



Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM INFORMATION PACK

VALS – in a nutshell

VALS is an Aboriginal Controlled community organisation that operates throughout Victoria. We provide legal assistance to persons of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background in the areas of Criminal, Family and Civil law, as well as crucial non-legal services and supports to the Aboriginal Community, including general welfare support and checks, support for Aboriginal people in police custody, targeted community legal education and policy and law reform work.

VALS maintains its strong client service focus through the role of Client Service Officers (CSOs) who act as a bridge between the legal system and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. VALS is actively involved in community education, research and advocacy around law reform and policy development, and we strive to:

- Promote social justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- Promote the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to empowerment, identity and culture;
- Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples enjoy their rights, are aware of their responsibilities under the law and have access to appropriate advice, assistance and representation;
- Reduce the disproportionate involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the criminal justice system; and
- Promote the review of legislation and other practices which discriminate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

The VALS volunteer program

VALS relies on the support of an enthusiastic cohort of volunteers to increase its impact and ability to assist our Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients. We offer a range of volunteer opportunities across the whole organisation, which are outlined in greater detail below.

In line with the depth of the work VALS engages in, the work volunteers will undertake through the volunteer program can vary greatly depending on which part of the organisation they are placed in. Some of this work will be exciting, some of it less so. Importantly, any student who wishes to undertake a volunteer placement at VALS must

be flexible enough to accommodate any such work request from their supervisor or other authorised VALS staff members.

Volunteers should be aware that Court related work will not be a regular occurrence and will only be undertaken at the request of and under the direct supervision of a VALS solicitor or volunteer coordinator.

<p><u>ALL NON-ADMITTED SOLICITOR VOLUNTEERS ARE REMINDED THAT, AS THEY DO NOT HAVE A PRACTISING CERTIFICATE ISSUED BY THE LAW INSTITUTE OF VICTORIA, THEY ARE NOT PERMITTED TO GIVE ANY FORM OF LEGAL ADVCE TO ANY CLIENT OR MEMBER OF ANY OTHER ORGANISATION UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES</u></p>
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Volunteer opportunities

As noted within the Application Form, the VALS volunteer program consists of both a General and Community volunteer program, as well as a specialised VALS Infringements clinic program.

The VALS General and Community Volunteer Program is designed to allow applicants to participate in two six-month rotations in any of eight areas of our organisation, which are briefly described below:

Social Justice Policy: This team focuses on the policy issues affecting VALS clients and other members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities more broadly. By assisting with VALS' policy submissions and other systemic advocacy work, this team advocates for fairer and more equitable treatment and legal outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.

NATSILS: The 'National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services' is the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services. NATSILS advocates at a national level for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the justice system, as well as to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services are adequately funded and equipped to provide high quality and culturally competent legal assistance services.

Community justice programs: This team comprises both VALS' local justice workers and client service officers, and provides critical non-legal support both to community members in custody, as well as those ordered to comply with community corrections orders. Members of this team also provide crucial support in assisting VALS to deliver its legal services to community members.

Community legal education: This team aims to better educate community members in relation to legal issues affecting them. The team conducts joint project work with other organisations and also works on VALS-specific projects. The work of this team is varied,

and includes organising targeted community outreach information sessions and events, creating and distributing plain-English legal information resources, and assisting with funding submissions and research projects.

Criminal law: This team assists community members with in-court representation, duty lawyer services, advice, referrals and information in relation to both summary and indictable crime matters.

Family/Youth law: This team assists community members with in-court representation, advice, referrals, information and outreach assistance with family law matters, including child protection, DHHS issues, intervention orders, and Children’s Court criminal matters.

Civil law: This team assists clients with court representation, advice, referrals, information and outreach assistance across a range of civil law areas, including tenancy, discrimination, police and prison complaints and victims of crime assistance applications.

In-house counsel: VALS’ in-house counsel was previously an experienced member of the Victorian Bar who now works as a VALS employee across all practice areas (Criminal, Family and Civil). Our in-house counsel is briefed by VALS staff-members to appear on behalf of existing VALS clients in a range of different Courts and Tribunals.

Unlike the VALS General and Community Volunteer Program, the **VALS Infringements Clinic** is focused solely on clients with infringements issues. This program gives volunteers an opportunity to manage their own file load under the direct supervision of a VALS lawyer. VALS Infringements Clinic volunteers will not rotate through other VALS practice areas, and will spend 12 months working exclusively on infringements files. However, where opportunities arise for VALS Infringements Clinic volunteers to be exposed to other areas of the organisation’s operation, the volunteer co-ordinator will try to facilitate this where feasible.

Descriptions of the type of work applicants may be required to undertake in relation to any of the above practice areas can be found in the appendix to this document.

Wherever possible, VALS will aim to place general volunteers into the program areas they have indicated a preference for. However, we cannot guarantee this for all applicants.

Induction and training

All successful candidates will be required to attend and participate in a full day induction and training session prior to commencing their volunteer placement.

All successful candidates in the VALS Infringements Clinic program will also be required to attend an Infringements Training session, which we will aim to schedule the same day as the general induction session. All volunteers are welcome to attend this infringements training session, but it is mandatory for VALS Infringements Clinic volunteers.

Commitment to VALS

If you are accepted into the volunteer program, you are expected to attend VALS an aggregate of 1 day a week for the period of 12 months. The VALS office is open Monday to Friday 9.00am and 5.00pm and volunteers are expected to attend during these hours on their rostered day.

Time at the office is to be treated as time in an ordinary working environment. If a volunteer cannot be at the office on his or her rostered day, is running late, or is planning to leave early, they are expected to give advance notice to the appropriate section Manager or Co-ordinator.

The primary consideration for any volunteer in this situation is not simply to honour an obligation to attend the office, but to ensure that VALS clients' interests are being addressed and maintained.

If you are given tasks to complete, you must complete these tasks speedily and comprehensively. If you cannot complete the task during the day, then make sure you inform the supervising staff member or volunteer coordinator, and leave appropriate hand-over notes for the next person who will be working on this task.

Where a volunteer is working as part of the VALS Infringements Clinic, they must provide advance notice if they will be unable to attend for more than two weeks, in which case hand-over memos for any files they have carriage of should be prepared.

Exposure to sensitive material

Volunteers should also be aware that VALS assists clients in relation to sensitive matters, including serious criminal allegations of murder, sexual offences, sexual offences on minors, as well as child protection matters, police complaints, victims of crime and coronial matters.

Many of these files will contain potentially disturbing material, and as part of the VALS volunteer program, volunteers may be exposed to this material. For example, volunteers may be required to read and analyse police briefs of evidence, assist with the preparation of briefs for counsel, assist with the interview of clients or the preparation of statements.

It is therefore important that volunteers are prepared for this possibility, and ensure they make the most of the self-care component offered as part of the induction program which will provide them with useful tools to ensure this exposure is not having a negative impact on their wellbeing.

Time sheets

Volunteers are required to complete the VALS Volunteer time sheets on a daily basis. Volunteers need to be aware that their time sheets may be reviewed at any time by their supervisor or other authorised VALS staff member.

Travel

The cost of any travel that a volunteer is requested to undertake as part of their placement will be reimbursed on production of a public transport receipt.

Use of the internet and email

Volunteers should be aware that they must comply with the VALS Information Technology policies.

Work/Client related emails should NOT be sent from a volunteer's personal email. Emails relating to a client should be sent from the work email account of an admin or solicitors work email account.

Dress Code

At all times volunteers must be neatly and appropriately dressed. As volunteers are working in a legal environment and will not be able to predict when they will be asked to assist in a Court, volunteers must be dressed in a manner that will allow them to attend Court at short notice. If the volunteer has any questions in this regard they should promptly discuss the VALS dress code with their supervisor. The dress code requirements also include volunteers paying attention to their personal hygiene.

Motor Vehicle Usage

Volunteers who drive the company vehicle should be aware of the clauses in the VALS motor vehicle policy, bearing in mind that the driver shall be responsible for the payment of any parking or traffic infringement incurred.

No Smoking

Smoking is strictly prohibited in every VALS office and vehicle. Smoking is to only occur in approved areas and cigarette butts are to be disposed of in an approved manner.

Code of Ethics

VALS and its staff acknowledge the participation and commitment of student volunteers to be essential and invaluable to the role of VALS in Victorian Aboriginal Communities.

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and all employees of the VALS endorse the following Code of Ethics for student volunteers:

- 1) All volunteers are required to sign and adhere to the VALS Confidentiality Agreement for Student Volunteers.
- 2) VALS requires volunteers to contribute a maximum of eight (8) hours weekly, for a period of 12 months (allowing for reasonable pre-approved absences) in order to satisfy the requirements of the Volunteer Program.
- 3) VALS requires volunteers to notify the Volunteer Coordinator and / or their supervisor at least one day (1) prior to their scheduled day of volunteering, if they are unable to attend.
- 4) VALS requires volunteers to deal with all VALS clients in a respectful and non-judgmental manner.
- 5) Volunteers will be supervised by qualified staff at all times.
- 6) Volunteers must adhere to the VALS Policy & Procedures.

Application Process

To obtain a placement at VALS prospective volunteers must complete and submit a VALS Application Form.

Applications will be opened for short period twice in any year. First intake period occurring in December / January and the second in June/July.

Applications will then be shortlisted for interviewing. Following interviews, successful candidates will then undertake a full day of induction training at VALS.

APPENDIX: Different VALS program areas

VALS Infringements Clinic

VALS Infringements Clinic volunteers will primarily be responsible for managing and progressing their own file-load (approx. 5-10 files) through the infringements system, under the supervision of a VALS lawyer.

Daily tasks may include;

- Taking instructions from infringements clients
- Liaising with supervising lawyers about strategy and options on infringements files
- Reviewing civic compliance and infringements court lists of fines and other documents
- Drafting correspondence to the Infringements Court and support persons
- Seeking and reviewing support material to assist with special circumstances applications
- Preparing and submitting special circumstances applications
- Assisting VALS criminal lawyers with briefs to appear at Court in relation to infringements files
- Referring clients to non-legal support services

Criminal Law

Daily tasks may include;

- Casework intake and assessment
- Transcribing records of interview
- Reviewing police briefs
- Case research for lawyers
- Client referrals to additional support services
- Booking client appointments
- Data entry

Family/Youth Law

Daily tasks may include;

- Casework intake and assessment
- Transcribing records of interview
- Reviewing police briefs
- Reviewing DHHS or Youth Justice reports
- Case research for lawyers
- Client referrals to additional support services
- Booking client appointments

- Data entry

Civil Law

Daily tasks may include;

- Casework intake and assessment
- Reviewing police briefs
- Client referrals to additional support services
- Case research for lawyers
- Booking client appointments
- Data entry

In-House Counsel

Daily tasks may include;

- Assist in coordination of In-House Counsel bookings calendar
- General administrative tasks (letters, client calls, photocopying)
- Reviewing briefed caseworks documents as requested
- Data entry

Social Justice Policy

Daily tasks may include;

- Policy research
- Assist in the drafting of VALS submissions
- Drafting briefing notes for Senior management and Board of Directors
- Data research projects

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS)

Daily tasks may include;

- Policy research
- Assist in the drafting of NATSILS submissions
- Drafting briefing notes for Co-Chairs and Executive Officer
- Assisting in coordinating meetings and administrative tasks for NATSILS forums sub-committees and working groups (Agenda, minutes, briefs)
- Data research projects

Community Justice Programs

Daily tasks may include;

- Custody Notification follow up
- Intake and Assessment assistance in Prison Release Program

- Data and Case note entry in Prison Release Program and Local Justice Worker program
- Assist in client follow up and appointment bookings
- Assist in client additional support service referrals and appointment bookings
- Assist in reporting and funding submissions
- Data research projects

Community Legal Education

Daily tasks may include;

- Drafting or editing CLE information documents
- Drafting or editing CLE promotional material
- Assist in the drafting of CLE funding submissions
- Assisting in organising CLE events (venue hire, catering, promotional material, guest speakers, exhibitions)
- Data research projects