

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd

Quarterly Newsletter: January-March 2010



24 Hour Legal Service
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Staff Update

VALS welcomes Solicitors Rebecca March and Elena Pappas who are working in the criminal law section and bids farewell to Solicitor Martin Ha who has returned to Sydney.

Community Legal Education

This quarter the Community Legal Education Unit has been involved in the following:

- Fortnightly visits to Wandara, Maya Healing Centre and the Collingwood Parkies.
- Partnering with the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) to produce a calendar featuring stories of Elders and young people in the community (see below for further details).
- Partnering with the Public Interest Law Clearinghouse (PILCH) for the *Dealing with Debt Clinic* in regional areas (see below for further details).

The Unit has also been continuing its partnership with Northlands Secondary College in producing a DVD and a booklet for youth discussing rights and responsibilities around:

- “hoon” driving offences and other traffic offences;
- security guards in shopping centres and other shopping rights such as those relating to refunds and bag searches; and
- public transport offences focusing on graffiti on trains, travelling without tickets and rights with ticket inspectors and police.

The project is ongoing as filming continues. The launch for the DVD is aimed for late next quarter. VALS will be releasing further information closer to the date.

Debt Clinic

VALS has partnered with the Public Law Interest Clearinghouse (PILCH) to deliver the **Koori Debt and Credit Clinic Project**. The project involves members of a clinic travelling to 4 regions and will feature:

- pro bono lawyers providing legal advice on debt and credit;
- information sessions;
- local service providers;

It is hoped that the clinic will lead to the following outcomes for Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander peoples in regional and rural Victoria:

- the resolution of credit and debt problems;

- enhanced legal literacy, particularly with respect to credit and debt law; and
- reduced legal and financial discrimination and exploitation.

The first clinic will be on **19th May 2010** at Uniting Care Centre, 136 Maude Street, Shepparton.

Do You Know Someone With an Interesting Yarn to Tell?

VALS and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) are looking for people to share their stories as part of a 2011 calendar. We want to hear inspirational stories from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community about survival, health, culture, identity, family, discrimination, human rights, justice and anything else! We're looking for people you know in the community who may have never had a chance to tell their story.

We want to showcase the diversity, strength and pride that exists within our community in Victoria! If you would like to nominate anyone, or yourself, for the project, please get in touch with:

VALS:	Loretta O'Neil	(03) 9419 3888	loneil@vals.org.au
VEOHRC:	Holly Charles Ireland	(03) 9032 3454	holly.ireland@veohrc.vic.gov.au

VALS Website Redevelopment

We are pleased to announce that the VALS website is currently being updated. New and recent submission and publication work is being updated at www.vals.org.au and will be available to download in the coming months.

Koori Women's Diversion Program

The Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service is currently working in partnership with the Koori Justice Unit of the Department of Justice, on a project relating to a proposed Koori Women's Diversion Program for women in contact with the Victorian criminal justice system. The project is fortunate to have Vickie Roach on board. Vickie is an Aboriginal woman with considerable experience on the 'wrong' side of the criminal justice system and has developed a burning passion for criminal justice reform, particularly in the way in which it impacts on Koori women.

If you know of any Koori women with previous or current contact with the Victorian criminal justice system – either personally or by other family members (such as daughters/mothers/sisters/aunts, so long as they are women's experiences), the project would like to hear from them. Please invite any Koori women you think might be interested in contributing their experiences to this project to **contact Vickie Roach** on **FREECALL: 1800 105 303**

Koori women can be assured that all calls will be held in the strictest confidence – and that NO identifying information will be passed on to the Department.

Agreement Aims to Bridge Gap in Greater Dandenong

Greater Dandenong police have signed a memorandum of understanding with the area's Aboriginal community which has led to the creation of a Police Aboriginal Liaison Committee. Superintendent Shane Patton and Aboriginal Elder Margaret Gardiner signed the agreement last week, hoping it would help strengthen relations between the two communities. The agreement covers police Region 5 Division

2, which includes Casey, Cardinia and Greater Dandenong. Superintendent Patton said it would better guide police about expectations of their role when dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, "This could be as a victim, a witness or a suspect."¹

Commissioner Calma Welcomes First UN Publication on the State of the World's Indigenous Peoples

Former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, welcomed the launch of the United Nation's first report on The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The report highlights how Indigenous communities all over the world face daily issues of violence, continuing assimilation policies, marginalisation, forced removal or relocation and denial of land rights among many other abuses. It also reveals alarming statistics on poverty, health, education, employment, human rights and the environment.² The report is available at www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/sowip.html.

Call to Redirect Prison Funding

In his Social Justice Report, tabled in federal parliament 20th January 2010, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma argued that a 48% increase since 1996 in imprisoned Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people meant current approaches are 'simply not working'.³

Calma suggests initiatives such as justice reinvestment which has achieved promising results in tackling rising incarceration rates in the United States. Justice reinvestment is using the money that would have been spent on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment and redirecting it towards social services in communities, including alcohol and drug treatment.

Law Week 2010

Law Week 2010 will be held from 17-23 May, with over 200 law-based events in Melbourne and across regional Victoria. The program involves over 150 organisations, who work with the Victoria Law Foundation to present seminars, exhibitions, lectures, Q&A sessions, court and parliament tours, and many other public events and displays designed to provide legal information at little or no cost. Law Week is the Foundation's highest-profile community outreach program. For a copy of the Law Week Calendar see www.victorialawfoundation.org.au/about-us/foundation-events/law-week/calendar-of-events?view=calendar&layout=calendar.

NAIDOC WEEK 2010: 4-11th July

The 2010 National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) theme is 'Unsung Heroes - Closing the Gap by Leading Their Way'. 'Unsung heroes' recognises the part played by the quiet achievers, past and present, in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The theme asserts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership of 'closing the gap'. The gaps that need to be closed include gaps between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and gaps in knowledge and understanding.

¹ The Springvale-Dandenong Leader (2010) 'Agreement aims to bridge gap' *The Springvale-Dandenong Leader* 3 February.

² Australian Human Rights Commission (2010) 'Commissioner Calma welcomes first UN publication on the state of the world's indigenous peoples' *Australian Human Rights Commission* 15th January 2010

³ The Australian (2010) 'Call to redirect prison funding' *The Australian* 21st January 2010.

The 2010 National NAIDOC Awards are now open for nominations. Each year the awards provide the opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be recognised for the difference they make in the lives of others. Information on how to nominate can be found at www.naidoc.org.au/NAIDOC-awards/nomination.aspx. Categories for the NAIDOC awards include:

- Person of the Year;
- Elder of the Year (Male and Female);
- Apprentice of the Year;
- Artist of the Year;
- Lifetime Achievement Award;
- Scholar of the Year;
- Sportsperson of the Year;
- Youth of the Year;
- Caring for Country Award.

The annual National NAIDOC Poster Competition is also now open for entries from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Artwork must be based on this year's theme 'Unsung Heroes - Closing the Gap by Leading Their Way' and will be reproduced on the 2010 National NAIDOC poster.

Further information about the poster competition can be found at: www.naidoc.org.au/forms/NAIDOC10_PosterCompForm_online_FINAL.pdf. Event history, awards, and event details can be found at www.naidoc.org.au.

VicRoads Indigenous Secondary School Scholarships

VicRoads is currently taking applications for their Indigenous Secondary School Scholarship for students commencing Year 10, 11 or 12. The scholarship provides financial assistance and practical support to successful applicants who remain enrolled and successfully complete studies until the completion of year 12 (eligible with equivalent TAFE course). The scholarship aims to increase training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth with the maximum amount of financial support as follows:

Year 10	\$800
Year 11	\$1200
Year 12	\$1600

For an application form or any further questions about the program, please call (03) 9854 2967 or email Chaise Egan (Indigenous Employment Project Officer) at Chaise.egan@roads.vic.gov.au. VALS also has a small number of application forms that are available for distribution. **Applications for 2011 scholarships close Friday 18 June 2010.**

Lifeline Funded to Provide a Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Helpline

Lifeline have been funded by the federal government to provide a Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Helpline for people experiencing violence; friends and family who want to know what they can do to help; and people wanting to change their violent behaviour. The 24 hour phone number is **1800 200 526**

Review of identity-motivated hate crime in Victoria

The State Government is reviewing the laws dealing with conduct and crime motivated by hatred or prejudice, and wants to hear from groups who are vulnerable to, or have experienced, hate crime. The review will consider whether current criminal penalties and civil remedies are adequate and whether there is a need for specific hate crimes offences.

Written submissions to the review are invited and are due by Friday 16 April 2010. For more information about making a submission and the terms of reference of the review go to:

www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/justlib/doj+internet/home/the+justice+system/community+consultation/justice+-+review+of+identity+motivated+hate+crime+in+vic

Alternatively, go to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHR) website to complete a Web Survey at:

www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/projects%20and%20initiatives/hatecrimesurvey.asp

The review findings will be delivered to the Attorney-General on 1 September 2010.

Equal Opportunity Act Update

Changes to the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* have been passed through the Victorian Parliament's Lower House. If adopted as law, these changes will allow the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to provide clearer guidance about the rights and responsibilities we all have to prevent discrimination and the harms it causes, and tackle structures and processes where discrimination is inherent. Unfortunately the Act fails to address discrimination in key areas such as on the basis of irrelevant criminal record.

Koori Justice Update

The latest issue of Koori Justice Update contains information on staff movements, job opportunities, links to upcoming conferences and events as well as funding and training opportunities. The publication also explains how you can register for the North Melbourne Football Club's new Aboriginal Academy, put in an application for a Department of Justice Indigenous cadetship, or for the position as CEO of the new National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. You can download or view a copy of this issue of the newsletter at:

[www.justice.vic.gov.au/CA256902000FE154/Lookup/KJNewsletters/\\$file/Issue_11-2010-12_March.pdf](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/CA256902000FE154/Lookup/KJNewsletters/$file/Issue_11-2010-12_March.pdf)

Football Federation Victoria Seeking Soccer Players

Football Federation Victoria (FFV) are seeking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander footballers for local club competition and a chance to represent Victoria at the next National Indigenous Football (Soccer) Competition as part of the FFV's Marngrook Meentel (Football Stars) Program. The following FFV Zone Development Officers can be contacted for further information and assistance:

- Foddy Kyprian 0424 016 311 Geelong, Colac & Warrnambool
- Dom Swinton 0417 967 621 Ballarat, Hamilton & Horsham
- Atilla Kerestes 0428 574 423 Shepparton & Wodonga
- Dave Coward 0400 266 571 Loddon Mallee

- Gene Parini 0424 037 020 Gippsland
- Elyce Carlyle (03) 9474 1833 Melbourne Metropolitan

For more information contact Elyce Carlyle, Community Development Co-ordinator, (03) 9474 1833; ecarlyle@footballfedvic.com.au | www.footballfedvic.com.au

VALS' 1st Quarter 2010 Submissions

January

- Submission to the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee in response to the Severe Substance Dependence Treatment Bill 2009
- Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in response to the *Inquiry into the high level of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system.*

February

- Response to the *Magistrates' Court Amendment (Mental Health List) Bill 2009.*
- Submission to the Department of Justice Victoria in response to *Reviewing Victims of Crime Compensation: Sentencing orders and State-Funded Awards.*

March

- Response to the Public Sector Standards Commissioner (PSSC) review of the effectiveness of Victoria's integrity and anti-corruption system.
- Comments to the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee concerning the *Equal Opportunity Bill 2010* (Vic).

Next Quarter Dates of Note

7th April World Health Day

26th April Anzac Day

9th May Mother's Day

7th May Come together and celebrate the **Northern Close the Gap in Indigenous Employment Business Recognition Ceremony**. The ceremony is part of an initiative that will recognise and reward businesses who recruit and train Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, whilst implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workplace protocols, policies and strategies.

The ceremony will be held at **2pm** at the Indigenous Education Centre, Kangan Institute, Pearcedale Parade, Broadmeadows. Guest speakers will share their knowledge and experience of successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategies and community members, local businesses, service providers and government representatives

are invited to attend. For more information about this event or to confirm your attendance please contact **Tanya Douglas** on **9279 2256** or via email tdouglas@kangan.edu.au.

- 17th May** Law Week Begins: Victoria Law Foundation's highest profile community outreach program.
- 26th May** National Sorry Day. Details at: www.nsd.org.au/home/
- 27th May** Reconciliation Week Begins. Details at: www.reconciliation.org.au/home/get-involved/national-reconciliation-week
- Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum
- 1 June** 10th Anniversary of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement
- 3 June** Mabo Day

If you have any questions regarding this newsletter or would like a copy of any of the submission materials mentioned (not currently available through our website as it is under construction) please contact Louise Hicks (Research Officer) on 9419 3888 or via email at lhicks@vals.org.au.