



Portia

2024

*The Annual Journal and Report
of Victorian Women Lawyers*

About this edition of Portia

The 2024 edition of Portia, the annual publication of Victorian Women Lawyers (VWL), takes a reflective and forward-looking approach, exploring the theme Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. This edition celebrates the achievements and progress of women in the legal profession while acknowledging the ongoing challenges that shape the future of law and society.

This year's collection of feature articles presents a diverse range of voices and perspectives, offering valuable insights into both personal journeys and professional developments. We are privileged to share the story of Commissioner Tran of the Fair Work Commission, whose remarkable journey from refugee to Commissioner sheds light on the power of embracing new opportunities. We also explore the evolving legal landscape surrounding gender dysphoria in the courts, with contributions and insights from a lawyer working in this quickly developing area of the law.

In this edition, we also hear from Jyoti Haikerwal, whose career shift became a way to invest in herself, alongside a reflection from Melissa Ellery on returning to work after parental leave. An interview with Mollie Tregillis sets out her unique decision to leave corporate law and embrace a role in consulting, where she helps firms navigate the strategic use of technology and AI for digital transformation. Further, an article about Dr. Tina Popa's work provides invaluable guidance on navigating mental health challenges within the legal profession, a critical topic in the current climate.

In the arts section, our committee members offer thoughtful reviews of two standout films from the Spanish Film Festival and the Melbourne Documentary Festival, providing a lens through which we can reflect on the intersections between law, culture, and storytelling. We include a recipe from *Free to Feed*—a social enterprise dedicated to empowering refugees and asylum seekers through food and cooking workshops and a glance into the books that made it onto the VWL bookshelf this year.

Portia also serves as a commemorative record of VWL's diverse and impactful events throughout the year. Highlights include a powerful collaborative event with Tarwirr-Indigenous Law Students and Lawyers Association of Victoria, the most inclusive Dame Roma Mitchell Event in VWL history, and workshops on topics ranging from women's health to social media advocacy. Other memorable events include discussions on neurodiversity and inclusion, and demystifying law reform, all designed to build community and advocate for systemic change.

We hope this edition of Portia inspires you to reflect on the progress made, engage with the present challenges, and look ahead to the limitless possibilities that lie ahead.

Editors and Co-Chairs of the Publications Committee

Shifa Shaikh and Nancy Abdalla

Publications Committee

This edition would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of the Publications Committee: Amy Stagg, Ella Heaphy, Nicole Pereira, Andree Pianta, and Alana Morgante. Their commitment to producing this edition is a testament to the power of collaboration, passion, and perseverance in amplifying the voices and experiences of women in law.

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Front cover image

Kathrin Longhurst, *Imminent Threat* (Midori Goto, artist) mixed media on linen 121 x 121cm

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Victorian Women Lawyers 2024: A reflection on leadership and legacy

As we look toward the future, the question we must ask ourselves is: *What kind of legal profession do we want to leave behind for the next generation of women?*

The answer lies in the outcome of our collective responsibility to push for systemic change.

Serving as the 2024 President of Victorian Women Lawyers (VWL) has been an extraordinary privilege—one that has allowed me to reflect on our shared history, confront our present challenges, and work towards a more equitable future. Each VWL President selects a theme to guide their tenure, and for me, the choice was clear: *“Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow.”*

This theme resonates deeply with my personal journey and the collective experience of women in the legal profession. It acknowledges the progress we have made, the barriers we continue to face, and the immense potential we have to create lasting change. It is a tribute to the trailblazing women who came before us, a commitment to the work we are doing now, and a vision for a brighter, more inclusive future.

Yesterday: Honouring Our Past

Like many women, my path to leadership was unplanned and, at times, fraught with self-doubt. Growing up in Singapore as a minority, I was often reminded of cultural expectations that women should be seen, not heard. I internalised these messages, believing leadership was for others. Moving to Australia in 2006 as a young immigrant woman pursuing law, I often felt out of place, questioning whether I belonged in a profession that seemed designed for a different archetype of success.

That sense of not fitting in began to shift when I began my journey in refugee law. Speaking up for those who had no voice, helped me find my own. It was a transformative moment that fueled my passion for human rights and social justice, and one that continues to inspire my advocacy for women—especially those from intersectionally diverse backgrounds.

Similarly, VWL's history is one of resilience and determination. Over the past 27 years, VWL has fought for greater representation of women in leadership, flexible working arrangements, and equity within the

profession. These victories were hard-won by trailblazing women who broke barriers and challenged systemic inequities. Yet, even as we celebrate their achievements, we must acknowledge that the struggle for gender equality in the legal profession is far from over. Women of color, LGBTQI+ women, women with disabilities, and others from marginalised communities still face systemic challenges that demand our attention and action.

Today: Embracing the Present

The realities we face today remind us that progress is never linear. Persistent gender pay gaps, inadequate representation in leadership, workplace harassment, and limited access to flexible working arrangements remain significant hurdles for women. These challenges are magnified for women at the intersections of multiple identities. As an immigrant woman of color with a disability, I have experienced firsthand the difficulty of navigating spaces that were not designed for people like me.

Despite these barriers, today presents us with opportunities to redefine leadership and create environments that champion inclusivity, empathy, and impact. For me, leadership has never been about titles or accolades. It is about the legacy of change we leave behind, the opportunities we create for others, and the communities we build together.

This year at VWL, we prioritised fostering an inclusive legal profession through impactful initiatives. Highlights include a Financial Literacy Podcast Series with Foley's List to empower women in managing their finances and progress on the Women's Health Guide: From Menstruation to Menopause to support women's well-being throughout their careers. We also ran mentoring programs for both students and professionals, providing guidance and opportunities for growth. Collaborating with Women's Legal Service Victoria, we advocated for improved processes to address sexual harassment and gendered violence. Additionally, we focused on creating safe spaces for women to share experiences and connect, championed workplace policies such as menstrual and menopause leave, and emphasised the importance of intersectional diversity. These initiatives underscore our commitment to action-driven change.

Tomorrow: Shaping the Future

As we look toward the future, the question we must ask ourselves is: *What kind of legal profession do we want to leave behind for the next generation of women?*

The answer lies in the outcome of our collective responsibility to push for systemic change. At VWL, we are committed to ensuring that the progress we make today does not stall or regress. This year, we have launched programs that mentor young women, provided platforms for diverse voices to be heard, and advocated for policy reforms that promote gender equality.

Our vision for Tomorrow is one of equity, inclusivity, and opportunity for all women. It is a future where women no longer have to choose between their careers and their well-being. A future where leadership is defined by empathy and collaboration, rather than power and privilege. A future where all women—regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances—feel supported, respected, and valued in their workplaces.

This year's theme, *“Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,”* reminds us of immense responsibility we have to the women who will come after us. Leadership is not about waiting for the perfect moment or opportunity to present itself. It is about stepping up, even when we don't feel ready. It is about being willing to take risks, to be vulnerable, and to be unapologetically ourselves.

As the sun sets on yet another successful year for VWL, I am filled with gratitude for the incredible women who have been part of this journey.

Here's to celebrating our Yesterdays, embracing our Today's, and boldly shaping our Tomorrows together.



AUTHOR

Joanna Abraham, VWL President

Message from our Patron

For all readers of Portia, the new edition is a Collector's treasure. The featured articles and artwork celebrate a community of high achieving women lawyers.



AUTHOR

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

Membership of and participation in Victorian Women Lawyers is now an important feature of the legal profession in Victoria, indeed, nationally. Belonging to Victorian Women Lawyers and participating in its varied activities help to bring more women forward to lead the legal profession. Importantly, VWL's activities teach women lawyers leadership skills and instil confidence in women as advocates. This year VWL marked the tenth anniversary of the Warren Moot, a program that has seen many, many young women lawyers learn how to be an advocate dealing with complex facts and law before some of the highest-level state and federal judicial officers. Consistently, the standard of advocacy has been outstanding.

The Moot has also given many young women lawyers the confidence to pursue their career paths within firms, government and the bars. Hence, congratulations to VWL for the vision of establishing and continuing the Moot for a decade and beyond.

As someone who has witnessed things from the beginning, I have been struck throughout the life of VWL by the enthusiasm and courage of its leaders and many of its members in developing and influencing policy, both locally and nationally, in a significant range of activities, from flexible working practices to supportive parental and childcare arrangements, to equal pay and employment opportunities for women lawyers, to recognition of family violence and exploitation, to the promotion of female lawyer leadership and advocacy training, to gender influenced digital enablement and AI.

This edition of Portia demonstrates the importance of VWL's ambitions.



Joanna Braithwaite



Loribelle Spriovski

The Portia Geach Memorial Award

The Portia Geach Memorial Award, established in 1961, is one of Australia's most prestigious prizes for female artists. It honours the memory of Portia Geach, a pioneering Melbourne-born artist and women's rights activist, by recognising the best portrait painted from life of a man or woman distinguished in art, letters, or the sciences.

The award, administered by the Award Trustee Perpetual, highlights the exceptional talent of Australian women artists in the field of portraiture.

The 2024 judging panel comprised Denise Mimmocchi, Curator of Australian Art at The Art Gallery of New South Wales; Katherine Roberts, Senior Curator at Manly Art Gallery & Museum; and Jane Watters, Director at S.H. Ervin Gallery.

This year, Lori Pensini was named the winner for her portrait, *The Conversation #3*.

Pensini's painting is part of a series that delves into the relationship between humans and animals, exploring how animals make decisions within their environmental and social contexts. Through *The Conversation #3*, Pensini reflects on the critical impact of habitat loss on wildlife and biodiversity, while also opening a dialogue about our shared

responsibility in addressing environmental challenges. The judges praised the work for its exceptional composition and the profound sense of connection it conveys between the human and animal subjects. They noted how the portrait sensitively raises questions about our perceptions of the natural world and the urgency of finding more sustainable ways to coexist with it.

In response to winning the award, Pensini expressed both honour and gratitude, sharing how the recognition affirms the importance of female voices in art and provides a vital platform for women in the creative community.



Lori Pensini

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Rachel Robb

From Refugee to Commissioner: The inspiring journey of Oanh Thi Tran

Oanh Thi Tran's ascent from a Vietnamese refugee to Commissioner at the Fair Work Commission is a compelling testament to the transformative power of opportunity and an illustration of how values can guide one's professional journey.

AUTHOR
Nancy Abdalla

Seeking refuge

In the UNHCR article published in April 2024 retelling Oanh's story, there is a photograph of a young Oanh wearing a layered pink dress with short puffy sleeves. Oanh is holding a pink hat and reaching out to hold the strap of a white bag that another child in a yellow dress is holding. In the photograph are nine other individuals – members of Oanh's family and friends. All of them stand in front of travel bags wearing summer clothing and gaze steadily at the camera. The elegance of the photograph is deceptive. If you had been presented with the photo in the absence of the UNHCR article, you may have been deceived into thinking this was a photo of the family's summer holiday. But it was taken when Oanh and her family were living in a refugee camp in Malaysia after fleeing Viet Nam. Oanh was 2 years old.

Oanh's story begins in Viet Nam, at a time when the nation was grappling with the tumultuous aftermath of a protracted war. Born in 1979 in the agriculture belt that is southern Viet Nam, Oanh tells me her family had lived in that region for generations upon generations. Despite this, her family's line was considered 'ethnically Chinese' because of their Chinese ancestry. Saigon had fallen to the North Vietnamese in 1975, and the victorious government wanted Viet Nam for the Vietnamese.

Her father was a fisherman and owned land and fishing property. Her father had no experience of Viet Nam without war and conflict, having lived through Viet Nam's colonial era and subsequent conflicts, including territorial disputes with bordering China and Cambodia. The Tran family, along with many others, faced increasing pressures due to their ethnic background and the shifting political landscape in post-war Viet Nam.

By 1981, her family made the difficult decision to flee the country. They embarked on a perilous boat journey. Her father – an experienced fisherman – made sure the boat looked like a fishing boat in the event the North Vietnamese government or other authorities found them. Their decision to flee was driven by several factors including escalating economic hardships and the new regime's policy of acquiring land owned by those that were considered ethnically Chinese. It was also driven by Oanh's mother, who wanted to be reunited with family who had left Viet Nam two years prior.

The Tran family's journey across the seas culminated in a 12-month stay in a UN Refugee Agency camp in Malaysia before they were settled in Brisbane in 1983.



New Beginnings in Australia

Resettling in Australia posed its own set of challenges. Oanh tells me there was plenty of government and community support and the Vietnamese community was already establishing itself in West End, an inner-city suburb of Brisbane, Qld. However, difficulties in adapting to their new environment remained. Oanh's father initially worked in ocean fishing. But his declining health made this work extremely difficult. He eventually developed pneumonia and could no longer continue fishing. Oanh's mother struggled to find work and navigate a new country with young children.

The family turned to sewing at home. At the age of eight, Oanh began to sew to assist her family. 'All we ever made was T-shirts' Oanh says, 'hundreds and hundreds of T-shirts'. Oanh recalls having to stay up all night helping her family prepare t-shirt orders and then going to school the next day having not slept.

The early work experience highlighted the precariousness of her family's situation. She tells me that fear of deportation loomed over her family, stemming from their uncertain status and the lingering impact of their refugee experience. 'Fear is a powerful motivator' she says. 'The fear never went away, it subsided but never fully went away.'

Finding Her Path

Oanh says her career choices were informed by who she is and the things she cared about - justice, fairness and people being treated well. 'I have always viewed workers' rights as human rights' she says. Early on, her values led her to experiences such as being involved in the student union while at university, volunteering at the Women's Legal Services in Brisbane throughout her law degree and early career, and volunteering with Amnesty International Australia. 'I have also been so fortunate in that I've always worked with good, kind people who didn't want to just invest in my career development, but also in me as a person.'

After pursuing a degree in law, Oanh initially worked as a judge's associate with the Honourable Roslyn Atkinson at the Supreme Court of Queensland. When considering what her next steps would be, a friend tipped Oanh off about an articulated clerk role at law firm Macrossan Lawyers. Applications for the role had already closed, but Oanh applied anyway, made a strong impression at her interview and was successful in obtaining the role. Of Macrossan's she says 'the Partners were excellent human beings who gave me great opportunities. I could have seen myself having a full career [t]here and climbing the ladder'. However, life had different plans for Oanh. She moved to the United Kingdom with her partner. She found work at a firm focused on workers' rights, where she was initially a paralegal and then a solicitor after she was admitted to practice in the UK.

Upon her return to Australia, she joined the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union (TCFUA) as an industrial officer where she was involved in a vast array of work, including drafting and negotiating agreements, industrial disputes of all kinds and recovering money for wage and superannuation theft for workers, many of whom who were low paid and award dependent. She continued advocating for workers' rights and fair treatment after the TCFUA amalgamated with the then Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (now CFMEU) in her role as the National Legal and Industrial Officer. She was with the TCFUA/CFMEU for 8 years.

Oanh's career continued to evolve when she became Principal Solicitor at the Young Workers Centre, a community legal centre dedicated to supporting young vulnerable workers. This role allowed her to merge her legal expertise with her deep commitment to social justice and fairness.



A Defining Moment

In 2023, Oanh was appointed as a Commissioner at the Fair Work Commission. Reflecting on her appointment, Oanh expressed initial hesitations about her candidacy, concerned that her background might overshadow her merits. 'Of course, there will always be those people who say you only got here because you're a diversity hire - but I know that I am able to say that I am here, yes because of who I am, and I am meritorious.' Support from her mentors also reassured her. 'Knowing that someone else believes you're capable and believes you have the experience and ability to do the job helps.' She has embraced the role with a deep sense of purpose.

Oanh's appointment underscores the importance of diversity in public service. Her presence in this role is not only a personal achievement but demonstrates that societal shifts need to be taken towards inclusivity and recognition of diverse experiences. She believes that diversity — in all its forms — strengthens institutions and enriches public service.

In her role as Commissioner, Oanh continues to see her work as one that is driven by her values of fairness and respect for human dignity. Her journey from refugee to Commissioner exemplifies the transformative power of opportunity, having mentors that truly care about you as a person and the vital importance of diversity in strengthening our institutions.

“

Of course, there will always be those people who say you only got here because you're a diversity hire - but I know that I am able to say that I am here, yes because of who I am, and I am meritorious.

”

In conversation with Mollie Tregillis

In December 2023, Mollie Tregillis, Legal Industry Advisor, left her role as Executive Director of Legal Optimisation Consulting at MinterEllison to venture into self-employment. Having built her career on embracing change in Australia's tradition-bound legal sector, Mollie wasn't afraid of the unknown—but the decision to step away from big-corporate life was not easy.

AUTHOR
Amy Stagg

Now, at 38, the IP-lawyer-turned-operations-expert channels her energy, excitement, and creativity into reshaping the legal profession. Mollie's journey from corporate law to consulting is a testament to her drive for innovation in the legal industry, her commitment to finding balance as a working mother, and her belief in utilising smarter ways of working - including technology and Artificial Intelligence, to reshape the profession.

Mollie wears many hats—strategic advisor, coach, wife, and mother to four-year-old Artie and stepmother to thirteen-year-old Elliott. At our meeting, Artie sits nearby, recovering from a cough and Mollie juggles motherhood and work with effortless energy. Dressed in cobalt blue pants and sporting platinum blonde hair, Mollie exudes confidence, defying outdated expectations of what a legal professional should look like.

A new mother myself, I have a vested interest in how Mollie manages her career and family responsibilities. Married to a successful barrister with 20 years' experience in commercial litigation, Mollie reflects that, 'I felt like I always had to stake my claim for my career'. In a household with two children and two big jobs, unlimited time to dedicate to her career was not available once she became a

mother. Mollie admits that she initially wanted to show that becoming a parent hadn't impeded her, but things had changed, naturally.

Located at the Footscray Cotton Mills, a former jute factory turned office hub for creative businesses, Mollie's choice of workspace reflects a deep appreciation for tradition and history, but equally her desire not to conform to industry expectations. The norm would see our conversation taking place at a generic corporate office in the Melbourne CBD, but Mollie loves to surround herself with creatives. 'I always wanted to be an artist,' she says. On her decision to rent an office so early in her solo-preneur journey, Mollie observes, 'It felt so big, but I was hitting an upper limit'.

Beginning her career in Intellectual Property at Norton Rose Fulbright (where she met husband, barrister Andrew McRobert), Mollie reflects that she woke up in her late twenties and thought, 'No, not this job, not this life'. Struggling to compete with colleagues better suited to big-firm life, she found herself exploring a career as an in-house lawyer, receiving many knockbacks. Mollie fortuitously secured a role as a Policy Lawyer at the Law Institute of Victoria, a job that she says restored the confidence she had lost. 'It happened quickly as it does when things are right. The LIV role allowed me to see all the jobs that people with a law degree can have.'

In 2017, Mollie transitioned to her first role in Legal Operations at Herbert Smith Freehills, and later at MinterEllison. Returning from maternity leave in 2021, she took on a pioneering role as Head of Legal Optimisation at MinterEllison. Here, Mollie spearheaded the in-house consultancy, introducing a novel approach to legal operations in Australia.

After departing MinterEllison in December 2023, Mollie began consulting as a strategic adviser, helping clients move beyond the basics of legal operations—focusing not just on efficiency and waste reduction but on fostering deeper discussions and mindset shifts. Design thinking, still relatively new to the legal industry, integrates the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and business requirements. Mollie sees this approach as vital for law firms aiming to stay competitive in the face of digital transformation.



Sally Anderson

Managing the dynamics and energy of a room comes naturally to Mollie, who has developed this skill in surprising ways throughout her career—including moonlighting as a barre instructor while working full-time. Mollie describes a theme arising in her career of, ‘cleaning up a mess, building something, and then making myself obsolete by finding the right person’. Mollie provides a unique, legal advisory service to forward-thinking businesses that understand the need to continuously improve and reconsider their innovation strategy, including by leveraging emerging technology.

Mollie’s vision for her clients goes beyond legal operations from an efficiency and wastage perspective and towards building infrastructure within firms to make innovation a seamless part of business strategy. Legal operations sit at the intersection of people, processes, and technology, aiming to enhance the delivery of legal services. Mollie emphasises the importance of professionals who can translate between legal and technological languages—people who understand both realms well enough to bridge the gap. These roles are crucial for firms that want to innovate effectively.

Mollie believes that embracing a continuous improvement culture and challenging industry norms is the key to commercial success for law firms. In her advisory work, she often sees, ‘too much work, not enough resources, almost no tech infrastructure or investment at all’, going on to identify that, ‘many in-house legal teams still don’t have document management systems’. She laments that firms often save money in the wrong ways, rather than investing in innovation infrastructure.

As we know, we in Australia practice in a risk-averse and change-resistant profession—one focused on upholding tradition. Mollie points to the common law system and precedent model inherited from the United Kingdom as evidence of this rigidity. Firms who invest in innovative services like Mollie’s will likely give themselves the competitive edge needed to survive and thrive in today’s disrupted legal market. With the rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), firms who ignore technological advancements risk being left behind by their competitors who embrace them.

However, technology is not the only way to improve lawyers’ efficiency and productivity. Perhaps because of her experience as a working mother, Mollie is passionate about finding creative ways to work sustainably and smartly. Her Corporate Recovery Mentorship Program and private coaching guide individuals to approach their work in ways that are both impactful and enjoyable. Mollie herself is recovering from burnout, describing her first six months of self-employment as ‘resetting my nervous system, doing a lot of nothing, and training myself in nothingness’.

Ultimately, Mollie’s message for the industry is one of optimism. She believes the next generation, with their energy and vision, will reshape the legal landscape, embracing the change that many in the profession have resisted for too long.



“

The system is not designed for primary carers—it’s a bum on seat, time on ground system. It doesn’t account for all the incredible things that a primary carer brings back. Who is more efficient than a primary carer? That we are still measuring our success on time will always disadvantage people that have less time.

”

Navigating mental health in the legal profession: Insights from Dr Tina Popa

The legal profession is notorious for mental health issues. While there is a much greater awareness of mental health issues in 2024 and initiatives aimed at promoting the well-being of legal professionals in law firms, it still remains a complex landscape in which more progress is required.

AUTHOR
Nicole Pereira

Dr Tina Popa, a lawyer and legal academic with postgraduate psychology qualifications researching wellbeing and the law, was recently involved in a study into the mental health challenges faced by legal professionals in personal injury law. With a grant of \$24,000, Tina's team (comprising Dr Christina Platz and psychologists Dr Kate Jackowski and Dr Kayleigh Young) interviewed 12 personal injury lawyers and nine mediators across Victoria.

Tina's findings revealed that the intense nature of personal injury law cases contributed substantially to the mental health struggles of lawyers and mediators working in the area. Lawyers in this field are frequently exposed to traumatic client experiences, including managing clients who have gone through institutional sex abuse, clients suffering from severe psychiatric conditions, and patients injured through medical negligence. Unlike any other transactional areas of law, these cases often involve deeply personal and distressing matters which can at times take a toll on the lawyers who handle them.

Addressing Burnout and Vicarious Trauma

When asked about well-being, the legal practitioners which were interviewed displayed an awareness of the mental health risks associated with their work. They recognised the dangers of vicarious trauma, where the emotional strain of dealing with clients' traumas often affects the lawyers themselves. Many lawyers reported that the emotional demands of their job, such as supporting clients through traumatic experiences left them drained and exhausted.

Even though these lawyers were working similar hours to lawyers in other areas, the intense and emotionally taxing nature of personal injury law resulted in burnout being less driven by the quantity of hours worked and more driven by the emotional demands of these types of cases on the lawyers who were handling them. Hence, showing us that burnout can be as much about the nature of your work as it is about the number of hours that you log.

The Role of Firm Culture and Support Systems

The stigma around mental health issues, while present, is less pervasive than anticipated. However, the effectiveness of support programs is often undermined by a lack of engagement from lawyers themselves.

Many lawyers are aware of EAP programs in their workplaces, but they do not actively use them, preferring instead to seek support from colleagues or friends. This 'lone wolf' mentality can perpetuate a cycle in which lawyers feel isolated in their struggles.

To mitigate this, Tina emphasises the need for a cultural shift within law firms. Encouraging a culture that normalises seeking help and integrates mental health support into daily practice is crucial. This includes not only having accessible psychological resources but also fostering an environment where discussing mental health issues is seen as a sign of strength rather than weakness.

A Competitive Environment

Another significant finding was the impact of the legal system's hierarchy on mental health. The adversarial nature of the legal profession, with its competitive environment, contributes to stress and burnout.

For junior lawyers, pressures from the legal system, such as strict deadlines and the various demands of them can also exacerbate stress. When compounded by the pressures to climb the corporate ladder, this adds another layer of strain on many lawyers which contributes further to mental health issues.

Addressing these systemic issues requires a multi-faceted approach, including reforming aspects of the legal system that contribute to this environment.

Better managing your mental health

To better manage and improve the mental health and wellbeing of legal practitioners, Tina recommends that law firms implement more comprehensive and tailored training programs such as basic training in psychology and wellbeing skills so that lawyers are better equipped to handle the emotional demands of their work rather than just the legal aspects of the job.

'Targeted psychological support and training is more effective than generic Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)', Tina says, 'and law firms that integrate psychologists or counsellors into their staff wellbeing plans are more likely to have well-rounded lawyers who know how to juggle the emotional demands present in their area of work'.

The shift towards hybrid working arrangements has been a notable change in

the legal industry, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. While flexible working conditions have provided some relief, they have not fundamentally reduced the intensity of the work for many lawyers, and in many cases, hybrid work models have blurred the lines between work and personal time.

Whilst hybrid work models offer many benefits, such as improved work-life balance and the ability to manage personal responsibilities, they do not alleviate the burnout and emotional exhaustion faced by many legal professionals.

Recommendations for Law Firms

Four ways in which law firms and leaders within firms can better support the mental health and well-being of their staff include:

- **Offering tailored training programs:** Law firms should develop specific training programs that address the unique mental health challenges faced by their lawyers. These programs should include access to psychological support and training on managing emotional stress.
- **Creating a cultural shift:** Creating a culture that encourages open discussions about mental health and normalises seeking help is essential. This involves leadership actively promoting mental health awareness and support.

- **Addressing systemic reform:** Addressing the hierarchical pressures within the legal system and advocating for changes that reduce adversarial stress can contribute to better mental health outcomes for lawyers.
- **Offering meaningful support:** Programs should go beyond superficial initiatives, such as occasional yoga/mindfulness sessions, and provide genuine, practical support tailored to the needs of lawyers dealing with high-stress cases.

While there have been positive developments in mental health awareness and support within the legal profession, substantial work remains. By adopting tailored training programs, fostering supportive firm cultures, and addressing systemic pressures, the legal industry can make meaningful strides in improving the well-being of its professionals. The combination of these efforts, along with a commitment to genuine, practical support, will be crucial in navigating the complex landscape of mental health in the legal sector.



Robyn Rich

Not a Career Break

I remember the moment I handed in my last assignment as an undergraduate law student, feeling a wave of relief at the thought of leaving essays behind. I was eager to move to Melbourne, join my dream firm, and start my life as a lawyer in private practice. At that time, I was convinced I had it all mapped out: I had the job and a 10-year vision for my career.

But here we are, six years on, and that once-clear 10-year plan has been replaced with a weekly travel itinerary.

AUTHOR
Jyoti Haikerwal

At the end of 2023, I was offered Senior Associate—a milestone I had been working toward and a goal I was incredibly proud to achieve. I loved my work, my team, and the challenges that kept me engaged. But despite all that, I started to feel a need for something more than just the rhythm of work. COVID lockdowns had put a hold on travel for at least two years, which for so many of us, had become a source of inspiration and renewal. When restrictions lifted, I tried to satisfy that feeling by taking annual leave here and there, but it never seemed enough. The short breaks felt like a quick fix when what I wanted was real freedom to travel, without the pressure of fitting experiences into a few days. I realised I was craving more than career milestones; I was wanting new experiences and a real opportunity to live outside my comfort zone.

When an opportunity came up for me to move overseas, I found myself facing a challenging decision. It felt as though I had to choose between the career and reputation I had built or the freedom to travel and explore. It was one of those rare crossroads that made me stop and think about what I truly wanted. Initially, I imagined moving overseas to travel for a while, then settling in the UK to work. But while the idea was appealing, it didn't truly excite me. Then, someone suggested doing a Master of Laws.

Higher education wasn't something I had seriously considered. As fulfilling as my undergraduate years were, I was quite content to leave behind late nights in the library. Professional development had always taken a backseat in the face of my workload, with the exception of the mandatory CPD points. With a demanding caseload, there was rarely time to pause and delve into new ideas or revisit my career goals. But when I learned about the University of Edinburgh's Master's program in Medical Law and Ethics, it felt right. Here was a chance to explore medical law in depth, develop my skills in a meaningful way, and engage with topics directly relevant to my practice. It wasn't just about 'taking a break' but about investing in myself and in my career in a way I hadn't before.

The decision was made, but the next step—telling everyone—was daunting, particularly the conversation with work. I assumed that leaving meant resigning. In a boutique firm, it's not easy to take leave without disrupting things, so I thought my only option was to give notice. Yet, when I told work my plan, instead

of the goodbye I was expecting, my boss offered options to make it work. She proposed a leave of absence, a concept that seemed almost impossible in a smaller practice. Her support made me realise how often we limit ourselves by assuming there's only one path forward. That conversation taught me the importance of creative thinking in shaping a career that aligns with personal goals.

With my leave approved and flights booked, I was ready for the adventure. Yet, moving overseas has been harder than I imagined. The transition wasn't seamless—far from it. Settling into a new city, adapting to student life again, and adjusting to a different pace of living were challenges I hadn't anticipated. But the rewards have certainly outweighed it.

That 10-year-career plan has given way to a weekly travel plan. I'm writing this article from London, soon to head to Norway, with Italy on the horizon next month. This isn't the life I envisioned for myself at this stage, but it has enriched me in ways I couldn't have anticipated.

This experience has shown me that this is not a 'career break'. Every day, through my studies and my travels, I'm honing the skills that will make me a better lawyer. Personal injury law demands empathy, understanding, and connection with clients' lived experiences, and what better way to foster that than by immersing myself in diverse cultures and perspectives?

To anyone considering a similar journey, my advice is simple: take the leap and, to share advice that I was given while I was contemplating this, *'The thing about dreams is that you have to live them; otherwise, they'll remain just that—dreams.'* I was hesitant, fearing that stepping away would cost me years of hard work. Instead, this experience is helping both my personal and professional life.

That 10-year-plan I left behind will still be there when I return. It may look different by then, or it may be exactly as I left it, but one thing is certain: this time away will have left its mark. Taking this opportunity has made me braver, more adaptable, and broadened my view of what's possible in a legal career. And if, for some reason, this path doesn't feel right, a return ticket is always an option.

For now, though, I'm so happy knowing I chose a path that fuels both my passion for the law and my desire to experience the world.



Shifting Perspectives

As I reflect on my Yesterday, I think about when I was preparing to return to work after taking parental leave. I was excited to have some 'me time' again. I loved my job, and I loved my colleagues. I was looking forward to having that part of me back again.

AUTHOR
Melissa Elleray

All these things were true. But I wasn't prepared for:

How hard it was to get back into the groove of my working persona, particularly when I was operating on reduced working hours and my brain was a little dusty (wait, how do I lawyer again?).

The struggle of managing my conflicting feelings about leaving my child in the care of another person.

How exhausting it was having to constantly manage The Mental Load for my family (and yes, the weight of that term deserves capitalisation).

The unwinnable battle with the clock: trying to squeeze more out of each hour of every working day, carving out time to express at work, and leaving work at a reasonable hour to get home to start the second shift;

all at a time that I was running on empty after months of no sleep.

The never-ending waves of illnesses from childcare in those first six months... well, that was a nightmare like no other (IYKYK).

As I reflect on my Yesterday, I think about what Yesterday looked like for the women who came before me:

The women who were told they were not dedicated enough to The Job because they prioritised their family obligations.

The women who were less likely to be promoted than their male counterparts.

The women who battled a stubborn gender pay gap in their workplaces.

The women who absorbed the impact of the motherhood penalty on their income and their career opportunities.

The women who were subjected to sexual harassment at work and then subjected to a detriment in their employment for making a complaint.

The women who had to campaign for the bare minimum in private and hygienic facilities to express milk at their places of work so they could feed their babies the next day (toilet cubicles need not apply).

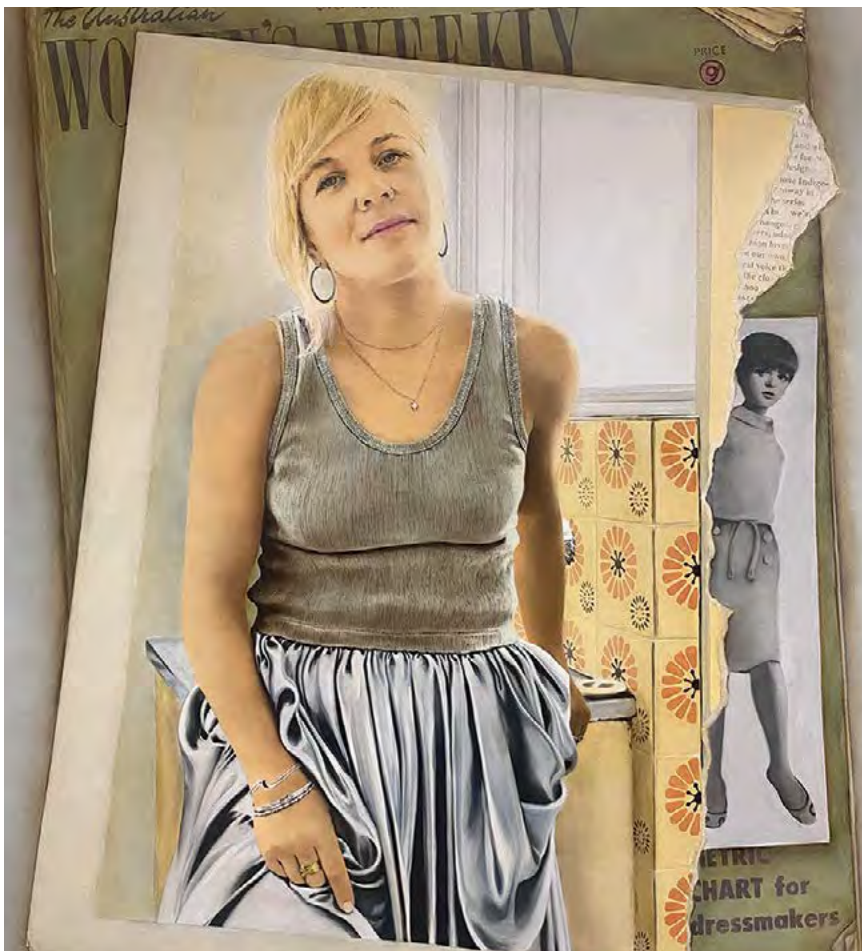
The women who worked in legal workplaces that were not designed for working parents to survive, let alone thrive.

An uncomfortable, dark feeling starts to build in my stomach. Wait... is that my Today?

I pause. I take a closer look. I peer behind the headlines and examine the networks and workplace cultures that are carefully being fostered by passionate and likeminded people:

I see women supporting women in my workplace. Truly supporting them, to pursue their passions and to care for their families, even when it is inconvenient, and especially during that dreaded first six months of childcare.

I hear my manager tell me 'I will support you to work with me while you raise a family', even though our working environment wasn't designed for working parents, and there were no other working parents in my role.



Rachel Coad



Rosy Lloyd

I see online communities of women helping women with everything from a referral for a barrister practising a niche area of law in another state, to their recommendation for the best robovac on the market (a shout out to the Llamas out there).

I see my managers advocating for change in our workplace, not for their own benefit, but because it is right, and it aligns with their values.

I see women developing networks for their mentees to support them as they navigate the early stages of their careers.

I see these women who have been champions for me as I navigate this unpredictable and uncertain period in my career, when I can't give as much of myself as I used to, and I'm not sure that I want to.

A soft, rosy warmth starts to bloom in my stomach. It squashes out the dark pit that was starting to take hold.

A lot of our Today might still look a bit like our Yesterday. But, looking around, our Tomorrow is in good hands.

Sponsor

Nicholes Family Lawyers

As Nicholes Family Lawyers approaches its 20th anniversary (to be held in 2025) we find ourselves reflecting on the journey that has shaped the firm into what it is today. From humble beginnings we have grown into a dedicated team of 16 professionals, including five Partners, working with clients across Australia and internationally from our offices in Melbourne and Geelong. Our growth and success are built on a foundation of trust, compassion, and respect — values that guide us in providing the highest level of family law advice to clients who are navigating some of life's most difficult times.

My own journey in the law began after completing my studies, when I started my Articles at Middletons Moore & Bevins, now K&L Gates. During this time, my passion for family law truly blossomed, thanks in no small part to the mentorship of esteemed legal professionals such as the late Noel Ackman QC, the late John Udorovic QC, David Brown KC and The Honourable Diana Bryant AO KC and The Honourable Paul Guest OAM KC before their judicial appointments. The collective wisdom, guidance, and unwavering support of these wonderful and inspiring people were pivotal in my development as a young lawyer.

With the experience and knowledge gained in my 11 years at Middletons Moore & Bevins, I seized the opportunity to establish my own specialist family law firm in 2005. While the journey has not been without its challenges, our steadfast commitment to client service has propelled Nicholes Family Lawyers forward. We take immense pride in being widely recognised for our excellence, as evidenced, for example, by our inclusion in the highly-regarded independent and peer-assessed Doyle's Guide over the past seven years.

As well as having earned a reputation for excellence as a law firm, we have also worked hard in relation to giving back to the community through our extensive pro bono program. Over the last almost two decades we have worked pro bono with organisations including the Royal Children's Hospital, WIRE, Fitzroy Legal Service, Alfred Help and The World Congress on Family Law & Children's Rights, and are also active members of a number of organisations and working groups including the Australian Federal Police led Australian Centre To Counter Child Exploitation. We also enjoy a strong partnership with Victorian Women Lawyers with whom we have co-presented a number of events over the years, many with a focus on family and domestic violence.

Although the firm bears my name, Nicholes Family Lawyers is a reflection of the collective efforts of our entire team. I am deeply committed to fostering a culture where everyone - whether they be support staff, new lawyers or Partners - feels appreciated and empowered. This has contributed to the formation of an all-female partnership, an achievement of which I am particularly proud, as I continue to champion the advancement of women in the law.

Our strategy has always been clear: invest in our people, and performance will follow. This commitment to leadership - grounded in authenticity, accountability, and best practice client service - aligns with our belief that "together, we are the collective sum of expertise, empathy, and excellence." This philosophy will continue to guide Nicholes Family Lawyers as we look toward the future.



AUTHOR

Sally Nicholes, Managing Partner

The evolving status of gender dysphoria in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia

In Australia, the healthcare provided to transgender children and adolescents faces intense scrutiny within a highly polarised socio-political landscape. As the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (Family Court) has addressed these complex issues, its approach has evolved in response to broader societal shifts, aiming to balance the protection of a child's welfare, parental responsibility and recognition of a child's right to self-determination.

AUTHOR
Ella Heaphy

What is Gender Dysphoria?

Gender dysphoria is a medical condition where an individual experiences psychological distress due to an incongruence between their biological sex and gender identity, with the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th edition) outlining the diagnostic criteria. Treatment options for gender dysphoria may include psychological counselling, hormone therapy, and/or surgical reassignment therapy, typically administered in stages:

Stage 1: Puberty blockers

Stage 2: Gender-affirming hormones

Stage 3: Gender affirmation surgery

A transgender person is someone whose biological sex does not align with their gender identity. Notably, not all transgender individuals experience gender dysphoria and not all individuals with gender dysphoria are transgender.

Understanding the Family Court's Jurisdiction

Most people might not know that the Family Court exercises power through section 67ZC of the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) ('FLA') - its 'welfare jurisdiction'. This jurisdiction enables the Family Court to make orders concerning the welfare of children, taking into account the best interests of the child as its paramount consideration in decision-making. A parent or person concerned with the care, welfare and development of the child has standing to make an application to the Family Court.

In Victoria, both state and Commonwealth case law and legislation govern the scope of a parent's ability to consent to medical treatment on behalf of their child. Whilst the Family Court has largely stepped back from the role of authorising medical treatment for children with gender dysphoria, it continues to play a role in situations where there is significant dispute or controversy.

Consent and Gillick Competency

From the classroom to the kitchen table, parents generally hold the power to make decisions they believe are in the best interests of their children. This includes the qualified power to make decisions involving medical treatment for their children. However, certain medical procedures known as 'special medical procedures' exceed the scope of 'parental responsibility' as outlined in section 61B of the FLA. These procedures require court

authorisation from the Family Court pursuant to its welfare jurisdiction. Historically, this judicial oversight has been deemed necessary in safeguarding the interests of children in complex medical decisions, ensuring protection against potentially irreversible errors made by parents on their behalf. Although advancements in medical technology and the evolving understanding of gender dysphoria may challenge the continued relevance of this approach.

There is a rebuttable presumption that an adult has the capacity to consent to medical treatment. However, this presumption does not extend to children, who are presumed to lack competence unless they are deemed 'Gillick competent' - a standard that must be determined by the Family Court. The *Gillick* competency test, assesses whether a child has sufficient maturity and understanding to make autonomous decisions without parental consent. Lord Scarman, in his judgment, emphasised that a child can consent to medical treatment if they fully understand the nature and implications of the proposed treatment.

The Development of Australian Case Law *Re Marion* (1992)

The 1992 High Court case *Re Marion* involved an application by the parents of a fourteen-year-old girl who suffered from an intellectual disability, severe deafness, and epilepsy. Marion's parents sought an order authorising the sterilisation of their daughter by way of a hysterectomy or a declaration that it was lawful for them to consent to the procedure. Marion's condition was such that she could not be assessed as Gillick competent. Whilst this case did not specifically address gender dysphoria, it importantly established a distinction between therapeutic treatment (for which parental consent suffices) and non-therapeutic treatment, such as sterilisation, which requires court authorisation due to the irreversible and invasive nature of the procedure. This ruling was significant in recognising the risk of making the wrong decision on behalf of vulnerable individuals where the consequences are grave.

***Re Alex* (2004)**

More than a decade after the decision in *Re Marion*, the Family Court considered *Re Alex*, a case involving a 13-year-old who was assigned female at birth but identified as male from an early age. Alex was under the care of Child Protection, which sought a declaration allowing them to consent to Stage 1 (puberty



Stephanie Galloway Brown

blockers) and 2 (gender-affirming hormones) treatment on Alex's behalf. Applying the principles established in *Re Marion*, the Family Court determined that the treatment for what was then referred to as 'gender identity disorder' was non-therapeutic.

As such, both Stage 1 and Stage 2 treatment were classified as 'special medical procedures' requiring court approval, which was granted in Alex's case. In 2009, the case returned to the Family Court, where it was found to be in Alex's best interest to have a double mastectomy and Stage 3 treatment was subsequently approved.

Re Jamie (2013)

This stringent requirement began to soften with the 2013 case of *Re Jamie*. Jamie's parents sought permission from the Family Court for her to undergo Stage 1 and 2 treatments. In this case, the Family Court determined that Stage 1 treatment no longer required court authorisation, provided there was no dispute regarding the child's *Gillick* competence, diagnosis or the proposed treatment between the child, their parents or the child's doctors. This shift acknowledged the role of parental responsibility and the emerging understanding of gender dysphoria, whilst still preserving a layer of judicial oversight for more invasive treatments. The Family Court held that court authorisation was still necessary for Stage 2 treatment due to its irreversible nature and the significant risk of making an incorrect decision. At the time, the judgment in *Re Jamie* was seen as a positive development, as it was thought to improve access to treatment for transgender children and adolescents. Despite the imposition of an application to the Court to determine the *Gillick* competency of a child, the decision was regarded as a move towards streamlining the process for those seeking gender-affirming treatment.

Re Kelvin (2017)

The landmark 2017 decision in *Re Kelvin* further advanced the recognition of autonomy for individuals experiencing gender dysphoria. Kelvin, assigned female at birth, was living with his father and had not seen his mother for two years at the time of the hearing. Kelvin was treated by a psychologist, a psychiatrist and an endocrinologist – all of whom agreed that Kelvin met the diagnostic criteria for gender dysphoria and collectively recommended that Kelvin proceed with Stage 2 treatment. Kelvin's father applied to the Family Court to seek approval for Kelvin to commence Stage 2 treatment. The Family Court ruled that court approval was no longer necessary for Stage 2 treatment if the child, their parents and their treating medical practitioners agreed on the child's *Gillick* competence, diagnosis and proposed treatment. This ruling marked a significant departure from earlier case law, recognising the authority of parents and medical practitioners. The Family Court departed from the decision in *Re Jamie* and held that *Gillick* competence could be determined without court intervention. Court authorisation will remain necessary where there is a genuine controversy or disagreement between parents or between treating doctors and parents.

Re Imogen (2018)

Re Kelvin provided much needed clarity, however, uncertainty persisted regarding Stage 3 treatment and the issue of *Gillick* competency in cases of parental disagreement. The subsequent case of *Re Imogen* showcased the ongoing complexities in such matters, as the Family Court was required to intervene when parental agreement was absent. Imogen, who was assigned male at birth, was diagnosed with gender dysphoria by her medical practitioners at age 16. Imogen had commenced Stage 1

treatment in 2019 when her mother objected to her progression to Stage 2 treatment. In response, Imogen's father applied to the Family Court seeking orders that Imogen make such medical decisions independently of her parents. The Court ruled that in cases of dispute, regardless of a child's *Gillick* competence, a court application is mandatory. Among the many concerns about the implications of this decision, the erosion of the *Gillick* competence principle is particularly significant. By determining that *Gillick* competence is not decisive in such disputes, the ruling could be seen as limiting the decision-making autonomy of *Gillick*-competent minors. This ruling reflects the legal challenges that continue to surround healthcare for individuals with gender dysphoria in Australia.

Re CD (2024)

The recent case of *Re CD* involved a child diagnosed with gender dysphoria whose mother consented to Stage 1 treatment whilst the father's whereabouts were unknown. Although not in the federal jurisdiction, the Supreme Court of Victoria had to determine whether the mother's consent to treatment on behalf of the child was sufficient, given the absence of the father's consent. The Supreme Court ultimately ruled that the mother's consent was valid, citing her parental responsibility as the primary caregiver. The Supreme Court found that neither the FLA nor the *Medical Treatment Planning and Decisions Act 2016* (Vic) mandates consent from both parents in the absence of a parenting order. This ruling reinforced the principle that parental responsibility, rather than court involvement, can suffice for medical decisions on behalf of children where there is no contrary parenting order in place.

Insight from Lander & Rogers Lawyer, Annebelle King

'Most adolescents who want to access Stage 2 treatment, provided their doctors recommend it and their parent's consent, can now do so without needing to apply to the Family Court. However, if there is a disagreement between parents or between doctors and parents, court intervention will still be required.'

This could create a major barrier for adolescents seeking to access this treatment. The resources needed to start court proceedings can be substantial, and I have observed that the court process can be highly emotionally challenging for both the adolescents involved and their families.'

Future Considerations

The Family Court has historically played, and will continue to play, a vital role in medical decision-making for children in specific circumstances. Yet many young people and their families seeking gender affirming treatment continue to face substantial barriers to access. A 2016 study revealed that the average wait time from initiating the legal process to the hearing date was approximately eight months on average. Moreover, the financial burden for those unable to obtain pro bono legal services ranged between \$8,000 and \$30,000, further compounding the difficulties faced by these adolescents and their families.

Indeed, the current legal framework reflects significant progress in addressing the needs of transgender children and adolescents, however it also highlights the necessity for legislative reform. The aim should be to ensure that these young individuals can experience their childhood and adolescence free from unnecessary legal intervention, allowing them to grow in an environment where they feel supported, understood and affirmed in their identity – like any other Australian child. Legislative progress should aim to reduce the burden on families, minimising the need for court involvement in what are ultimately personal and deeply sensitive healthcare decisions. As society continues to evolve, so too must the legal approaches to these sensitive and critical issues.



Anne Smerdon



Vicki Sullivan



Sponsor

Brave Legal

Brave Legal is preparing the next generation of legal professionals for the challenges of a long career in the law but being wellness centric. This is done through tailored programs for staff, clients and being loud about leave.

Brave Legal was founded on 1 January 2021 with a clear mission – to help restore the lives of our clients after an injury. We understood that suffering an injury can be a difficult and traumatic experience. We had also witnessed the negative impact of being involved in litigation experienced by clients, and at times, staff.

Litigation, at its heart, involves conflict, requires significant resources and an outcome can take years. This difficult experience can be made worse when the purpose of the litigation revolves around a serious injury suffered by the Plaintiff.

Put simply, we have seen both clients and staff affected by the litigation experience and want to ensure that our legal services are provided with compassion but that both clients and staff have structured support in recognition of the simple fact that working in the area of conflict can be stressful and can place psychological strain on clients and the staff that are supporting them.

The way we prepare our legal team is by offering support programs alongside legal services. We offer Brave Support to clients and Brave Wellbeing to our team.

Brave Support is a free service offered to all clients where they are connected to a counsellor who can support them throughout the duration of their claim. The counsellor is trained in trauma awareness and vicarious trauma and is well-equipped and briefed to support clients on an ongoing or urgent basis. In addition, all clients partner with a lawyer and legal assistant who has undergone the vicarious trauma and trauma-informed training.

Brave Wellbeing is a wellness-centred staff program which encompasses mindfulness practice, physical wellness, meditation and the trialling of stress management techniques. All staff have been trained in vicarious trauma, dealing with difficult clients and self-care. All staff, including support staff, are offered an external training program which includes mental well-being strategies. In addition, Brave Legal has partnered with an experienced mental health accredited social worker who has worked primarily in the legal industry to provide regular training, debriefing and staff check-ins.

How does this prepare the next generation of lawyers?

It ensures that our team know that their health and wellbeing should not be a cost of a career in the law. Conversations about wellbeing are frequent and normal. A structured wellness program also means that staff are continually supported – not just at times of great stress or crisis. It also provides a “mental health tool-box” for them to draw upon when self-care is needed.

The Brave Support program ensures that clients have access to an experienced and trained support person. This can alleviate the burden on staff who deal with clients on a day to day basis and means that clients can be given well-being strategies on how to manage the impact of litigation when and if they need it.

In our experience, staff are often required to wear many hats for clients – confidante, advocate, advisor. In the area of personal injury, the reality of a client in physical pain can mean that demands on time and emotional support can be higher than in other areas of law. Ensuring staff are supported by being able to offer professional support is as important as the privilege of being able to offer this free service to clients in need.

Lastly, our stretch goal is to be loud about leave. Encouraging long periods of leave to have a real break from the law, ensuring it is regularly scheduled and having open discussions with all staff about when their next break is taking place. Along with this, we ensure that our team can *really* take leave. This means putting in place supports – both personnel and technical support – to ensure that there is meaningful time away.

We know that resilience can positively impact work satisfaction and engagement, improve overall well-being and lower depression levels. As the Harvard Business Review recently commented – resilience is a team sport – and as such, supporting wellness needs to be considered by law firms in a multifaceted way.



AUTHOR

Bree Knoester, Principal

Sponsor

Clayton Utz

Prioritising equity, diversity and inclusion in all we do.

Prioritising diversity benefits the entire legal profession, and a profession that embraces a wide range of perspectives is not only stronger but also more adaptable and innovative.

At Clayton Utz, diversity and inclusion are more than aspirations; they are the foundation of our workplace culture. We believe the strength of our firm lies in the diversity of our people, their experiences, and their perspectives. Our commitment to creating an inclusive environment allows every individual to thrive, contribute and lead, with their unique contributions recognised and celebrated.

Our approach is both broad and focused to address gender equality, LGBTIQ+ inclusion, cultural diversity, accessibility, and the empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our "Momentum" network drives diversity across the firm as the vehicle through which many of our diversity initiatives are implemented.

For example, the Gender arm of our Momentum network has fostered a supportive community which has earned us recognition as a Workplace Gender Equality Agency Employer of Choice for fifteen consecutive years. This accolade highlights our ongoing efforts to close the gender pay gap and provide equal opportunities at work for all genders.

Our diversity initiatives go beyond gender. We run a disability confidence and ally training to ensure our staff are cognisant of how to be inclusive to ensure our firm thrives. Through partnerships with CareerSeekers and CareerTrackers, and the launch of our First Nations traineeships, we create opportunities for refugees, asylum seekers, and First Nations people to build meaningful legal careers. These programs are just some of the pathways through which we implement our belief that everyone should have the chance to contribute and succeed, and that our profession will benefit from including different perspectives.

This culture of inclusion not only enriches our workplace but also enhances our ability to serve our clients with creativity and empathy. Personally, coming from a background without deep roots in law, finding a firm that embraces diversity has been invaluable to my development and practice. Clayton Utz is more than just a workplace; it's a community where my voice is heard, my differences are celebrated, and my potential is nurtured. It is this commitment to diversity that makes the firm stronger, more innovative, and better equipped to face tomorrow's challenges.



AUTHOR
Emina Besirevic, Lawyer

Sponsor

Foley's List

Foley's List differs from others due to our barrister owned business model and unwavering commitment to providing comprehensive, high-quality legal services that cater to a broad spectrum of practice areas.

A few key aspects that set Foley's apart include:

Diversity and Inclusivity: With 40% of our members being women, Foley's List boasts the largest representation of female barristers among any list. This diversity fosters a wide range of perspectives and expertise, allowing Foley's to provide clients with a deeper understanding of the legal landscape.

Innovative Practices: Foley's List has continually embraced innovation, including being the first to adopt an equal opportunity policy and integrate new technologies into its operations. By leveraging technology and modern communication tools, Foley's List provides efficient, timely services to clients.

Broad Expertise: With barristers covering a wide range of practice areas – from commercial law to common law, criminal, family law, and beyond – Foley's List offers one of the most comprehensive legal services available. This broad range allows clients to find the right fit for their legal needs whilst allows our members to diversify their practices as they wish.

Client-Centered Focus: Foley's List prides itself on providing tailored legal solutions by carefully aligning clients with barristers whose expertise and approach are best suited to each case. Our dedicated Clerking team with over 100 years of collective legal experience allows an expert but personalised approach ensures optimal outcomes and high levels of client satisfaction.

Commitment to Professional Development: Foley's List is dedicated to fostering the growth and development of our barristers and solicitors alike, regularly offering training and mentoring programs. This not only ensures that their legal professionals remain at the forefront of their respective fields but also guarantees clients access to highly skilled, informed counsel.

Through these distinctive qualities, Foley's List consistently provides legal services of the highest standard, setting us apart from other barristers' lists.



AUTHOR
Andrew Turner, Chief Clerk & CEO

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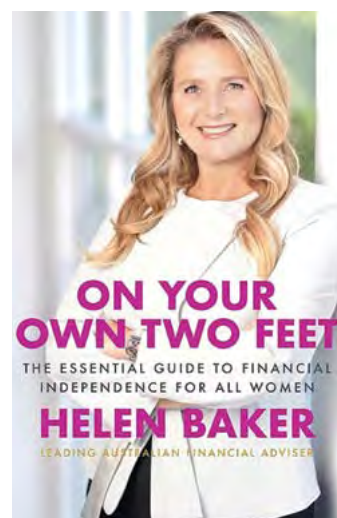


Jennifer Rosnell

Book Review

On Your Own Two Feet: Steady steps to women's financial independence

Helen Baker



*'Keep your head, heels
and standards high'.*

AUTHOR

Book review by Nicole Pereira

In her short novel, 'On Your Own Two Feet', Helen Baker examines the strategies which women need to adopt in order to get on top of their finances and reach a level of financial security and stability.

Baker, a licenced financial adviser with a humble upbringing, believes that one of the reasons why money matters is not only because of the rising cost of living but because people are living longer and starting to work later in their lives unlike the generations before them. 'Nowadays there's the gap year'; people want to travel before entering the workforce and these same people also want to work shorter weeks and

retire early. And whilst we can stop mortgage repayments once a house is paid off; the bills continue.

Baker also explores in depth many of the key strategies that women can apply in their lives based on their age group and relationship status, acknowledging that women will have different financial needs at different phases in their lives. Women in their 20s and 30s might be saving for their first home or just beginning to add a mortgage to their lives, whilst women in the 40s and 50s might be juggling children, going through a divorce or losing a parent, each of which comes with its own financial stresses.

One of the best ways in which we can stay on top of our finances is by doing an annual 'financial clean', just like how many of us may do an annual wardrobe clean, a financial clean involves reviewing all your insurance policies, your credit cards, your superannuation, your last tax return and your balance sheet to see where you can make improvements.

The final tips that Baker leaves us with are:

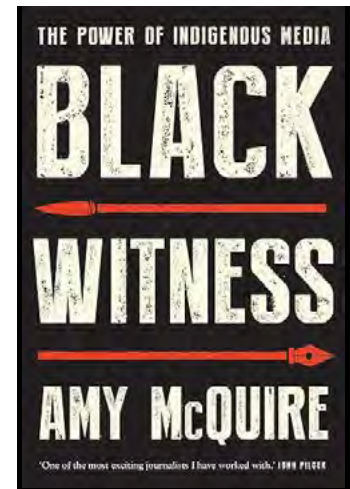
1. Borrow less than you can afford
2. Keep an emergency fund for a rainy day
3. Improve how you manage your superannuation
4. Review your insurance policies regularly
5. Think about establishing an estate plan.



Deborah Walker

Black Witness: The Power of Indigenous Media

Amy McQuire



“One of the book’s strengths is its focus on the concept of “witnessing”—both in terms of witnessing the realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life and the act of First Peoples bearing witness to their own histories and truths.”

AUTHOR

Book review by Nancy Abdalla

In *Black Witness: The Power of Indigenous Media*, Amy McQuire offers a compelling exploration of the crucial role that First Nations media plays in reshaping narratives, challenging colonial histories, and amplifying the voices of First Nations peoples in Australia. McQuire, a Darumbal and South Sea Islander, journalist and academic, brings both personal insight and scholarly rigor to her examination of how First Nations media serves as a form of resistance and empowerment.

The book addresses the media’s traditional role in perpetuating stereotypes and marginalising Indigenous perspectives. McQuire argues that mainstream media often distorts or omits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, reinforcing colonial structures. In contrast, First Nations media, ranging from community radio and television to digital platforms, offers a powerful alternative. It allows First Peoples to reclaim agency over their stories, providing a counter-narrative that is more accurate, nuanced, and grounded in lived experience.

One of the book’s strengths is its focus on the concept of “witnessing”—both in terms of witnessing the realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life and the act of First peoples bearing witness to their own histories and truths. McQuire thoughtfully discusses how First Nations media fosters a sense of community, resilience, and cultural preservation, while also offering a platform for activism and social change.

Black Witness is not just a critical look at First Nations media but also a celebration of its potential to disrupt dominant power structures. McQuire’s writing is accessible, engaging, and thought-provoking, making the book a valuable resource for those interested in media studies and social justice. Ultimately, McQuire makes a compelling case that First Nations media is not just a tool for representation but a vital force in holding the powerful to account and making the world a more equitable place.



Deidre Bean



Naomi White

Film Review

Wangany Mala (2020)

Featured at the Melbourne Documentary Film Festival, *Wangany Mala*, directed by Will McCallum, explores the enduring cultural and historical ties between the Yolŋu people of Arnhem Land and the Macassan traders of Indonesia. Set between Yirrkala in north-east Arnhem Land and Makassar in South Sulawesi, the film highlights the ongoing relationship that has existed for centuries despite colonial attempts to erase it.

The documentary follows two parallel stories: a young Muslim woman in Makassar gathering materials to re-create a traditional pinisi boat, like those used by her ancestors, the Macassan traders, and Yolŋu leaders Arian and Timmy preparing to visit their Bawaka homelands in Arnhem Land. Through these stories, *Wangany Mala* emphasises the survival of this cross-cultural connection.

Central to the film is Edith Mamarika, a Knowledge Holder from Groote Eylandt, whose insights into the Macassan trade are woven throughout. Rare archival photographs and footage from the National Film and Sound Archive enrich the narrative, bringing this shared history to life.

Set to a haunting soundtrack by Fia Fiehl, the documentary celebrates the resilience of these cultural bonds and highlights the significance of the Macassan-Yolŋu trade in shaping both cultures. *Wangany Mala* is a poignant reminder of the deep, ongoing connections between Australia and Indonesia.

AUTHOR

Film review by Nancy Abdalla



Film Review

A Moroccan Affair ("Ocho Apellidos Marroquíes")

A Moroccan Affair ('Ocho apellidos marroquíes'), directed by Álvaro Fernández Armero, is a 2023 Spanish romantic comedy which involves cultural exploration. The film features Julián López, Michelle Jenner, Elena Irureta, and María Ramos, and follows the Díaz-Aguirre family as they navigate unexpected revelations and cultural clashes in Morocco.

The story begins with the death of José María, a wealthy Cantabrian. His widow, Carmen (Elena Irureta), daughter Begoña (Michelle Jenner), and Begoña's ex, Guillermo (Julián López), travel to Essaouira, Morocco, to recover José María's first fishing boat. Their journey takes an unexpected turn when they discover that José María had a secret daughter, Hamida (María Ramos), living in Morocco.

The film carries viewers through the vibrant Moroccan culture through the lens of a Spanish family who struggles to navigate their new environment. The cinematography by Sergi Gallardo captures the beauty of Essaouira, providing a picturesque backdrop to the unfolding drama.

On the flip side, the screenplay by Daniel Castro, while humorous, often relies on predictable clichés.

Overall, *Ocho Apellidos Marroquíes* provides an entertaining cultural experience for those looking for a light-hearted Spanish rom-com with an exploration of Moroccan culture.

AUTHOR

Film review by Nicole Pereira



What's on our VWL bookshelf?

Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead

Olga Tokarczuk (translated from Polish by Antonia Lloyd-Jones)

In a rural Polish town near the Czech border, Duszejko is the reclusive, eccentric caretaker of wealthy people's summer homes. Over the course of one winter, several members of the vibrant cast of characters are found dead. Duszejko is certain she knows who is behind the murders – if only anyone would take her seriously. A gripping murder mystery filled with dark humour and sprinkled with philosophical and political reflections.

The Lying Life of Adults

Elena Ferrante (translated from Italian by Ann Goldstein)

Giovanna, a teenager living in Naples, becomes disillusioned with adulthood when cracks form in the facades of those around her. She suddenly feels deceived by everything and everyone – the adults in her life, the city in which they live. A vivid portrait of life in the city of Naples and the psyche of a teenage girl transitioning into adulthood.

The Fraud

Zadie Smith

Historical fiction meets real courtroom drama: this novel is centered around the unbelievable, but true Tichborne case that captivated Londoners in the 1870s. Sir Roger Tichborne, heir to a great fortune, was presumed to have died in a shipwreck, until a man comes forward claiming to be him. The narrative is anchored around the character of Eliza who, by way of becoming enraptured by the trial and those involved, comes to better understand the complexities of society in Victorian England. A fascinating case presented in a well-crafted novel.

Small Things Like These

Claire Keegan

In the weeks leading up to Christmas in 1985, Bill makes his rounds in a small Irish village delivering coal to keep the townspeople warm. On Christmas Eve, while making deliveries, he comes across a shocking sight that forces him to reflect on the consequences of perpetual

silence, and whether he is willing to break it. A subtle yet powerful representation of Ireland's dark history that is at once haunting and hopeful. A perfect novella.

Women & Children

Tony Birch

In Melbourne in the 1960s, Joe spends his summer holidays with his beloved grandpa. Joe suddenly loses his childhood innocence over the course of one summer when his mum must help her sister, his aunt Oona, to escape from an abusive partner. This slice-of-life novel shows the impacts of domestic violence on children and intergenerational trauma, as well as the resounding power of families. As always, the power in Birch's storytelling comes from the way he writes a story simply and allows the reader to do the rest.

The Bee Sting

Paul Murray

We meet the Barnes family – AJ, Cass, Imelda and Dickie – in the wake of the global financial crisis, when their family is seemingly falling apart. As the narrative unfolds, so too do the characters' histories, serving as a reminder that there is always more to a person than you may think. A slow-burning family saga which builds to a climax until its last page, this masterfully crafted novel left me with many questions.

AUTHOR

Book reviews by Alana Morgante



Elizabeth Barden

Free to Feed

“In my country, if you don’t have an ingredient in your home, you just go to your neighbour and borrow it!”

Free to Feed is a not-for-profit social enterprise empowering refugees and people seeking asylum to overcome barriers to social and economic inclusion through the delivery of shared food experiences

For Nassim, cooking is inseparable from family. With Qashqai roots – a traditionally nomadic people of Turkish origin – Nassim grew up in Isfahan, a big city of turquoise domes in central Iran, where mountains merge with the desert.

Here, her family home was alive with morning conversations and laughter, tempting a young Nassim’s appetite for curiosity and making it impossible to sleep in! Her summers were spent waking up at 7am for breakfast and black tea – a must in any Iranian household! Together, her grandmother, her mother and Nassim would cook until the early afternoon, three generations of strong women preparing daily feasts to be shared with almost 30 people!

Nassim’s grandmother was a revolutionary in her own community. She lived in a small village where girls were mostly uneducated, and for almost 20 years, she ran a secret school, teaching them how to read and write. It was Nassim’s grandmother who also encouraged Nassim to study too, despite cultural expectations. Before moving to Australia in 2022, Nassim studied law and worked as a lawyer – fighting for the rights of others in the same way her grandma did. Nassim’s food is fuelled by this fight, this want for people to know about the Iran she calls home – her language, her hospitality, her people.



Anar Salad

(Makes 10 serves)

Ingredients

- 300gm baby spinach, roughly chopped
- 50gm walnuts, roughly chopped
- 2 (300gm) oranges, peeled & cut into large chunks
- ½ fresh pomegranate, seeds only

For the dressing

- 15ml brown vinegar
- 50ml pomegranate syrup
- 15ml grape syrup
- 6ml olive oil

Method

Place spinach in a serving bowl, top with the orange, walnuts & pomegranate seeds.

For the dressing

Combine vinegar, syrups, oil & sugar & mix to combine. Drizzle dressing over salad & serve.

Anar translates to pomegranate, which is native to Iran. This bright fruit is widely celebrated across Persian foods and traditions.

freetofeed.org.au



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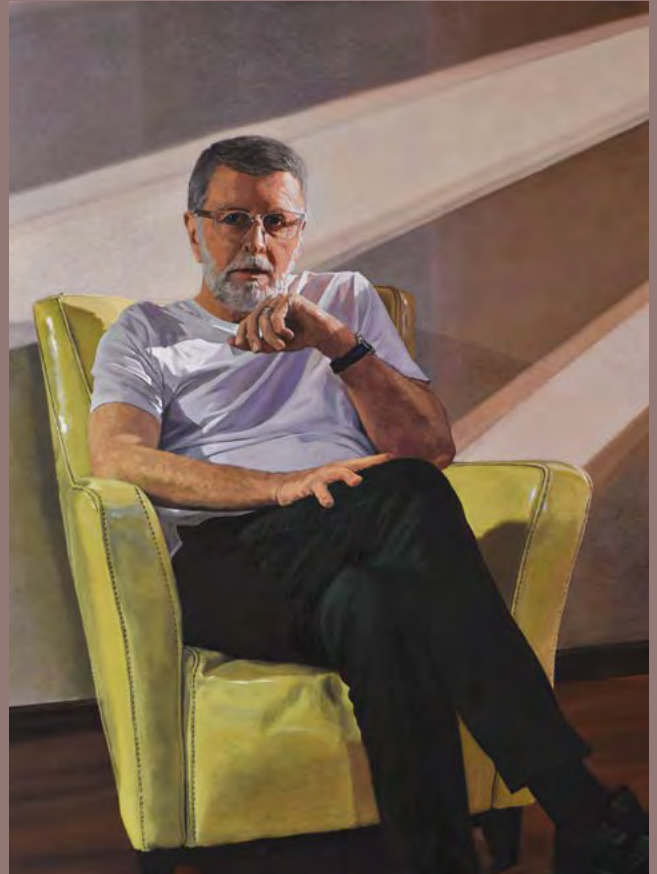
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Mary Clifton

Sponsorship Report

VWL would like to thank each and every one of our sponsors for their ongoing support in 2024:

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

We also extend our gratitude to the following event and project sponsors for their support in 2024:

- Gatehouse Legal Recruitment
- Clarence Workplaces for Professionals

VWL's work would not be possible without the invaluable support and contribution of our sponsors and supporters. The generosity of our sponsors has allowed us to run meaningful events and facilitate important conversations within our community. We have been able to come together as women in the legal profession from various backgrounds, offering 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 2025, including with our newest sponsor List G Barristers.

AUTHOR

Isabella Armao, Sponsorship Officer

Diversity and Inclusion

'Practising Law with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities: Empowerment, Identity and Culture'

On 20 March 2024, at Allens, VWL's Diversity & Inclusion (D & I) Committee and Tarwirri-Indigenous Law Students and Lawyers Association of Victoria jointly presented a candid, insightful discussion, led by Tekan Cochrane of Tarwirri and Shivani moderating with a stellar panel:

- Her Honour Magistrate Rose Falla
- Candice Jackson, Barrister, Victorian Bar
- Neane Carter, Solicitor, Terri Janke and Company.

Magistrate Abigail Burchill stepped in on the evening to impart a deeply moving Acknowledgement of Country.

The seminar addressed how we can promote inclusion and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the workplace including:

- Mandatory cultural training
- Awareness of 'tokenism' in the workplace
- Ensuring acknowledgments of country are genuine and meaningful.

'Neurodiversity and the Law: Successes and Ideas'

In June this year D & I joined with WiPS to hold a similar event on Neurodiversity with the College of Law after one of our committee members, Tamsin Jowett, who is passionate about educating others about neurodiversity, initiated the topic and gave an invaluable contribution as a panellist. Alongside her was -

Natalie Phillips-Mason, Chief All and Founder at Inclusive Change. Bree Ridgeway, Barrister at Victorian Bar; and Natalie Plumstead, VWL WiPS Co-Chair, moderating with great sensitivity, insight and style.

We learned about the significant challenges those with neurodiversity face noting the often invisibility of neurodiverse peoples, respect for their confidentiality and measures to promote their inclusion.

It has been an exciting year for the co- chairs presenting at the International Legal Regulators Conference at the Langham. Speaking about our cultural journeys in the law and the discrimination and challenges we have overcome to be here.

As we move into 2025, we are proud to say we have committee members who identify as Aboriginal, LGBTQIA+ and with a disability, from diverse religion and cultural backgrounds spanning Macau to Kenya.

AUTHOR

Shivani Pillai and Felicia Leong, Co-Chairs

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.

2024 Achievements / Highlights

VWL is dedicated to achieving equity and promoting safety for women across Australia.

The Justice Committee with the support of our sponsor, Ethos Migration Lawyers, held a panel discussion on Family Violence and how it affects women and children in the community.

As we are aware, family violence disproportionately affects women and children in Australia and can happen to anyone. In this panel discussion, we discussed how family violence impacts migrant women and children on temporary visas differently to other groups in the community, and how the legal profession can best support them in challenging times.

Special Mentions

Steph Vejar from Women's Legal Service for her support.

Looking Ahead to 2025

This year, the Justice Committee brought together legal professionals from diverse backgrounds and roles who are passionate about family violence and migrant rights.

We are inspired to continue advocacy and conversations on this live issue and look to the future with hope.

In 2025, we look forward to bringing more awareness to the topic of financial literacy for women.

AUTHOR

Amanda Emonson and Zefy Souvlakis, Co-Chairs



Jill Talbot

Sponsor

Justitia

Shortly after it was founded in 2005, some wag (we may have used a different descriptor at the time) wrote a column about the firm's inception, referring to us as "Just Tits".

Let's let that sit there a second.

It says a lot about the legal industry at the time. It also says a lot about why our founding Partners Sarah Rey and now Supreme Court Associate Justice Mary-Jane Ierodiaconou thought it was high time to disrupt the state of play. "A boutique firm? Founded and run by women?". Some were sincere when they described the move as "brave". Others totally meant it as a euphemism.

18 years later, we've seen other boutique firms come and go, but we've continued to thrive and we're still run by women. No disrespect intended, but we prefer it that way. That's why when we expanded in July this year we merged with another boutique, female-led firm (Toop Workplace Law). It's been a happy meeting of the minds because we weren't just looking to scale up – shared values were a must.

So, what does it look like in practice and why are we so passionate about our being female led? It means that the following are the norm not the exception in our workplace (and the list could go on...):

- All staff, bar two, work part-time. And we're not talking about the sort of faux part-time work where someone wrangles five, six or seven days into three to make up for it. We arrange our matters carefully so that someone carries the file to avoid the lawyer primarily responsible for the file working on their days off. And, if someone needs to disappear for family or other reasons, they can go at the drop of a hat with full support - no questions asked.
- We had an expert in perimenopause and menopause talk to the whole team about the hormonal rollercoaster that everyone with a womb encounters at some point.
- Staff can chat about the reality and challenge of raising babies and kids (and pets) - we don't have to feel like we are wasting time or colleagues might not be interested.
- There's no expectation to work insane hours. While other firms might say it, we back it up with modest billable targets.
- If you're menstruating so heavily you actually can't leave the house, well, of course, you WFH.

We're named after a Goddess, after all. We wouldn't have it any other way.



AUTHOR

Meg Crawford, Special Counsel

Sponsor

Maddocks

Joe Maddock was 28 years old when he founded Maddocks on 1 August 1885 and today the firm has offices in Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney and has grown to over 700 partners and staff. The firm will celebrate its 140th anniversary in 2025 and some elements of Maddocks history has remained constant over the years.

The firm was born at the height of the 1880s land boom in Melbourne and land-based areas of practice, such as planning, development and construction are still core parts of the business today. Maddocks started acting for Melbourne City Mission in 1909. As one of the city's leading community support organisations working to address homelessness, we are very proud to have them as one of our oldest and most important clients, supporting them each year at one of their signature fundraising events, 'Sleep at the G'.

Maddocks relationship with local government dates back to 1901 when it started acting for the City of Nunawading (now the City of Whitehorse) and devised the first Victorian Local Government Handbook in 1936. Today we provide advice, advocacy, and transactional assistance to the majority of Victorian councils in areas ranging from administrative law and employment to multi-million-dollar property developments.

Diversity and inclusion have always been at the heart of the firm. Maddocks continues to sponsor the William Ah Ket Scholarship, an initiative fostered by the Asian Australian Lawyers Association. The scholarship is named in honour of William Ah Ket who completed his articles of clerkship at Maddocks in 1903. He is one of the first people of Chinese heritage to practise as a lawyer in Australia. In 1971 the firm appointed its first female partner, Jean Alcorn, to a partnership that numbered ten at the time.

Today, women make up 71% of the firm, 38% of the partnership and 50% of the executive team. Our history of strong client service and training, along with strategic growth plans for the firm has resulted in Maddocks acting today for listed corporate clients, private equity and large property developers. Our connection to our history will continue to play a role in the firm's success into the future.



Maddocks

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.

2024 Achievements / Highlights

The Outreach Committee ran three events this year.

Unlocking the Power of Social Media - Strategies for Building Your Legal Brand and Network (8 May 2024)

Event Format: Online Panel Discussion

Event Summary: The Outreach Committee hosted an online panel discussion focusing on strategies for leveraging social media to promote legal professionals and expand their networks. The event featured presenters Ange Smith, Jennifer Tutty, and Hadassah Andagali, who provided insights into effectively using social media platforms to build a personal and professional brand. Key takeaways included authenticity, crafting a strong LinkedIn summary, focused social media strategy, and maintaining an updated website.

Fair Fees and Cost Agreements (1 August 2024)

Event Format: Online Webinar and Panel Discussion

Event Summary: This event featured a panel of speakers including Annabelle Ballard, Bridget Kennedy, Binti Prasad, and Katie Lockey. The discussion covered essential components of cost agreements, risks of non-compliance, managing costs agreements, handling unpaid invoices, and communicating with clients about costs. The event provided practical advice and was well-received by attendees.

Building Your Community in the Region (15 November 2024)

Event Format: In-Person Networking Event

Sponsor/Host: La Trobe Law School (Bendigo), Curium Legal, Foster Legal

Event Summary: An in-person networking event aimed at connecting female law students and young practitioners with local firms. The event included speeches by La Trobe Law School alumni and career "speed dating" sessions. Key themes included opportunities in regional practice, work-life balance, and diverse career paths.

Special Mentions

Thanks to our dedicated committee members: Eve Foster, Cassandra Hurley, Jacinta Learey and all event participants and organisers.

Looking Ahead to 2025

The Outreach Committee is inspired to continue building on the successes of 2024, focusing on innovative events and initiatives that support the professional growth and community engagement of women lawyers.

AUTHOR

Annabelle Ballard & Bridget Coutts, Co-Chairs

Committee

Work Practices

Role

The **Work Practices Committee** addresses employment practices that impact women lawyers. Our primary focus for 2024 was on women's health issues, as well as our continued commitment to progressing flexibility in the workplace, reducing workplace discrimination and championing the professional growth of women lawyers. Through ongoing discussion and analysis, we aim to tackle the challenges commonly faced by women while enhancing the overall work environment in the legal profession to promote equal opportunities and gender inclusivity.

2024 Achievements / Highlights

Earlier in the year, we were proud to partner with Maurice Blackburn for the inaugural **Menstruation to Menopause** panel event, emphasizing the significance of education, policy reform, and open dialogue to create supportive workplaces for women at different life stages, from menstruation through to menopause and beyond. At the event, we announced the launch of the Victorian Women's Lawyers **Menstruation to Menopause Guide** to be published in 2025 with support from Maurice Blackburn - watch this space!

2024 was the third consecutive year of our hugely successful **Tough Talks** interactive panel event, sponsored by Justitia Lawyers and held at Clarence Workspace for Professionals. The event attracted a fantastic turnout, with an honest, insightful and engaging panel. This event continues to provide a valuable platform for attendees to listen, engage, and share their workplace experiences, which often bring feelings of disappointment, isolation, and a strong urge to advocate for justice and equality.

Special Mentions

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the speakers who contributed to our events this year. Their honesty and openness greatly enhanced the success and inspiration of these gatherings, providing invaluable insights and knowledge to our audience.

Committee members, Sapphire Parsons and Mary Quinn, worked with Women's Legal throughout the year, assisting with the development of the Starts with Us Framework to eliminate harassment and violence against women in the workplace. This involved contributing to forums, drafting and engaging with Women's Legal and other stakeholders on how we can address these critical matters in the workplace.

Committee member, Anupama Baker, assisted with the drafting of the VWL submission to the Inquiry into issues related to menopause and perimenopause by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee.

Our gratitude extends to the dedicated committee members for their relentless efforts and contributions throughout the year in supporting the work practices events, publications and submissions. Special recognition to our co-chairs Julia & Nina, and committee members Katerina, Mary, Keeley, Von, Shelvi, Safai, Jenny, Anupama, and Sapphire for their unwavering support and commitment.

Looking Ahead to 2025

We understand the importance of establishing a platform for open dialogue and learning, where individuals at all stages of their legal careers can seek guidance and support. Looking forward, our emphasis will remain on further developing our events and projects to ensure they are enriching and impactful.

AUTHOR

Nina Milner and Julia Eastoe, Co-Chairs



Yvonne East



Rebecca Armstrong

Committee

Women in the Public Sector (WiPS)

Role

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

2024 Achievements / Highlights

The Women in the Public Sector Committee (WiPS) has had an impactful 2024. The committee has grown and extended its activities to embody its aim to bring opportunities for engagement in the public sector context. This year the WiPS committee led events which engaged with thought provoking and socially impactful discussions in furtherance of VWL's theme that is reflective of the past while remaining future focused.

WiPS broke new ground partnering with the Diversity and Inclusion Committee to host "Neurodiversity and Inclusion: Successes and Ideas" on 24 June, an event which sought to promote ideas for more inclusive working environments for neurodivergent lawyers. Our panellists Barrister Bree Ridgeway, Natalie Phillips-Mason, Tamsin Jowett in a lively discussion convened by Natalie Plumstead, provided lived experience insights and expertise on engaging with neurodivergent lawyers with respectful curiosity. The panel provided their insights on ways to create safe and inclusive legal environments where neurodivergent lawyers can thrive.

On 17 July, the WiPS committee hosted the 'Intersectionality and Discrimination: The Positive Duty under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*' panel event.

The panellist discussion centred on the positive duty to eliminate conduct that is unlawful under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, exploring the impetus for employers to comply. The discussion considered the application of the duty in the context of the public sector as a model employer.

The WiPS Committee expresses its gratitude to the College of Law and Victorian Government Solicitor's Office for supporting our events in 2024.

Special Mentions

The WiPS Committee expresses its sincere gratitude to our wonderful committee members and their contributions in 2024 and our event subcommittee members Stephanie D'Rozario, Eugenie Chung, Apsara Murale, Madeleine Stratmann, Kiara Wagner and Alexandra Lioudvigova.

Looking Ahead to 2025

The VWL theme for this year has provided the opportunity to reflect on the strengths and challenges within the public sector in supporting diversity and addressing discrimination. The WiPS committee looks forward to further enriching its activities into 2025.

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. Our events hope to highlight the value of forging and maintaining networks for one's career development and building their community in the legal world.

We also aim to bring our members fun events that do not feel too formal or overwhelming. It's a balancing act!

2024 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 with our special guest Elise Pulbrook from MasterChef. We know so many women in the law juggle many passions and wear multiple hats at the one time, and Elise is a real testament to how broad those passions can be.

We held our Cross Industry Networking panel with Clayton Utz, which delved into the cross over between AI, Tech and the legal industry.

Finally, the Networking Committee have provided support for VWL's AGM and End of Year celebration to take place at the Queen Victoria Women's Centre. It's always a wonderful way to wrap up the very busy VWL year.

Special Mentions

The Co-Chairs, Harriet and Shannon would like to say a very big thank you to all our wonderful Committee members. Their hard work was the reason that the events held by the Networking Committee were a huge success.

Looking Ahead to 2025

Our committee plans to keep bringing exciting events to our members and we are looking forward for another big year to come. For now, thank you to everyone who attended our events and contributed to the community VWL is building.

AUTHOR

Harriet Whiteley & Shannon Hubert, Co-Chairs



Julia Ciccarone



Stafford Gaffney



Committee

Law Reform

Role

The Law Reform Committee remains steadfast in its commitment to gender equality and in amplifying the voices of women lawyers through active contributions to law reform initiatives at both state and federal level. Our core mission is to engage in impactful submissions, consultations, and advocacy efforts that advance the rights and interests of women and gender-diverse communities.

2024 Achievements / Highlights

In 2024, we bid a fond farewell to our dedicated Co-Chair, Sophie Lloyd, and warmly welcomed Sapphire Parsons as the new Co-Chair (joining Casey Guilmartin as continuing Co-Chair), and Madeleine Stratmann as our Secretary - who bring fresh perspectives and energy to our leadership team.

This year, the Committee proudly contributed to two law reform consultations:

- **Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry**
 - addressing issues related to menopause and perimenopause, emphasising the need to close gendered health gaps and address policy challenges.
- **Australian Human Rights Commission Law Reform Collaboration**
 - partnering with Pride in Law and Liberty Victoria, we worked to identify current and emerging threats to transgender and gender-diverse human rights, advocating for stronger, more inclusive protections.

We were also thrilled to co-host “**De-mystifying Law Reform: A Focus on Coercive Control and Family Violence**” with Nicholes Family Lawyers. This event featured a distinguished panel, including Her Honour Judge Alexandra Harland (Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, Division 2), Jade Blakkarly (CEO of Wire), and Joanna Fletcher (Executive Director, Family, Youth and Children’s Law). The panellists explored the complexities of law reform surrounding coercive control and family violence, encouraging greater public understanding and community engagement on these critical issues.

Special Mentions

Our heartfelt thanks go to our dedicated Committee members, and all former members whose contributions have been instrumental in shaping our work.

We also extend a special thank you to the Law Institute of Victoria for their invaluable support in providing a space for our meetings throughout the year.

Looking Ahead to 2025

As we look to the future, we remain committed to advancing law reform at both state and national levels. Through our ongoing efforts, we aim to inspire and enable the broader community—including women and gender-diverse individuals—to actively engage in shaping the future of Australian law.

AUTHOR

Casey Guilmartin, Sophie Lloyd & Sapphire Parsons, 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.

2024 Achievements / Highlights

On Tuesday 4 June 2024, Victorian Women’s Lawyers Mentoring Committee held its first event for the year, sponsored by Brave Legal, Clarence, and Foley’s List. Focusing on Work, Wellbeing, and Health Hacks for Junior Lawyers.

The panel discussion was facilitated by Bree Knoester, Principal Lawyer and Founder of Brave Legal. The panellists were Meg Crawford, Chami Rupasinghe, Sashi Perera and Craig Evans who shared valuable insights, tips and tricks for thriving in law while prioritising well-being. These panellists came from music, comedy, entertainment and business backgrounds.

The discussion was vibrant, positive and provided attendees with “hacks” to manage their health and wellbeing. They discussed a “non-traditional” pathway in the law while pursuing passions beyond the law. The stories shared highlighted the importance of prioritising health over other conflicting priorities. Our panellists also explained how important it is to find a supportive employer who helps to enhance your well-being and while growing in your career.

We thank everyone who attended and thank you to our sponsors, Brave Legal, Clarence, and Foley’s List for their support. A special thank you to the VWL Mentoring Committee for organising this event.

On 24 July 2024, the VWL & WBA Law Student Mentoring Program officially commenced with a formal launch event. The Program’s dedicated patron, Her Honour Justice Rita Incerti, delivered inspiring remarks that underscored the value of mentorship and set a motivating tone for the year ahead.

Following the launch, K&L Gates led a values-based session designed to help mentors and mentees connect, laying the foundation for productive and meaningful mentoring relationships.

This event marked the 17th anniversary of the VWL & WBA Law Student Mentoring Program.

Special Mentions

We extend our gratitude to K&L Gates for hosting and to everyone who attended, contributing to a successful and impactful launch of the mentorship program.

AUTHOR

Cordillia Thomas & Maira Dad, Co-Chairs

Publications

Role

Portia is the annual journal and report of VWL, which is produced by VWL's Publications Committee. This year, Portia explores the theme *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. This edition celebrates the achievements and progress of women in the legal profession while acknowledging the ongoing challenges that shape the future of law and society.

2024 Achievements / Highlights

This year's collection of feature articles presents a diverse range of voices and perspectives, offering valuable insights into both personal journeys and professional developments. We are privileged to share the story of Commissioner Tran of the Fair Work Commission, whose remarkable journey from refugee to Commissioner sheds light on the power of embracing new opportunities. We also explore the evolving legal landscape surrounding gender dysphoria in the courts; hear from a lawyer's reflections on returning to work after parental leave and explore the current mental health challenges facing the legal profession through the prism of Dr Tina Popa's work in this area. Another highlight includes a profile piece on Mollie Tregillis, ex-lawyer and current consultant to firms on strategic and digital transformation.

Importantly though, we want to express our genuine belief that the Publication Committee's work goes beyond just publishing these works. Portia serves as a means of capturing and celebrating the dynamic role of women lawyers, in and outside of VWL, and serving as a platform for dialogue, advocacy, and education on issues that affect the profession.

Special Mentions

A huge thank you to the editors of Portia, the Co-Chairs of the Publications Committee, Nancy Abdalla and Shifa Shaikh, the dedicated Publications Committee, Amy Stagg, Nicole Pereira, Ella Heaphy, Alana Morgante and Andree Pianta. Your tireless efforts are greatly appreciated in bringing to life the 2024 edition of Portia. Thank you as well to our sponsors for their reflections on this year's theme which are shared in Portia and to our designer and publisher, Design by Wolf.

Looking Ahead to 2025

VWL always encourages contributions to Portia by our members. If you are interested in submitting an article to Portia in 2025, we would love to hear from you.

AUTHOR

Nancy Abdalla & Shifa Shaikh, Co-Chairs

Special Projects

2024 Achievements / Highlights

Dame Roma 2024

On 7 March 2024, 300 diverse members of the legal profession converged on the Melbourne Town Hall in celebration of International Women's Day.

The event commenced with an operatic rendition of the Acknowledgement of Country. Kate Ramsay, author of 'A Hell of a lot of Glass' provided the keynote address at this year's Dame Roma. This was followed by an invigorating discussion from our panellists around the UN IWD 2024 theme: Count Her In, as well as the VWL theme for 2024: Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow. Dame Roma this year also allowed VWL to strengthen our connection to the profession by hosting the most intersectional and diverse panel IWD has ever seen, made up of representatives from the Asian Australian Lawyers Association (AALA), Tarwirri, Disabled Australian Lawyers Association (DALA) and Pride in Law (Vic) - the first collaboration of its kind in the legal industry. Panellists engaged in an insightful conversation surrounding the barriers women face in the profession and more generally, including care giving duties and pay. This event has become VWL's flagship annual event and we look forward to Dame Roma again in 2025.

Foley's Podcast

In collaboration with Foley's List, we launched a podcast series, Getting your Ducks in a Row. The three-episode series explored the key life stages and financial milestones that may impact women in law. We had a number of keynote speakers discussing their experiences and insights about what goes into starting your own legal business, starting or ending relationships and going on parental leave or returning to work. The focus was on setting women lawyers up for success as they face various stages of life. We also celebrated the promotion of the series with a fabulous launch event that took place at the Foley's office in July.

Special Mentions

We thank Bridget Coutts for her work as Special Projects Officer in the first half of 2024.

Looking Ahead to 2025

Lesbia Harford

We have been laying down the groundwork for an exciting Lesbia Harford oration that will take place next year. Watch this space!

AUTHOR

Oriana Torcasio, Chair

Communications

2024 Achievements / Highlights

I am pleased to provide another positive update for communications this year.

We have maintained strong levels of engagement across our socials, including Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram. Thanks to a suggestion by our sponsorship officer Isabella Armao, we are also exploring the use of reels in more of our content, including in sponsor spotlight, though the more traditional image post remains the preferred method for now.

We continue to use Instagram and Facebook stories as a regular promoter of our events. It has been particularly helpful for reminders of already live events, especially in the lead up to events. In addition, we continue to use this method to promote other posts and news items regarding issues relating to gender and diversity, which has generated positive engagement.

It has been great to use our communications to continue building connections with our sponsors and other external stakeholders. We have also continued a strong relationship with the Law Institute Journal through our regular contributions on issues of diversity. Thank you to those who have provided contributions this year. Next year, the nature of our contributions will change to become even more collaborative, and we will work more closely to LIV to produce articles that tie into the relevant themes of their issues.

Special Mentions

I'd like to finish this report by thanking several groups. Firstly, the VWL executive, especially Joanna and Linda, for their support and guidance, including at short notice as can often be the case in communications. Secondly, our sponsors, for their continuous collaboration on, and engagement with, our communications. It is great to have this two-way relationship in communications with sponsors who are clearly passionate about promoting the work we have achieved together. Finally, I'd like to thank the VWL members for their engagement with us throughout our various communications over this year. We appreciate the support and look forward to further engagement next year.

AUTHOR

Alex Lioudvigova, Chair

Special Report from the Treasurer

The 30 June 2024 financial year saw VWL record a deficit of \$19,848.83, a significant increase over previous years. This result was driven by a number of things - our continued focus on networking as the year included the Dame Roma event, the always popular Members and Guests event, the mentoring programme, the Warren Moot but most significantly, a special "Briefing for Balance" event in 2023, in collaboration with the Women's Barristers Association. This was a concerted decision on VWL's part to mark the introduction of the Victorian Gender Equitable Briefing Policy, requiring 50% of all briefs, and at least 50% of the value of all brief fees for both senior and junior women barristers under the new Victorian Government legal services panel contracts. The event was the largest equitable briefing event of its kind, and aimed to drive greater gender equity in the briefing of counsel and facilitate relationships between those with briefing power and women at the bar. VWL also hosted an event in Geelong, in collaboration with Deakin University, which was very well attended.

Overall member numbers reduced by 10% and VWL sponsorship increased by a similar amount. The financial result this year of a deficit reflects a desire to expand our membership base to include women practicing at the Bar and to provide practical training and support for all our members.

Interest income reduced, as we drew down on some of our investments to fund the deficit.

VWL's accounting fees and administrative expenses remained constant when compared to the prior year. Our contributions to AWL dropped in line with the reduction in our membership fees overall. Legal fees were incurred ensuring VWL's Rules of Association were reviewed and brought up to date. Portia costs continue to grow, as we ensure it remains the high-quality magazine our members have come to expect. We will explore ways to reduce the Portia costs by allowing members to "opt-in" to physically receiving the publication, thereby reducing our carbon footprint.

Most other costs constant in comparison with prior years.

We hope to continue delivering high quality and useful functions while ensuring we remain compliant and cost-effective.

Looking Ahead to 2025

Continuing to deliver high quality and useful functions while ensuring we remain compliant and cost-effective.

AUTHOR

Liz Cooper, Treasurer

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Jo Bertini

Event

Victoria Law Foundation's Legal Laneway Breakfast

7 February 2024

On 7 February 2024, VWL was thrilled to once again join other members of the legal and justice sector at the Victoria Law Foundation's annual Legal Laneway Breakfast. Our President and Vice-President, Joanna Abraham and Linda Hunt, were up bright and early food and drink to attendees, and VWL was privileged to be able to sponsor the Welcome to Country, performed beautifully by the Djirri Djirri dancers, traditional custodians of Narm and surrounds. Thank you to the VLF for hosting, and congratulations on another successful event.

VWL looks forward to once again supporting the Victoria Law Foundation at the Legal Laneway Breakfast in 2025!



Sponsor

College of Law

As the Executive Director of the College of Law, Victoria and as an Australian Lawyer, I take pride in working for an organisation dedicated to the delivery of innovative, practice focused, flexible and accessible education to enhance the careers of the next generation of legal professionals. At College Victoria our focus is on equipping law graduates with the practical skills and ethical grounding they need to successfully transition from student to early career Australian lawyer.

Operating as a bridge between academia and practice, our approach is centred on ensuring that our students are 'practice ready' upon completion of their practical legal training. We achieve this by integrating hands-on learning with simulated legal practice matters, all of which under the guidance of our academic team comprised of seasoned legal professionals. This approach ensures students are comfortable with the day-to-day tasks of legal practice, from drafting submissions and appearing in court, to advising clients and negotiating settlements. This practical exposure is vital to ensure they can transition seamlessly into the profession.

In Australia, as in many parts of the world, the legal industry is undergoing rapid technological change. It is essential that such change is reflected in our training programs, so the next generation of legal professionals are prepared to harness these innovations and new ways of working in legal practice. Addressing this, we have integrated legal technology into our curriculum to ensure that our graduates are familiar with e-platforms such as PEXA and have experience with legal technology design and automation, such as Josef's no-code Designer and Builder program. This gives our students a competitive edge and ensures that they can participate in 'legal tech' conversations to drive efficiencies and innovation in whichever legal field they choose to enter.

Finally, we place a strong emphasis on ethics and professionalism, both of which remain foundational to legal practice in Australia. Our students are trained to consider and navigate ethical dilemmas in real life scenarios and understand the importance of maintaining professional integrity. This approach nurtures their understanding of the ethical framework within which Australian lawyers work and empowers them to positively discharge their professional obligations to clients, colleagues, the Courts and the community more broadly.

In an evolving legal environment, it is important that we continue to reflect on current legal practice and update our training programs accordingly. In doing so, our programs keep pace with the profession and ensure the next generation of lawyers can successfully navigate the ever-changing legal landscape and excel in their chosen profession. We are committed to producing College of Law graduates who are not only capable of facing the challenges of today but are also well-prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.



AUTHOR

Sophie Williams, Executive Director

Event

Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon

7 March 2024

In celebration of International Women's Day on 7 March 2024, VWL and WBA held the annual Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Lunch. We were honoured to welcome 300 attendees from across the legal profession back to the Melbourne Town Hall with Shauntai Sherree Abdul-Rahman opening the event with an operatic rendition of the Acknowledgement of Country. This was followed by an invigorating discussion from our panellists around the UN IWD 2024 Theme: Count Her In, as well as the VWL theme for 2024: Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow.

In her keynote address, Kate highlighted the current developments and progress we have made, and addressed how far we still have to go particularly in tackling gender pay inequality. Kate made specific reference to the competing demands of women who are balancing care giving duties along with professional roles, discussing how we can break these 'glass ceilings' and navigate those glass labyrinths and cliffs.

Our panellists (Kate Ramsay, author of 'A Hell of a lot of Glass' and our fantastic panellists, Justine Clark, Principal at Tisher Liner FC Law and the community champion for Pride in Law, Dr Daye Gang, a Barrister at the Victoria Bar and the community champion for the Asian Australian Lawyers Association, Sam Drummond, lawyer/writer and disability advocate for the Disabled Australian Lawyers Association, Candice Jackson, Barrister at the Victorian Bar and the community champion for Tarwirri and Jill Prior, co-founder and Principal Legal Officer of the Law and Advocacy Centre for Women, and the community champion for VWL) discussed the importance of continuing to advocate for greater equitable pay for women, the importance of giving our time to mentor and support those entering the profession from lower socio-economic backgrounds, greater recognition of the intersectionality of those living with a disability, who identify as a member of the CALD or LGBTIQ+ communities, which exacerbates the gender pay gap even more. It was a thought-provoking conversation from a panel which truly represents the diversity and intersectionality of the legal profession.



Event

Practising Law with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities: Empowerment, Identity and Culture

20 March 2024

On 20 March 2024, VWL's Diversity & Inclusion Committee and Tarwirri-Indigenous Law Students and Lawyers Association of Victoria jointly presented an insightful discussion by three leading Aboriginal women:

- Her Honour Magistrate Rose Falla, a proud Wotjobaluk, Wemba Wemba and Mutti Mutti woman and Supervising Magistrate, Koori Court
- Candice Jackson, a proud Palawa woman, Barrister, Victorian Bar
- Neane Carter a proud Djaara, Yorta Yorta, Wamba Wamba, Wergaia/Wotjobaluk woman, Solicitor, Terri Janke and Company.

The event commenced with a deeply moving Acknowledgement of Country by Her Honour Magistrate Abigail Burchill, proud Yorta Yorta/Dja Dja Wurrung woman.

The seminar addressed how we can promote inclusion and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the workplace including:

- Mandatory cultural training commencing at school and continuing through tertiary education to the workplace.
- Acknowledgement of Country delivered in a way that is meaningful.

- Awareness of 'tokenism' in the workplace, for example, not just recognising and respecting culture during Reconciliation week.
- Taking a genuine interest in the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and recognising the 'cultural load' they bear.

We extend our deepest gratitude to each of the speakers who shared their personal journeys including the barriers they each faced and what non-indigenous Australians can do to respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultures and our shared histories.

We thank Allens for their generous sponsorship and Foley's List for live streaming this event, enabling the dissemination of this important discourse across the country.

The event was moderated by Co-Chair, VWL Diversity and Inclusion Committee and Victorian Bar Indigenous Justice Committee member Shivani Pillai and culturally guided by the wonderful Tekan Cochrane, a proud Kooma and Yuwaalaraay woman ~ Executive Officer of Tarwirri and Senior Lawyer.



Event

Unlocking the Power of Social Media – Strategies for Building Your Legal Brand and Network

8 May 2024

The VWL Outreach Committee hosted an online panel discussion on 8 May 2024, shedding light on how to unlock the power of social media to promote yourself, your business and expand your professional network. Cassandra Hurley moderated the online event, which was well attended and provided some valuable insights.

The presenters for the event were:

- Ange Smith – Co-Founder of Digital Whiskey
- Jennifer Tutty – Founder and Principal Lawyer at Studio Legal
- Hadassah Andagali – law student and co-ordinator of social media marketing for Svensons Barristers

With so many social media platforms available, this event gave attendees some excellent tips on how to “be your own cheerleader” (in Hadassah’s words). Particular take-aways from the event included:

- Be relatable and authentic – share experiences. If clients can see a little of themselves in you, they are more likely to trust you.
- Craft your LinkedIn summary well.
- Choose one or two social media platforms that work for you or your firm and do those well (Jennifer Tutty’s key point and a focus she retains for her firm).
- While social media is the new frontier of marketing, you should also keep your website current – while social media is the invite into who you are, the website will walk the client through the door (in Ange’s words).

The point all presenters emphasised was that to stand out, you have to show people who you are. You also have to show your prospective clients what you can offer them – think about what your ideal client needs and how you can provide it. Something for all of us to think about.

Event

Members & Guests 2024

15 May 2024

The VWL Networking Committee was pleased to host another exciting Members & Guests event, held earlier this year at the Bank on Collins.

Our guest speaker this year Elise Pulbrook MasterChef semi-finalist, lawyer, community cookbook author, and new mum, spoke to our members about her experience juggling the demands of a career in the law while pursuing her passion for food, encouraging those in attendance to take the time to nurture their own interests outside of the law.

As always, the event also served as a positive networking opportunity, allowing attendees to connect with peers, share their own experiences, and kick off new professional relationships.

Thank you to Gatehouse Legal Recruitment for sponsoring the event.



Event

Work, Wellbeing and Health Hacks for Junior Lawyers

4 June 2024

On Tuesday 4 June 2024, Victorian Women's Lawyers Mentoring Committee held its first event for the year, sponsored by Brave Legal, Clarence, and Foley's List. Focusing on Work, Wellbeing, and Health Hacks for Junior Lawyers.

The panel discussion was facilitated by Bree Knoester, Principal Lawyer and Founder of Brave Legal. The panellists were Meg Crawford, Chami Rupasinghe, Sashi Perera and Craig Evans who shared valuable insights, tip and tricks for thriving in law while prioritising well-being. These panellists came from music, comedy, entertainment and business backgrounds.

The discussion was vibrant, positive and provided attendees with "hacks" to manage their health and wellbeing. They discussed a "non-traditional" pathway in the law while pursuing passions beyond the law. The stories shared highlighted the importance of prioritising health over other conflicting priorities. Our panellists also explained how important it is to find a supportive employer who helps to enhance your well-being and while growing in your career.

We thank everyone who attended and thank you to our sponsors, Brave Legal, Clarence, and Foley's List for their support. A special thank you to the VWL Mentoring Committee for organising this event.



Yvonne Boag

Event

Neurodiversity and the Law: Successes and Ideas

26 June 2024

On 26 June 2024, Victorian Women Lawyers' Women in the Public Sector Committee and the Diversity & Inclusion Committee hosted the 'Neurodiversity and the law: successes and ideas' panel event.

The panellist discussion centred on building safe and inclusive environments for neurodivergent lawyers.

The panel, who brought a rich and diverse range of work and life experiences, comprised barrister Bree Ridgeway; Natalie Phillips-Mason Chief Ally and Founder at Inclusive Change; and Tamsin Jowett Neurodiversity Coach and former CEO of Asperger's Victoria.

Attendees of the event enjoyed a lively discussion and interaction with panellists. The key points of discussion included: the importance of leadership to create inclusive legal environments, managers being approachable and engaging in a respectful curiosity with neurodivergent lawyers, allies and fellow lawyers being partners in valuing the strengths and richness of neurodivergence, open and inclusive conversations to create safe and comfortable environments for everyone.

The WiPS Committee extend thanks to the panel, panel moderator Natalie Plumstead, subcommittee leaders Stephanie D-Rozario, Alex Lioudvigova, Madeleine Stratmann, Eugenie Chung and Aspara Murale, and the College of Law for sponsoring this event.



Sponsor

Allens

Allens > < Linklaters

How is your organisation preparing for the integration of AI and other technological advancements in legal practice?

Enhancing digital literacy and embracing new technologies like generative AI not only allows the legal profession to keep pace with change, but also helps us to prepare our clients for the opportunities and risks of tomorrow.

At Allens, this involves:

- supporting its people to build their knowledge and skills of the evolving technology landscape;
- making thoughtful and deliberate investments in new tools and technologies; and
- working through the data, governance and operational considerations that new technologies present.

There are many recent examples of how Allens is implementing the above principles. The development of own ChatGPT function, Airlie, is a good example. Airlie facilitates the controlled use and integration of generative AI technology, while importantly maintaining the confidentiality of the firm's and its clients' information. The firm is also undergoing trials of Microsoft CoPilot and Thompson Reuters CoCounsel, and uses several other tools and programs including eDiscovery platforms, automative contract generation programs and contract review tools to supplement and elevate the skills of its lawyers. Through its new digital literacy platform, the Future Fluent Passport, Allens is also seeking to ensure that its lawyers and business teams can effectively utilise the wide range of technology available to them and give them the digital skills to equip them for the future.

How does your organisation prioritise equity, diversity and inclusion in its current operations and client interactions?

Harnessing the talents and diversity of a firms' people helps us to connect with clients, solve complex problems, innovate and attract more great and diverse people. Allens sees strength in the unique backgrounds and life experiences that its people bring to the firm.

This year, Allens achieved its gender representation target of 40% women within the partnership a year ahead of schedule. It also been recognised as an employer of choice for gender equality through the Workplace Gender Equality Agency for the 20th consecutive year, and for LGBTQIA+ inclusion achieving Gold Tier employer status through Pride in Diversity's Australian Workplace Equality Index. The firm is also committed to reconciliation through its First Nations Engagement Plan 2023-26, and its involvement with Jawun and the Empowered Communities Project, and the firms' First Nations legal and corporate services internship program.

Each of these awards, programs and achievements signal to the industry, our clients and our people, the firms' commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion.

The firms' internal practices also reflect this commitment. For example, Allens has a number of LGBTQIA+ identifying leaders across the firm and many culturally diverse partners and business unit leaders, showcasing to its people the importance of bringing your whole self to work. The firms' network groups are similarly pivotal in fostering gender, LGBTQIA+, accessibility, cultural and linguistic, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion. These networks host a range of internal events and activities for our people, often drawing on annual national and global dates of significance to raise awareness and foster inclusion in the everyday practices of the firm.



Frankie Moran



Sharon Billinge



Event

Law Student Mentoring Program Launch

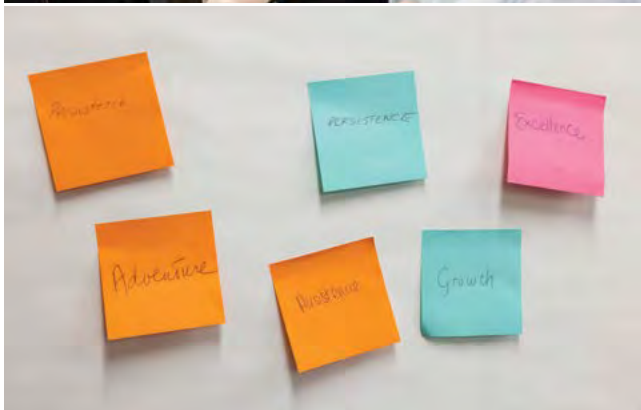
24 July 2024

On 24 July 2024, the VWL & WBA Law Student Mentoring Program officially commenced with a formal launch event. The Program's dedicated patron, Her Honour Justice Rita Incerti, delivered inspiring remarks that underscored the value of mentorship and set a motivating tone for the year ahead.

Following the launch, K&L Gates led a values-based session designed to help mentors and mentees connect, laying the foundation for productive and meaningful mentoring relationships.

This event marked the 17th anniversary of the VWL & WBA Law Student Mentoring Program.

We extend our gratitude to K&L Gates for hosting and to everyone who attended, contributing to a successful and impactful launch of the mentorship program.



Event

“EmpowerHER” Wellbeing Workshop

31 July 2024

VWL held a wellbeing workshop led by Psychologist & Mental Health Advocate Anushka Phal from Umeed Psychology. Anushka created a supportive environment where participants were able to explore and address the unique challenges they face in their professional and personal lives. Attendees participated in candid discussions and interactive exercises to uncover the profound impact of childhood experiences, cultural values and societal expectations on their career trajectories. The workshop also helped legal professionals to recognize the deep-rooted influences that shape their professional lives; how cultural values, expectations and identity interplay to influence mental health and career; how to recognise and address burnout in the legal profession; and how to implement effective strategies for mental health resilience.

We were delighted to receive positive feedback and here is what one of the participants had to say about the event: *“I liked how interactive the event was. It was great to meet and hear from other women in the industry. I thought Anushka’s content and exercises were excellent. It was a very human interaction and left me feeling energised”*.

Thank you to Sounita Viravout for organising the event and to Anushka for facilitating the event with authenticity. We also thank Clarence Workplace for Professional Places for sponsoring the event.



Ali Marshall

Event

Fair Fees & Costs Agreements

1 August 2024

The VWL Outreach Committee hosted an online Webinar and Panel Discussion on 1 August 2024. The presenters were:

- Annabelle Ballard, Barrister
- Bridget Kennedy, solicitor at Blackstone Legal Costing
- Binti Prasad, partner at Hunt & Hunt
- Katie Lockey, partner at Mal Ryan & Glen

The event kicked off with a technical presentation by Kennedy and Ballard, who ran through what needs to be in a cost agreement and disclosure statement, and the risks associated with getting things wrong for a business' bottom line (void contacts!) and individual practitioners (who risk being struck off!). The slides were particularly detailed and VWL members are welcome to view the full presentation at VWL's website.

The panel discussion portion of the evening extended beyond the black letter law, to practical tips on dealing with costs from four experienced female practitioners. Ballard, Kennedy, Prasad and Lockey each shared her experiences dealing with costs agreements, unpaid invoices and having discussions with clients regarding costs and disbursements. The panel discussion covered the significance of gender parity in fees to career progression, strategies to overcome the "awkwardness" involved in talking about costs, and the importance of providing updated costs estimates to building client trust.

Switching focus to the responsibilities of clients, the panel also addressed how to deal with clients who refuse to pay a bill. Kennedy suggested trying to educate the client as to the reason for the costs and where the value of your work lies, with empathy and patience. Nevertheless, sometimes practitioners have no choice but to commence debt recovery proceedings or apply for cost assessment. To avoid this worst-case scenario, Lockey shared that she tries to collect money in trust prior to completing work for specific matter types and keeps an internal list of 'bad payers'.



Lynn Savery

Event

Menstruation to Menopause: Women's Health in the Workplace

8 August 2024

It is recognised that the current legislative work rights do not account for the support required for women experiencing pain and discomfort in the workplace. Women health concerns range from painful periods to reproductive health, polycystic ovary syndrome, endometriosis, miscarriages and perimenopause.

Our panellists graciously shared their insights and experiences on what can be done now to improve the workplace for women experiencing health issues. This includes policy reform, lobbying government and workplaces, increasing the amount of personal leave available (or introducing reproductive/menstruation leave) as well as championing flexible work practices.

Thank you to our panel, Jessica Heron, Maurice Blackburn, Imogen Szumer Maurice Blackburn, Mona Emera, Emera Family Law and Natalie Moore, Own Your Health Collective for sharing your insights and personal experiences with the audience.

Thank you to VWL President, Joanna Abraham for moderating the event and sharing your own journey with managing chronic pain in the workplace.

At the event, the VWL Work Practices Committee was excited to announce the launch of the Victorian Women's Lawyers Menstruation to Menopause Guide to be published in 2025 with support from Maurice Blackburn.



Event

Warren Moot 2024

August 2024 to November 2024

The VWL Warren Moot celebrates its ten-year anniversary.

The Warren Moot is a landmark event in VWL's calendar, it attracts a diverse cohort of participants, ranging from law students to more established members of the legal profession.

The Moot provides participants with an opportunity to test their advocacy skills and engage directly with members of the Judiciary, with a view to providing solicitors with an insight into a career at the Bar and to also look to improve their advocacy skills.

The Moot, which celebrated its ten-year anniversary in 2024, was launched on 5 August 2024 by the Honourable Justice Rowena Orr KC of the Victorian Court of Appeal, Elizabeth Bennett SC of the Victorian Bar, and Michelle Dixon, a Partner at Maddocks. The panellists participated in an engaging panel discussion facilitated by Maddison Harrington and Alanna Ivanova, VWL's competitions officers. The panellists shared their experiences in relation to oral advocacy and appearances before the bench as well as their insight on the skills and attributes of a good advocate.

Each moot round was presided over by members of the Judiciary, including judges of the County Court, Supreme Court and Federal Courts. Our teams grappled with all new and novel problems drafted by members of the Victorian Bar, and for the first time, encountered a rolling 'factual matrix' following the protagonist 'Derek Smith of DStinct Aroma' through his journey through the Australian court system. In recognition of the ten-year anniversary, we were fortunate enough to have 10 teams face off against each other, with the first two rounds being hosted at

Maddocks. The four teams who reached the semi-final were invited to appear at the Fair Work Commission before Deputy Presidents O'Neil and Millhouse.

The Grand Final was held on Monday, 11 November 2024 at the Supreme Court before a 'full bench' comprised of (for the first time in the Warren Moot's history) three judges – in celebration of the ten-year anniversary of the moot.

Two teams progressed to the Grand Final, being CU in Court and Felicitous Solicitors. We were incredibly fortunate to have VWL's Program Patron, Chief Justice Warren, Patron of VWL's Student Mentoring Program and Judge Tran of the County Court preside over the Grand Final.

Congratulations to the winners of the 2024 Warren Moot, team 'CU in Court', comprising of Clayton Utz graduates, Zanna Gorfe, Charlee Hawkes, Kate Buckley and Elizabeth Seychell.

VWL also congratulates the runners up, team Felicitous Solicitors, comprising of Fel Leong, Jennifer Xj Wu, and An Jiang.

Both teams displayed exceptional advocacy skills and are to be commended for their resilience and determination.

VWL extends its sincere thanks to Maddocks, who have sponsored the moot since its inception, together with the members of the Bar who drafted the problems, and to the members of the Fair Work Commission for so willingly hosting the semi-final round.

Lastly, we would like to thank all members of the Judiciary who kindly gave up their time to adjudicate each of the four rounds.



Event

VWL Professional Mentoring Launch 2024

10 September 2024

The College of Law hosted this year's Professional Mentoring Launch which was officially opened by the Honourable Associate Justice Mary-Jane Ierodiaconou.

Her Honour addressed the audience with very relevant topics affecting our workplaces today. Diversity, inclusion, belonging and other important topics were elaborately discussed. The audience were also captivated by a video message shared by Her Honour created by Pixar, called 'Purl'. The audience were able to relate the message conveyed in the animation to their everyday workplaces where there is still a struggle with workplace diversity. Her Honour emphasised the importance of being your authentic self, and finding your supporters in or around your organisation whether it be colleagues or mentors. The discussion revolved around questions of inclusion and belonging and how important these qualities are to a mentoring relationship.

The attendees also recorded qualities they believed that related to mentoring on notepads and used these as talking points to network with other mentors and mentees in the room. The event was an overall success.



Sponsor

K&L Gates

The legal profession carries a reputation for being slow to change – with good reason, we tend to carefully evaluate situations before making moves. But whether we like it or not, evolving technologies have and are changing legal practice.

With change comes a wealth of opportunities. For the broader community, AI-based legal tools can provide increased access to justice for disadvantaged people groups. Within the profession, digital tools can increase efficiency by providing automated document generation, summaries of recent cases, e-discovery platforms, and more.

Personally, I've seen new technologies add value in several ways. I was involved in developing an AI-based chatbot that increases efficiency by providing the first draft of a legal document based on the user's answers to questions. I've also used other emerging technologies to create streamlined products. Even one software tool can be used to create a variety of streamlined products that are adaptable based on what the situation requires.

It's also true that development can have a flip side.

AI can be a double-edged sword when it comes to diversity and inclusion. On the one hand, AI tools can analyse data to help identify and reduce gender bias. On the other hand, large language models (such as ChatGPT) are trained on and, therefore, reflect materials that may themselves contain inherent bias. It's important to recognise and address this, and consciously keep diversity and inclusion as central values in this changing legal landscape.

AI tools also tend to have unfaltering confidence in their own abilities, but in reality, aren't (yet) accurate enough to rely on without thorough verification – CoPilot is still laced with the fine print "Copilot uses AI. Check for mistakes".

It's important not to let the current deficiencies of AI-based technologies dissuade us from using them. Not every idea will work, or every technology be useful, but only by using these tools can we better discover their benefits and limitations and develop technical soft skills that will only become increasingly important. A cautiously curious approach is key.

I'll leave you with this (corny) limerick written for me by CoPilot:

*In the courts where the gavel does ring,
Diverse voices and AI bring zing.
With inclusion in mind,
And tech intertwined,
The law's future is a vibrant new spring!*



AUTHOR
Phoebe Naylor, Lawyer



Liz Stute



Mez Truskett



Heather Miller



Nicolette Eisdell

Sponsor

Coulter Legal

For many years, Coulter Legal has been focused on Geelong and surrounding regions, which has meant we have been in the position to develop strong and solid relationships with key clients, referrers and community organisations. More recently, we have expanded our presence into Melbourne with enormous growth, meaning we have had to change the way we build our profile in a new market, but without changing the fundamental culture of who we are and our history. Our history has consistently been about people; our people, our clients and our community. This is a crucial part of the way we do business and has shaped our business over the past 90 years to be who we are today.

From the very beginning, part of our culture at Coulter Legal has been to build strong relationships with community organisations to maintain our ongoing awareness of the key challenges in our communities and give back in a meaningful way. This has included building partnerships with community organisations that emphasise improvements for people living with disadvantage including homelessness, food security and employment opportunities. This has the positive effect of grounding our people in the reality of the social fabric in which we work.

Coulter Legal celebrates 90 years of business in 2025, and client interactions and expectations have changed dramatically over that time! Where instructions, advice and communication to and from the other side was by post and in person, which often allowed for important consideration time, we know our clients now expect timely advice and are more sophisticated and educated than ever before because of access to enormous volumes of information at their fingertips. There is no more crowding around the first fax machine in Geelong to see how it all works!



AUTHOR

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

At Coulter Legal, we are currently rolling out generative AI practices, along with a focus on continuous improvement and development for our people. We use AI to support our lawyers and assistants to streamline operations, including client onboarding and the collection and collation of important information, and improve accuracy in the end product for our clients. This improves efficiency in standard processes and creates more time and space for the crucial element of legal advice, which is the actual advice itself!

Clearly AI and automation are two key trends in the legal sector, and careful consideration must be given to the potential ethical concerns of the use of such technologies and maintaining confidentiality for lawyers and for clients. Finding and retaining talented people and ensuring their ongoing wellbeing in a sector that tends to lean towards a higher rate of psychological risks is an emerging issue that aligns with the sense that lawyers must always be on, and always be responding to clients. At Coulter Legal, we encourage people to find the work life balance that works for them, noting that can look different for different people. Almost all of our people work flexibly, to provide our people with the opportunity to create time and space for the things that are important in life.

Over the next decade, we believe the role of Coulter Legal in the communities we operate in will shift more towards providing quality over quantity. We see a connected experience of legal services for our clients throughout their business or individual journey. At Coulter legal, the next decade will see greater automation of simple and standard legal processes for improved cost effectiveness for our clients and a greater focus on high quality advice through critical thinking, problem-solving and empathetic ways of working.



Pollyxenia Joannou



Cynthia Breusch

Event

Australian Women Lawyers 2024 National Conference: Leading The Way

18–19 October 2024

On 18 – 19 October 2024, Australian Women Lawyers (AWL) held its biennial National Conference in Canberra, attended by over 150 delegates from across Australia.

The 2024 National Conference, themed 'leading the way', began with a welcome message from AWL's Patron, the Honourable Justice Jacqueline Gleeson, and a video message from Her Excellency the Governor-General Samantha Mostyn AO. The Governor-General noted that a strong legal system is built on equality, diversity and respect, and emphasised the importance of having women in visible positions of leadership.

Delegates then heard from keynote speaker Jennifer Robinson, Australian human rights lawyer and barrister in London on how the law silences women. Jennifer, author of *How Many More Women* spoke about gender-based violence and the impact of the Me-Too movement in society.

The conference also featured panel presentations from esteemed women in the legal profession, chaired by Board Members of AWL, including:

- Dr Anna Cody, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, and chair Leah Marrone (barrister and former AWL President). Dr Cody spoke about the positive duty amendment introduced in December 2022, which imposes a legal obligation on organisations and businesses to take proactive and meaningful action to prevent relevant unlawful conduct from occurring in the workplace.
- First Nations lawyers Karly Warner and Emma Hudson-Buhagiar from Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT, and chair Alinta Robinson-Herbert (Tasmania Women Lawyers), who discussed the topic of First Nations women in law.
- Deputy Chair Sarah Court of ASIC and CMM Carly Kind, Privacy Commissioner, and chair Astrid Haban-Beer (current AWL President and Women Barristers Association representative, as well as the 2010 VWL Convenor), who discussed the Australian regulatory landscape and privacy laws.
- Dr Hannah Tonkin, NSW Women's Safety Commissioner, Katrina Marson and Sapphire Parsons (VWL member), and chair Shelley O'Connell (Women Lawyers Association of South Australia), who explored the gendered violence pandemic.
- The Hon. Justice Chrissa Loukas-Karlsson, Ann-Maree David, Kirsty Salvestro and Deborah Battison on kindness in law, who encouraged us all to advocate for better legal workplaces.
- Dr Alice Jill Edwards, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, who shared her experience assisting victims of war and violence globally.
- Kate Eastman SC and Dr Kylie Weston-Scheuber, and chair Renee Bianchi (Women Lawyers Association of NSW), who discussed the issue of equitable briefing and pay disparity at the Bar.
- Dr Francesca Rush, Alicia Genet and Anabel Griffin, and chair Stephanie Pasharis (VWL's AWL representative and 2022 VWL President), who discussed how Artificial Intelligence, and the growing STEM industry was changing the legal profession.
- Tanja Kovac and Dr Sonia Palmieri, and chair Emma Luck (Women Lawyers of WA), who explored the contribution of women to public policy.
- Fiona McLeod AO SC and chair Jennifer Batrouney AM KC (both past Presidents of AWL). Fiona offered her reflections on how to lead through your values, leading to a standing ovation from delegates.



Guests also attended AWL's Gala Dinner, at the National Portrait Gallery. The keynote speaker for the Gala Dinner was the Honourable Justice Louise Taylor of the ACT Supreme Court, the first Indigenous woman to become a Supreme Court judge in Australia. The Hon. Justice Louise Taylor encouraged us all to continue advocating for diversity in the legal profession.

The Gala Dinner also featured the presentation of the AWL Award to this year's recipient, Fleur Kingham. Attendees celebrated Ms Kingham, immediate past president of the Australian Association of Women Judges and co-founder of the Women's Legal Service in Queensland, who has been a strong advocate for the rights of women in the community.

The 2024 AWL National Conference was a wonderful opportunity to connect with lawyers across the nation and engage in an informative and thought-provoking discussion on a range of topics crucial to the advancement of women in the legal profession. The conference was also a reminder of the role that each of us can individually play in fighting for justice, as well as the power of a collective voice in advocating for change.

Get involved in AWL

AWL is Australia's peak representative body of women lawyers and is governed by a board of directors comprising representatives from each State and Territory women lawyers' association. Members of AWL's Consistent Bodies, such as VWL, are automatically members of AWL.

Members of VWL can work alongside AWL's board of directors to advocate for change in the legal profession by working alongside the board to draft submissions or plan the next national conference (to be held in 2026).



Sponsor

Ethos Migration Lawyers

Ethos Migration Lawyers was built on the core values of loyalty and honesty. The word 'ethos' deriving from the Greek language, embodies the fundamental spirit and underlying sentiment that has shaped the character of Ethos Migration Lawyers over the years.

Inspired by their own family history of migration from Greece to Australia, the founders of Ethos Migration Lawyers were driven by these experiences to support individuals and businesses in navigating their migration needs. This founding journey has instilled empathy, resilience, and strength in their work culture, permeating throughout the organisation.

In driving our organisation ever-more forward, Ethos Migration Lawyers commit to endorsing diversity and innovation within the workplace. This dedication has retained a special kind of talent whose mission is to create emotional connections with their clients and advocate strongly for their migration needs.

This legacy will continue to drive the mission of Ethos Migration Lawyers, ensuring we evolve while staying true to the values which first defined us.



AUTHOR
Zefy Souvlakis, Partner



Pamela Tippett

Event

Tough Talks

29 October 2024

Back for its third consecutive year, VWL with support from Justitia and Clarence Workspace for Professionals held the interactive panel event, Tough Talks.

We had a great turn out of attendees from the legal field, providing a platform to listen, engage, and share experiences in the workplace that can evoke feelings of disappointment, isolation, and the pressing need to advocate for justice and equality.

Our panellists shared a challenging experience they faced in their workplace, detailing its impact on them and their teams, as well as the steps taken to address the situation. Audience members actively engaged with the panellists, posing questions such as, *'In hindsight, would you have approached things differently'*, *'What changes are necessary in the workplace to ensure that discrimination and sexism are properly addressed?'* and *'How can we effectively manage difficult conversations in our work environments?'*

Thank you to our panel, Monique Keel from Women's Legal Service, Jayne Parker from Youth Law Group, Victoria Police, and Jyothi Chaganti from Coles Group for sharing your experiences.

Thank you to Korina Leoncio for her incredible moderation of the event as well as Justitia and Clarence Workspace for Professionals who sponsored the event.



Event

Cross-Industry Networking Event

6 November 2024

The Cross-Industry Networking Event, Techscape: Designing the World of Tomorrow was held at Clayton Utz on Wednesday 6 November 2024. Throughout the event panellists, Tara Dharnikota, Swetha Meenal, and Dr Ruwangi Fernando explored the impact of AI and technology on society, critical infrastructure required to safeguard use of AI and shared advice on how to become future ready. The panel discussion was thought-provoking and offered new insights into the evolving role of AI in designing the world ahead.

The event was hosted in collaboration with Clayton Utz's Melbourne Momentum Gender Committee, Her Tech Circle, She Leads Tech and Women of the Australian Legal Technology Association. The panel was moderated by VWL President, Joanna Abraham. We would like to thank our panellists, event sponsor and partners and all committee volunteers for their efforts in making the event a true success.



Esther Erlich

Event

Building Your Community in the Region

15 November 2024

The VWL Outreach Committee hosted an in-person networking event at Wine Bank on View, in Bendigo Victoria. The purpose of the event was to give female law students and young practitioners the opportunity to develop a real connection with local firms and gain insight into the unique opportunities and work-life balance regional practice has to offer.

The event commenced with a speech by a La Trobe Law School alumni, Kimberley Parker and Karin Temperley on the theme "Regional Law Practice – how to have it all". Each speaker shared her journey from studying law at La Trobe University in Bendigo, to regional practice, and all the unique opportunities she experienced along her career path.

For the networking portion of the evening, the Outreach Committee facilitated career "speed dating" between attendees over pizza and refreshments.

The theme that shone through in practitioners' discussions with aspiring lawyers was that there is more to regional practice than meets the eye. At regional firms, young lawyers have the opportunity to serve their community and gain hands on experience working with clients on a broad range of matters, without giving up the things they love. "Small town" does not mean "small cases" and there are more roads than one to thriving in the legal profession.



Fiona O'Byrne

Sponsor

Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO)

The VGSO, and its predecessors, have been advising Victoria since the colony was established in 1851, which is pretty special. But of course we're not the same organisation that we were then. Our legal practice has adapted over time to suit the needs of the State.

For example, in 1983, our criminal law practice was separated out to the Director of Public Prosecutions (now the Office of Public Prosecutions). Other practice areas have evolved to respond to changes in the federal-State legislative balance, the growth in new areas of law and competitive pressures. VGSO moved to a fee for service model in 1993 and now competes in the market for legal services (with some exceptions for VGSO exclusive work such as constitutional law, human rights and native title).

Our history is rich with years of accumulated knowledge and know-how from providing services exclusively to government. We know the workings of government, its needs, drivers and best practice. We've developed a deep understanding of the policy and regulatory frameworks government must navigate, and what it means to serve the rule of law for the State. We attract people with diverse experience but who share a common desire to use their legal skills to support better social, economic and environmental outcomes in our community. Our people are experts in what we might call the 'extra law' that overlays everything that government does, even when it appears to be acting like a commercial entity or using private law tools to achieve public benefit.

We know though that our long history can't weigh us down. Sometimes a well-established reputation for excellence in some areas, can make it tough to develop or articulate value in others. Our culture reflects our public service duties of transparency, openness and impartiality - which are constants - but our symbiotic relationship with government means that we will always have to adapt to government needs and objectives.



AUTHOR

Rebecca Radford, Lead Counsel



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