

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd

Newsletter: October 2004



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Congratulations Mr Alf Bamblett



The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited (VALS) congratulates Mr Alf Bamblett, Member of the Board of Directors, who was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Deakin University on 26 October 2004. Mr Bamblett was awarded a Doctor of Laws in recognition of his advocacy in Aboriginal Affairs over the last thirty years. VALS thanks Mr Bamblett for his contribution to VALS as a Board Member on various occasions over a number of years. Mr Bamblett is well respected by staff at VALS and the Indigenous Australian community.

Alf Bamblett and Wendy Brabham (Director of Deakin University Institute of Koorie Education)

Staffing Update

VALS thanks Ms Leah Billeam for her service over the last two years as Family Law Solicitor. Ms Billeam's position was seconded from Victoria Legal Aid (CLA) and she will return to work at VLA in Preston as a Duty Lawyer. The secondment arrangement between VALS and VLA is ongoing. VALS welcomes Ms Sarah Rozenbes who took over Ms Billeam's position and commenced work as Family Law Solicitor on 25 October 2004.

Plans to Tender Out Legal Services for Indigenous Australians are Going Ahead

The plan to tender out legal services for Indigenous Australians was made a certainty when the Liberal Party was re-elected into Government. The Request of Tender will be released in November 2004.

Damages for Assault by Police - Update

As previously reported in the July 2004 Newsletter, on 31 May 2004 His Honour Judge Campbell handed down a Judgment in favour of a VALS client assaulted by police, Awarding him \$71,000.00 Damages. The Judge found against three Defendant Police Officers and apportioned part of the liability to the State of Victoria. Taking interest into account, in August 2004 the client received Damages totaling \$89,426.00 from Victoria Police.

Home Truths Conference: Stop Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence a National Challenge (15-17 September 2004)

Ms Terrie Stewart (Member of Board) and Ms Greta Jubb (Research Officer) presented a paper titled 'Intervention in Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Experienced by Indigenous Australians' at the Home Truths Conference on 16 September 2004.

VALS argued that the justice system is in many respects failing Indigenous Australians experiencing family violence and sexual assault. VALS is not advocating the decriminalisation of family violence and sexual assault. However, VALS calls for the creation of space for intervention in family violence and sexual assault that:

- Is based on an Indigenous Australian community led approach or involves the Indigenous Australian community;
- Provides alternatives to the legal justice system that operate either in a stand alone capacity to the legal justice system, work in conjunction with the legal justice system, or both.

Child Protection Reforms - Update

On 8 October, Mr Frank Guivarra (CEO) presented a paper at the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Child Abuse Conference on proposed legislative changes to the Child Protection System by the Department of Human Services (DHS). VALS endorses the title of the conference, 'Families are Forever: Build Them Strong!' Mr Guivarra also presented the paper at the Aboriginal Community Consultation with DHS (13 October 2004), facilitated by the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association. VALS argued that the DHS should make only urgent and minimal legislative change until collaborative partnerships and more early intervention initiatives have been introduced.

VALS is in the process of drafting a submission in response to the DHS 'Protecting Children: Ten Priorities for Children's Wellbeing and Safety in Victoria - Technical Options Paper'.

Victorian Government Response to the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report

The Government released the 'Victorian Government Response to the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report' (Government Response) on 11 October 2004. However, the Government Response does not reflect a commitment to funding emergency accommodation for Indigenous Australians fleeing family violence. VALS urges you to lobby the Government to respond to criticisms that the Government Response does not go far enough and more refuges or safe houses are needed for Indigenous Australians. VALS has drafted a proforma letter that is available on the website.

Up coming Events

Keys for community: Opening the door to your rights

'Keys for Community: Opening the Door to Your Rights' will be presented on 30 November and 1 December 2004 at Shepparton and Echuca. The following agencies will deliver presentations and link Indigenous Australians with their service: Office of the Public Advocate,

Energy and Water Ombudsman, Victorian Ombudsman, Consumer Affairs Victoria, and Dispute Settlement Centre.

Share The Knowledge Day

VALS staff will attend the 'Share the Knowledge Day' at Drouin on 18 November 2004. 'Share the Knowledge Day' is a mini-expo and an opportunity to learn about and meet service providers.

Vacant Position

Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer

The due date for applications for the position of Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer has been amended. The correct date is Friday 19th November 2004. For further information, contact the Victoria Police Aboriginal Advisory Unit (9247 5245).

Indigenous Women's Justice Forum

VALS is planning to hold an Indigenous Women's Justice Forum in February 2005. The following topics will be discussed at the forum: family violence, sexual assault and child protection. Further information will be published in the VALS November 2004 newsletter.

Contact Details

If you require information about the contents of this newsletter or wish to subscribe to our mailing list, please contact VALS. Previous newsletters are available on the VALS website