

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd

Newsletter January 2005



24 Hour Legal Service
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Staffing Update

VALS thanks David Podger for his service as Criminal Law Solicitor at head office. David ceased employment in November 2004. VALS welcomes Renee Wilson who commenced worked as Criminal Law Solicitor at head office in November 2004. VALS thanks Diane Jones for her service as Word Processor at head office. Diane ceased employment in January 2005

VALS thanks Francis Hill for his service as Criminal Law Solicitor in the Bairnsdale regional office. Francis ceased employment in December 2004. VALS extends thanks to Raeleen Hibbins who will leave the position of legal secretary/receptionist in the Bairnsdale regional office in February 2005. Raeleen's work over the past five years has been appreciated.

Tendering Out Legal Services for Indigenous Australians

VALS submitted a response to the Attorney General's Department's Request for Tender for the purchase of legal services for Indigenous Australians on 17 December 2004 (Request for Tender). A dedicated team responded to the Request for Tender and their efforts are greatly appreciated. VALS also wishes to thank the individuals and organisations who provided references in support of VALS' tender application. The Attorney-General's Department will announce the successful applicant in February 2005/early March 2005. The successful applicant will commence operations from 30 June 2005.

Complaints Against Police – Things You Need to Know

VALS acknowledges that it is not easy for Indigenous Australians to make a formal complaint about ill-treatment at the hands of member(s) of Victoria Police. VALS has anecdotal evidence that many Indigenous Australians are reluctant to initiate complaints or follow complaints through to completion. VALS encourages Indigenous Australians to take notice of the following suggestions in order to help themselves, and assist VALS to in turn assist them:

- *Patience and strength*- complaints against police take a considerable time to investigate and complete. It is important to have support networks around you (ie: family, friends and service providers) to overcome pressures to withdraw a complaint.
- *Determination, enthusiasm and realistic expectations* - it is a waste of time to lodge a complaint and not follow through with it. It is unlikely that police culture will

change if complaints are not followed through.

- *Communication flow* - it is important to keep VALS and Ombudsman Victoria updated once you lodge a complaint, such as letting VALS and Ombudsman Victoria know if you change your address or phone number. We cannot assist you or inform you of the progress of your complaint if we do not know your whereabouts.

VALS has reported in previous newsletters about a successful complaint against police which resulted in an Indigenous Australian receiving \$89,426.00 in Damages. The case took four years and was not easy, but a positive outcome eventuated in the long run. A strength of the case was that the Indigenous Australian took action as soon as possible by seeking medical treatment and legal advice.

Indigenous Women's Justice Forum - Invitation to Indigenous Australian Men and Women

The details of the next Indigenous Women's Justice Forum (IWJF) are as follows:

- Date: Tuesday 22 March 2005
- Time: 9.30am – 4.00pm (lunch provided)
- Venue: Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre - Corner Bell Street and St Georges Road, Preston.

To RSVP please contact Greta Jubb at VALS on: 9419 3888 or email gjubb@vals.org.au

VALS invites both Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and women to attend the forum to discuss the topic of family violence. VALS acknowledges that as family violence is a family issue it is important for men and women to meet and not work in isolation.

Child Protection Reform

VALS continues to be involved in discussions with the Department of Human Services (DHS) in relation to the proposed reform of the Child Protection System. VALS produced a submission in 2004 expressing concerns about the impact of the proposed reforms on Indigenous Australians (please see VALS website). In 2005 the DHS will consult with the Indigenous Australian community on policy issues. VALS is concerned by reports that there will be no funding increase for Child Protection in the budget.

New Pamphlets

VALS has developed new pamphlets for the Indigenous Australian community on the following topics:

- VALS Facts;
- Fines;
- Koori Court;
- Solicitor Appointments;
- Police Interviews;
- Young People and Police.

Please contact Loretta O'Neill for copies of the pamphlets.

Keys for Community: Open the Door to Your Rights.

VALS will be involved in 'Keys for Community: Open the Door to Your Rights' Program (Keys for Community Program) in 2005. The Keys for Community Program involves Government and non-Government agencies regularly visiting Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee regions to educate the Indigenous Australian community of their rights and how to access services. The following agencies are also involved in the Keys for Community Program:

- Consumer Affairs Victoria;
- Office of the Public Advocate;
- Ombudsman Victoria;
- Energy and Water Ombudsman;
- Dispute Settlement Centre.

Contact Details

If you require information about the contents of this newsletter or wish to subscribe to the mailing list please contact VALS. Previous newsletters are available on the VALS website.