



Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

Newsletter

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Bullying in Schools

Michele Zaccaro Civil Lawyer

It is an ongoing problem that appears to only raise its head, when someone is seriously injured or the police are called to a school to investigate an incident complained of by a concerned parent.

If you are a student or a concerned parent then this Legal Service is here to listen and act on your complaint of bullying at school. We are only a phone call away so call and speak to your Civil Lawyer Mike Zaccaro and talk over your concerns and what we can and will do for you:

- Listen to you,
- Take a statement,
- Write to your school Principal and complain,
- Advise you of your legal rights and remedies available to you against the school, teachers, Education Department, student concerned,

What you need to do to assist your Lawyer to prepare your case/claim for Compensation,

- change in Policies and procedures in the school concerned, what medical and psychological assistance that is required to substantiate a claim or damages.

There is a DUTY to COMBAT BULLYING in schools and we are here to help you so don't put it off until your concerns become serious.

Video Conferencing

Victoria Legal Aid have been discussing a proposal to establish Video Conferencing facilities in the Grampians and Shepparton regions.

The proposal if implemented will link Victoria Legal Aid, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and some specialist Legal Services. This will enable clients to talk to their lawyers and Client Service Officers directly over computer links 'virtually' face to face. Such a system is expected to improve the quality of service provided.

Mandatory Sentencing

The tragic death of a young man in the Northern Territory under the Mandatory Sentencing Laws has shocked and energised many people into vocal opposition to those laws. Organisations such as the Catholic Commission for Justice Development and Peace, and the National Children and Youth Legal Service, have been active in publishing on this issue. Editorials in the Melbourne Age and the Australian have strongly condemned Mandatory Sentencing laws.

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service has written to the Prime Minister, the chief minister of the Northern Territory Denis Burke, all Victorian Federal Politicians and Senator Bob Brown of Tasmania. Senator Brown is preparing a Private Members Bill in an effort to overturn Mandatory Sentencing Laws in both NT and WA to be submitted to the Senate in the next few weeks.

Our VALS letter was published in the Age on the 17/2/2000, and we have received a number of calls from people volunteering their time and support on this issue by lobbying politicians.

The Herald Sun's Andrew Bolt wrote an article published on the 21/2/2000 which, under the guise of providing background, sought to lay the blame for the young mans death on the Angurugu Aboriginal community on Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria. VALS immediately wrote to the Herald Sun seeking to enlighten Mr. Bolt on his failure to realise the enormous impact of 'non indigenous Australia' on indigenous communities which cannot be instantly 'cured' even where land is held or has been returned to traditional owners.

The social and cultural dislocation on indigenous communities due to generations of non indigenous administration reducing traditional leadership and control, forced settlement into permanent yet remote townships which have almost a complete lack of employment and training opportunities. The lack of culturally appropriate prison diversion programs, drug, alcohol and other substances programs and those programs to address chronic



Community Day Dandenong

The Legal Education Unit has been meeting at the Bunurong Health Service with members of the Dandenong region Koori community to identify how VALS services can assist with community legal education needs. Issues about police liaison, youth services, the Community Justice Panel, accessibility of the Department of Human Services agencies, services for drug and alcohol problems are some of the issues that have arisen. The contacts made between agencies and community has been invaluable. Discussions and plans about the development of programs and events are underway.

The community decided to hold a "Community Day" on February 18. In spite of the 38 degree heat, over 40 local community people attended, along with Bunurong Co-op staff, local police, VALS staff in client services and education, students and staff from the local TAFE institute, as well as Koori and non-Koori staff in local government and non-government agencies working with the Koori community.

One of the aims of the day was to inspire links with the police. Inspector John Hynes of the Dandenong police attended and emphasised his commitment to the day by turning up on his day off, doing the cooking on the outside barbecue, and then making a speech. Other brief speeches were made by Lisa Anderson, Manager of Bunurong Co-op and VALS Deputy CEO Antoinette Gentile. The day's music was provided by Grant Hanson and Kutcha Edwards.

VALS Staff Moves

Farewell to Community Legal Education Officer Sherry Nekalevu who has left us to move to Mildura and Client Service Officer Bradley Boon who is taking up a new position at the Health Service. Senior Legal Secretary Noeline McKenzie and Legal Secretary Carmen Dunn also left us before the Xmas break. We wish them all the best in their new endeavours and thank them for their service here at VALS.

Welcome to new Client Service Officers Tracy Van Beek and Ann Maree Kirkman who recently commenced duties here at VALS Fitzroy Office.



literacy deficits are also strategies which should be employed to reduce the indigenous imprisonment rate. The recent withdrawal of funding by the NT government from providing education in the local languages of these remote townships has further disadvantaged those who use and speak English as a 2nd even 3rd or 4th language.

Here in Victoria our Justice framework has followed other states in sentencing prisoners to longer prison times but has not adopted the draconian legislation of the Northern Territory and Western Australia. We do however have an over-representation of Aboriginal people in Victorian prisons at over 10 times that of non indigenous Victorians and it is vital that similar prevention strategies as have been suggested be strengthened and further developed. The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service has advocated for such culturally appropriate programs throughout its history. It is positive and of note that the Brack's Government here in Victoria is going to reintroduce an annual review of progress in implementing the Royal Commission into Deaths in custody recommendations.

Message from VALS CEO

Nigel D'Souza Chief Executive Officer VALS.

I have been in the position of CEO here at VALS for close to three months. One of the issues that I have picked up on is that of complaints. VALS has a clear complaints procedure which enables clients and community members to register their concerns about any matters. Generally the process is that complaints must be lodged using a feedback form or it must be in writing. If this causes anyone difficulty then VALS staff can assist people in writing down their issues. Having done this however, the person making the complaint needs to sign the typed document. If you do not use VALS to assist you then you certainly can use anyone else. The important thing is that a written feedback needs to be signed. While we will do our best to deal with complaints fairly if you are unsatisfied with outcomes you may also use the Legal Ombudsman's Office (1800 357 772). Feedback – both good and bad- is always welcome because we need to know what members of the Koori community think if we are to improve our service and keep up with needs.