods. Add 500g of sugar to the water and simmer until sugar has dissolved, stir occasionally.
Once the sugar has dissolved, take off the heat and add the lime peel only. Leave to cool.
- 3 Juice 2 of the limes, reserve one for garnish.
- 4 Once cooled, strain off the lime peel and happy days.
- 5 Add 15ml of syrup, 7ml of lime juice and a dash of Angostura bitters to a glass. Stir well, add ice and sparkling water, garnish with a slice of lime - Chef's kiss

Those interested in refreshment without the DIY can visit
Glou, 310 Smith St, Collingwood VIC 3066

glou.com.au

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Leanne Xiu Williams

Sponsorship Report

Victorian Women Lawyers would like to thank our sponsors for their ongoing support in 2023:

- 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
- Nicholes Family Lawyers
- Stuart Family Lawyers
- Svenson Barristers
- Victorian Government Solicitor's Office

Many of our sponsors hosted VWL events which you can read about in the Events section of this Journal. We also thank our sponsors for their contributions to Portia.

We also extend our gratitude to the following event and project sponsors for their support in 2023:

- Clarence Workplaces for Professionals
- Cornwalls
- Deakin Law School
- Gatehouse Legal Recruitment
- Lex Medicus

VWL would not be able to do the work we do without the support and contributions of our sponsors and supporters. The generosity of our sponsors has enabled us to host engaging and impactful events and foster important conversations in our community. We have been able to bring together legal professionals from diverse backgrounds and provide opportunities for learning, growth, connection and empowerment. We congratulate our sponsors on another successful year and are looking forward to collaborating with our sponsors again in 2024.

AUTHOR

Isabel Britten-Jones, Sponsorship Officer

Committee

Diversity and Inclusion

During 2023 the Diversity and Inclusion Committee have worked on building VWL's connections and collaborative opportunities with law associations representing diverse and intersectional co-horts. In particular we have grown VWL's relationship with Tarwirri, Indigenous Law Students and Lawyers Association of Victoria and with Pride in Law.

We are committed to learning through discourse and discussion how the legal profession can promote inclusion of those with diverse backgrounds, plans are in the works for events in 2024.

The D&I Committee continued to represent VWL at round table meetings of the Victorian Legal profession and provided support to a number of initiatives and events ensuring an intersectional lens was applied to VWL's work. The D&I team also contributed to many of VWL's communications and publications in 2023 including statements in support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

In October the committee contributed an article to the Law Institute Journal. In 'Respecting and celebrating cultural differences - Finding a spirit of unity' Shivani Pillai, wrote about culture diversity of race, ethnicity, religion, language and customs *within* culture and how we can find a spirit of unity inspired by her experience in Papua New Guinea where she was voluntarily teaching advocacy to 150 Law graduates on behalf of the Victorian Bar (International Advocacy Training Committee).

The Diversity and Inclusion Committee welcomes new members particularly those with diverse abilities, gender diversity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples so truly reflect and advocate for diversity, for women in law in Victoria and beyond.

AUTHOR

Shivani Pillai and Felicia Leong, Co-Chairs



Lori Pensini

Committee

Justice

Role

The role of the Justice Committee is to bring justice and human rights related issues that impact women to the attention of VWL, its members and the wider legal community.

2023 Achievements / Highlights

This year, the Justice Committee partnered with sponsor Clayton Utz, to hold the Reproductive Justice Panel discussion during Women's Health Week to explore our rights and employers obligations through the various stages of the reproductive journey.

From this impactful event we are working with the wider VWL volunteer base to look at how we can make workplaces in the legal industry better for women who might be impacted by gender specific health issues.

Special mentions

Thanks to our dedicated committee members: Julia Despard and Rebeka Glover.

AUTHOR

Amanda Emonson and Zefy Souvlakis, Co-Chairs



Heather Miller

Committee

Outreach

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.

2023 Achievements / Highlights

This year, the Outreach Committee continued to focus on connecting people through technology, to further remove barriers to engagement with our regional and suburban lawyers and students. We proudly hosted an online panel-based event focussed on 'Difficult Conversations at Work', which provided invaluable insights to our community on managing conflict and difficult conversations. We also organised a joint community themed networking event in Geelong with the Women in the Public Sector Committee.

Special mentions

We wish to thank our committee members for their time and support. We also wish to thank Nicole Davidson, Nina Hoang and Maddison Harrington in helping deliver an important discussion on approaching difficult conversations and providing some practical tips to navigate them. In addition, we wish to thank Diana Taylor for being a part of our community themed networking event in Geelong.

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. We will continue to offer a mixture of online and hybrid events to enable VWL members and the broader legal community, regardless of their location and circumstances, to attend and remain involved.

Reflection on 2023 Theme of "Community"

The theme of 'Community' brings a sense of togetherness and belonging.

The commitment to community goes to the heart and soul of Outreach, and will continue to be a focus in the future.

AUTHOR

Lucy Padula and Shaniya Vilash, Co-Chairs

Committee

Work Practices

Role

The Work Practices Committee is dedicated to addressing the various aspects of employment practices that affect women lawyers. With a primary emphasis on key areas such as flexibility, workplace discrimination, pay equity and transparency, parental leave policies, part-time work, and the professional advancement of women lawyers, our committee seeks to discuss and analyse challenges consistently faced by women. The committee also aims to improve the overall work environment for women in the legal profession, fostering equal opportunities and gender inclusivity in the field.

2023 Achievements / Highlights

2023 marked the return of 'Tough Talks,' an engaging session where experienced legal professionals shared their insights on handling challenging conversations. Throughout this interactive event, we collectively explored effective strategies for addressing crucial topics such as advocating for well-deserved remuneration increases, managing high-stakes client matters, and championing diversity in the legal profession.

The Work Practices Committee then re-launched the Coming to the Bar event where we were joined by four barristers and Anna Svenson, director and principal clerk to discuss various aspects of life at the Bar, including exam preparation, mentors and clerks, practice areas, parent and care giving responsibilities and disability supports.

Special mentions

We would like to thank all of the speakers that presented at our events. Their honesty and transparency made the events successful and inspirational. They each provided valuable insights and knowledge to our audience, which have greatly contributed to our goals.

We also extend our gratitude to our dedicated committee members for their tireless efforts and valuable contributions throughout the year. Special thanks to Julia Eastoe, Audrey Capasso, Kat Tilnak, Katerina Petkovska, Mary Quinn, Safai Alidad, Sage Wilson-Short, Sapphire Parsons, and Stacey White for their unwavering commitment and support.

Looking ahead to 2024

Looking ahead to 2024, our focus will be on the continued development of our events and projects, with an aim to make them even more enriching and impactful. We recognise the importance of creating a platform for open dialogue and learning, where individuals from all stages of their legal careers can find guidance.

AUTHOR

Isabella Armao and Nina Milner, Co-Chairs

Sponsor

Svenson Barristers

Building a Supportive Legal Community

Building a supportive legal community is incredibly important for any lawyer or person who works in the industry. By its nature, a community is about sharing experience, seeking support and friendship and finding people who have common ground with you.

Let's walk through some challenges and opportunities in building a supportive community in the legal industry:

- **Who should I know?** Anyone who can understand your role in the industry can be a key person in your community. Don't seek out people who do exactly what you do, even if this seems like the easiest path. Ultimately the legal sector is a small one, so having connections outside of your practice area is valuable. Mentors are also incredible people to welcome into your community. Ask peers or industry leaders for recommendations for a good mentor match for you. There are also some great formal mentoring programs you can seek out through organisations like the LIV, VicBar and VWL.
- **How do I find 'my people'?** The adversarial nature of the legal industry does initially seem to present barriers to creating connections. But one thing that I think that the legal industry does well is creating social spaces for touchpoints away from the email chains and courtrooms. Networking doesn't come easily to everyone, but it is an important way to expand your circle. Get out there and go to events! VWL offers so many opportunities for this – you just need to rally the courage to get out there and engage. You will quickly meet peers who will become warm familiar faces as a starting point.
- **Fostering acquaintances to become connections:** You took the step to meet someone – now it is time to make that acquaintance an authentic connection, maybe even an industry friendship. What next? I recommend you harness the power of social media. Once you meet someone you felt connection with cement that meeting into a lasting relationship with a LinkedIn connection ad. You will quickly see who you have in common and it gives you the practical details to enable you to seek out more substantial 1:1 connections.

Ultimately, having a community will enrich your experience in the law in so many ways. You can have a very long career in the law – sharing it alongside others who you feel connection with will always be more fulfilling than doing it solo.



AUTHOR

Anna Svenson, Director and Principal Clerk

Committee

Women in the Public Sector (WiPS)

Role

The Women in the Public Sector Committee fosters opportunities for women with legal backgrounds to participate in learning and development, engagement with the broader legal community, and to explore topics impacting women in the public service.

2023 Achievements / Highlights

The WiPS Committee in 2023 has thoroughly embodied VWL's focus on building meaningful, authentic relationships, and the benefits of forming such a support base.

WiPS held the insightful *'Frank and Fearless: Ethics in the Public Sector'* panel CPD event. Held online the session was attended by a number of practitioners not only in Victoria but in other states and territories as well.

In the spirit of community, the WiPS Committee was excited to collaborate with VWL's Outreach committee an event in Geelong, an area (outside of Melbourne's CBD) with one of the highest concentrations of public sector lawyers. The event brought together public and private sector lawyers for an opportunity to foster new connections and provide a platform for new relationships to be built in the Geelong area.

Special mentions

The WiPS Committee expresses its sincere gratitude to our wonderful committee members and their contributions in 2023: Maira Dad, Stephanie D' Rozario, Jessica Fitzgerald, Rebecca Johnston, Alex Lioudvigova, Kiara Wagner, and the support of all past members.

The WiPS Committee also gives special thanks to its outgoing Co-Chair in 2023, Catherine Dent.

Looking ahead to 2024

The activities of the WiPS committee in 2023, and the community forged within the committee itself, is a credit to the strong social and working relationships fostered through VWL. The WiPS committee looks forward to further enriching its activities into 2024.

AUTHOR

Rachel Matulis and Natalie Plumstead, Co-Chairs

Committee

Networking

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 and building their community in the legal world.

2023 Achievements / Highlights

The Networking Committee had a successful year of events which you can read about in the events section of this Journal.

We held our annual Members and Guests event as well as introducing a new event "Building Your Community Event" and have been working to build connections with associations outside of the law to provide VWL members with even more diverse opportunities for networking in 2024.

Finally, the Networking Committee have provided support for VWL's AGM and End of Year celebration to take place at the College of Law.

Special mentions

The Co-Chairs, Rhiannon and Jyoti would like to say a very big thank you to all of our wonderful Committee members – Ariella, Abigail, Victoria, Rachael, Elle, Lucy, Jess, Alex, Louise, Shannon, Felicia and Paloma.

Their enthusiasm, imagination and hard-work was the reason that the events held by the Networking Committee were a huge success!

Reflection on 2023 Theme of "Community"

Community in the law is so important now more than ever. It is our committee's role to continue to provide opportunities to connect VWL members together, this is always a privilege and we thank everyone who attended our events and contributed to the community VWL is building.

AUTHOR

Jyoti Haikerwal and Rhiannon Zarro, Co-Chairs



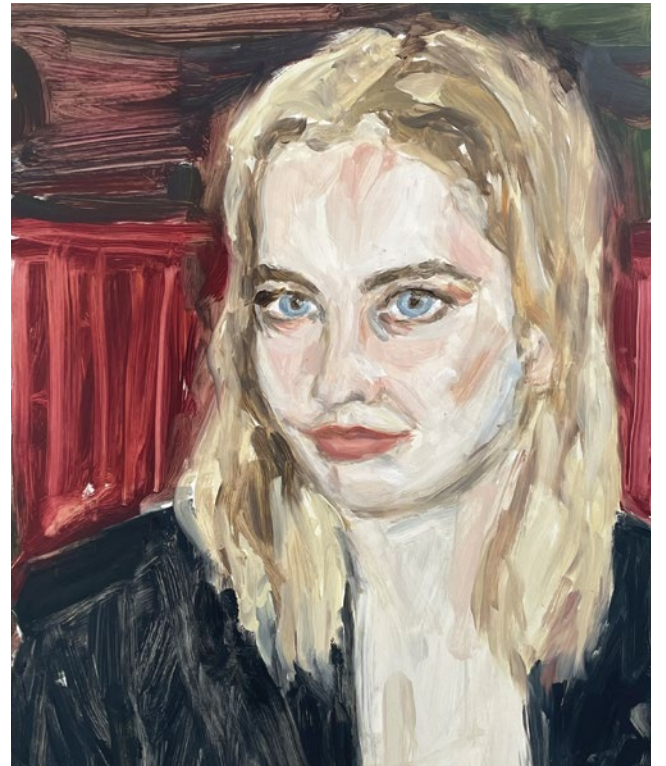
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Kirthana Selvaraj



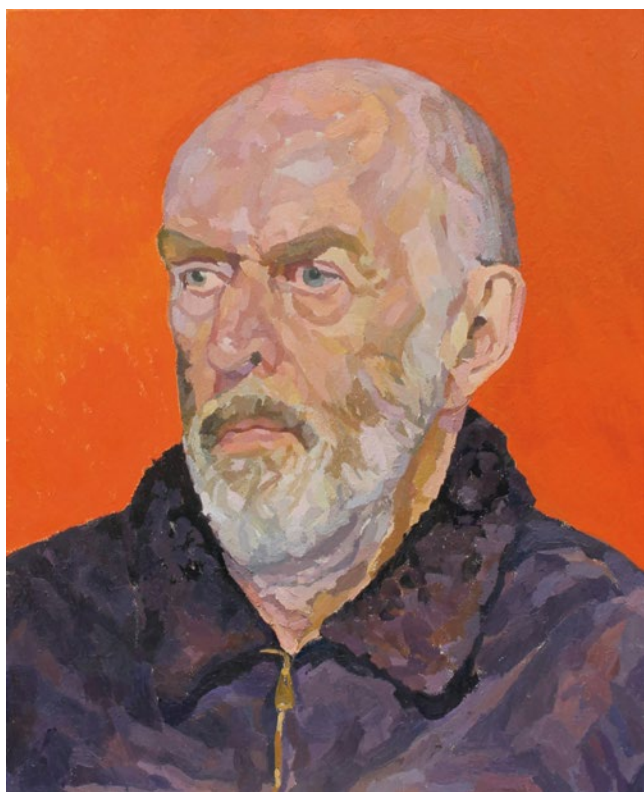
Mez Truskett



Ondine Seabrook



Rebecca Armstrong



Elizabeth Nelson



Frankie Morgan

Committee

Law Reform

Role

The Law Reform Committee's primary role is to promote women lawyers and gender equality through submissions and contributions to law reform initiatives, such as Victorian or Commonwealth government public consultation on proposed law reform.

2023 Achievements / Highlights

In 2023 we farewelled exceptional past Co-Chairs: Andrea de Silva and Stephanie Dendrinis, and welcomed Sophie Lloyd and Casey Guilmartin as new Co-Chairs.

The Committee had a busy start to the year, contributing to three law reform consultations at both a Victorian and Commonwealth level:

- Federal Attorney-General's Department's (AGD) public consultation process on *Scoping the Establishment of a Federal Judicial Commission*. The consultation received 57 submissions, of which 37 have been made public on the AGD website.
- Federal Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee's *Inquiry into Current and Proposed Sexual Consent Laws in Australia*. The final Inquiry Report was published in September 2023. The VWL submission is #47 and is available for download on the Senate Inquiry Report website.
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet's Office of Women's public consultation on the *National Strategy to achieve Gender Equality*.

Behind the scenes, we have been consulted on several nascent law reform proposals and are developing tools to support the broader community to make law reform submissions. We are excited to share these in 2024

Special mentions

Thank you to our enthusiastic Committee members: Luisa Ashton, Sabrina Berardinelli, Sarah Lefevre, Jasmine Tonkin, Quynh Trang McGrath, Andree Pianta, Bronwyn O'Brien, Samreen Shakeel, Madeleine Strattman, Natasha Whitehead, and all past members.

A warm thank you to Jess Date and Raff Rossignuolo from the Law Institute of Victoria for generously finding our Committee a space to meet throughout the year.

Looking ahead to 2024

We are excited to continue contributing to Commonwealth and Victorian law reform and sharing tools to support the broader community of women and gender diverse peoples to make submissions to law reform consultations in 2024.

AUTHOR

Sophie Lloyd and Casey Guilmartin, Co-Chairs

Committee

Mentoring

Role

VWL's Mentoring Committee is responsible for all mentoring programs and associated education and support for mentors and mentees. Mentoring programs are a great opportunity for students and junior lawyers to gain insight into working in the law, develop their network and share ideas with mentors in the legal profession.

2023 Achievements / Highlights

VWL & Women Barristers' Association Student Mentoring Program

This program has been run since 2009 bringing together law students with solicitors and barristers and providing an opportunity for those about to enter our profession to learn from those who are already working in it. The patron of this program is Honourable Justice Rita Incerti, we are honoured to have her valued support and guidance for this program. This year we matched over 60 pairs of program participants. In a sign the profession does care about giving back and helping the next generation, we had more applications from members of the profession wanting to be a mentor than we had students to pair them with.

VWL Professional Mentoring Program

Designed to enable junior women (less than 5 years PAE) in the legal profession to obtain the benefits that may be drawn from a 1:1 mentoring relationship. VWL matched over 60 pairs of program participants eager to grow their network and develop as professionals. We thank the patron of this program, the Honourable Associate Justice Mary-Jane Ierodiconou for her continued support of this program

Special mentions

Justine Sammut

Bridget Coutts

Cordilia Thomas

Mia Hyslop

Pearl Wang

Batool Al Sallakh

Ginevra Greco

Monique Hardinge – special mention for her assistance with the pairing process for the 2023 VWL Student Mentoring Program

Looking ahead to 2024

Moving into 2024, we hope to continue providing our programs, being the Student and Professional Mentoring Programs, and to building on the theme of community, we are also looking at education materials and training for those looking to get more out of their mentoring relationships.

AUTHOR

Bridget Coutts and Justine Sammut, Co-Chairs

Sponsor

College of Law

The meaning of Community at the College of Law

The way in which the legal profession works together and offers its time to continually maintain and upskill its members is a great example of a community of professional learning. Since 2017 I have worked with the College of Law as an Adjunct Lecturer helping to develop the legal skills of thousands of graduates aspiring to join our community. My own career development has also been greatly enhanced by the time others in our community have given.

In the Victorian Bar (Bar) mentoring scheme I was mentored by Glen Pauline. I am grateful and owe my career to the support and advice that his mentoring provided. More importantly it really opened my eyes to the power of mentoring. Now, I have paid back that benefit to others by participating as a mentor with the Victorian Women Lawyers', Law Institute of Victoria, and the Asian Australian Lawyers Association mentoring programs.

As Chair of the Bar's ADR Committee Education Subcommittee, we organise CPDs for our members on the topic of ADR, including a mediators' discussion group which is an opportunity for members of the Victorian Bar who are mediators to come together and reflect on their practice. I have been attending since I was first accredited around 5 years ago, in 2018 I was the most junior person attending, now I lead them. This brings the experiences of senior and junior members together and offers an opportunity to learn and grow from each other and practice.

Committee work is an essential way to help shape the wider legal community and we have been involved in submissions to the MSB and Supreme Court as well as approving and working on accreditation of mediators at the Bar. I have also had the opportunity to be appointed a member of the ADR of the Magistrates' Court of Australia.

As a new mediator I really struggled getting my practice hours up. I rang Carey Nichol, a fellow member of the Bar and ADR Committee who asked me, 'when do you need it done by? What are you doing on Thursday?'. I got my hours thanks to Carey's and Glen Pauline's generosity. Now I make it a habit of having a junior co-mediator at every opportunity.

This is what community means to me.



AUTHOR

Tasman Ash Fleming, Adjunct Lecturer at the College of Law, Barrister & Accredited Mediator (NMAS) Victorian Bar

Sponsor

Maddocks

Maddocks and its impact on the wider community

At Maddocks we are encouraged to attend pro bono clinics with Refugee Legal. As part of these clinics, we call refugees to hear their claims. We draft letters and statements and submit applications for them. All of this is aimed at keeping refugees here, bringing their families here and allowing these people to finally access the certainty and permanency needed to build a life and truly foster a community.

Refugee Legal work used to entail assisting refugees with temporary protection visa applications, but changes to the law this year have granted temporary visa holders permanent "resolution of status" visas.

The temporary visa system was slow – often causing refugees to appear to be visa-less while their claims were processed. They would finally get a visa only to need to reapply for the next one. They constantly had to re-substantiate their claims or face being returned to their home country and often would struggle to access employment and health services. Even in these circumstances, Australia has been enriched by refugee communities who have shared their culture and built networks within Australian society.

The shift to permanent visas has been an incredible time at Refugee Legal. My phone calls would often end with the client telling me that they "have waited 10 years for this" and I could sense their relief.

Now work continues to request that those who have had protection claims rejected can be reconsidered, and family abroad can be reunited with Australian refugees and given permanent visas in Australia. Mothers, fathers, children and siblings who have been separated for over 10 years now have the chance to see each other again.

Slowly but surely we are playing a small part to assist people to re-connect with their communities abroad and, through a sense of permanency, foster community connections in Australia and put down roots.

Where our employers offer us the opportunity to dedicate a day here and there to contribute to Refugee Legal (or any other pro bono clinic), we have everything to gain from saying yes.



AUTHOR

Laura McKenzie, Lawyer and co-coordinator of Refugee Legal clinics at Maddocks

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Sally Ryan

Sponsor

Victorian Government Solicitors Office

How the VGSO fosters a sense of community during a time of crisis

During the pandemic, legal systems and rules impacted directly on all Victorians in visible and dramatic ways – not just changing how we live and work, but also through consequential steps which aimed to minimise those impacts.

The VGSO felt those impacts as public servants, practitioners and as an employer. We advised on human rights and Charter implications. We helped craft and implement rental and other relief schemes for impacted individuals and businesses. And, like everyone, we had to grapple with a world where our shared community, linked to a sense of place, was disrupted.

Our responsibility was to continue to deliver for our clients and the Victorian public, while we worked to safeguard the physical and mental health of our staff. Despite the challenges that came through that remarkable period, I am proud – not just of what we did then, but of what we're doing now to preserve the flexibility that we know works for service delivery, but still fosters an inclusive community of ethical and fulfilling practice.

VGSO's purpose is to serve the rule of law exclusively for the State. We do not define success by our size or profit, but by whether the work we do lives up to this somewhat lofty goal.

That provides an important shared objective for all of us, which is a great starting point for fostering a sense of common purpose and community, and a touchstone to return to whenever we are faced with questions about ethics or the scope of our practice.

Those in private firms would recognise many of the other things we do to foster a shared community across various buildings, groups and areas of practice – from social and learning activities, formal and informal peer networks, to our future leaders' academy that trains high performing future managers on skills beyond their legal expertise. Our strong links to organisations like VWL – including providing its current exceptional President – and the LIV also help connect our workplace community with the broader profession, as does our leadership on equitable briefing.

Ultimately, though, as the pandemic taught us, our sense of community is cultural rather than geographic. Our focus on collaboration, leadership and learning – a VGSO way of treating each other, our clients and all Victorians with fairness, decency and respect – defines and sustains our community and our pride in it.



AUTHOR

Alex Murphy, Assistant Victorian Government Solicitor

Event

Frank and Fearless: Ethics in the Public Sector

23 February 2023

On 23 February 2023, Victorian Women Lawyers' Women in the Public Sector Committee hosted the 'Frank and Fearless: Ethics in the Public Sector' panel CPD webinar. The discussion centred on the ethical landscape that public sector lawyers operate within, and tools for overcoming the individual ethical complexities that may be faced in the course of carrying out their roles.

The panel, who brought a rich variety of work and life experiences, comprised Australian Office of Parliamentary Counsel, First Parliamentary Counsel Meredith Leigh; barrister Elizabeth Bennett SC; Wage Inspectorate Victoria's Chief Counsel Tien Tran; and VGSO Lead Counsel Nicole Spicer.

Attendees of the event enjoyed an insightful discussion regarding the various ethical scenarios that can arise when working in and for government. The panellists discussed topics including relationship management in an in-house environment, ethical expectations of barristers, and the legislative framework Commonwealth government lawyers must comply with. The panel generously provided their own insight as what it means, in practice and beyond, to act in accordance with their core ethical principles in order to provide frank, fearless and independent advice.

The WiPS Committee extend thanks to the panel, panel moderator Humaira (Maira Dad), subcommittee leaders Kiara Wagner, Alex Lioudvigova and Humaira (Maira Dad), Co-Chairs Catherine Dent and Rachel Matulis, and the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office for sponsoring this event.



Event

Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Lunch | International Women's Day 2023 - Cracking the Code: Innovation for a gender equal future

9 March 2023

On 9 March 2023, Victorian Women Lawyers held the Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Lunch in celebration of International Women's Day.

Attendees from across the legal profession gathered in the Melbourne Town Hall to hear a lively discussion between Jane Caro AM, feminist, writer and journalist and Zoe Condliffe, founder and CEO of She's A Crowd.

With the UN theme for International Women's Day "Cracking the Code: Innovation for a gender equal future" as their starting theme, Jane and Zoe shared intergenerational views on past and current barriers that women face within the workforce, society and discussed innovative practices that are being used to break these biases. Importantly, they also provided practical tips for how individuals can work towards an equitable future.

Sophie Lefebvre, VWL President provided the guests a history of the lunch as well as reflections on the life and legacy of Dame Roma Mitchell while Liz Ruddle KC (Convenor of Women Barristers' Association) shared her thoughts on the importance not only of the 'first' women in law but those who follow in their footsteps.

We extend our gratitude for the support of our Event Sponsor, Gatehouse Legal Recruitment and event partner Women's Barrister Association and thank Executive Committee members Joanna Abraham and Stephanie Vejar for their hard work in organising this event.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Melissa Hobbs



Event

Managing and Preventing Vicarious Trauma in Law

17 March 2023

On 17 March 2023, members of the legal profession joined VWL for a seminar on the impact of vicarious trauma in the legal profession, including recognising the symptoms and discussing how the legal profession can do better to help lawyers manage and prevent vicarious trauma.

Attendees heard from Bree Knoester (Brave Legal), Andrea Phillips (College of Law) and Nina Milner (Victoria Police Prosecutor and Managing Supervisor of the Specialist Sexual Offences Prosecution Unit).

Bree shared with attendees lessons our own profession can learn from recent cases. This included sharing information about how the ABC helps their journalists manage vicarious trauma, such as having trauma informed awareness training for staff; trained peer support, having a network of professionals to support staff and have a "talk, talk, talk" policy to normalise the topic as we can't change the nature of the work, but we can talk more about it.

Andrea helped those in attendance to develop a personal wellness plan and she also highlighted the importance of having high quality supervision and concluded with guiding the attendees through a mindfulness exercise. Both Bree and Andrea also reflected on the importance of Mental Health First Aid training.

Thank you to our sponsors Brave Legal and the College of Law.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Melissa Hobbs



Event

Flourishing Workshop Series with Penny Locaso

19 April 2023, 19 July 2023 and 5 October 2023

In 2023 VWL was happy to welcome back Penny Locaso, who hosted a series of wellbeing and leadership workshops. Penny is the author of *Hacking Happiness*, a TEDX speaker and contributor to the Harvard Business Review.

On 19 April 2023, participants joined Penny for 'Fear(less) You Masterclass' on how to use fear to create the change we wish to see in work and life. The interactive workshop saw participants develop action plans that will enable them to remove the barriers associated with fears and a tool kit to build resilience and confidence. On 19 July 2023, Penny facilitated "Work-Life Boundaries for energy, presence & calm." One of the key take-aways from the workshop is that "Flourishing isn't a luxury, it's a necessity".

On 5 October 2023, Victorian Women Lawyers held the final workshop of VWL's Flourishing Workshops series online. The Clarity Roadmap helped attendees to find clarity in their career or life journey.

When we asked attendees about what they found most useful about the workshop, we received the following feedback:

"A very helpful roadmap to aid self reflection and next steps."

"Clarity, understanding of my yes list and what my purpose is, how I can link it to my goals."

We are so grateful and thank Penny for her expertise in helping us to deliver our purpose when we established the Flourishing Workshop series, which has helped our members and the wider community with access to resources, tools and training necessary to enable them to become insightful leaders, build meaningful connections and end the cycle of burnout and for themselves and their staff, which in turn leads to sustainable careers in law.

We thank our sponsor Clarence Workplace for Professionals for hosting the first two workshops of this series.



Event

Members & Guests

4 May 2023

On the evening of 4 May 2023, the networking committee hosted VWL's annual Members and Guests event at the Bank on Collins Street. VWL were thrilled to be joined by Sashi Perera, a 'recovering lawyer', comedian and nominee of best newcomer at the 2023 Melbourne International Comedy Festival.

Members and Guests event is an evening where VWL showcases itself to the wider community. VWL were delighted to have almost 200 people attend the event, and it was a joy to see VWL members and guests networking over drinks and canapes on the night.

Sashi brought a light-hearted feel to the event. The room was alive with laughter as Sashi shared her experience from practicing law and how she eventually transformed her way from the world of law to the world of comedy.

VWL thanks Gatehouse Legal Recruitment for sponsoring this event and for their continued sponsorship of this event since 2019. Thank you to Abigail, Ariella and Victoria for their hard work in putting this event together.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Melissa Hobbs



Event

Wiyi Yani U Thangani Summit

11 May 2023

This year, VWL has been proud to live its values and its support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. This has included developing stronger ties with Tarwirri, the Indigenous Law Students and Lawyers Association of Victoria.

VWL was proud to sponsor Tarwirri members Candice Jackson, a proud Palawa woman and barrister and Keshi Moore, a proud Banjima woman and law student, to attend the Wiyi Yani U Thangani ('Women's Voices') Summit (the 'Summit') on Ngannawal and Ngambri Country (Canberra). The Summit was conducted over three days and was a one-in-a-generation opportunity.

Candice and Keshi met with various First Nations women from across the nation, all of whom have unique backgrounds and stories. The Summit was an opportunity for First Nations women and girls to strategise with each other about the work ahead while celebrating the work that has already been done. It was also a reminder that First Nations women have great strength and power and can achieve incredible goals, especially when working together for future First Nations generations.

A number of outstanding projects led by First Nations women and girls were on display, which were strongly based on culture, forging ahead with innovative ideas, and advocating against prejudice and systemic injustices.

Tarwirri and VWL thank Candice and Keshi for sharing their experiences the very vital Summit which provided such a truly inspiring experience including an 'Instagram take over' by Keshi.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Keshi Moore



Event

Tough talks - How to navigate difficult conversations in the workplace

11 May 2023

Imagine that you've been at the same firm for three years, it's the annual salary review and you are told unceremoniously that there is no budget for the remuneration increase you know you deserve – what do you do? This was one of the many real life experiences that our panel - Koula Politis, Shikha Luddu and Catherine Roberts graciously shared with attendees.

With event moderator, Jessie Taylor at the helm, attendees of our 'Tough Talks' workshop were able to navigate together how to effectively manage our response to difficult conversations in the workplace. Managing a high-stakes client matter and championing diversity in the workplace were other topics covered by our panel, which included sharing key insights and learnings with us.

Attendees walked away with more tips and tools on how to navigate their own difficult conversations in the workplace.

Thank you once again to our event sponsor, KHQ Lawyers who were the ultimate hosts.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Melissa Hobbs



Event

Law Week Film Screening & Panel Discussion: Paid Family and Domestic Violence Leave – A Step in the Right Direction but more needs to be done

17 May 2023

In conjunction with Victorian Law Week 2023, Victorian Women Lawyers, Nicholes Family Lawyers & The College of Law were proud to hold this event which spotlighted recent changes to paid family and domestic violence leave.

The event commenced with a screening of family and domestic violence awareness-raising film *The Fort*. Set in regional Victoria the film tells the story of a mother and son living with family and domestic violence. It was then followed by a panel discussion between experts and key voices in the family violence space:

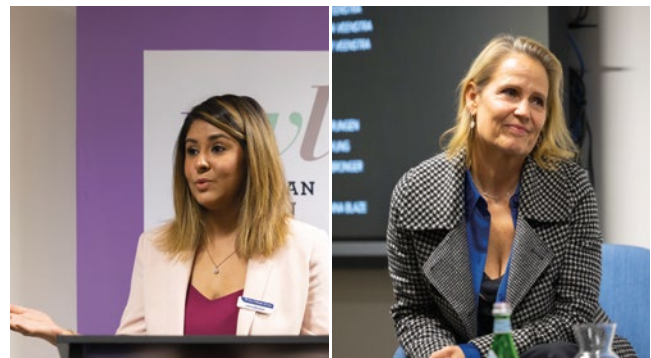
- Jade Blakkarly – CEO, WIRE
- Michaela Maloney – Partner, K&L Gates
- Shaynna Blaze – Co-Founder, Director, Chairperson, Voice of Change

The panel discussed the dire situation faced by many who attend work each day trying to hide the physical, emotional and psychological impact of experiencing family and domestic violence – either directly themselves or as a result of seeing their children being abused in this way and shared their thoughts on recent reforms and what more can be done.

Thank you to the Victoria Law Foundation for their tireless work in making the law accessible to the wider community, as well as to Catherine Giles, Partner at Nicholes Family Lawyers for expertly moderating this important discussion.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Melissa Hobbs



Event

Difficult Conversations at Work

19 July 2023

On 19 July 2023 the Outreach Committee hosted an online panel-based discussion focussed on difficult conversations at work. The event was moderated by Cassandra Hurley from DBA Lawyers who kept the lively discussion between the speakers flowing.

The panellists for the event were:

- Nicole Davidson, commercial mediator;
- Nina Hoang from FCW Lawyers; and
- Maddison Harrington from Gilchrist Connell.

Nicole gave some practical tips on approaching a difficult conversation, including taking the other person's perspective into account, preparing in advance and being flexible. As Nicole noted "when we're dealing with humans, conflict is something we always come across but are rarely taught how to deal with properly."

Maddison suggested that respect, honesty and transparency within the workplace as well as regular check-ins were key to having an effective difficult conversation.

Nina noted that avoiding a difficult conversation will likely make it worse when the issue does arise. Nina suggested a flexible and supportive approach from a manager is beneficial, as you never really know what is happening within an employee's life which may impact their work.

The online format of the panel discussion was an excellent way to share some invaluable insights around difficult conversations with the broader VWL community of members including from regional and suburban, and made the session more accessible to all. We will all be left with Maddison's visual of her employer clients dangling their feet over the flames of a workplace issue while her advice is designed to yank them back from the precipice and diffuse the conflict before it is too late!

Thank you to all involved in making this event a success, including the panellists, VWL Outreach Committee members, and our President and Vice President.



Alison Mackay

Event

VWL & WBA Student Mentoring Program & Launch

26 July 2023

On Wednesday 26 July, the launch of the highly anticipated VWL & Women Barristers' Association (WBA) Student Mentoring Program took place for 2023, sponsored by K&L Gates.

The event was organised by the newly VWL Mentoring Committee, with co-chairs Bridget Coutts and Justine Sammut introducing the event. Attendees heard from the program's patron the Honourable Justice Rita Incerti, who spoke to her personal mentorship experiences and the importance of mentoring relationships for professional growth.

Clare Monger from K&L Gates ran the second half of the event which consisted of an insightful activity providing attendees a chance to on and share their core values with one another.

Many thanks to the sponsor of this program K&L Gates, to the VWL Mentoring Committee for their tireless support in getting the event off the ground and Monique Hardinge of WBA for her assistance with the matching of mentors and mentees ahead of the event.

PHOTOGRAPHY
Melissa Hobbs



Sponsor

Maurice Blackburn

The role of community for women in the legal profession and its application at Maurice Blackburn

Community, for me, is a group of people with whom there is a sense of belonging. This feeling of belonging derives from a recognition that with those people, there are shared values, attributes, or purpose.

Community is powerful because with those shared values and purpose, there is a space in which one can feel welcomed and find support and inspiration. When this occurs, it is easier for people to bring their full selves into their workplace and learn and apply themselves to the best of their potential.

Having a strong sense of community allows those in the legal profession to provide a better service to society. This is particularly so because the legal profession can be a high pressured environment, with large amounts of stress. It can involve working with sensitive and challenging information, as well as working with clients that are grappling with the impact of certain events, injuries or illnesses on their lives. The impact of this can be overwhelming at times.

However, when you feel part of a community, you don't face those challenges alone. It is easier to draw on other people for support, to ask questions, to offer ideas, to ask for feedback, to problem-solve and make goals to progress one's career.

At Maurice Blackburn, I have been fortunate to work in legal teams that are predominantly made up of women. This has given me the opportunity to learn from other women at various levels of seniority in the law, including managers. In a profession that has historically been very male dominated, and in some fields continues to be so, I am very grateful to have had a community of women to learn from and obtain support.

To measure the impact of this on my legal career would be very difficult, but I believe it has contributed significantly to building confidence in the merits of my work (especially when that may be questioned externally by senior members of the profession) and has inspired me to set goals for higher opportunities (having seen other women obtain those more senior positions).

I believe law firms can contribute by having a Women's network committee that can organise networking events and create mentoring programs. They can also engage in policy reviews or ideas that can aim to promote more inclusivity in the firm and externally, such as equitable briefing.



AUTHOR
Elisa Bolzonello, Lawyer

Event

Warren Moot Launch

23 August 2023

In late August 2023, for the ninth consecutive year the Warren Moot Competition was launched by Justice Kristen Walker and Justice Jane Dixon of the Supreme Court of Victoria. Their Honours engaged in a candid panel discussion of their experiences as advocates and judicial officers. Guests then had the privilege of receiving guidance from Elizabeth Ruddle SC on preparing and delivering successful courtroom advocacy, and of hearing from previous grand finalists, Felicia Leong and Evangelia Diamantopoulos, on their experiences of last year's competition.

The former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Honourable Marilyn Warren AC KC, VWL's patron and the namesake of the Moot was unable to attend in person but provided a warm welcome and words of advice for participants via a pre-recorded video.

The Warren Moot provides participants with an opportunity to test their advocacy skills and engage directly with respected members of the judiciary and Victorian Bar. VWL is proud to facilitate this event in conjunction with our sponsor firm, Maddocks, and to support the continued education and development of women lawyers by increasing opportunities for participation in written and oral advocacy.

VWL would like to thank Maddocks' Taboka Finn for her opening remarks, and Maddocks for their ongoing support of the Warren Moot, including hosting the launch event and knock-out rounds of the competition.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Melissa Hobbs



Event

Briefing for Balance

6 September 2023

On the 6th of September 2023, Victorian Women Lawyers and the Women Barristers' Association (WBA) hosted 240 members of the Victorian Legal Community for our 'Briefing for Balance' dinner.

The event marked the commencement of Victorian Gender Equitable Briefing Policy on 1 July 2023. The policy applies to the 35 law firms appointed to the Victorian Government Legal Services Panel.

Citing a commitment to address economic inequity for Victorian women, the policy requires law firms acting for Victorian Government clients to use reasonable endeavours to brief women barristers and meet a 50% target for the number and value of briefs to women with that target applying to both junior and senior counsel.

It is VWL's hope that all firms (regardless of panel membership) will work toward the targets that the policy sets.

VWL's President, Sophie Lefebvre commenced the evening's formalities by sharing the following message from Victorian Attorney-General, Jaclyn Symes:

"Gender equity in our legal and justice sector is not just about the promotion of women. It is also about supporting a fairer, more fit for purpose and accessible justice system."

That is why I am proud of the Government's equitable briefing policy requiring 50% of all briefs, and at least 50% of the value of all brief fees for both senior and junior barristers under the new Victorian Government legal services panel contracts.

We hope that this is one step toward seeing better and more just outcomes for the Victorian community."

As well as providing an opportunity for barristers and solicitors to network and over dinner attendees had the opportunity to hear about the policy, current gender equitable briefing data and strategies for achieving targets in the future from an insightful panel of speakers:

- Matthew Hocking, Victorian Government Solicitor
- Liz Brande, Executive Director Legal Services Coordination, Department of Justice and Community Safety, Victoria
- Anna Svenson, Director & Principal Clerk, Svenson Barristers
- Kylie Weston-Scheuber, former Convenor WBA;
- Astrid Haban-Beer, President, Australian Women Lawyers and panel moderator.

VWL thanks the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office & Svenson Barristers for their sponsorship that made the evening possible.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Vanessa Shambrook



Event

Reproductive Justice: Workplace rights and obligations

7 September 2023

VWL hosted a panel discussion focusing on reproductive justice in the workplace.

The discussion delved into a wide breadth of issues facing women in the workplace from menstruation to menopause and all over reproductive journeys in between. The panel was moderated by Joanna Abraham of VWL, who was joined by Cr Sarah Carter an advocate for access to fertility treatments, Bonney Corbin from MSI and Nikola Prestia a workplace lawyer.

The panellists discussed the many challenges and barriers women face in the workplace when it comes to managing their health. The panellists shared their insights on recent shifts in workplace entitlements, the work that is still to be undertaken and the attitude of employers when addressing reproductive justice.

Cr Carter and Joanna also bravely shared their personal fertility and reproductive health experiences to shed light on experiences that so many face but are seldom spoken about in the workplace.

Thank you to the Justice Committee for organising this event, Joanna Abraham for moderating the panel and to Clayton Utz for sponsoring the event.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Nico Keenan of Melissa Hobbs Business Photography



Event

Coming to the Bar

10 October 2023

In October, the Work Practices Committee presented an insightful "Coming to the Bar" panel discussion for women considering making the move to be a barrister.

Offered as an online webinar or in person seminar, the evening covered various aspects of life at the Bar, including exam preparation, mentors and clerks, practice areas, parent and care giving responsibilities and disability supports.

The engaging discussion was moderated by Anna Svenson (Director and Principal Clerk, Svenson Barristers), who was joined by barristers Evelyn Tadros, Franceska Leoncio, John Maloney and Priya Wakhlu.

Thank you to our panellists for sharing their valuable insights and to our sponsor Clarence Workplaces for Lawyers for their support and providing an exceptional venue.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Melissa Hobbs



Event

VWL Professional Mentoring Program & Launch Event

18 October 2023

On Wednesday 18 October 2023, VWL successfully launched the 2023 Professional Mentoring Program.

The event was organised by the VWL Mentoring Committee, with co-chairs Bridget Coutts and Justine Sammut introducing the event. Attendees heard from the Honourable Associate Justice Mary-Jane Ierodiaconou, program patron, who spoke to her own professional experiences and importance of goal setting. Her honour also shared some tips on how best to approach professional development and progression meetings to get the best possible outcomes.

The second half of the event included a workshop focused on attendees making self-assessments on their strengths and development needs to consider what it is they most wanted to get out of their mentoring relationships and how to approach meetings between mentors and mentees.

Many thanks to the program sponsor and host for this launch event the College of Law and to the VWL Mentoring Committee for their continued support for this program.

PHOTOGRAPHY
Melissa Hobbs



Event

Building Your Community Panel & Networking Event

19 October 2023

Taking on the VWL theme of the year, on 19 October the VWL Networking Committee invited the legal profession to join us for 'Building Your Community'. The event was designed for lawyers of any background looking for ways to make genuine connections in the legal industry. Despite some technical hiccups, event was a huge success being sold out (plus a waitlist).

Attendees heard from, Justice Michael Sifris, of the Court of Appeal, Daniel Ajak, Director at Ajak & Associates and Neena Aynsley, Partner at Herbert Smith Freehills. The panel was moderated by Rachael Harris of the VWL Networking Committee, who prompted the panellists to reflect on their careers and the way their community evolved throughout the years.

The panellists discussed a range of topics from how they built their respective legal communities through community involvement, mentorship, luck and how to leverage it. Each of panellists spoke about their varied experiences and backgrounds, as they all came to the Melbourne legal profession as an outsider with little to no in-built connections.

The panellists' insights gave rise to wonderful discussion about different ways to build one's community regardless of practice area or legal background. Following the panel, the attendees were invited to network over canapes and beverages with many staying back to build their own networks right up until closing time.

Our thanks to Cornwall's for hosting this event in their lovely offices.

PHOTOGRAPHY
Melissa Hobbs



Sponsor

K & L Gates

The meaning of community to Belinda Tralli and K&L Gates

Community is important because it makes us feel accepted and supported, and empowers us to be the greatest version of ourselves, learning from one another and encouraging one another.

I have a really close-knit family where I live in Melbourne. I've been really lucky growing up in a place where I have always felt so much love and support from those around me. Family was my first community and the one that has been with me my whole life. We've often gathered around food and/or coffee. Whether that is lunches with the whole family at my grandmother's house, or a quick coffee between errands on a Saturday morning. To me, sharing something (whether it is a commonality such as a workplace or an interest such as a sport) creates community.



AUTHOR

Belinda Tralli, Senior Associate



Ah Too Chew

Event

Geelong: Building Your Community Event

17 November 2023

VWL's 2023 strategy and theme is centred on 'community'. This theme focuses on the importance of building meaningful, authentic relationships, and the benefits of forming such a support base. Consistent with this theme, the WiPS Committee together with Outreach Committee collaborated on 17 November to hold an event in Geelong which bringing together two sectors of the legal community – the public and private sectors.

Each area has its own stronghold in the Geelong area, but rarely will have cause to overlap in a professional working capacity. This event brings together those sectors – which both exist within the broader legal community – with a hope to foster new connections and provide a platform for new relationships to be built in the Geelong area.

The fostering of social connection has an inevitable relationship with personal and community wellbeing, with social connectedness as a driver of overall happiness.

A keynote address was provided Diana Taylor, a well-recognised figure in the Geelong community, sharing her thoughts on what community means to her.

VWL thanks Coulter Legal and Deakin Law School for their sponsorship of this event.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Frank Fillipi



Event

The Warren Moot Grand Final

20 November 2023

In its ninth consecutive year, the Warren Moot was as hotly contested as ever, with ten teams signing up for the multi week advocacy challenge.

After three knock out rounds, the final two teams appeared before VWL's Patron, the Honourable Marilyn Warren AC KC, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, in the Banco Court of the Supreme Court of Victoria.

VWL congratulates the finalists:

- The Dennis Denuto Memorial Scholars aka "the Vibe" – Ebony Mack, Lauren Woolley, Amanda Robinson and Summar Altaee a team from Aitkin Partners who were successful on the day; and
- VGSO Graduates – Alana Morgante, Ellen Kalaja, Georgia Lucas and Madeleine Gome the valiant runners up. Ms Gome was named best advocate on the evening.

VWL would like to thank our sponsor Maddocks for their ongoing support of this competition and for generously permitting the use of their space and facilities over the first three rounds.

We also thank the barristers of Foley's List for facilitating the development of entirely new problems for this year's competition.

Finally offers our gratitude and thanks to the esteemed adjudicators for the time they gave to judge each round and provide considered feedback to participants – Justice Rita Incerti of the Supreme Court of Victoria, Judge Sharon Burchell, Judge Sara Hinchey, Judge Suzanne Kirton, Judge Fiona Todd, Judge My Anh Tran and Judicial Registrar Rosalind Avis of the County Court of Victoria, and Deputy President Amber Millhouse and Commissioner Katrina Harper-Greenwell of the Fair Work Commission.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Melissa Hobbs





Ashlee Bucholtz

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