

Diverse Voices in the Law

**An initiative of the LIV Young Lawyers
Community Issues Committee**

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Law Institute of Victoria and the contributors of this publication respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we met and worked to form this publication, the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri peoples of Kulin Nation. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, skies and culture.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We make a commitment to walk softly, gently and lightly on this land – land that was never ceded, which holds more than 60,000 years of culture, traditions and stories from beyond the Dreamings.



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“Diverse Voices in the Law exemplifies the manifold benefits to be derived from embracing our differences and learning from one another’s perspectives. To ensure public confidence in the legal system our profession needs to reflect the plurality of experiences that exist within the Victorian community. This collection of articles is a reminder that we all share in the responsibility to sustain a culture in the legal profession that is respectful and inclusive to all. I applaud the commitment of everyone involved in bringing this publication to life.”

Tania Wolff

President, Law Institute of Victoria

“This meaningful project by LIV Young Lawyers plays a critical role in LIV’s commitment to empowering a strong and diverse legal profession. Diverse Voices in the Law has provided individuals from under-represented groups a platform on which they can share their experiences with the wider legal community. This is a crucial step toward learning how, as a profession, we can address barriers and clear a pathway for the growth of a more representative and diverse profession, one reflective of the community in which we live, and that supports and provides career progression opportunities for all practitioners.”

Adam Awty

CEO, Law Institute of Victoria



Foreword

By 2022 Community Issues Committee Co-Chairs

This series of articles, 'Diverse Voices in the Law' seeks to contribute to the conversations on how we can encourage lawyers and law students from all backgrounds and experiences to be their whole, authentic selves at work.

Speaking from our personal experiences as members of diverse communities, and the anecdotal evidence from our friends and colleagues, we believe that it is not uncommon for diverse lawyers and students to face challenges (of varying degrees) due to their identities.

Diversity in the legal profession takes many forms, some more obvious and visible than others. It includes people of diverse genders and sexualities, people of colour, people with disabilities and all those with intersecting identities. We have done our best to make this publication as thought-provoking as possible for as many diverse groups as possible.

Some common experiences faced by diverse lawyers and students can include: LGBTIQ+ individuals navigating diverse experiences of 'coming out' in the workplace or being mis-gendered by managers and/or colleagues resulting in them feeling unsafe at work. Culturally and linguistically diverse individuals may find themselves subject to unconscious biases of others. Disabled

individuals may face challenges in requesting reasonable accommodations or face negative social attitudes about their disabilities.

As recent news indicates, many lawyers and law students suffer from significant mental ill-health and sexual harassment, both of which are under-discussed, and prolific in our workplaces and communities.

Each person's way of coping with or managing any of the experiences above can be an innately personal journey, and as a result, there is insufficient public discussion about the prevalence and/or nuances of these issues. Further, the hierarchical nature of our profession means junior members of our profession are particularly disadvantaged when faced with these challenges.

Our publication collates personal stories of diverse law students and lawyers. This series of articles aims to identify many of the key issues commonly faced by diverse peoples in the law, and promote discussions on how we can address these challenges as a collegiate and united profession.

We want to recognise that facing these issues can be of discomfort to all parties involved. Diverse individuals



might feel isolated, undervalued or believe that it is unfair that they face barriers that other individuals need not worry about. Conversely, individuals who are not part of a particular diverse community may feel apprehensive when dealing with many of the often novel challenges experienced by diverse lawyers/students, and may fear being perceived as ignorant or insensitive, despite holding no ill-intent.

We also understand that from time to time, we make inadvertent mistakes. We believe that it is in precisely these moments that we can reflect upon our own biases, recognise our privilege(s) and use them to amplify the voices of other diverse individuals. We encourage all readers to research further on the issues discussed in this publication using our suggested resources, or through their own initiative.

Our publication is by no means exhaustive of all challenges faced by diverse individuals, and we hope you will join us at our subsequent events to share your ideas for improvement in the legal profession.

To diverse lawyers and students, we impart a further message: **you are not alone**. We hope that the strategies discussed can empower you to navigate any challenges you may face. Reaching out and joining a diverse association that represents your community can also bring a wealth of support and knowledge.

We hope you find our publication engaging and insightful.

Yours sincerely,
Elin Teo and Maddison Harrington



Elin Teo



Maddison Harrington

The Need and Importance of Diversity in the Legal Field



A theory of change: An interview with Fiona McLeod AO SC

Written by Amy Wright

Finding your purpose

When Fiona McLeod began her studies at Melbourne Law School in the 1980s, she didn't fit. The legal profession was an institution, grounded in tradition. People came to study law from legal families, from certain backgrounds, and with a very specific roadmap of where they were headed in their hands.

Fiona came from a family of medical professionals. She had no family introduction. She found the first few years of law school disengaging and lacking in a human context. Her classes were a cycle of rote learning; 'here is a case, this is the ratio, learn the ratio' – there was no focus on the human beings involved in these cases and how they were affected by the decisions that were being made about their lives. Fiona just couldn't see where she fitted into this version of law and very nearly left law school to pursue acting.

However, everything fell into place for Fiona when she studied an international law subject run by Gillian Triggs. Gillian, who later became the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, talked about human rights in

the context of atrocities and the fundamental protection against the State. Fiona finally understood what the law is about – "it is about the protection and pursuit of rights". Fiona had found her purpose: "there were real people who needed me to make a difference."

Being the change you want to see

While there were roughly equal numbers of male and female lawyers when Fiona started practising, the opportunities for men and women were far from equal. As Fiona explains, "Men were destined to succeed, and women were destined to be average."

Fiona observed that women were not progressing at the same rate as their colleagues at the Bar. While male barristers were successful because of their confidence, women, who displayed the same confidence and were just as capable, did not receive the same amount of work. Further, there was an assumption that female barristers would not be able to commit to more demanding work due to their caregiver responsibilities. These gender assumptions, even those not deliberately held, have a cumulative effect on career success.



Fiona McLeod
Interviewee

Despite being equally capable, a male barrister who has had longer, more high-profile briefs in the superior courts seems far more meritorious than the female barrister who's had twenty briefs in the Magistrates' Court because that's what she was offered and was unable to break out of that.

“Merit is the sum of all the opportunities that you have been given over the course of your career.”

To address these issues, Fiona came together with other female barristers to create the Women Barristers' Association. Despite the pushback around the association, such an organisation needed to exist to identify and eradicate discrimination against women, and advance equality. It also provided a space for women to network and support one another.

Building a pipeline for change

It is the small changes that make all the difference to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace because change is incremental. Throughout her career, Fiona has been active in the pipeline of change in the legal profession. She has provided flexible working opportunities for female barristers, allowing them to work on high-profile cases while raising young families. In 1998, Fiona was involved in the Hunter and McKelvie Report which began a serious discussion about women's equity at the Bar and eventually led to an increase in access to opportunities for female barristers.

In 2009, Fiona led the creation of the Equitable Briefing Policy. This policy was brought about due to the disproportionate number of briefs and duration of appearances that women barristers had. The Equitable Briefing Policy aims to support the progression and retention of female barristers and reduce the underrepresentation of women in superior courts by asking adoptees to take reasonable endeavours to brief women barristers of relevant seniority and experience.

Conclusion

So, what should we do if we see inequality in the law? Fiona implores us to be the change that we want to see: “Be bold. If you see a problem, there is a problem. Don't second guess yourself. If you see a problem, you are the best person to deal with the problem.” The law teaches us how to solve problems, and we ought to use that skill to improve our profession.

Finally, Fiona imparts a little drop of wisdom that is so important to remember when trying to bring about change:

“Know in your hearts, that you have the ability to light up the room, any room, that you walk into with your enthusiasm and your passion, and you cannot help but make a difference for the rest of us.”



Amy Wright
Author

Australia's cultural landscape has changed: Will our judiciary change with it?

Written by Joesph Aharfi

Etched into a wall within the High Court are the names of the first men to sit on its bench in 1903. These jurists worked hard to forge a fair and just judicial system that would stand the test of time. They also came from roughly the same kind of social and cultural background; Christian views and European roots were shared by most of the men who cast judgment on the law. This made sense at the time, but it hardly needs to be said that our demographic landscape has changed since 1903 – it is time our judiciary changes with it.

Multiculturalism is at the heart of Australian society. Half of us have a parent born overseas. One in four of us was born overseas. One in five of us speak a language other than English at home. While there is a lack of statistics on judicial diversity, it is clear that our courts do not quite reflect the social and cultural make-up of our broader community. There is no reason that this should remain the case. As former Chief Justice Robert French has said: “the institutional integrity of a court requires both the *reality* and the *appearance* of independence and impartiality.”¹ When judges reflect the communities from

which they are drawn, our judicial system will benefit from strong public confidence.

As former justice Michael Kirby asserts, part of the common law's genius is the fact that it “always adapts to the environment in which the law in question operates.”² A diverse judiciary will inspire greater public confidence because it can approach legal arguments from a multitude of angles. Indeed, this underpins the rationale of a multi-member bench. Diversity further mitigates adverse effects of judicial biases on a fair trial. In its developing paper on judicial impartiality, the Australian Law Reform Commission has identified socially based attitudes, stereotypes and a lack of cultural competency negatively impacts minority litigants.³

If we can agree in general terms with the notion that (a) a judiciary that reflects the diversity of our community in Australia is a good thing and (b) that we are still far from having reached this point – then what is to be done? A good place to start could be broader recognition that this is an issue.

“When judges reflect the communities from which they are drawn, our judicial system will benefit from strong public confidence.”

There are few clear statistics in terms of judicial diversity. The research which has been done is mostly in relation to the number and percentage of women judges and magistrates. While we have a way to go to properly bridge this gender gap, women are clearly increasing their presence in the judiciary.⁴ Our courts will be in better shape when ethnic, disabled, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and gender diverse minorities are also able to increase their presence.

Increased transparency in the judicial appointments process would also lead to positive change. As things stand, appointments are at the discretion of the executive on the sole basis of merit – considerations of diversity are allowed *only where* merit is equal.⁵ The main issue with this approach is that it divorces merit from diversity when instead, diversity and merit should be seen as two sides of the same coin, with the former being a key to wisdom.

Before her appointment to the Magistrates' Court, Magistrate Rose Falla helped establish Victoria's first Koori Court. She learned from Koori and non-Koori mentors, who she says were "generous with their time and in sharing their knowledge."⁶ The wealth of insight Magistrate Falla must have drawn from this experience will now be woven into the common law. She will add to the stock of insight and perspective to which any judge – no matter their cultural background – may have recourse.

On a final note, it is worth emphasising that some of the strongest proponents for judicial diversity are judges themselves. As one scholar has noted: "they really do

know better than anything what the job entails and who might be some of the best candidates."⁷ With this in mind, we might ask what our executive is doing to ensure our courts reflect our diverse Australian community. The supply of good candidates is certainly there – where is the demand?

1. *South Australia v Totani* (2010) 271 ALR 662, French CJ at 69.
2. Michael Kirby, 'The Challenges to Justice in a Plural Society,' Speech delivered at the Commonwealth Lawyers' Association Judicial Conference, 4 April 2002.
3. Australian Law Reform Commission, 'Consultation Paper: Judicial Impartiality,' 2021, pages 10–12, accessed at <https://www.alrc.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Judicial-Impartiality-Consultation-Paper-30042021.pdf>.
4. Brian Opeskin, 'AJA Judicial Gender Statistics, Number and Percentage of Women Judges and Magistrates at 30 June 2020,' University of Technology, Sydney.
5. McLoughlin and Williams, 'An Age of Diversity,' 9.
6. Law Institute Victoria, 'State's First Indigenous Magistrate,' accessed at <https://www.liv.asn.au/LIV-Home/Practice-Resources/Law-Institute-Journal/Archived-Issues/LIJ-March-2013/State-s-first-Indigenous-magistrate>
7. Alan Paterson, 'Power and Judicial Appointment: Squaring the Impossible Circle' in Graham Gee and Erika Rackley (eds), *Debating Judicial Appointments in an Age of Diversity* (Routledge, 2018) 32, 54.

This article was written prior to the finalisation of the Australian Law Reform Commission report, 'Without Fear or Favour: Judicial Impartiality and the Law on Bias' (ALRC Report 138). To read the full report or its summary, please click on the following link: <https://www.alrc.gov.au/publication/ji-report-138/>



Joesph Aharfi
Author

Towards diversity intelligence in the legal profession

Written by Tienyi Long

In 2019, I wrote an essay arguing that lawyers must develop their ‘diversity intelligence’ to better serve the interests of a diverse community.¹ I further proposed that diversity intelligence be included as a continuing professional development (CPD) requirement for legal practitioners.

What is diversity intelligence?

First coined by Professor Claretha Hughes,² diversity intelligence is ‘the capability of individuals to recognise the value of diversity and to use this information to guide thinking and behaviour.’ This incorporates a number of interlinking skills and attributes:

- a) awareness of others and their differences;
- b) practical skills to work with different people, or in unfamiliar situations;
- c) commitment to critical self-reflection; and
- d) importantly – appreciation for the value of different perspectives and realities to achieve a common aim.

Why is diversity intelligence important in the legal profession?

The starting point for all lawyers is the ethical obligation to act in the best interests of their client. Australian

lawyers work with clients of different races, genders, sexualities and abilities. They are required to identify the interests of the parties involved – often during time-sensitive, high-pressure circumstances. A lawyer without diversity intelligence is more likely to make broad inferences based on stereotypes, or impose their own expectations of what a client’s interests should be. This undermines their judgment, and their ability to achieve a favourable outcome for their client.

Further, issues affecting diverse communities can have implications for how the law is applied. In family law, an assessment of a child’s best interests requires consideration of the child’s lifestyle, culture and traditions, especially if the child is from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.³ Similarly, cultural considerations, and issues relating to systemic disadvantage such as substance abuse, exposure to violence and lack of formal education, can be taken into account in criminal law proceedings.⁴ In a global economy, commercial lawyers may be required to navigate the requirements of Islamic banking law when advising on financial transactions, or account for the harm caused by loss of ‘face’ when assessing damages in commercial disputes involving Asian litigants.⁵

“Diversity intelligence ... facilitates the development of solutions which align with best practice and are equitable for everyone.”

Of course, not all lawyers are ‘client-facing’. Lawyers also play an important role in navigating complex and unprecedented challenges, including COVID-19 and the existential threat of a rapidly warming planet. This covers a broad range of advocacy, lawmaking and policy development work – from embedding human rights in the COVID-19 response to developing contractual clauses for net zero carbon emission.

Diversity intelligence equips lawyers in these roles to work collaboratively with different professions, and different sectors of the local and international community. This, in turn, facilitates the development of solutions which align with best practice and are equitable for everyone. Without diversity intelligence, there is a risk of perpetuating existing inequities, and creating echo chambers where misinformation and radicalisation can flourish.

How can I develop diversity intelligence?

Just as lawyers require substantive legal knowledge in different areas, diversity intelligence looks different for everyone. You may wish to learn a new language, attend a talk given by a person with lived experience of intersectionality or discrimination.

If, like me, you enjoy reading, a good starting point for diversity in Australia is the Growing Up series, which covers a broad range of lived experiences. For podcast lovers, *The Art of Inclusion* by the Diversity Council of Australia discusses social issues from the perspective of Australians from diverse backgrounds.

Ultimately, diversity intelligence is developed in the same way as any other skill: by consistently dedicating time, critically reflecting on areas of improvement and taking every opportunity to put your skills to practice. The effort is well worth it: it will make you a better lawyer, and better equipped to make a difference in a diverse Australia.

1. My essay is published on the Asian Australian Lawyers Association website here: <https://www.aala.org.au/william-ak-papers>.
2. Claretha Hughes, *Diversity Intelligence: Integrating Diversity Intelligence Alongside Intellectual, Emotional and Cultural Intelligence for Leadership and Career Development* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
3. *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth), ss 60CC(g) – (h).
4. See e.g. *Bugmy v the Queen* (2013) 249 CLR 571; *Munda v Western Australia* (2013) 249 CLR 600, 618.
5. Cam Truong and William Lye, ‘The Rise of Asian Litigants in Commercial Disputes’ (Speech, Foley’s List Commercial CPD Series, 15 March 2017).



Tienyi Long
Author

‘You start on Monday’: How we can better value lawyers with disabilities and their life experiences

Written by **Kate Brown**

Graeme Innes AM is a prominent advocate for people with disabilities and a more inclusive workforce. He served as the Disability Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission from 2005 to 2014. Graeme’s passion for advocacy derives from his own lived experiences navigating the legal profession, and broader society, with a vision impairment. He believes that diversity and inclusion is important as a “diverse community creates a stronger community,” and “brings [in] people with a different understanding of life and breadth of experience.”

Importance of diverse life experiences

Graeme has also been a member of numerous administrative and consumer tribunals. He highlights the importance of having decision makers from a diversity of backgrounds: “If someone on the tribunal has a lived experience of disability who can relate to the person appearing before them, it doesn’t change the law that is being administered, but it does change the perspective of the decision maker. In the same way as in a jury

situation, we want to be judged by our peers, by people like us.”

A case in point is that of Marlon Noble, a Yamitji man. Because Marlon had an intellectual disability, a court found he was unfit to plead. As a result, Marlon was incarcerated for nearly 10 years without a conviction. Graeme describes this case as “a confluence of bad law and an administration system where people [with disabilities] are not involved . . . my understanding is that his representatives supported a not fit to plead finding, thinking it was in his best interests . . . A more inclusive legal profession both in terms of decision makers and representation would have been to his benefit.”

Increasing disability representation in the profession

One of the key ways to increase diversity in the legal profession, Graeme believes, is to make diversity and inclusion plans part of a firm’s KPIs, because “in business, what you don’t count doesn’t count.” Some firms, for example, have had quotas where 40% of



Graeme Innes
Interviewee

“[Diversity] creates a stronger community and brings [in] people with a different understanding of life and breadth of experience.”

candidates had to be women. Historically, increasing the employment of women has been an area of focus. Then firms moved on to increasing representation of culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTQIA+ individuals, while people with disabilities seem to be at the end of that process.

The main reason for this is the attitudinal barrier. People with disabilities experience what Graeme describes as “the soft bigotry of low expectations – we’re not expected to achieve much.” The lack of representation in the media is partly to blame, and, according to Graeme, “while that continues the struggle to obtain employment and acceptance in the community is going to continue. We only knock over that barrier by getting people with disabilities to tell their own stories.”

In particular, the capacity to tell their own stories has the effect of dispelling myths and stigmas about people with disabilities: “All of the things that the community assumes, the opposite is true. We take less sick leave, stay in jobs longer, we make fewer workers’ compensation claims, and because we have had to manage particular challenges in other areas of our lives, we actually make better managers.” A strategy that Graeme would like to see is firms targeting particular positions for people with disabilities which showcase their capacities. Furthermore, people with hidden disabilities tend not to disclose their disabilities. To combat this and ensure that people with disabilities, or with diverse backgrounds, want to stay in the profession,

“firms have to celebrate the change [and] make it a welcoming space.”

One of the things Graeme noted when working with some firms is that lack of diversity is a commercial risk. Legal professionals need to represent the diversity of their clients: “People with disabilities are in business. They are entrepreneurs and small business owners because they don’t face this limiting and negative attitude, and that’s going to become a problem for firms if they don’t have people with disabilities in their workforce.”

Ultimately, firms and the legal profession generally must focus on difference as a benefit, not as a challenge. Graeme’s advice is to encourage decision makers. The most effective thing decision makers can do for someone with a disability is to say four very small words: “you start on Monday.”



Kate Brown
Author

Ethnic diversity and inclusion in the Victorian legal profession: The imperative for improved data collection

Written by **Dannika Collins**

Diversity and inclusion form the foundation upon which the Victorian legal profession may thrive. But while there are countless benefits to ensuring the foregoing, they must be accompanied by the implementation of robust data collection.

Collecting data

Recent steps have been taken to cast a light on the composition of Victoria's legal profession.

As part of its 2020 practising certificate renewal process, the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commission (VLSB+C) integrated a series of novel questions into its renewal form. The questions sought to ascertain the ethnic and linguistic background of the legal practitioners.

Of the 24,495 registered lawyers in Victoria, over 17,000 (70%) responded. Approximately 78% indicated that they were born in Australia, and 22% speak a language other than English. The statistics also revealed that the majority of lawyers in Victoria are of Australian or European

descent. Approximately 45% of lawyers reported Australian ancestry, followed by English (23%), Irish (11%), Scottish (9%) and Italian (8%) ancestry. Chinese ancestry (5%), Greek ancestry (5%) and Indian ancestry (3%) followed in smaller proportions, with less than one per cent of lawyers being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

These statistics constitute the Victorian legal profession's very first assemblage of ethnic data – the rationale for which, according to VLSB+C CEO and Commissioner Fiona McLeay, was to help consumers select a lawyer from a culturally appropriate background.

While augmenting transparency for the purpose of public interest is an indubitably judicious cause, it is equally important for such transparency to inform a cultural metamorphosis within the legal profession.

Facilitating change

There are numerous ways in which data collection can positively transform the legal profession.

“Rigorous data collection helps us illuminate the diversity of the legal profession, establish industry standards, promote accountability and drive meaningful change within our community.”

By expanding the current data collection scope and disseminating data on the diversity and inclusivity of the entities that employ legal professionals, those entities can be prompted through comparison with other such entities, to bolster their efforts around ensuring diversity and inclusion, and thereby refine their practices. By regularly reviewing their policies and procedures through the lens of intersectionality, and by delivering inclusive initiatives that are supported by empirical and statistical research, these employers can also enhance their public profile, attract diverse recruits and retain greater talent.

On an individual level, constructively utilising the insights gained through data collection can ensure that employees from all backgrounds feel seen, heard and welcomed by the community.

Forging a better future

Rigorous data collection helps us illuminate the diversity of the legal profession, establish industry standards, promote accountability and drive meaningful change within our community.

These effects will not only ameliorate the experience of current legal professionals, but of future generations to come. That is why we must act now.

As stated by former LIV President, Sam Pandya, “it is time for the legal profession to better represent and reflect the diversity of our community at all levels.” With the VLSB+C taking the first step toward uncovering our ethnic and linguistic demographics, the legal profession can continue to monitor its composition and consider how best to diversify it. With each new step, we draw closer to a tomorrow that not only accepts our differences, but embraces them.



Dannika Collins
Author

The importance of visibility

Written by Anastasia Misarvidis-Tyshing and Matthew Healy

Sheetal Deo is an advocate for change. As part of the LGBTIQ+ community and someone from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background, Sheetal has devoted much of her career to championing accessibility, and inclusion of diversity in the legal industry.

Sheetal is the Principal Solicitor and creator of one of Australia's most innovative law firms, Shakti Legal Solutions. It is one of only a few social enterprise law firms, and perhaps the only to offer a 'pay what you can' model for eligible clients. Shakti Legal Solutions seeks to make legal services more accessible for everyday people with everyday problems and offers various pricing models for those of lesser financial means. As a big believer in the power of representation, part of the motivation behind Shakti Legal Solutions was to promote 'alternative pathways' in law. For Sheetal, one of the key issues present in our industry is a lack of visible diversity; in career pathways, practitioners in leading or management roles, and thought.

Flowing from this is The Diversity Collective (TDC), an initiative Sheetal created in order to look past unconscious bias training in the legal industry. TDC is a cooperative social enterprise that offers bespoke training and consulting services, to help organisations and individuals in their respective allyship journeys.

'Calling In' unconscious bias

Unconscious biases are social attitudes about a group of people held on a subconscious level. These social attitudes are often informed by stereotyping, and as a result has a discriminatory effect when it manifests in recruitment processes or building relationships in the workplace.

Across the legal industry, unconscious bias training has been an initiative widely adopted by many firms. While these programs have had a positive effect on the legal industry, they have not translated into the widespread behavioural change they seek to instigate. For Sheetal, TDC is a way to call the very concept of unconscious bias into question, through the voices of CALD individuals.

One of the downfalls of unconscious bias training is its failure to address systemic bias. The TDC challenges common approaches by highlighting the underlying structures that produce unconscious biases. TDC utilises storytelling as a powerful tool to compare and contrast systemic bias and unconscious bias, whilst also illustrating the various forms of unconscious bias in the courtroom, hallways and boardrooms.



Sheetal Deo
Interviewee

“‘Calling in’ patiently allows organisations and individuals to critically reflect across all of their operations and prevent pigeon-holing the experience of CALD people to social stereotypes.”

Sheetal shared an interesting observation which another colleague shared with her. It was a meeting with middle-managers, all of whom identified as white except one woman of colour. Despite all being at the same level (in title, at least), the chair of the meeting had consistently looked to the woman of colour to take notes during the meeting. The woman herself had not even noticed until, upon leaving the meeting, another colleague brought it to her attention.

An unconscious bias-focused approach would attempt to address the particular issue and may even avoid similar experiences. Contrastingly, a systemic bias-centred approach would seek to demonstrate that the incident is not localised, rather perpetuated by gender and racial biases wherein CALD women are stereotyped as subservient. The concept of 'calling in' patiently allows organisations and individuals to critically reflect across all of their operations and prevent pigeon-holing the experience of CALD people to social stereotypes.

Celebrating diverse pathways in the law

Historically the narrative around a career in law, furthered by Law Student Societies (LSS), has pushed a singular portrayal of success in the legal industry – the corporate route. While this route is often glamorised in pop culture, this pathway is often overwhelmingly white.

Sheetal first noticed the lack of visibility of pathways during law school. Whilst large corporate firms have the advertising budget to sponsor LSS events and career fairs, smaller firms, community legal centres and other non-corporate entities do not have the same funding, and often as a result, are not afforded the same opportunities and exposure.

As a consequence, the incredible achievements accomplished outside the corporate sphere, many of which belong to under-represented individuals, are equally under-represented and cast as 'non-traditional,' suggesting that it is outside the norm, or less than in some way. It is important that a more diverse array of legal pathways to success are advertised to students.

In short, Sheetal Deo and the initiatives she leads seek to promote greater diversity in the legal industry, not only culturally and linguistically, but in how we see the practice of law itself – by promoting a celebration of diversity of pathways, of background and of accomplishment.



Anastasia Misarvidis-Tyshing
Author



Matthew Healy
Author

Indigenous Perspectives



Dare to Dream: From student to magistrate, Rose Falla's commitment to making a difference

Written by Elin Teo

Magistrate Rose Falla is a Wotjobaluk / Wemba Wemba woman, and Victoria's first Indigenous magistrate. Prior to her appointment in 2013, Falla enjoyed a prominent career at the Office of Public Prosecutions. She is currently the Supervising Magistrate of Koori Justice, an institution she established as a policy officer at the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Humble beginnings

Falla had never envisioned that she'd be a magistrate, nor even a lawyer. Initially, she had wanted to become a police officer, but later decided against it and pursued an interest in law at Deakin University. During those formative years as a student, she was inspired by her father's and sister's work in Indigenous Affairs when she saw firsthand how Koori people thrive and heal in programs designed by their own community.

"Self-determination is not a new concept," Falla said. Indigenous people bring perspectives enriched with a

wealth of knowledge on Aboriginal customs, culture and Lore which can be utilised to create programs that heal community.

The Koori Courts were established with the principles of therapeutic justice operating to uncover the social and intergenerational factors that drive criminal behaviour and provide offenders with tools and support to deter recidivism. Once the offender enters a plea of guilty, the prosecutor, the offender and their lawyer, an Elder, a community corrections officer and the offender's family convene at the Bar table and have a cultural conversation. This conversation assists the magistrate to determine an appropriate penalty.

Falla observes that the best results occur when offenders actively identify their own needs and commit to the process. These changes in criminal behaviour occur because the offender is able to retain relationships and a strong connection with culture and community and improve their wellbeing and mental health. Juvenile



Magistrate Rose Falla
Interviewee

"Indigenous people bring perspectives enriched with a wealth of knowledge on Aboriginal customs, culture and Lore which can be utilised to create programs that heal community."

offenders in foster care or remand significantly benefit from exposure to positive role models and strategies to resolve conflict peacefully.

Challenging social biases

Beyond the Koori Courts, Falla is committed to making a difference to the community. She believes that myths and stereotypes about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be challenged. “There should not be an assumption that if you see an Aboriginal person in court that they are the accused”, she affirms using the Koori Courts as a prime example. Whilst the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal system remains a prevalent issue, those people are a small subset of the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Falla recalls a personal experience, “I was asked how I’d feel prosecuting an Aboriginal person.” Bewildered, she thought: “Would you ask a [non-Indigenous] person the same question?” These are the types of uncomfortable situations that Indigenous lawyers and students may face.

Falla calls out these social biases. She doesn’t do it to embarrass others, but instead to clear misconceptions. Indeed, she finds that sometimes people do have the best of intentions but don’t know what is appropriate. Falla finds that seeking mentors and allies who speak up can help in navigating these situations.

Beyond individual efforts to manage these situations, she hopes that truth-telling will bring a better understanding of Blak history and help reconciliation efforts.

Advice for Indigenous students and professionals

Falla believes that one of the biggest hinderances for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, is their lack of connections.

“It [makes it] really difficult to dream big. But do it! With gusto and commitment, you will absolutely get there.”

Falla recommends students to access Koori centres at university as it’s a great way to find people who share the same culture and trepidation of being at law school.

Indigenous clerkship programs and mentoring programs are also fantastic way to meet people and build support networks. Falla fondly recalls her time at the Victorian Bar Indigenous clerkship program shadowing the then-barrister, Judge Michael Bourke. The opportunity to ask questions and understand the intricacies of court procedure was formative in nurturing her passion for criminal law.

To students and emerging professionals of all cultural backgrounds, Falla reminds us to seize every opportunity. Whilst your path may go a different way, the end goal is still achievable.



Elin Teo
Author

Voyage

Written by Victor Aeberli

Human

A charismatic and optimistic character, Matthew Karakoulakis (Matt) is not just a friendly face with a warm energy. He's the principal of a wholly-owned and operated Aboriginal commercial and litigation legal practice and an advocate for inclusive policy practices.

Matt's beliefs about inclusion flow deep within his ancestral veins and spread to the people and places Matt calls home. Matt holds dearly his Greek and Aboriginal heritage, he was born and raised on Kurna Country (phonetically pronounced: Gar-nah) with family connections to Narungga Country, a testament to how far his family's heritage travels across space and time.

Memories

Matt grew up on Kurna Country with a connection to culture. Painfully though, he sometimes felt the need to conceal his Indigenous heritage for fear of persecution. Matt explains how he experienced cultural sensitivities and feelings of not being 'Blak' enough. When surrounded by his Aboriginal peers with darker skin, Matt felt a little out of place because of his mixed background. This progressed into the early stages of his career where he would find himself internally asking the question, "are

you really a lawyer now?" But as Matt grew older and wiser, he found a deeper sense of pride in his diversity through Uncles, Aunties and Elders. He strongly believes that being Aboriginal comes from the heart. The way he describes Australia today is filled with deep and enduring affection for this beautiful country.

Work

One fateful day, Matt decided to pursue a career in law, and set the course of his voyage justice bound. He graduated from Flinders University and in 2004 took his first job at ASIC and later practiced in corporate takeovers, fundraising and larger-scale corporate acquisitions at various firms.

Matt opened his own practice in 2014 after various experiences in larger firms left him feeling a little disenchanted with his dream of strengthening the connection people have to the law. Matt wove a clear mission to improve the lives of his Aboriginal community through commerce, business and organisational capacities at AMK Law. He achieves this by maintaining an unwavering focus on caring for Country through sustainable business practices and promoting growth within Aboriginal communities through nurturing



Matthew Karaloulakis
Interviewee

Aboriginal businesses. The team works with First Nations suppliers of goods and services whenever they possibly can inside of the business and for the things they need. Even their AMK Law logo artwork was commissioned through an Aboriginal artist and tells a deeper story of connection and unity.

Matt believes that increasing representation in the legal profession is an important step towards resolving some of the many issues Indigenous people face.

“There are so many pressing issues affecting our people that need a deep cultural understanding to resolve.”

Matt believes there is a need for many more Indigenous commercial lawyers as well as lawyers in almost all other practice areas and vocations outside the law. He believes that promoting and nurturing growth in tandem with providing support is the key to taking greater steps towards reconciliation.

“Through the creation of successful business opportunities, a lot of problems can be tackled head on by creating positive employment prospects and ultimately better results for Indigenous people.”

Message

Whilst Matt continues to build upon his goals, the trials and tribulations he faced made him the success he is today. It was ultimately a moment of discouragement that led him to carve his own way through persistence and Dreaming to deliver law differently through his own legal practice.

Matt places great importance in remaining connected with his culture throughout university and into his professional career.

“Culture has to be first. Lawyers can easily put their legal hats on and see a problem through that lens, but we tend to forget that there are people involved and it’s only through understanding culture that we can put it first. Then, and only then, can the law be used as a vehicle to achieve the best outcomes.”

Matt strongly believes that the overlap between culture, Lore and law forms the vehicle to resolve many problems that Indigenous people experience.

“All cultures need to be recognised and Indigenous cultures have tons to offer. We need to understand what Indigenous cultures are collectively about to properly

inform us of the potential our land and Country has.”

Matt believes that being in touch with Aboriginal culture is a wonderful thing that can benefit the broader community. Ultimately, it's about breaking down the barriers and having great human connections regardless of ethnic backgrounds. Through that experience, we will have a deeper understanding and connection to each other.

The next steps for Matthew are about creating even greater levels of innovation, efficiency and effectiveness within his team as he continues to inspire the next generation of Aboriginal commercial and dispute resolution lawyers in developing themselves and the opportunities throughout the community.



Victor Aeberli
Author

Culturally competent lawyering: We owe it to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients

Written by Elin Teo

As lawyers, it is our ethical and professional duty to act in the best interest of our clients. We must also convey our legal advice clearly to help our clients make informed choices. When we serve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, it is critical that we understand how cultural norms influence client–lawyer relations as miscommunication can have a profoundly detrimental effect on clients. Melia Benn shares her approach and tips she developed from her experience representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients at the Queensland Bar.

Importance of managing cultural miscommunication

Melia firmly believes that lawyers have a duty to manage cultural barriers when taking instructions and helping the jury and judicial officers best understand their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. She believes that it is a skill that requires continuous development and is best cultivated through hands-on experience interacting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

However, she stresses that preparation is key to building trust with clients and avoiding inadvertently offending them which can lead to the break down of the client–lawyer relationship. Melia kindly shares her approach to managing such challenges.

Melia’s tips

1. Learn about the client’s cultural background

There are over 250 Indigenous nations, each with its own cultural norms, rules and social hierarchies that influence communication styles. General information is widely accessible online. When needed, Melia finds that reaching out to justice groups helps with answering specific questions. She recommends doing so well in advance of a client meeting as these justice groups are often under-resourced and may take some time to respond to your correspondence.

2. Consider the subject matter of the client–lawyer discussions

Certain subject matters may be considered as ‘men’s business’ or ‘women’s business’ in the client’s cultural



Melia Benn
Interviewee

“Lawyers have a duty to manage cultural barriers when taking instructions and helping the jury and judicial officers best understand their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.”

background. If so, the client will not speak on matters that they have no authority to speak on. Where this is an issue, the gender composition of the meeting may be a vital consideration.

3. Understand differences in communication styles

Silence in Indigenous culture is a signifier of authority. When a person takes long pauses, it is likely that the person is well-respected in their community and ought to be appreciated for their thoughtfulness. Conversely, silence could also be a sign that the client has been asked a question that has made them feel uncomfortable. The reason for that discomfort is not always obvious and can be multi-layered.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients often do not tell stories in chronological order. Interruption can be detrimental as it may be construed as a sign of disrespect. Melia uses a recorder to manage this challenge and takes short notes to keep her clients on track.

4. Unforeseen cultural barriers

Melia emphasises that spending time to build trust and rapport can be invaluable in managing an unforeseen cultural barrier that arises during a client meeting. Clients often recognise these efforts and would likely be willing to answer a direct question about their cultural communication norms to help overcome these challenges.

A systemic approach to building cultural competency?

Beyond individual efforts to develop these fundamental communication skills, Melia is an advocate for a systemic approach through a mandatory continuous professional development course. Melia laments that she was only given a one-hour seminar during her Readers' course on practical tips for managing cultural barriers and had never been checked on to see if she is indeed well-adept in representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

Another issue she observes is that Indigenous lawyers are often relegated as 'cultural advisors', people who by virtue of belonging to a community ought to help their colleagues manage their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. However, the reality is that less than 1% of practitioners in Victoria identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Melia, herself, is one of two Indigenous female barristers called to the 1100-member strong Queensland Bar. She asserts that reconciliation is the collective responsibility of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

We owe it to our clients to educate ourselves and fulfil our ethical and professional duty to the highest standard. Melia reminds us, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients have spent their whole lives walking in white Australia, the least their lawyer can do is show them due respect and research their culture and learn how to communicate with them.



Elin Teo
Author

A reflection from the Indigenous representative at Melbourne Law School

Written by Anton D'Amico

This piece is about my overall experience as an Indigenous student at Melbourne Law School (MLS). Before I continue, I want to express how humbled I am to study at MLS. It's a great privilege for me to study at one of the world's best law schools and it's opened up wonderful opportunities for me.

Firstly, I want to recognise the increase in the number of Indigenous students at MLS. In my cohort, there are around ten Indigenous students with roughly another ten enrolled in the incoming 2022 cohort. It's encouraging that MLS is developing a considerable cohort of Indigenous students as it creates a greater sense of solidarity. It's been a pleasure getting to know all the other mob from my year level and I feel more comfortable being around the law school as a result.

MLS also teaches Indigenous specific content in the curriculum. The MLS Indigenous Law and Justice Hub have committees set up to provide recommendations for further inclusions of Indigenous content in the curriculum. A substantial amount of Indigenous content is taught in compulsory subjects like Legal Method and Reasoning, Disputes and Ethics, and Legal Theory. Furthermore, there are a number of electives where

students are given the opportunity to specialise further in Indigenous content. I'm currently enrolled in the subject, Treaty: Indigenous-settler Agreements, which I'm excited to take. The substantial amount of Indigenous content within the curriculum means that I am able to make a better-informed decision before finishing my law degree about what I might want to do in the future. However, there is still room for improvement such as ensuring tutors are able to teach the Indigenous content with respect and with a sufficient level of cultural sensitivity. The Indigenous Law and Justice Hub also provides valuable discussions and panels that are Indigenous specific like talks around Indigenous incarceration in the criminal justice system.

I am the current Indigenous Representative for the Melbourne University Law Students' Society (MULSS) and I also have an Indigenous co-opt. The university has recently agreed to give the Indigenous portfolio a considerable amount of money in the form of a grant to facilitate social events, lunches and panels to create a better sense of collegiality amongst Indigenous students. It's humbling to see the university's willingness to provide the funds for these programs and to give it to Indigenous students to use at our discretion.



Anton D'Amico
Author

During my undergraduate degree, Murrup Barak was a strong presence on the main campus. Murrup Barak was a building in the middle of campus and had staff that provided good support for Indigenous students by organising lunches and social events that helped build a sense of community and a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, Murrup Barak is only meant to be for undergraduate students and is quite disconnected from MLS so its presence is hardly felt. My goal is to try and replicate in some way what I saw at Murrup Barak to try and create better collegiality and community amongst Indigenous students.

It's exciting to be at a university that is receptive to the voices of Indigenous students and to witness tangible improvement. I'm optimistic and confident that MLS will continue to strive forward and aim higher towards providing enriching programs for future Indigenous students.

Resilience and Overcoming Barriers



An interview with his Honour Judge Arushan Pillay

Written by Esther Adebayo and Punam Roopra

Judge Arushan Pillay was born in apartheid South Africa to a Tamil family and raised in Launceston, Tasmania, where his Honour completed a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Laws at the University of Tasmania. His Honour was admitted to practice in 1996 and subsequently called to the Victorian Bar in 2003. On 6 August 2019, his Honour was appointed as a judge to the County Court. Now one of the few judges of colour on the bench, his Honour shares his experiences of growing up as a minority, reflects on some of the barriers in the profession and shares his advice on dealing with some of these issues.

Q: Can you tell us what it was like growing up as a minority in Launceston in the 1970s?

A: My family and I moved there in 1976. Launceston was a small town with a population of about 70,000 people. We were transposed to a situation where there were not a lot of people like us. There were only two other Indian families, most people were Anglo-Australian. In South Africa, we had lived in a very strong Indian enclave with lots of people like us with whom we had shared names, foods, and cultural background. It's an isolating experience to be in an environment where you do not see others like you. You don't see your experience reflected

by anything that's going on around you. It's a sense of being dislocated both physically and mentally.

Q: How did you cope with that feeling of 'dislocation'?

A: There's not much you can do. For me, it was probably easier because I was young, and was able to attend school. In my formative years, I was able to bend my life into being more Australian than South African Indian, which is more difficult for people who come here when they're older. It was also easier for me as I spoke English well. South African Indians by and large speak English as our first language so that gave me an incredible advantage when we migrated.

Q: Why law?

A: It suited me. Indian migrants say to their children: it's either medicine or law, perhaps dentistry or pharmacy. You are told we are moving for opportunity and education because that's what we know will attract money, position, and the ability to help the rest of the family; you owe it to the entire family to take up that opportunity and not pass it up. That's the migrant story repeatedly. So, why did I choose law? Partly it was chosen for me, but it also suited me.



**His Honour
Judge Arushan Pillay**
Interviewee

The background that I came from in apartheid South Africa was also a motivating factor. It had been a terribly unjust place for many years particularly in its treatment of the African population, the Indians and the Whites. Some of those who stood up against this injustice were lawyers, the likes of Mandela and Oliver Tambo who defended various freedom fighters in court. I saw something powerful in that. I see a real power to the law, either as a sword or as a shield. It was important to me to do something with my life that I was good at and that was the law.

Q: Did you feel isolated when you joined the profession?

A: It's strange to look back on this but when I do, I think, yes. I did feel kind of isolated as an Indian in the law because there weren't that many of us when I moved to Melbourne but now there are lots and I am a part of that. As a junior lawyer, you can sometimes get so trapped in your own world that you perceive yourself as being isolated or as an imposter when in reality, you're not. It's important to talk to other people to understand we are not alone; we share many experiences and we're here to support each other. That's one of the things I always say to people: there are others like you who share your experience. Go talk to them.

Q: You have spoken about how you value the law for its openness, fairness, and equality of treatment. Do you see the profession in the same light?

A: Large parts of it I do. I love the law and I think we have a great profession but it's not free from

problems. We face many issues including unfairness and discrimination. Currently, the most pressing one is how young women in the profession are being treated. It is incredibly unfair and demeaning that such poor treatment occurs to the majority of women in the profession at some stage in their career. That's simply unacceptable.

The review commissioned by the Victorian Attorney-General (Szoke Review), has shone such a strong spotlight on this issue. I think that it is the greatest unfairness working away at the heart of our profession now and we need to do something about that. One of the things that I felt terribly saddened by and embarrassed by was that I had been in the profession for over 20 years, and I had not fully appreciated what it was like for young women in the profession. I never really tried to understand that, and because I never tried to understand, I've never tried to change anything for them. I'll always feel a sense of disappointment, if not shame about my lack of willingness to engage with that issue before last year.

Q: What advice would you give young lawyers who find themselves in a position where they might experience racism or feel stereotyped?

A: I would never say to young practitioners or have the expectation that you would call it out. There's so much going on when it happens. For me, and that's very personal for me, I'm conflicted by what

I'm feeling that I think calling it out is just beyond me. I normally say that it's okay to feel conflicted and to be unable to label what occurred. It's important to go to the people you trust and share what's happened and discuss it. Then, you can decide how you would like to address it. That targets the root problem with racism. Racism is designed to make you feel lonely and isolated and vulnerable. I still struggle with dealing with it and I don't think I could ever just immediately call it out, but I don't have a blanket rule. We are all members of the profession, so it helps to make friends. There's something to be said about having people you can share those experiences with, and you can find some comfort in your tribe.



Esther Adebayo
Author



Punam Roopra
Author

Reclaiming cultural identity to excel as a lawyer: An interview with William Lye OAM KC

Written by Zoe Zhou

William Lye OAM KC is the first barrister of Malaysian Chinese descent appointed King's Counsel in Australia. William credits his success to his 'multicultural lawyering' approach wherein his cultural identity serves as a unique lens to analyse nuances in international commercial disputes.

However, William had not always viewed his culturally diverse identity as a source of empowerment. Initially, the limited visibility of role models sharing his cultural identity within the industry has placed a restricting influence on him. This experience ultimately motivated him to be a staunch advocate for cultural diversity in the law: he was one of the founding members of the Asian Australian Lawyers Association, and the recipient of the Order of Australia Medal in 2017 for his service to the law, to business and to the promotion of cultural diversity.

Breaking the self-imposed bamboo ceiling

The appointment of Hamant Dhanji as the first judge of Indian descent in the Supreme Court of New South Wales resonates particularly with William as it was a clear sign

of positive progress towards a more culturally diverse inclusive profession.

When expressing his hope for an increasingly diverse legal profession, William shared his own experience of limited visibility of Asian representation in the law, and how it affected him as a young professional some 30 years ago.

The lack of cultural diversity was particularly apparent when William joined the Victoria Bar to practise as a barrister in 1988. There were less than a handful of barristers of Asian descent in Victoria and across other states or territories of Australia. He was the one who looked and sounded different from his peers, and could see barely any Asian representation at the upper echelons in the legal profession. The notion that "you cannot be what you cannot see" resonated.

William's mindset evolved, however, after a visit to Hong Kong in the mid '90s. A similar Commonwealth judicial system on this land is run mainly by Chinese lawyers, Chinese judges, and Chinese judicial officers.



William Lye OAM KC
Interviewee

"You cannot be what you cannot see ... The lack of visibility poses great challenges, but ... the courage to re-imagine the future by transforming the cultural heritage into a source of empowerment can be invaluable."

They share similar heritages, languages and cultures with William, presenting him with an inspiring possibility in the law. While the structural limitations imposed on individuals should not be understated, possible self-imposed limitations should also be acknowledged. The lack of visibility poses great challenges, but for young professionals and law students of multicultural backgrounds, the courage to re-imagine the future by transforming cultural heritage into a source of empowerment can be invaluable.

Cultural identity as an asset for career growth

By navigating through complex legal issues across cultures, William grew appreciation towards his own cultural background. His cultural identity enabled him to develop a deeper client relationship that goes beyond transactional.

William believed that it is precisely his multicultural background that allowed him to better adapt to an increasingly globalised legal profession. Growing up in Malaysia, a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual society, it was the norm for him to frequently engage and embrace cultural differences. This has allowed him to approach his international clients with an open mind and take time to understand nuanced challenges in overseas businesses and workplace culture.

William noted: compared to Australian corporate and business culture, many Asian corporations and businesses are more deeply intertwined with family

relationships with the key players themselves being parents, siblings and spouses across generations.

Similarly, a contract usually symbolises the end of a prolonged negotiation in Australia. Whereas in many Asian cultures, it symbolises the very beginning of a loyal partnership, and potentially life-long friendship. Therefore, there is an expectation for lawyers to forge strong client relationships that go beyond business transactions.

Understanding these cultural nuances has become increasingly commercially invaluable as it allowed William to better identify business opportunities and give superior service to his clients.

Building long-lasting change for culturally diverse lawyers

Despite his advocacy efforts, there is still a pressing reality of little cultural diversity in leadership roles. William powerfully pointed out that, as a cultural minority, we need more than mere existence, instead we need to have the opportunity to achieve and succeed. This will require generational efforts. This also requires younger professionals and law students to stand up and participate in advocacy.

As an immigrant himself, William also acknowledged that the difficulty of developing essential professional networks can be a significant barrier to professional advancement. He encouraged multicultural young

professionals and law students to reach out and build valuable relationships and seek mentorship. He encouraged multicultural young professionals and law students to not only do so within their own cultural groups, but to also actively engage with the broad community so that they are seen and can better challenge social structures and build valuable alliances.

To young diverse lawyers, William echoes the words of Sir Winston Churchill: success is not final, and failure is never fatal. The key lies in the courage to continue.



Zoe Zhou
Author

Studying amidst a chronic back injury, to one day be the backbone of the legal industry

Written by Anastasia Lazarus

What does my professional future look like? How am I meant to run from one end of William Street to the other when some days I struggle to get out of bed? How am I meant to sit, stand and wait in court all day? How am I meant to finish my law degree? How am I meant to stand up for others when I struggle to stand? Will a WorkCover claim hinder my future prospects of success? Who would even want to hire me?

These are but a few of the questions I have cried over in the last 16 months since suffering from a spinal injury at work that is still unstable and has left me with neuropathy, chronic pain, migraines, countless medical appointments and a lot of uncertainty.

I had been determined from the start that I would not be defined by this, even though some days I can't function. I have had to put off starting a family, my professional career has been jeopardised and my husband within three months of being married to me has seen me in some of my weakest and darkest moments.

My motto had been 'mind over matter' and I have heeded the advice of every doctor, specialist, therapist and treater. I have indulged in natural therapies looking to mask the pain and find relief. I kept pushing through thinking that others have it worse, I'm strong enough to deal with this alone and I wasn't going to let this control my life at 28. But truthfully, I was living in denial and hadn't processed it. Chronic pain is a silent disability, one that is not widely recognised yet slowly takes away every part of you and can control every aspect of your life, until one day you look in the mirror and you don't know who the person in the reflection is anymore. That vibrant and full-of-life newlywed is just a fatigued and sometimes all but destroyed ragdoll.

It's still important to weigh up pros against cons and generally speaking, try to find the positives in life. The silver lining so far from this experience are the transferable skills I have developed that are important in law, life and university.

1. Boundaries

It's okay to say no and it's better to establish boundaries early to not only protect yourself in any environment, but also to avoid a carrot–stick situation. I had to learn (albeit the hard way) that a job, a promotion and promises of advancement is not worth your health, your mental health or your body.

2. University assistance

Universities offer disability support also known as study assistance plans. These are specifically tailored to each student's needs. The university will identify what will support you to reach your study success. This is a service that not all students are aware of, but is very important.

3. Workplace assistance

If you meet the criteria, workplaces also have capacity to meet your needs. This can be in the form of ergonomic set ups, flexible work arrangements and many other options. There is no shame in this, be it temporary or permanent. Your Human Resources Manager will be able to assist you with this.

I was fortunate to be lectured twice by a barrister and senior partner of a firm in New South Wales who is an incredible teacher with a wonderful outlook on life. I would look forward to his classes for the content, but he also had a way of brightening our day and made law school enjoyable.

He inspired me to keep going and inspires me to be a great lawyer. I wasn't aware he is in fact quadriplegic. He does not let it define him – instead, he is defined by his remarkable knowledge of the law, his tenacity, how reassuring he has been to his students and for being an excellent advocate. That's how I want to be defined too. Not by my medication, not by the specialists I have to see, not my disability plan or the fact that I had to submit a WorkCover claim.

Disabilities or illnesses, no matter how they present, whether they're silent or visual, do not define a person. Nor will they stop you from reaching goals or striving for excellence. It is however imperative that you ask for help, seek what is available to assist you, utilise resources and remember that you are not alone.

"Disabilities or illnesses, no matter how they present, whether they're silent or visual, do not define a person nor will they stop you from reaching goals or striving for excellence."



Anastasia Lazarus
Author

The imposter syndrome misdiagnosis

Written by Amber Meyer | 董右瑄

Content warning for mentions of racism, misogyny, settler-colonialism (no explicit detail).

Women of colour are the most underrepresented group at every level of the legal profession. Behind white men, white women and men of colour (in that order), women of colour also face the sharpest decline in representation as their careers advance. While women represent 16% of the junior associates at law firms, that number drops to a minuscule 4% at the board of directors level.¹ Knowing this, we can't dismiss the increasing prevalence of self-doubt among women of colour as simply another case of the imposter syndrome.

First, I'd like to point out that 'people of colour' as a term can be misused to equate the experiences of all marginalised groups based on race. As such, I only use it here to contrast against the white homogeneity. In the same vein, I use the term 'women' only as a signifier for individuals that experience misogyny.

Coined in 1978 by researchers Clance and Imes,² imposter syndrome refers to a persisting sense of self-doubt or fraudulence that occurs even with clear proof of your success.

For women of colour, feelings of imposter syndrome deepen – not because of an inherent sensitivity or lack of resilience – but because the intersection of their gender and race positions them in stark contrast to their white- and male-dominated workplaces. The consequences of this 'double jeopardy' or 'glass cultural ceiling' are obvious from the statistics mentioned earlier. Yet, despite the clear link between marginalised groups and higher reports of imposter syndrome, the impact of structural barriers is insulated from blame as the focus remains on what individuals from this group should do to help themselves.

Here, I borrow from author Mary Ann Sieghart's research in *The Authority Gap*,³ and that of *Harvard Business Review* writers Ruchika Tulshyan and Jodi-Ann Burey,⁴ to explain the fallacies responsible for perpetuating bias against women of colour.

Our cultural perceptions of confidence are built on the behaviour of white male leaders. When we think of confidence, many of us picture the senior partners or CEOs at our firms, and many of these role models are known to occupy a particular demographic. This becomes an issue when we falsely equate a specific type of confidence – the speaking-loudly-at-meetings type of

confidence or the not-taking-no-for-an-answer type of confidence – with competence.

In addition, numerous studies have shown that men *think* they are much smarter than women.⁵ Teachers, parents and peers share this bias too. As this bias chisels away at a woman's intellectual confidence, women then face a lose-lose situation; their signs of humility are misinterpreted as confirmation of their inferiority, but their demonstrations of confidence are penalised for contradicting our social expectations of women.

The resulting stigma of incompetence affects women of differing ethnicities and cultural backgrounds differently. For First Nations women, they deal with the two-pronged attack of underrepresentation in the legal profession, and over-representation as offenders in the criminal justice system.⁶ For black women, they must navigate the stereotype of irrational anger, deliberately imposed to keep them docile and powerless. If a black woman speaks up about her mistreatment, she must labour to ensure she doesn't hurt anyone's feelings or risk being labelled as 'divisive' and 'difficult to work with'. Conversely, while Asian women are twice as likely as black and white women to be stereotyped as intelligent, they are also three times more likely to be labelled as

subservient. As part of the quiet and assimilated ‘model minority’, Asian women are expected to work hard, keep their heads down, and just deal with it.⁷

So, understanding that this feeling of not fitting in stems from a systemic combination of racism and sexism, what should we do?

At their core, effective solutions must recognise that women of colour are forced to walk the shaky tightrope between perceptions of arrogance and incompetence that men, and especially white men, do not. Talk too much about your own achievements and you’re labelled conceited and self-important. Talk too little and your achievements go unnoticed.

We can take the extra bit of time to assess the adjectives that come to mind when assessing our female colleagues of colour. Are we using words like “bossy”, “shrill”, “unlikeable” or “aggressive”? If so, there’s a chance that we are letting systemic bias shape our perception. We can correct this by using more objective tools, such as her credentials or work ethic, to ground our judgments.

Moreover, women not only talk less during meetings, but also are more likely to get interrupted. If we are chairing a discussion, we can make sure all participants are given equal talking time. If a woman of colour makes a good point but is ignored, or if that point is repeated by and then credited to another colleague, we can step in with something along the lines of, “that’s a good idea. I think

[colleague] raised it first. Did they want to elaborate on what they meant?”

If we are male, we can also check ourselves for any reflexive hostility that we feel towards a female boss. Do we feel resentful when working under her guidance? Yet, her credentials shouldn’t be scrutinised because she’s not a man, and her instructions shouldn’t be taken any less seriously.

This list is not exhaustive. In this way, I encourage you to find the potential gaps in your knowledge and be open to learning. As a final note, I want to remind you:

Women of colour are resilient. We do not need fixing. We belong in the legal profession, and we are good at what we do.

1. McKinsey & Company, Women in Law Firms (2017).
2. PR Clance and SA Imes, “The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention” (1978) 15(3) *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice* 241.
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Amber Meyer | 董右瑄
Author

Point of distinction: The importance of rewarding neurodiversity in law

Written by Cheryl Koh

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the best thing one can do before a law exam is to get a good night's sleep. The night before my first law exam my brain had other ideas. It thought it was the perfect time to *incessantly and intensely* think about how a flushable tampon could ease the plumbing problems plaguing city sewage systems. *Does this require engineering a new material? Perhaps the answer is in nanofibres? Where does one meet a materials engineer?* I did not sleep before my first exam. Doing well seemed a long shot when I saw the sun come through the window.

I have ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). My attention is next to none when the subject matter is of low interest to me, but it is *obsessive* when the subject matter is of great interest to me (roughly referred to as 'hyperfocus'). Neurotypical people have this to some degree. People with ADHD experience this to the extreme. Fluctuating between 'deficit' and obsession means I often have an inability to focus on the right thing at the right time. I need a high level of feedback and ample opportunities for iteration to feel engaged. I also have greater difficulty with anything sequential. I often write sentences from the middle, and rarely read from

the first page. I find it challenging to follow other students' linear outlines; all of my notes are in an Excel spreadsheet that other students find equally hard to follow.

These confessions beg the question of whether these 'deficits' are compatible with law. In moments of doubt, I recall the experience of top American litigator David Boies, who has represented Al Gore and recently, Virginia Giuffre. Boies has dyslexia and did not learn to read until the third grade.¹ He excelled in law school by compensating with his exceptionally strong memory. In court, Boies speaks without notes and is more mentally agile than his counterparts.² He has been referred to as the lawyer that everyone wants.³ One cannot talk about Boies as an exceptional litigator without talking about the competitive advantages resulting from his dyslexia. Despite his success, Boies has said in interviews that his greatest challenge in law school was timed exams due to his slow reading speed.⁴

The world is generally designed for neurotypicals by neurotypicals – law schools and the legal profession included. Students with ADHD tend to excel in environments with a high feedback loop⁵ but law schools

“Good support for neurodiverse lawyers can only result in more original thinking and excellent advocacy.”

often have low levels of formal feedback (eg. a single 100% exam). It is uncommon practice in Australian law schools to have formative assessments, where students receive feedback on their work without a formal grade. The situation is more dire upon entering law firms where the predominant attitude is ‘sink or swim’, where new lawyers are presenting in court with next to no training or feedback.⁶ This is a problem for most lawyers regardless of their disability status, but it is worse for those who are already challenged.

There is, however, an emerging signal that progress is being made. ‘Neurodiversity in Law’ is a UK initiative that promotes and supports neurodiversity within the legal profession. Doughty Street Chambers in the UK offers a guaranteed interview to applicants who are disabled within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010, provided they meet the minimum requirements of the position for which they have applied.⁷ The Disabled Australian Lawyers Association (DALA), which launched in 2021, is a national association advocating for greater representation and inclusion of people with a disability in the legal profession.

I believe that good support for neurodiverse lawyers can only result in more original thinking and excellent advocacy. The educational psychologist who diagnosed me with ADHD said that I have an exceptional ability with people and that I can iterate over ideas very quickly to produce a novel result. There is evidence from empirical studies showing that people with ADHD are more

sensitive to injustice⁸ – a trait every client would want in their advocate.

I did not manage to figure out how to make a flushable tampon before my exam. However, I did manage to do well by anyone’s measure despite the low odds of success. I had somehow tapped into ‘hyperfocus’ that morning. I read the examiner’s report recently, and was surprised to learn that my responses were regarded as excellent even though they diverged from the model answers. What a fitting metaphor encapsulating the importance of recognising and indeed, rewarding neurodivergent thinking in law.

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Cheryl Koh
Author

Forging Diverse Spaces



An interview with Molina Asthana

Written by Punam Roopra and Elin Teo

Molina Asthana is Principal of Swarup Asthana Lawyers and Business Advisors. She has previously worked as the Principal Solicitor at the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office, and as a solicitor at top tier firms Clayton Utz and MinterEllison.

Molina is a passionate advocate for cultural diversity in the law through her contribution as National President of the Asian Australian Lawyers Association and on the board of the LIV, where she was the first South Asian President-Elect. Access to justice and equality are values that underpin her work for which she has received recognition, including receipt of the Victorian Multicultural Award for Excellence in 2014 and 2016 and shortlisting as a Finalist for the LIV Access to Justice Award in 2016 and the Women in Law Awards in 2020.

She has also been involved in initiatives aimed at increasing cultural diversity in the media, politics and sport.

Q: Before you practised in Australia, you had a career as a practising lawyer for 7 years in India. What was it like to start your career all over again?

The journey for any foreign qualified lawyer to get requalified and find work in Australia can be quite long. However, my journey was particularly difficult as I was constantly discouraged because of my background.

Most recruiters didn't consider me for roles – my foreign qualifications and experience as a practising lawyer in India were all discounted.

But I wasn't willing to give up. I contacted partners of law firms directly and told them of the value I could bring to their firms. I was lucky to get a job at Clayton Utz, where I progressed to an associate position within six months. Within a year and a half, I was a Principal Solicitor with the VGSO.

There was a particular experience that I recall. I was at MinterEllison when I got a call from a recruiter, who had told me that I would never get a job at a top tier firm, so I shouldn't bother applying. He had called to ask if I'd like to apply for an opening at a small boutique firm. When I told him where I was working, he was in shock. He wasn't ready to put my name forward for a big firm and was in disbelief that I got it on my own.

It was an interesting journey as I had to create my own space and make things happen for myself.

Q: Have you had moments where you felt like you did not belong?

Yes, as culturally and linguistically diverse people, we can be made to feel like we are imposters, even if we are as



Molina Asthana
Interviewee

good as anyone else. Confidence is important – you have to believe in yourself to overcome this.

I came to Australia knowing that I'm different and that I would have to create my own space. When I was working for top tier firms, no one made an effort to get to know me or my background, to find out where I came from or anything about my culture. It was always up to me to find common ground. It was often footy, Australian TV shows or the schools they went to – topics I knew nothing about. My colleagues were also sceptical when I got work, which added to the feeling that I did not belong.

That's why it is important to create your own space. At the Asian Australian Lawyers Association, we empower people not only to manage these adverse circumstances, but to thrive in these environments and reassure them that they are not alone in facing this.

Q: What are the benefits of creating networks of people to address such issues rather than facing them individually?

Firstly, there is strength in numbers – a larger voice makes a difference when you are trying to create change.

Secondly, it is also an opportunity for sharing experiences and strategising for change – not only between peers, but also between lawyers of varying seniority. There is a sense of comfort to find out that others have had similar experiences.

Finally, the power of big associations or a community of people is that you can invite decision makers to the table, and they are more likely to join. They can be made aware of issues that ought to be addressed and can be encouraged to implement changes that are conducive to greater inclusion. By leaning on each other's networks, we can bring a larger cohort of decision makers to the table as well.

Q: From when you first entered the profession to now, do you see change? How much of that change is tokenistic?

Yes, I do see change. In 2007 when I started at the

VGSO, there wasn't any public discourse about diversity and inclusion in both the public and private sectors. By the end of my 11 years at the VGSO in 2018, we had formed a D&I Committee that had representation from, and policies for, various strands of diversity. I would've loved to have been involved with such initiatives when I started, but back then, there was no appetite for any change.

However, change is slow, and we need to be better at recognising intersectional identities. In the US, cultural identity came first due to the marginalisation of black people. Then came gender and other strands of identity. Conversely, in Australia, the gender movement came first, as such cultural identities are obscured. There are targets now to have greater female representation on boards, but there is no requirement for having greater cultural diversity – in that sense, women of colour get marginalised as they are hardly ever considered for leadership positions.

Some change can be tokenistic due to the pressure of appearing to do the right thing. That works for me, for the moment. I see it as an inroad. I'll go in, prove myself and make changes that will forge the way forward for others like myself. It's still important though, to call out tokenistic change. We ought to ask: where do organisations see diverse lawyers in decision making processes? The diverse lawyers that ascend to leadership positions are often ones who have to make

noise so they can't be ignored, or those who stay silent and aren't disruptive. Consistently highlighting the same diverse persons as role models is also tokenistic – there are many people of colour that ought to be celebrated.

Q: Any advice for young diverse lawyers coming into the profession?

Own your background – you have the benefit of having a background that provides you with a diverse perspective and positive values. However, it is equally important that you inculcate good values from your adopted culture (for us, Australian values). If you own your background and also imbibe good values another culture, it is the perfect combination for your professional success.



Punam Roorpa
Author



Elin Teo
Author

A roadmap to an accessible profession: The founders of the Disabled Australian Lawyers Association share their vision

Written by Elin Teo

Navigating the legal profession is not without its challenges, but finding others with shared identity and lived experience can be a great way to make the journey smoother. Before connecting in 2021, Natalie Wade, Ella Alexander and Abbey Dalton all felt like they would benefit from a community of disabled lawyers, but had found it challenging to find other disabled people in the profession. Through their respective experiences at law school and entering the profession, they realised there was an imperative need to have a systemic approach to disability inclusion and a safe space for disabled people to connect with each other. As a result, they established the Disabled Australian Lawyers Association (DALA) as the peak representative body for disabled students and lawyers.

Addressing representation at law school

When Natalie enrolled in 2008, she was the only physically disabled student in her cohort at Adelaide Law School. The faculty was eager to work with Natalie to ensure her classrooms and exams were wheelchair accessible. Using her experience, Natalie became an advocate for disabled students. Working

with the university's disability services, Natalie saved disabled students the laborious task of re-applying for accommodations each academic year. Instead, each student's disability assistance application would last the lifespan of their degree.

As the elected disability office bearer for the student representative council, Ella was involved in developing her university's Disability Action Plan and setting up a network of disabled students. Due to her position, she was aware that there was a sizeable population of law students with invisible disabilities. However, (to her knowledge) she was the only law student who was open about her disability.

Importance of inclusion at work

The transition from student to lawyer can feel daunting. Where specialised disability services exist at universities, the workplace is vastly different. Disabled employees are left to consider whether to disclose their disability, and advocate for the accommodations they require. This can sometimes be a challenging task as a junior lawyer in a hierarchical profession.



Abbey Dalton
Interviewee



Ella Alexander
Interviewee



Natalie Wade
Interviewee

As a result of the systemic underrepresentation of disabled people in the legal industry, organisations may feel apprehensive about the best way to approach accommodating a disabled employee, even if they are eager to diversify their talent. For example, Abbey commented that during clerkships, her colleagues and interviewers were sometimes hesitant to question further about her disability because they weren't sure what was appropriate or okay to ask. This can place the onus on the disabled person to always request adjustments, which can be challenging when they are eager to conform and impress. Abbey compares this to her current workplace, where her colleagues are very open with their questions about how to best accommodate her. Having these conversations is beneficial as it ensures that they can all work out how to best collaborate as a team. Through DALA, Abbey hopes that her graduate experience of openness and inclusion can become the norm for future disabled graduates.

Need for systemic and structural change

The co-founders of DALA maintain that, from their own experiences, organisations are often willing to accommodate disabled lawyers, however, lack knowledge on how to do so effectively. Natalie, Abbey and Ella point to the value of universal design and disability action plans to establish clarity for both the employer and disabled employee.

The objective of universal design, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,

is to ensure social and physical environments are accessible to everyone regardless of their disability, age or any other factors. For example, ramps, disabled toilets, accessible documents, digital accessibility or flexible work arrangements are some baseline inclusions that law firms can implement in the first instance, to ensure that disabled people feel they can be active and valued members of the workforce, without having to take additional steps to request these things.

Natalie asserts that disabled lawyers can be equally competitive as their able-bodied peers and should be given the opportunity to compete. Disabled lawyers are only disadvantaged when legal practice takes on ableist forms. She believes that networking and billable hours should be distilled into their fundamental concepts and presented in an accessible way.

Natalie, Ella and Abbey share a vision of a profession where disability is celebrated. To that end, DALA will work with organisations to enact structural changes. Disabled students and lawyers are encouraged to convene in the safe spaces DALA creates through its events.



Elin Teo
Author

Creating space through storytelling

Written by Kim Koelmeyer

For the culturally diverse, life in jurisdictions like Australia can feel like a square peg squeezing into a round hole.

When it comes to the legal profession, professionalism, performance and leadership is defined by traditionally Anglo-Saxon standards. Behaviours and markers of success that are culturally enforced in the home don't necessarily translate to success in the workplace. Those that fall outside of the dominant and assertive archetype of 'leader,' may not enjoy the accolade, consideration or progression.

This incongruence creates a life of incidental censorship. Firstly, instances of outright racism and discrimination can be traumatising and disheartening. And there is also the death by a thousand cuts: fielding "what is your background?" questions, or spending that extra 30 minutes in the morning styling one's natural hair to be more 'professional', or turning the other cheek to an off-hand comment. Spread across a decades-long career, this burden is not insignificant. And when there's no one that looks like you in the office, it's easy to feel alone.

Spaces for candour and safety are essential staples needed in the profession to air these issues, normalise experience and rebut the everyday assumption that there's no one like you out there. Beyond individual

impacts, implementing these measures also has a public interest lens. Fostering cultural safety, aspiration and wellbeing among culturally diverse lawyers and law students ensures they are best empowered to discharge their duties and ascend to positions of influence. So we stand to inch the legal system that bit closer to representing the community it is installed to serve.

Law in Colour: Creating space through storytelling

Law in Colour is an online space sharing the stories of people of colour in the legal profession. What started as simple conversations between friends recorded on an iPhone has become a small team of dedicated students and young professionals building a community of over 2,500 across our platforms. This speaks to the chord that storytelling and representation has struck, and the need to showcase the rich diversity the profession holds.

Creating Law in Colour has revealed some cardinal truths in how we might as a profession carve out space to empower conversation.

Building conversation in

Our interviews serve as a manufactured space for guests to showcase their work, raise their profile, reflect on their experience and share their opinions on diversity in the

"You never know what insights come out when you just pass someone the mic or ask the right question."

profession. Sometimes, you never know what insights come out when you just pass someone the mic or ask the right question. And this is a blueprint that can be replicated.

Meaningful conversation can't happen out of nowhere. The infrastructure of the profession needs to be engineered to facilitate it. In everyday practicalities, this looks like investing in frameworks like mentoring, where a space for honesty, reflection and questioning is created and encouraged. Whatever it may look like, the space needs to be created for people's experience and insights to come forward, or they will remain bubbling just beneath the surface.

People-centred storytelling

It's one thing to create space, but it is another to make that space safe enough for an honest exchange of ideas to thrive.

We are engaged in a constant iterative process with our guests and audience, because at the end of the day, we are trusted with stories that are not our own. These include feelings of insecurity, mounds of rejection or traumatic experiences of racism. This responsibility is not to be taken lightly, so we bake a 'guest-centric' ethos into every point of our process. Because for one, our work does not exist to parade the trauma of the profession. We also don't aim to further a particular thesis. We merely hope to create a tapestry of the experience and opinion that colours our legal profession. That means some guests speak about the benefits of

litigation, and some recount their experience migrating to Australia.

In the same vein, we cannot rely on culturally diverse lawyers to extract their trauma and experience for the benefit of the development of the profession. As important as a cultural exchange can be, it cannot be a performative exercise of sharing anecdotes. It needs to be genuine, people-centred conversation with no agenda.

Law in Colour was born out of a desire for the profession to engage in a conversation. It aims to hold a mirror up to the state of play when it comes to diversity, and venture how we might press forward. By creating space, we strive to create one dimension of insulation that can equip upcoming generations of culturally diverse lawyers with the knowledge that there are people out there in the profession with their skin colour, aspirations, struggles and fears. But we impact a very specific remit. And so the duty extends to the profession at large to ask: what will your impact be?



Kim Koelmeyer
Author

Changing the status quo: How young people have the power to create their own opportunities

Written by Marian Liwanen

I have often wondered whether I made the correct decision in pursuing law. Not merely because of the academic rigour required to undertake this degree but because I have often been overwhelmed with the sense that I simply don't *fit*. For marginalised or culturally diverse people, the legal profession can sometimes feel like an impenetrable behemoth, where success is largely defined by how closely one fits an Anglo-centric (white), male standard.

As a young woman of colour, to exist at odds from this ideal has meant having to carry the burden of navigating through spaces that I know aren't built for people like me. It means sitting through work conferences where I am the only woman and only person of colour in the room. It means, like now, having to justify my right to belong and my right to succeed.

The legal profession is at a juncture where archaic notions of gender and race can no longer be sustained in the face of a more globalised and multicultural Australia. Change does not happen overnight and

requires individuals to step up and lead the charge. As the inheritors of the profession, it is especially important for young people to help shape a more diverse and inclusive industry. Young leaders like Yasmin Poole show us precisely why young people's voices matter and what we can achieve when we realise that we have agency.

Embracing your unique perspective

It is often the case that most young people are hesitant to speak up for fear of not being taken seriously because of the perception that we don't know enough about the world. Despite her prolific presence in the media today as a youth advocate and board director of OzHarvest and YWCA Australia, Yasmin insists that the confidence and bravery required to champion youth issues in public forums are traits she developed over time.

Yasmin recalls a time when she realised that she couldn't let her fear allow her to miss an opportunity to speak up about an important youth issue. She recognised that "as a young person, I'm not the expert authority on everything," but for Yasmin, having a platform means being able



Yasmin Poole
Interviewee

"As the inheritors of the profession, it is especially important for young people to help shape a more diverse and inclusive industry."

to raise perspectives that are often marginalised in mainstream forums.

Like those of us who exist outside the “standard,” Yasmin admits to feeling strange amongst a “sea of suits” and once thought she needed to fit in to gain approval. She has since learned however that this not the “optimal or healthy” way to view success. Now, she views her unique perspective as a source of pride and strength, encouraging others to do the same.

“Diversity,” she asserts, “makes a better legal system.” Serving the entire community requires understanding that nobody’s experience is exactly the same and it is precisely within these differences that we find the answer to why diversity should be encouraged. Having a unique perspective opens our eyes to the nuances of culturally diverse and marginalised communities and allows us to scrutinise structures and policies to see whether they uphold equality or lead to inequality. As Yasmin affirms, “it harms us to feel the need to conform because that requires us to remain silent.”

Finding strength in community

Yasmin personally credits the discovery of a youth-led organisation during her post-high school gap year to igniting her passion in youth advocacy. Seeing other young people leading change redefined her idea of what leadership looks like and allowed her to broaden the scope of what opportunities were available for her. She believes that with the right support, there are endless possibilities for what young people can achieve.

Even today, connecting with other Asian Australians has been a source of “healing” and “strength” for Yasmin. Through this, she has been able to find support from other people who have also dealt with experiences of racism and sexism which has affirmed that “[we] are not alone in these issues.” It is this connectedness, made easier through social media, which she believes gives young people an edge in challenging the status quo. “We have to work collectively together to have these conversations and push for change” in order to create spaces at the decision-making table not only for ourselves but “also for those who don’t traditionally have that space.”

It is “our time to resist.”

How my employer supported me to be my true self at work

Written by Ross Sottile

I distinctly remember when I started my career in the legal profession, I grappled over whether I would feel included and equal at work as a gay man or whether I would need to guard my identity.

I started my career in law in February 2016 at Maurice Blackburn Lawyers. Since 2016, I have worked in many roles as a legal assistant, floating legal assistant, senior legal assistant and more recently law clerk. I am currently in my fourth year of law at Deakin University with aspirations of becoming a lawyer in early 2023.

For me, it was not a question of whether I would decide to be out in the workplace, but rather if I would feel comfortable and supported doing so. You see, I never wanted to spend time in my career using energy hiding aspects of my personality. It was important for me to be able to express myself in a way in which I felt natural. I wanted to feel like I could share aspects of my life so that I could form honest relationships with my colleagues.

Looking back now, I felt supported to be myself from day one. I remember that I began to let my guard down within the first few days and started to show my

authentic self quite early on. In fact, by the end of my first week, most people in the office knew that I live with my boyfriend and our chihuahua, *Popcorn*.

You may be wondering what made me feel so supported to be my true authentic self at work. For me, it was the fact that my employer provided and continues to provide an inclusive culture. It was, and is, an ongoing priority for the firm to ensure a supportive and inclusive professional environment for people of diverse genders and sexualities that assisted me feeling a sense of relief and comfort to be able to come to work and not have to hide a part of myself.

As soon as I was able to let my guard down, I felt a huge sense of relief. I experienced genuine respect and felt safe to express myself, and in turn, my productivity and morale at work increased expeditiously.

In September 2017, marriage equality was put to a voluntary survey for all Australians on the electoral roll. This was a very difficult time for many of us in the LGBTIQ+ community as our rights to marry our loved ones were in the hands of others. I remember feeling anxious because I had plans to propose to my partner

“I never wanted to spend time in my career using energy hiding aspects of my personality. [I wanted] to express myself in a way in which I felt natural.”

pending the change in law. During this time, there were campaigns shown on TV supporting both the 'yes' campaign and the 'no' campaign. My employer showed strong support for the LGBTIQ+ community during this time by encouraging all its employees and Australians to ensure their details were registered with the electoral role and to vote 'yes'. On 26 September, I marched together with 50 of the firm's staff to the local post box in the CBD to post our 'yes' vote. I remember feeling a sense of pride and happiness knowing that my rights to be treated equal under the law were well supported by my employer and colleagues.

If you are a law student or graduate, and you are starting a new role or going to interviews, and diversity or inclusive culture is something you are passionate about in your workplace, I would encourage you to ask potential employers what initiatives and support they have in place for those who identify as LGBTIQ+.

Some examples of great diverse initiatives that firms in Victoria have implemented include having a network of people who support, mentor and coach employees who identify as LGBTIQ+ as well as influencing policies, training and recruitment practices to be LGBTIQ+ inclusive and increasing staff awareness of LGBTIQ+ related issues.



Ross Sottile
Author

Creating a mental health positive profession: An interview with Claire Humble

Written by **Caroline Ashton, LLB Student, RN**

Claire Humble is a lawyer and mentor in the Practical Legal Training course at the Leo Cussen Centre for Law. She is passionate about fostering healthy attitudes towards mental health in the legal profession and is an accredited Mental Health First Aid Course Instructor.

Claire recognises there is a trend in legal workplaces of placing a greater emphasis on the importance of mental health. COVID-19 has particularly sparked change in these settings with the introduction of flexible work arrangements, working from home and strategies for managing employees' mental health.

Claire explains that mental health was once a taboo topic not openly spoken about at work. It was challenging to admit you were struggling and to ask for help. With the spotlight placed on mental health now, Claire provides insight on some of the issues affecting the legal profession today: who is responsible in addressing mental health concerns, and what can be done about to support better mental health.

The landscape today

High risk areas

The legal profession has a high incidence of mental health conditions, Claire acknowledges with reference to a 2009 report.¹ In particular, criminal, family, personal injury and refugee law place a highly emotional and stressful toll on practitioners. Repeated exposure to traumatic or confronting material in the course of a matter can be triggering or stress provoking. Employers can be held vicariously liable for injury, including psychological injury, that occurs in the workplace and must take steps to ensure that they have mechanisms in place to address the risks and manage issues raised promptly. It is important to implement health and wellbeing strategies at the outset rather than at the point of crisis.

Burnout

Working in consistently stressful circumstances can lead to burnout. Claire explains that “wearing armour” and not debriefing about difficult working conditions or case



Claire Humble
Interviewee

work can take its toll. People can become withdrawn, no longer attend events and continue to work in an unhealthy manner. Eventually, they cannot keep up and burnout.

Claire identifies firms which provide little autonomy have a toxic workplace culture and/or unrealistic demands and expectations, foster competition not collaboration are likely to lead to employees developing burnout, anxiety and/or depression.

Drinking culture

Many work-related social events involve drinking, which does not necessarily contribute to a healthy workplace. Claire states that it can be counterproductive towards mental health and more likely to exacerbate addiction, mental health conditions, and even increase the risk of harassment and sexual harassment.

Who is responsible?

“Everyone,” Claire responds. Irrespective of a person’s position, whether they are a manager, supervisor, family or friend, everyone has a role to play in addressing mental health as a serious issue.

In particular, Claire encourages senior staff to take responsibility. Claire reflects that mental health might not have been properly acknowledged previously and was seen as a weakness or something to be judged. However, senior staff hold a position of influence whereby sharing their experiences can help invoke change and encourage others to do the same.

What can we do?

Supporting employees

Claire discusses a number of strategies to address mental health in the legal setting. Part of senior staff’s responsibility is to ensure they are facilitating a safe space for their employees. This involves stamping out toxic work practices and assessing how they look after their employees and manage work expectations, particularly of law graduates. For example, giving young lawyers the option to step away from an emotionally challenging or stressful situation and have another senior person step in, if required, could be a useful strategy.

Additional suggestions include an open-door policy, regular meetings, flexible hours, clear policies and guidelines, a mentoring system and ongoing training.

EAP services

An Employee Assistance Program is a useful service that firms can provide, and if provided, firms should ensure it is easily accessible. These services are completely confidential and can support the mental health of employees in the workplace.

Social events

Claire recommends holding fewer alcohol-centred events and encouraging exploring healthy alternatives such as supporting a charity, picnics, yoga sessions, walkathons or taking a creative class.

Mental health first aid course

This course equips participants with the tools to identify mental health conditions and encourage their colleagues to seek professional help. Participants also learn about different types of mental health conditions and how to have a conversation with another person if they are concerned about them, further reducing the stigma around them.

Conclusion

It is important to recognise that we all have a part to play in taking mental health seriously and fostering a safe and inclusive workplace. There are many strategies that can be taken including the above. Alternative resources have been included below such as policies, templates, videos, fact sheets which provide further information about, and assistance for, mental health.

1. Norm Kelk, Georgina Luscombe, Sharon Medlow and Ian Hickie, 'Courting the Blues: Attitudes Towards Depression in Australian Law Students and Lawyers' (2009) Brain & Mind Research Institute Monograph, Sydney.

Resources

Law Institute of Victoria Member Counselling Service

LIV members can access three counselling sessions per year (phone, online or face-to-face). This service is free and confidential.

Headspace

Headspace offers general resources and personalised support services for individuals up to 25 years of age.

Lifeline

A confidential, 24/7 crisis support phonenumber service that provides assistance to individuals thinking about suicide or suffering emotional distress.

Beyond Blue

Beyond Blue offers general resources on anxiety and depression, and personalised support through its 24/7 chat and phonenumber service. Individuals can also connect with others through its community forums.

Suicide Call Back

A nationwide service providing 24/7 telephone and online counselling to people affected by suicide, and general resources on mental health.

Head to Health

A bank of digital mental health resources for individuals, and their family, friends and caregivers.

Your General Practitioner

A GP offers personalised medical advice and can provide referrals to mental health specialists.

Mental Health First Aid Australia

A course that provides participants practical skills to respond to a person experiencing a mental health problem.

LIV Ethics Helpline

LIV members can access confidential ethics guidance by emailing, ethics@liv.asn.au or calling, (03) 9607 9336.



Caroline Ashton
Author

The legal profession will make space for you, but you don't have to keep waiting for it

Written by Alyssa Sigamoney

I made the decision to enter the legal profession staring at squares of paper with a level of frustration I had not quite experienced before. I was at the end of my internship at the Bridge of Hope Innocence Initiative based at RMIT University. I had spent months looking over legal materials theorising what had occurred and if the accused's race had contributed to a potential wrongful conviction. During this internship, I saw how the harmful, ongoing impacts of colonisation, racialised policing and perceptions of criminality make people of colour more susceptible to wrongful convictions, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.¹

I started to think about whether or not the participation of a lawyer of colour would have changed anything. Whether having someone who looked a little further than what was put in front of them with an understanding of the nuances of a side glance or the more insidious forms of implicit racism would have changed the way the case was run, preventing a wrongful conviction. At the end of the internship, I decided I wanted to help create this change, rather than accept what was happening. That was my

catalyst for starting law school and I have carried it with me ever since.

Finding my space and purpose

Finding my place in law school was not easy. As someone quiet and happy to fade into the background, law school was slightly terrifying. Add being one of the few brown women in my cohort into that, I wasn't exactly running to find my space or share my voice.

I was sitting in a property law class when I realised that this approach wasn't going to be sustainable. My frustrations grew when I realised that discussing native title in the *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* case was going to be one of the few times we talked about the impacts of colonisation on how we practice law. I remember looking around the room to find someone who shared my frustrations. I was one day going to be practising law alongside the same people and I'd wanted to know that they also understood the impacts of implicit and explicit racism on the way people interacted with the law.

“Those entering the profession need to be allowed the space to gather and grow as they find their place within it, supported by those who have come before them.”

It took some time, but I eventually found my space. I used the same discomfort and frustration to seek out those who were feeling the same way as me. I had conversations with other quiet people of colour I met in class. We commiserated, laughed, and learnt from each other, making our own spaces where we felt comfortable talking about our experiences, frustrations and hopes for change. Those unexpected conversations carried me through law school and helped me situate myself in what I wanted to do and be when I entered the profession.

Moving towards admission, I shifted from student to mentor. Working with women of colour starting their law degrees and who will one day join the profession alongside me, we continue conversations that started in the spaces I made with my peers. My mentees have the opportunity to vent and to see that it's still possible to make it to the other side, despite those frustrations and challenges. They are passionate and motivated, and it's my hope that they stay that way.

Making more space

As young, diverse people in the legal profession, it often feels like we are fighting an uphill battle; that it's 'us against them' to make sure that people that look like us don't fall prey to the inherent racism we still see in the legal system.

Those entering the profession need to be allowed the space to gather and grow as they find their place within it, supported by those who have come before them. This

will allow them to be the best lawyers they can be, but more importantly, be the lawyers they want to be. This will only happen if they're given the space to do so and are allowed to be themselves, navigating the ins and outs of entering the profession without the impacts of the way they look or how they identify breathing down their necks.

While it still frustrates me that the role of racism in wrongful convictions and miscarriages of justice is not more broadly recognised, I know I can use my carved-out space to change that.

If you are a young lawyer of colour, you do not need to wait to be given that space. You can use your knowledge and experience as a catalyst to make space in the profession on your own, putting your frustrations to use. I had some help along the way, but I still forged my own path. I found my space, like so many others can and will.

1. Research has been conducted to analyse this issue. For further reading see: Stratton, G. & Sigamoney, A. (2020) Why We Don't See Race: How Australia has overlooked race as an influence on miscarriages of justice. *Race and Justice*, 1–16.

Additional material on wrongful conviction

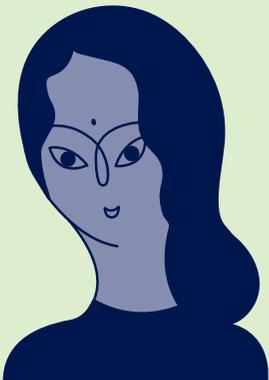
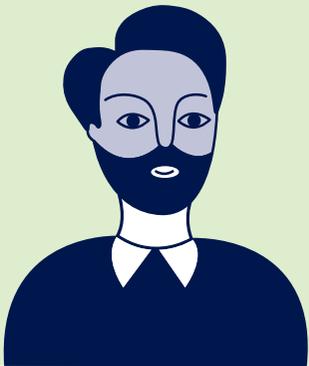
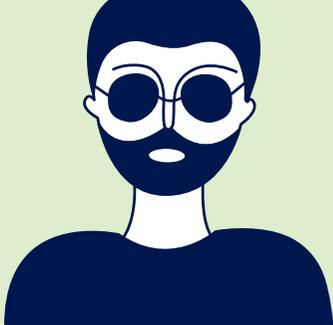
1. Murder On Trial: Was a Melbourne woman's conviction beyond reasonable doubt? *Sarah Dingle, ABC Background Briefing*, February 2019. <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/jailed-woman-challenges-melbourne-murder-conviction/10790646>
2. White Justice, black suffering: Extracting False Confessions, *Amy McQuire, Griffith Review*, 65. <https://www.griffithreview.com/articles/white-justice-black-suffering/>

3. Black Lives Matter, Race & Wrongful Conviction, *Alyssa Sigamoney & Monique Moffa, The Bridge of Hope Innocence Initiative*, July 2020. <http://www.bohii.net/blog/2020/7/10/blacklivesmatter-race-and-wrongful-convictions>
4. Harrison, M. & Trounson, H. (2021) An Investigation of Key Factors Leading to the Wrongful Conviction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues* 24 (3–4), 20–36.



Alyssa Sigamoney
Author

Diverse Associations





African Australian Legal Network

The AALN is a professional network for legal professionals and law students of African descent, as well as members of the legal profession with an interest in diversity in the legal profession. Established in 2018, the AALN is a professional community that aims to increase the representation of legal practitioners of African descent, as well as support those practitioners in their professional development and career success. The AALN contributes to diversity and inclusion efforts within the law, coordinates programs that facilitate access to the profession, and otherwise endeavours to create a professional space in which members feel they can be their whole selves.

The AALN's activities for young lawyers and law students include paid internships with Victoria Legal Aid and the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, professional development and commercial awareness workshops, and an annual mooted competition, where competitors are mentored by members of the Victorian Bar and appear before judges of the County Court and Supreme Court.

Find out more at the website: <https://www.aaln.org.au/> or by emailing Ayman Shash, President, at ayman.shash@aaln.org.au



Asian Australian Lawyers Association

The Asian Australian Lawyers Association (AALA) is a national association which seeks to:

- bring together members of the legal profession of Asian heritage and cultural background, and others with an interest in Asia;
- provide a cohesive professional network to advocate for and provide support to members; and
- promote and facilitate cultural diversity in the senior ranks of the legal profession, including fostering a pipeline of culturally diverse talent – starting with law students and young lawyers.

Joining the AALA will provide to access:

- a wide range of networking, professional development and thought leadership events and initiatives, designed to help attendees build connections, career skills and commercial awareness and D&I knowledge, in conjunction with law firms, educational institutions, student societies and other bodies, including:
 - the National Cultural Diversity Summit;
 - the William Ah Ket Scholarship;
 - the Career Workshop Series;
 - the AALA VIC Internship Program with the County Court of Victoria;

- dedicated networking events, both in-person and virtual, including speed networking and virtual coffees and lunches;
- CPD events presented by subject matter experts;
- thought-provoking panel discussions regarding topical issues, such as the increased incidence of racial discrimination and vilification in light of COVID-19; and
- celebrations of culturally significant festivals such as Lunar New Year and Diwali;
- volunteering and mentoring opportunities, including through the AALA Mentoring Program; and
- a community of like-minded peers and experienced legal practitioners, both in Victoria and around Australia.

Sign up today at <http://membersuite.aala.org.au/membership-application> or contact vic@aala.org.au if you have any queries.

Australian Italian Lawyers Association

AILA was established 27 years ago. It is one of the oldest law associations in Australia. The Hon Tony Pagone AM KC is the patron and Vincent Morfuni KC is the president. New members are welcome <https://aila.net.au/join/>. The AILA hosts several CPD events each year and speakers at past events have included chief justices of the Supreme Court and other judicial officers, attorneys-general and shadow attorneys-general. It also sponsors an annual essay writing competition and various prizes for law students.

Contact: Secretary, Joseph Carbone,
australianitalianlawyers@gmail.com



DISABLED AUSTRALIAN
LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

Disabled Australian Lawyers Association

The Disabled Australian Lawyers Association (DALA) was established in March 2021 by Natalie Wade, Ella Alexander and Abbey Dalton. It is a national association with the aim of promoting greater representation and inclusion of disabled people in the legal industry. DALA

aims to create a space for disabled law students, practitioners and academics to network and share resources, opportunities and experiences. DALA also advocates and raises awareness about the experiences, successes and barriers disabled people face to ensure their ongoing equal participation in the legal industry. You can follow their public page on LinkedIn, and if you identify as disabled, join their private members' group.

Diverse Women in the Law

Founded in 2019 by Keerthi Ravi, Diverse Women in Law (DWL), seeks to empower Diverse Women by providing meaningful structural enablers, such as mentoring, networking, and awareness-raising initiatives that proactively enlists industry stakeholder engagement. The Sydney-based not-for-profit, which has 900-plus members, has plans to expand into Victoria and other states.

Initiatives include a moot and witness examination competition, targeted mentoring programs, university campus presentations, research and, since COVID-19, online events on wellbeing, how to lead, clerkships and careers in government. DWL considers 'diverse women' are identified as women (cis, non-binary or gender diverse) from underrepresented backgrounds including culturally and linguistically diverse, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, LGBTQI+, with caring responsibilities, from regional, rural and remote areas, living with a disability or experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. For details visit <https://www.diversewomeninlaw.com.au/>

French Australian Lawyers Society

Established in 2013, the French Australian Lawyers Society (FALS) is a national not-for-profit organisation with an old heritage that promotes and encourages diversity and inclusion. FALS specifically promotes the networking of French-speaking lawyers who are interested in the Australian and French legal systems. It aims to empower through knowledge-sharing by fostering personal and professional relationships between members of the legal profession in both countries. It provides resources to its members including but not limited to support for law students travelling to Australia/France for work experience/internships or study. FALS organises regular networking functions including seminars for legal professionals across a broad section of the Australian and French communities.

Do not hesitate to get in touch at Contact@fals.org.au or look at the website for additional information: fals.org.au

LIVOut

The LIVOut Working Group, which sits under LIV's Diversity Committee, is the LIV's LGBTIQ+ Working Group. The network aims to increase the profile and engagement of LIV members who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer; contribute to law reform and the provision of competent and effective service on issues concerning individuals who identify as LGBTIQ+; as well as provide networking and mentoring opportunities for LIV members who identify as LGBTIQ+. The LIVOut Working Group is open to all LIV members who are part of the LGBTIQ+ community, and LIV members interested in the issues faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals.

The Working Group engages with other stakeholder organisations in the legal and LGBTIQ+ space generally, organises events and networking initiatives and contributes to relevant law reform.

The Working Group meets six times a year.

Co-Chairs: Oliver Cox and Sebastian Lynch

If you would like to join the LIVOut Working Group, please email alhr@liv.asn.au with your resume (redacting any personal information) and a brief statement of why you seek to join, and how you could assist the Working Group.

To be eligible to apply to join the LIVOut Working Group, you need to be a LIV member. If you would like to get involved and are not an LIV member, please contact the membership team to join.

MELBOURNE CATHOLIC
LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION

Melbourne Catholic Lawyers' Association

The MCLA was founded in 2001 and is part of a long tradition of faith based guilds for particular professions. It aims to keep members anchored to faith in what can be a very competitive and career driven world. Its events include the Red Mass at the commencement of the legal year, a Lenten retreat and an annual dinner.

The group has an egalitarian ethos and allows law students and young lawyers to mix with lawyers of all levels on an equal footing.

There is no formal membership and people at all stages of their faith journey are welcome to join the mailing list and attend events. The MCLA's chaplain can be contacted for confidential ethical or personal support.

Join the mailing list via MCLA's website:
www.catholiclawyers.com.au

Muslim Legal Network

The Muslim Legal Network (MLN) is a unique professional association that seeks to increase accessibility to the legal system within Muslim communities by providing networking opportunities, community education workshops, referral services and mentoring programs.

Founded in 2008, the MLN members consist of both legal professionals and law students across Victoria and Australia who are active members of their respective communities. The MLN vision is a society in which every member has access to the information, mentors and sponsors necessary to reach their potential and the capability to maximise access to justice for the disadvantaged.

It is therefore a critical body working to address issues of accessibility and representation of Australian Muslims in the legal system.



Northern American Australian Lawyers Alliance

The North American Australian Lawyers Alliance Incorporated (NAALA) is a peak representative body which is dedicated to advancing cross-border opportunities and collaboration between lawyers, policymakers and multilateral institutions across Australia and North America.

NAALA serves its members by working to improve the legal profession, by eliminating bias, enhancing diversity and advancing the rule of law throughout Australia and North America.

NAALA works to increase public understanding of and respect for the rule of law, the legal process, and the role of the legal profession at home and throughout the world. Hold governments accountable under law. Work for just laws, including human rights and a fair legal process. Assure meaningful access to justice for all people. Preserve the independence of the legal profession and the judiciary.

NAALA facilitates professional activities that advance the law, education, business and society. It promotes cultural

harmony and diversity through community, mentorship and the exchange of ideas.

NAALA aims to increase collaboration between individuals, institutions and nations and enhance opportunities in Australia and North America.

NAALA is the first and only peak body bridging the gap between the Australian and North American legal systems.

Pride in Law

Pride in Law is a National LGBTIQ+ Law Association based in Australia, with chapters located in Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria. The Victoria chapter of Pride in Law officially launches this year, with the Committee being appointed in 2021.

It is a not-for-profit organisation and non-political group, aimed at connecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and questioning (LGBTIQ+) members of the legal community and their allies.

Pride in Law founder Dean Clifford-Jones formed this association to bring together the LGBTIQ+ legal profession across multiple disciplines.

The Victorian chapter is led by Kristina Antoniadis as President, supported by Tiffany Tullberg (Enquiries Officer); Jodie Jarvis (Events Co-ordinator); Hugo Vicat (Advocacy Officer); and Cate Bennett (Secretary).

There is no formal qualification in law required to become a member of Pride in Law. Membership is calculated on a biannual basis commencing from 1 July 2021. The subscription fee is \$30 for an individual and \$20 for a student. Pride in Law is not for profit and therefore able to keep their membership subscriptions low to allow more inclusion and accessibility within the LGBTIQ+ community. Membership entitles each member to voting rights and concessional rates on events. As well, of course, being updated as to important issues that may impact the LGBTIQ+ community. To become a member is quite easy and can all be done online.

This year, the Victorian chapter officially launches and with that they commence their monthly networking events. This is a move welcomed by all and which will see a much-needed move back to face-to-face networking and away from the virtual networking that has been a feature of both 2020 and 2021.

Above all, Pride in Law is there to support members of the LGBTIQ+ and their allies and to advocate for the needs of the LGBTIQ+ community. For further information as to how Pride in Law benefits emerging lawyers and how to become a member, please go to www.prideinlaw.org



Victorian Women Lawyers

Victorian Women Lawyers (VWL) was founded in 1996 and is the peak representative body for women lawyers in Victoria. VWL's mission is to advance women's legal and human rights and achieve justice and equality for all women. VWL aims to remove barriers and increase opportunities for women in the legal profession. Through seminars, networking events, mentoring programs for both law students and practising lawyers, and an annual moot competition, VWL promotes continuing education, career development and advocacy. VWL advocates for women through submissions to government, journal articles, donation drives and its annual publication *Portia*. Members are encouraged to join VWL's sub-committees:

Publications Committee manages VWL's communications with members and the legal community and publishes VWL's annual journal, *Portia*.

Justice Committee addresses justice and human rights issues.

Law Reform Committee aims to work towards law reform and promoting the understanding and support of women's legal and human rights.

Outreach Committee supports relationships with regional, suburban and remote members.

Networking Committee organises events fostering networking and career development.

Women in the Public Sector provides a forum for women lawyers in local, state and federal government firms, departments and statutory bodies.

Work Practices Committee advocates for the retention and advancement of women in the profession.

Diversity and Inclusion Committee promotes equality and opportunities for women lawyers who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, having a disability or LGBTIQ+.

Contact: vwl@vwl.asn.au

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