



Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Newsletter

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Police Academy Trip

Wayne Bell VALS Client Service Officer
(Heywood)

On the 27th June 2000, I received a request to send six or seven youths from the Heywood/Portland area to attend the Victoria Police Academy. The trip was to have a look about the Academy and also to have a say on the relationship between Koori youth and Police.

The trip was for one day, although the recruits the youth spoke to were in their final stages of their training. The youth were invited to attend the Hi-Challenge Camp at Bacchus Marsh where the recruits completed their last training before being sent out on the streets.

For the youth to attend the camp, which was in the first week of N.A.I.D.O.C., the youth had already planned their own N.A.I.D.O.C. activities such as dancing and the like. I had to speak to Sen. Cont. Mark Braun, who is a Search and Rescue officer with the police. I told Mark that the boys would dance and tell stories as Aboriginal people. Mark agreed to the idea and suggested that the whole camp should have the Aboriginal and Torres Strait flags flying for three days.

The boys agreed and, not only danced and told their stories, but also got involved with the recruit's activities such as walking the high wire, climbing up rope ladders and generally participating. Even yours truly got onto the high wire but had to have three of the boys hold the safety rope on the ground. Mark and the recruits were so impressed with the youth that the recruits invited them to their graduation. After a few phone calls, this was agreed to by Victoria Police Command and an extra bonus was to have Chief Commissioner Neil Comrie present the youth with their High Challenge certificates. When we finally got to the Academy, under my direction or should I say misdirection, (and the worst part was that we nearly missed lunch), but the reception that the recruits gave the boys and their mothers who were also invited, was something that I have never witnessed before. Mothers so proud of their son's achievements, stood in awe of how their sons were accepted.

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Vincent Lingiari . Gurindji Elder, Leader, and Pioneer of Aboriginal Land Rights.

On the 24th of August former Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser, presented the 5th Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture in Darwin titled * 'The Past We Need To Understand'. The speech was widely reported. It captured attention partly because it was critical of some of the Howard Government policies. It was also the first time that Fraser had called for a Bill of Rights because the existing system did not adequately protect Indigenous people.

We should take this opportunity to remind ourselves who Mr. Vincent Lingiari was and his significance to the History of Indigenous Rights in this country. Vincent Lingiari was a Gurindji man whose tribal lands encompass the Wave hill –Limbunya area of the Northern Territory. This country was taken from the Gurindji in the early half of the 20th century with many killings of the original Gurindji landowners, the land being taken up by whites as a pastoral lease known as Wave Hill cattle station. Massacres of Indigenous people over land continued in Northern Australia into the 1930's. The Gurindji buried many of those victims to white invasion in the rock caves of Seal Gorge on Wattie Creek surrounded by the painted totems of their tribe. The lease to the Wave Hill cattle station by the 1960's was held by Lord Vestey an English cattle baron.

It was due to events in 1966-67, when a strike by cattle station workers at Wave Hill initially over working conditions, became a claim for land rights. Aboriginal Reserve system. The Gurindji peoples walkout and fight for justice was a major landmark in the history of Aboriginal Rights and Land Rights in Australia, and it was Mr. Vincent Lingiari who was the indigenous leader who inspired and led the now famous event. Along side others such as Pincher Mangari, Gerry Ngaljardi, Long Johnny Kitnaari, the author Frank Hardy and J. W. Jeffrey who petitioned Lord Casey, Governor General on the 19th of April 1967. That petition requested the Government to return a small part of the Wave Hill lease and aspired *'to show the rest of Australia and the rest of the world that we are capable of working and planning our own destiny as free citizens'*.

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VALS Lawyers in the Media

Story One

VALS Solicitor Paula King returns to VALS after three months working as a Judges Associate (assistant and researcher) to Chief Justice Alistair Nicholson Head of the Family Court. Below is an article about her which appeared recently in the Melbourne Weekly magazine.

Paula completed Arts/law at Melbourne University in 1998, says she wanted to study law from year 10 due to the treatment of relatives she witnessed, by the Police and court system. She aspired to be someone from the Koori community representing Koori community members in the Justice system. Paula was admitted as a solicitor in March this year after completing her articles, working at VALS. Since being seconded to the Family Court she has worked in Darwin and Alice Springs, where she says she did not come across any other Indigenous lawyers at the same time as the local Aboriginal community members were saying they need more Aboriginal lawyers.

Paula is keen to encourage other Indigenous students to study law. She says that it is very important that Aboriginal students have the support of Indigenous students units at Universities, that the drop out rate among Aboriginal students being high due to the financial and other pressures facing a community unused to tertiary study as the norm.

Koori students need to get confidence in being in tertiary institutions and being able to balance the family pressures common in the Koori community. Being the only indigenous student in her year at University placed additional pressure on her and she was thankful of the support of the indigenous units and actively promotes more of the same in tertiary institutions. In the future she says she would like to work in the top end for indigenous women's legal services for a time and eventually become a barrister (a specialist in representing people in court).

Mick Dodson was the first indigenous male in Victoria to become a Barrister and as yet, there has been no female indigenous women barrister in Victoria.

Adapted from the Melbourne Weekly Magazine article 'The Power of one August 13-19. 2000

Story Two

Richard Edney, a VALS solicitor recently had an interesting article published, in the Victorian Law Institute Journal, about making pleas being like story telling.

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....Vincent Lingjari . Gurindji Elder, Leader, and Pioneer of Aboriginal Land Rights.

The Wave Hill walkout as did other significant events by indigenous people since 1788, contributed enormously to the struggle towards justice in regard to the ongoing struggle for Native Title in this country. This indigenous man, still so little known in the general community which elevates sports-persons as heroes above social activists, took on the government and the companies leading his people back to their traditional territory, establishing a homestead at Seal Yard on Wattie creek a place with permanent water.

The Gurindji then developed their own cattle business on their traditional land in a true act of self-determination. The South Australian popular songwriter, Paul Kelly wrote a song, 'From little things, big things grow' in which the Wave Hill Walkoff, has been immortalized.

*The ABC web site www.abc.net.au has the transcript of RH. M. Fraser's lecture

Cont. from p.1 ...Police Academy Trip

Even the VALS acting CEO stared in total disbelief. The youths were involved in many firsts during these trips, the flying of the Koori and Torres Strait Islander flags at the Police camp, Koori youth participation in the training of Police recruits, having been photographed with the Commissioner of Police and being photographed with a squad of Police at their graduation. One last thing that I would like to add is that, during the time that both the Koori lads and the recruits spent together whilst either at the camp or at the Academy, the relationship that both groups built would only improve.

Staff Moves

Farewell to Marcus Dempsey and Daniel McGlone solicitors who have recently left to work for Victoria Legal Aid.

Farewell also to Nigel D'Souza, our former CEO and Lauren Harris, our former Legal secretary. We wish them all the best for the future and thank them for their contributions to VALS.

Welcome to Vernise Solomon our new Legal Secretary.

Parents Can Help If Kids are in Trouble in Court

A pamphlet that highlights how parents can help if their children are taken to the Police station or have to go to court will be launched on the 6th of October. President of the Children's Court Judge Jennifer Coate will help launch the new VALS pamphlet in Shepparton.