

NEW WAVE FOLLOWS SUCCESS

The school lawyer model continues to develop in high schools across Victoria.

After the success of the first Australian in-house school lawyer in 2015, lawyers in school programs continue to develop in Victoria, especially in outer urban and regional areas. Community legal service providers and the Geelong Victoria Legal Aid office have placed lawyers in primary and secondary schools to break down barriers and build trust with a cohort of young people often overlooked by the legal system. As a consequence, the Victorian School Lawyer Reference Group was formed last year, with a push by interstate legal centres to make it a national group.

The reference group was set up to develop and strengthen the school lawyer model with a longer term goal to see the program in all relevant schools across Victoria. Another function of the group is a learning network to share ideas, challenges and resources.

Mid-term evaluation of WEstjustice's School Lawyer Project at The Grange P-12 College demonstrates the success of creating an education-justice partnership in local schools. Staff at the school described high levels of respect for the school lawyer Vincent Shin among students, which has meant word has spread that he is helpful and trustworthy. One

counsellor reported that the lawyer has engaged students who ordinarily would not be referred for counselling, and subsequently referred them to her. The evaluation has also shown the importance of having the right sort of lawyer to deliver the program.

School lawyer Beth King is another example of an approachable lawyer employed by Darebin Community Legal Centre to work with teenagers on site at the Pavilion School. Located in Preston and Mill Park, the Pavilion provides alternative education for young people aged 12-20 who have been disengaged or excluded from mainstream education. Lawyers in school programs are also expanding across other alternative education and special needs schools. Angus Woodward (WEstjustice) and Cameron Bloye (Hume Riverina Community Legal Service) are piloting school lawyer projects in alternative schools, often engaging with large refugee populations, young mothers and students in out-of-home care. WEstjustice is piloting a similar program at Warringa Park School, working with students with intellectual disabilities.

Members of the Victorian School Lawyer Reference Group include Darebin, Flemington Kensington and Moonee Valley Community Legal Centres, Hume Riverina Community Legal Service, Springvale Monash Legal Service, Victoria Legal Aid, WEstjustice and Youth Law. **See Court on Camera p13.** ■

Shorna Moore is director of policy and community development at WEstjustice. She is the convenor of the Victorian School Lawyer Reference Group.

LOOKING TO HELP?

To find pro bono opportunities for your firm see www.justiceconnect.org.au/get-involved, which also manages the LIV's pro bono Legal Assistance Service.

For solicitors: talk to your pro bono coordinator or the person responsible for pro bono work at your firm or see www.fclc.org.au/cb_pages/careers_and_getting_involved.php.

For barristers: see www.vicbar.com.au/social-justice/pro-bono.

SELF-CARE PACKAGE

Harrowing experiences at work can have a lasting impact for lawyers – a new guide can help.

The Australian Pro Bono Centre has launched Client management and self-care – a guide for pro bono lawyers, which is available free on its website. The guide is a resource to help train lawyers involved in pro bono work and people across the legal assistance sector.

Working with clients who are experiencing disadvantage, illness or hardship requires specialised client management skills, which are not always developed in a commercial practice. Pro bono clients may be experiencing disadvantage or marginalisation through a range of social, financial or personal barriers.

The guide provides information to help lawyers communicate effectively with clients, assess the client's legal capacity, obtain clear instructions and give comprehensive, easy-to-understand advice. It educates lawyers about cultural awareness and how to best work with interpreters. It also gives lawyers a better understanding of key indicators of common mental health issues so they can provide appropriate support and assist clients who threaten to harm themselves or others.

Pro bono lawyers are regularly exposed to confronting material and tragic circumstances. Acting for a client who has been through serious injury, illness or trauma, domestic or family abuse, homelessness or sexual assault, can be a harrowing and emotionally challenging experience for lawyers that can have a lasting impact. The guide creates awareness of the risks of compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma

and burnout. It also discusses the potential for certain matters or clients to trigger an emotional response in lawyers and suggests ways to identify and manage signs and symptoms of strain in themselves and colleagues.

The guide provides role play scenarios to help lawyers put their training into practice. It includes mental health services cards to support the debriefing process for lawyers following a difficult conversation or matter, and for clients who may benefit from a referral to support services.

The guide is a collaboration between Sparke Helmore Lawyers, Henry Davis York, Clayton Utz and McCabes Lawyers, with substantial input from across the legal assistance sector, other law firms and experts in mental health. ■

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