



# Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Newsletter

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## Bullying in Schools

**Michelle Zaccaro Civil Lawyer**

It is an ongoing problem that appears to only raise its head, that is 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 before your concerns become serious.

## Video Conferencing

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

The proposal if implemented will link Victoria Legal Aid, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and other 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 reduce the time it takes to deal with legal matters.

## Mandatory Sentencing

The tragic death of a young man in the Northern Territory under the Mandatory Sentencing Laws has shocked and energized many people into vocal opposition to those laws. Organizations such as the "Catholic Commission" 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, all members of the Senate from Victoria and Senator Bob Brown of Tasmania. Bob 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 realize 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, the

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## **Community Day Dandenong**

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Education Unit met 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 and 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 held a "Community Day" on February 18. Community members and Elders were invited, along with Bunurong Co-op staff, local police, police from the Aboriginal Liaison and Youth Services units based at police headquarters. VALS staff in the client services, management and education sections attended as well as students and staff from the local TAFE institute. Koori and non-Koori staff in local government and non-government agencies working with the Koori community were also in attendance.

If you want further details involving the issues discussed please contact Lisa Anderson at the Bunurong Health Service in Dandenong on (03) 979 45933.

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lack of employment and training opportunities has contributed to the serious social problems these communities suffer from. The lack of culturally appropriate prison diversion programs, drug, alcohol and other substances programs and those programs to address chronic 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 2<sup>nd</sup> even 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.