

**Federation of
Community Legal Centres
Annual Report 2002-2003**

coordinating committee report

The Coordinating Committee was elected in September following Victoria's successful hosting of the National Community Legal Centres Conference.

The role of the Coordinating Committee and indeed the role and direction of the Federation were topics of debate over the past year. To facilitate the development of a strategic plan for the Federation, a consultant was employed. The Committee developed a number of short-term strategic goals to ensure the Secretariat Staff and the Working Groups were active and effective.

Strategic Plan

The Strategic Planning process was funded by Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) and well supported by member Centres. The consultation process produced vigorous debate and ideas were brought forward and aired. A number of issues papers were written by staff of Centres to promote discussion. The Planning Advisory task group worked constructively to assist the consultant and helped promote member interest in the project. The final Strategic Plan Report's directions and key findings were endorsed by the membership. The Committee extends thanks to the consultant Helen Carr, the Planning Advisory Group and all the people who made time to participate in the Strategic Plan process.

Policy Development

The Federation attempted to influence and made submissions about a range of policy and law reform issues. The work was done within the Secretariat, by Working Groups and also individual Centres. This work is outlined in other sections of the Annual Report but the Coordinating Committee would like to acknowledge the extensive work and experience the Working Groups bring together in reports, submissions and media releases. This work is extraordinarily valuable as is the effective collaboration between the secretariat staff, Working Groups and the Membership.

The Federation was extremely fortunate to recruit Dr Deborah Kirkwood to the position of Policy Officer in 2002. We were also fortunate to employ experienced CLC worker Jill Richardson to conduct the disability audit and ex-federation policy worker Sally Smith to work on the Justice Statement policy and the Senate Inquiry into Legal Aid.

Damien Lawson's work in 2002 (which was subsequently taken up by Peter Noble) in relation to the Peace Network and the ASIO Bill deserves special mention. So does the work of Simone Elias and Jen Anderson who drafted a new parental leave policy to cover the secretariat staff. The Coordinating Committee also organised a meeting of management committee members to advance the process of the second stage of the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA).

In 2002 the Federation developed policy in relation to the State Government's Probono Tendering proposals. The Federation worked through Voluntas (a Law Foundation supported policy forum) to refine this policy and it is positive to report that the State Government adopted positions very similar to those that the Federation advocated. It was also positive that the review of the Legal Practice Act has responded to many of the issues put by the Federation.

Priorities and projects

The activities and priorities of the Coordinating Committee are to a significant extent shaped by the projects and issues which are already in place when the year commences. In this regard the projects were:

- A policy development kit
- A VLA funded Federation website
- VLA funded access to an electronic legal library
- Implementation of the Professional Indemnity Insurance (P.I.I.) Cross Check
- Introduction of a National Risk Management Manual
- A Federation wide Disability Services audit

Coordinating Committee/Secretariat Priorities

The Coordinating Committee and Secretariat Staff also developed short-term objectives, which were subsequently endorsed by members. These objectives were: -

- State Conference before the end of June 2003
- To organise regular meetings with key stakeholders to build knowledge and the capacity for collaborative action
- Have input to the development of the Department of Justice's Justice Vision
- Review Secretariat priorities to ensure that the workload was manageable and work arising from the Strategic Plan was achievable

State Conference

The State Conference in June was well attended and the Conference Dinner was over subscribed. Long serving volunteers at Centres were acknowledged by being presented with a certificate of appreciation in recognition of their outstanding contributions to CLCs over many years.

Valuable work was done at the Conference in relation to the Strategic Plan, the Justice Statement and other policy and skill development workshops.

Michelle Predika (North Melbourne) and Jen Anderson (Job Watch) were the architects and organisers of this extremely inexpensive and successful State Conference.

Key Stakeholders

The Coordinating Committee adopted portfolios in relation to key stakeholders in order to increase our knowledge of issues in particular sectors and to share around the workload. Where possible the Coordinating Committee member attended stakeholder meetings with the Executive Officer or Policy officer.

Lee Archer resigned from the Committee in June when she took up a non-CLC position. Lee made a great contribution to three CLC's over about eight years and to the Coordinating Committee. One of the projects initiated a couple of years ago which Lee worked hard on and reached fruition just before she left was for CLC workers to have access to a counseling and debriefing service. This has been well supported by Victoria Legal Aid.

Secretariat Staff and Committee Representatives

The Secretariat Staff deserve a special mention and thanks for their work and commitment to the many tasks that come with being a peak body for a diverse group of Centres. Thanks go to Marie Collard, Liz McKeag, Deborah Kirkwood and Ian Horrocks, the other project workers and volunteers. Also special thanks to the members who represent the Federation on committees of other organisations.

The Coordinating Committee

coordinating committee members

2002-2003

Jen Anderson (Job Watch)

Lee Archer (Werribee Legal Service) - resigned June 2003

Gillian Dallwitz (Women's Legal Service Vic) - resigned October 2002

Simone Elias (Flemington/Kensington CLC)

Robin Inglis (Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service)

Neil Longmore (The Legal Centre - Warrnambool)

Mishelle Predika (North Melbourne Legal Service)

Helen Yandell (Western Suburbs Legal Service)

the federation secretariat report

It has been a busy and industrious year for the Federation Secretariat as we have worked to promote the activities and philosophies of the Community Legal Centre (CLC) sector. We have strived to make the Secretariat more effective and efficient in providing services to members through working closely with members on a broad range of policy issues.

The Federation is the peak body for what are now 47 member Centres across Victoria! We are delighted to welcome the new Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service as a Federation member. The Federation Secretariat provides information and support to all of its members and works to facilitate communication and collaboration between Centres.

The Secretariat has responded to an increasing number of requests for information about legal services from the community. It has also responded to ongoing requests for information, feedback on legislation and policy reforms, representation and consultation from government, other organisations and community groups. The diversity and range of issues and policy areas we respond to, and engage with, is astronomical. It is our role to facilitate and support CLCs work on the issues which members identify as priorities.

The key projects for the secretariat over the past year have included:

- Federation Strategic Planning Process
- The Website Project
- Electronic Library
- Counselling Services for members
- Professional Indemnity Insurance (Cross Check) Project
- National and State CLC conferences
- Legal Practice Regulation
- Pro Bono Policy
- Pro Bono Secondment
- Justice Statement
- Law reform and legal policy development
- Disability Audit Project
- Electronic Referral Database
- Human Rights Dossier
- Relationship building with key stakeholders and government
- State funding submission

The Federation Strategic Plan was a major process and a fruitful one. The majority of members participated, providing a great opportunity to discuss the work of CLCs and the significance of what we do. The discussions were affirming of our values and philosophies and enabled us to explore new ideas and structures. We are grateful to VLA for providing funding and the consultant Helen Carr, who worked closely with both Coord and Members to prepared the Strategic Plan Report. The four key areas of the plan have been endorsed by the membership:

- Federation Capacity
- Sector Development
- Justice Initiatives
- Federation Profile

A task group worked on issues which required further consideration. We are now able to move into the implementation phase of the plan which will enhance the Federation's processes and effectiveness.

Services to Members

This year the Secretariat has been involved in the provision of much needed services for members. Centres can now access online electronic library services which have been made available through Butterworths with the

support of Victoria Legal Aid. We have also finalised an agreement with the OSA Group to provide counselling and debriefing services to members, again with valuable support from VLA. Given the difficult nature of CLC work and our challenging work conditions this service will be very valuable.

Website

We are thrilled that the Federation website is finally coming to fruition with the availability of funding from the State Government. The website task group which comprises Elsje van Moorst, Sam Biondo and Ian Horrocks has employed consultants to develop the website and it will soon be up and running.

Conferences

The National Conference of Community Legal Centres in Melbourne in 2002 and the State Conference at Trades Hall in 2003 were exciting and busy times for the Secretariat. The conferences have been a great way to bring the sector together and to inform each other about our work and the diverse issues that concern us. Marie Collard did a great job managing the finances for both conferences. Furthermore Marie has been wonderful at keeping all the finances of the Secretariat running smoothly over the past year.

Law Reform and Policy Development

Sally Smith left the Secretariat role as Policy Officer after having her baby and Debbie Kirkwood is now in that role. Sally and Debbie have promoted law reform and legal policy development in the Federation. They worked closely with Working Groups on a broad range of issues (outlined in the policy officer report). As the peak body of legal centres in Victoria it is vital that the Federation has input into law reform and policy development and draws on the experiences of our clients and the communities with which we work, as well as our combined expertise in a variety of areas of law and criminal justice issues. We also seek to keep member centres informed about these issues and facilitate and support law reform and policy work that is undertaken by members.

The Justice Arena

The Secretariat has worked to ensure the Federation has input into developments in the justice arena in Victoria. Robin Inglis (Coordinating Committee Member), Ian Horrocks, Sally Smith and Debbie Kirkwood have been working towards the upcoming Department of Justice's 10-year vision for justice. They have met with government and other stakeholders on this issue and Sally has written an issues paper to the Department of Justice.

The Secretariat has also overseen and contributed to the State Funding Submission for CLCs. We worked on the Review of Legal Practice Regulation and made submissions to government on pro bono policy. The Federation monitors and evaluates the impact of changes in the justice arena.

Relationship Building

The Secretariat and the Coordinating Committee (Coord) have worked together to build our relationships with key stakeholders. Coord members

have been allocated portfolios and together with the Executive Officer or Policy Officer (depending on which stakeholder) have established regular meetings with stakeholders such as Victoria Legal Aid, Department of Justice, Victorian Law Reform Commission, Victorian Council of Social Services, the Victorian Law Institute and the Victorian Law Foundation.

Program Development identified the need to build relationships between CLCs and Members of Parliament. Liz McKeag and Debbie Kirkwood worked with Program Development to allocate CLCs to all State Members of Parliament. Program Development will now provide information and ideas to CLCs about ways to build relationships with those politicians.

Federation Projects

The Secretariat has enjoyed having a number of project workers on board over the year. Jill Richardson completed the 'Disability Audit Project' and was a great asset to the Secretariat team during her time with us. Annie Nash beamed her radiant light on the Secretariat while she organised the 2002 National Conference. Steve Womersley commenced working patiently with us on the website project. We are fortunate to have had Sally Smith continue her valuable work on a casual basis.

The unending demands and requests on the Federation are handled well and professionally by the Secretariat Staff. Liz McKeag, our Administrator, has done a great job responding to the multitude of calls and inquiries received each day. Ian Horrocks, as Executive Officer, strived to ensure that he has been accessible to all members to discuss any matter as it arises. Ian has overseen and been involved in all the projects of the Federation Secretariat. Ian was instrumental in establishing an electronic database for the Secretariat to access referral information to CLCs. We are grateful to Scott Baldwin, a volunteer, who developed the database and entered the data. This database has increased our efficiency in providing legal centre referrals to the community.

Coordinating Committee

We would like to acknowledge the commitment and hard work of the Coordinating Committee who manage the work of the Secretariat. Coord have put in extensive time and energy to oversee the Strategic Planning Process and to assist, direct and support the work of the Secretariat. It is a thankless task so we would like to extend our warm and heartfelt thanks to you all and your Management Committees who permit you to participate on the Committee. Without this work, the Secretariat would not be able to function.

We enjoy the unique and diverse issues we work on and the amazing, hard working and generous people in CLCs we have the pleasure to work with. We look forward to a progressive, productive and collaborative year ahead.

Secretariat Staff
Federation of Community Legal Centres

policy officer report

The Federation of Community Legal Centres has continued to engage in law reform and social justice issues in a global climate which has seen increasing fear of diversity and punitive responses to people experiencing disadvantage. The detention and treatment of refugee and asylum seekers, the introduction of draconian counter terrorism legislation, the war on Iraq and cuts to community organisations are among some of the threats to human rights which have influenced our work over the last year and which remind us how important our work is. The Federation has worked collaboratively with a wide range of non-government organisations in responding to issues.

Input to Government Policy

The Federal and State Governments have sought the Federation's input into numerous inquiries. At a Federal level we have made written submissions and been involved in consultations with various inquiries such as the Senate Inquiry into the Human Rights Commission Bill, the Senate Inquiry into the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Legislation Amendment (Terrorism) Bill, the Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry, the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General and Australasian Police Ministers Council Joint Working Group report on Cross Border Investigative Powers for Law Enforcement and the Senate Inquiry into Legal Aid and Access to Justice.

At a State level, various government departments have sought representation and input from the Federation including the State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Violence Against Women, the Volatile Substances Protocols Advisory Committee and the Corrections Victoria Women Prisoners Policy Committee. At the CLC State Conference this year the Attorney-General Rob Hulls said that he values and supports CLCs being outspoken and acting as a thorn in the side of government. We will endeavour to oblige him.

Federation Working Groups

Continuing the work of Sally Smith, the focus of the Policy Officer has been on law reform and supporting the policy work of Working Groups. The level of expertise, the hard work and commitment of working groups is amazing. The contributions they make to law reform and social justice are immeasurable. While it is not possible to be involved in everything that working groups do we have prioritised key and pressing issues which working groups are actively engaged in such as sexual offences, home detention, volatile substances, changes to family law, human rights violations and police responses to family violence. We have worked on a broad range of social justice issues such as the production and distribution of over 200 No War t-shirts for the peace rally.

In addition there have been some issues, not covered by working groups, which have required a Federation response. The State and Commonwealth Counter Terrorism Legislation was a cause for great concern this year and there was a need to follow up the tireless work that Damien Lawson did in this

area. Peter Noble, Claire Mahon, Helen Yandell and myself formed a short-term terrorism laws task group. In consultation and collaboration with a variety of non-government organisations and community groups we wrote submissions on the proposed legislation, sent letters to all Senators, provided updates and information to the 400 people on Damien's terror laws email list and sent out numerous media releases. We held a successful media conference at the Law Institute with speakers from the Islamic Council, Amnesty International, Trades Hall Council, Federation of CLCs and the Law Institute. After much debate and amendment the ASIO Bill finally passed and now we must wait and monitor what impact the increased powers for ASIO will have.

The Federation has established quarterly combined meetings for Working Groups to bring representatives together to discuss law reform and policy issues and to look at ways to work collaboratively.

The law reform and legal policy newsletter has been distributed to all CLCs regularly and increasingly to external groups and journalists who have expressed interest. This has been a good way to keep people informed about the law and policy reform work that legal centres are doing and current justice issues.

Justice Statement

The Department of Justice in Victoria is developing a 10-year vision for justice. It is important that the Federation has input into this significant initiative. We held a workshop of this issue at the State Conference and have documented our ideas and comments. The Federation have been involved in meetings and consultations with the government and other stakeholders about the 'Justice Statement'. Sally Smith prepared a discussion paper which has been submitted to the Department of Justice.

The Federation also participated on the Pro Bono Secondment Pilot project, with substantial assistance from VLA saw a number of very successful 6-month pro bono placements of solicitors from law firms into CLCs. We thank VLA and the firms for their generous support of this Pilot program

Pro-bono Policy

There have been significant developments in the area of pro bono over the last year with the establishment of the governments panel firms required to undertake pro bono work as part of their contract arrangements with government departments. Drawing on the Federation's pro bono policy and continuing consultations with organisations involved in the Pro Bono Policy Council, we prepared a submission to the Department of Justice's Government Legal Services Panels Pro Bono Commitments Issues Paper.

Law and Policy Reform Training

Several training sessions were held this year to resource law reform and legal policy work including two media workshops, organised in collaboration with the Victoria Law Foundation, and lobbying and Freedom of Information Act workshops. Additional media and lobbying training was held at the State

Conference. In Law Week we held a community forum at Trades Hall about Community Legal Centres and the relationship between casework and systemic policy work.

The need for such trainings and requests from both within CLCs and outside organisations led to the Federation's involvement in the ChangeXchange. This is a group comprising CLCs, tertiary institutions and law firms which seeks to address the need to reinvigorate activism and campaigning and to facilitate information exchange and skill sharing in Victoria. We are looking at ways to provide forums on a variety of issues including advocacy, lobbying, working with the media, campaign strategies and public interest law. The Reichstein Foundation has funded the establishment phase of the project, which is now underway. A social change video is being produced in collaboration with SKA TV.

Federation Representation

I have had the opportunity to represent the Federation on several committees: the Victorian Law Reform Commission Defences to Homicide Advisory Panel, the Law Institute's Administrative Law and Human Rights Section Bill of Rights Committee and the State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Sexual Assault.

As representative on the Homicide Advisory Panel, I organised a forum for CLCs and other interested groups to provide information and enable discussion about defences to homicide law reform options. Researchers from the Victorian Law Reform Commission, Jamie Walvisch and Siobhan McCann, spoke at the forum and gave an overview of the Commission's work on this reference and the various options for reform.

The Federation has worked closely with the Law Reform Commission on a number of their references and participated in many of their consultations and forums. With the appointment of Judith Peirce (from Brimbank Community Centre) as Commissioner at the Law Reform Commission, overseeing the Crimes Family Violence Act Reference, we look forward to working even more closely with the Commission on this reference.

Several volunteers have assisted with legal research and submission preparation. Thanks to Cherie Leatham, Bridie Andriske and Nive Srikantha.

There is a never-ending stream of issues, inquiries and reviews, which we seek to respond to as a means of improving access to justice. Our collaborative approach within CLCs and with other organisations enables us to contribute in a broad range of areas and in diverse ways. The need for social change and law reform is as great as ever. Through law reform and policy work we endeavour to advocate on behalf of CLC clients and their communities.

Debbie Kirkwood
Policy Officer

federation secretariat staff members

2002-2003

Ian Horrocks
Executive Officer

Sally Smith
Policy Officer
(August 2002 – June 2003 LWOP)

Deborah Kirkwood
Policy Officer
(Sept 2002 -)

Marie Collard
Financial Administrator

Liz McKeag
Administrator

PROJECT WORKERS

Annie Nash
Jill Richardson
Caroline Lambert
Caz Pellow
Kerrin Panlook
Min Goh

VOLUNTEERS

Scott Baldwin
Cherie Leatham
Bridie Andriske
Suzy Rule
Nive Srikantha
Min Goh

working group reports

access to interpreters working group

In the 2002/03 financial year funding was again made available to Community Legal Centres (CLCs) from the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Justice for the use of interpreters in Centres.

This funding enables non-English speaking clients access to legal information/education within their local communities at no cost to the client. These funds are also used for translation of client's documents and the provision of Auslan interpreters for clients who have a hearing impairment.

The Working Group has developed a "survival kit" for interpreter and translation usage in Centres. It was launched at the State Conference in June 2003 and Centres will find this publication a valuable resource. The kit explains such mysteries as the difference between TIS (Translating & Interpreting Services) and VITS (Victorian Translating & Interpreting Services) and how to contact these services, hints when using an interpreter and pro-forma forms to assist with the monitoring of expenditure and bookings within each legal Centre.

Thanks go to Suzy Fox and Carmen Tommasi for the work involved in putting the kit together. The group could not function without the support, enthusiasm and commitment of this small-dedicated band of people. The Group would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Nona San Pedro from the Tenants Union of Victoria for sharing her valuable expertise at the State Conference workshop for Interpreters.

The role of the Group is primarily administrative and tasks include allocation of funds to Centres, developing policies and procedures, monitoring usage of interpreters and dealing with enquiries from Centres in relation to interpreting needs.

Once again our thanks go to the Federation Secretariat for their ongoing support and assistance.

Carol McNair
Footscray Community Legal Centre

child support working group

Members of the Group met quarterly to keep up-to-date with policies and procedures of the Child Support Agency and to monitor legislation, implementation and related matters, such as the availability to request a waiver of the fee for obtaining a birth certificate. Members of the Group include child support solicitors and workers from Community Legal Centres and Victoria Legal Aid.

Our activities for this period include a talk by a Senior Investigative Officer from the Ombudsman's Office, who explained what kind of information they were looking for when investigating a case, what powers they have and don't have, and the main kinds of complaints they receive about the Child Support Agency (CSA) and Centrelink.

Law Reform work we are undertaking includes trying to delete the necessity to object to CSA before we can go to Court for a paternity test order. We are also requesting Victoria Legal Aid change their policy so that they grant legal aid for paternity tests whether or not the father is unemployed, or employed and will not pay for the test in the first instance.

Media articles are discussed and the impact on child support of proposed legislation, such as the rebuttable presumption of joint custody.

The members of the Group gain support from each other and information to become efficient and achieve excellence in child support matters.

*Katrina Haller
Peninsula Community Legal Centre*

children and youth issues Working group

The Working Group was very active over the year and was involved in the following issues: -

Independent Persons Program

Combined with the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues and YACVic to drive a proposal to establish a statewide network of trained and supported independent persons to support young people during police interviews. This program ultimately received pilot funding for 18 months and is about to commence across four local government areas and one regional area.

Children's Commissioner Campaign

Worked alongside YACVic and other agencies to establish the Coalition for a Children's Commissioner in Victoria that is currently advocating for the establishment of a youth and children's rights focused body.

Chroming

Made a written submission into the Inquiry into the Inhalation of Volatile Substances run by the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee. We opposed any increase in existing police powers of arrest or detention and any criminalisation of chroming. Unfortunately, legislation was ultimately passed that gave police powers of search and seizure for volatile substances and associated implements, and provided a 'civil apprehension' power to detain young people affected by chroming. Members of the Working Group are represented on the Volatile Substance Abuse Protocols Advisory Committee to develop protocols in relation to the implementation of the new legislation.

State CLC Conference - Making Your CLC Real For Young People

Presented a workshop at the State CLC Conference on ways that CLC's can better engage young people, best work for young people as clients, provide community legal education programs to young people, involve young people as effective and meaningful participants, and secure youth specific legal service funding.

PERIN Fines

Compiled useful information and precedents about dealing with PERIN fines and posted it on the Youthlaw website to enable young people to better deal with these fines themselves.

Responses to Family Violence

Represented in the Family Violence and Children's Issues subcommittee of the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence. This forms part of the development of a best practice framework for an integrated response to family violence in Victoria.

National CLC Conference – Models of Youth Participation

Presented a workshop at the 2002 National Conference to present various models of youth participation to encourage CLC's to better engage and involve young people in the running of their services.

Gavin Green

St Kilda Legal Service

community legal education workers group

Last year was a particularly busy time for the Community Legal Education Working Group (CLEWS). The 2002 National CLC Conference was held in Melbourne and the Working Group assisted in organising and convening the National CLEWS Network and conducted three workshops for the Conference: - 'Putting the Community Back into CLCs', Best Practice Development 1 & 2 and 'CLE Relax You're Soaking In It'.

Follow up from the National CLEWS Network was for all states to comment on a discussion paper drafted at the previous national conference. This paper looks at developing principles for joint community legal education projects between Legal Aid Commissions and CLC's. CLEWS have had discussion on the topic and will feed back to the National CLEWS Network this coming national conference.

CLEWS contributed to the development of an evaluation form for the participants attending the 2003 National Conference.

Current and ongoing projects: -

- 'Young Mum's Kit' - the Working Group is pursuing funding avenues to assist with this project
- Working with Access to Interpreters Working Group to develop a CLC information brochure to be translated into several languages
- Re-establish the CLE register
- Look at IT opportunities to enhance CLE activities i.e. Federation website
- Look at current CLC manuals and training for volunteers
- Develop a CLEWS kit for new workers

The Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence (SSCRFV) has been a joint initiative of Victoria Police and the Office of Women's Policy. A number of sub committees have been established through the SSCRFV and the Federation is represented on a number of these groups. Karen Milgrom was nominated and accepted as the CLEWS representative to participate in the Professional and Community Education Sub-Committee.

Last year Publisher training sessions were provided for workers. Funds were also obtained to buy a data projector, which is at the Secretariat and is available to all workers to assist with their CLE sessions. CLEWS will continue to provide opportunities for CLE workers to develop publishing skills.

The CLEWS Working Group brings together a range of creative and enthusiastic people who are always prepared to take on a new challenge. The Working Group aims to provide support, encouragement and inspiration to CLE workers and develop innovative CLE projects.

Thanks to Jill Richardson for her contribution to CLEWS as a member and co-convenor. Thanks to the members of the Group for your creativity and commitment to the Working Group.

Flora Culpan
Broadmeadows Community Legal Service

corrections working group

2002-2003 - not a bad year for the Corrections Working Group (CWG). The positives have been that we have identified certain long-term strategies and direction. We have decided to make ourselves visible and relevant and have called for regular meetings with government, politicians and contracted prison service providers. We have also resolved to go in hard for the establishment of a Centre for the Human Rights of Imprisoned People.

"The law will punish a man or woman who steals the goose from the hillside, but lets the greater robber loose who steals the hillside from the goose."(Anon, 1700's)

The following law reform activities kept us busy throughout the year:

- **Home Detention:** Members of CWG fought against introduction of home detention and won some changes to the proposed legislation. Congratulations to all who worked on that.
- **Strip-searching:** We are supporting a half on half off type strip search so the prisoner is not totally nude at any time as a first step towards the ultimate goal of abolishing the practice of strip-searching.
- **Healthcare** provision is still a colossal and unresolved issue. The Director of the Prison Healthcare Supervisory Unit has been a great help; he has intervened successfully upon our request in individual cases. Wider change is obviously going to be much more difficult. To that end, we have met with the health service provider, Pacific Shores Health, and are hoping to be able to increase accountability as a precursor to an overhaul of the current systems.
- Participated in Corrections Commissioner's forum on the provision of pre-release education, training and employment for indigenous prisoners.
- Put in a submission on the Victims of Crime Register.
- Put in a submission to the Senate Select Committee Inquiry into Poverty and Hardship in Australia. Virtually all the other submissions dealt with the "working poor". Our submission made the connections between poverty, gender, race and imprisonment.
- Have applied for philanthropic \$\$ to fund a worker who will do research to prepare a submission to Government and lobby for the establishment of a Centre for the Human Rights of Imprisoned People.
- Have been invited to sit on the Women's Correctional Services Advisory Committee. This is a new body and hopefully our participation will achieve good results.

- Have started meetings with Labor women politicians to bring the issue of women's imprisonment to the forefront of their agendas.

Thanks to each member of the Working Group, our colleagues and friends both inside and outside the prison for a great year.

*Arati Vidyasagar
Darebin Community Legal Centre*

disability working group

The 2002/2003 year was a busy one for the Disability Working Group (DWG), albeit without a formal schedule of meeting dates and times.

During the period, the DWG primarily worked as the reference group for both the Federation's CLC Disability Access Project and the Sexual Offences Project of the Disability Discrimination Legal Service as well as assisting in the preparation and delivery of the NACLC Disability Rights Network Meeting prior to the 2002 National Conference in September 2002.

human rights working group

Right Off: The Attack on Human Rights in Australia

The HRWG began the year by finalising its major project, a 130 page report entitled "*Right Off: The Attack on Human Rights in Australia*", in early September 2002.

The report outlines successive Australian governments' move away from active support for and participation in the human rights treaty monitoring system, toward a vigorous practice of human rights violations, and disengagement from the U.N human rights treaty system. The report documents Australian governments' responses to concerns raised by U.N treaty bodies concerns and criticisms in respect of Australia's obligations under six international treaties:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- Convention Against Torture, and other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Punishment
- Convention on the Rights of the Child

The report reveals the particular antagonism of the Commonwealth Government (under John Howard) to its international human rights obligations

and to the U.N treaty system. State governments did not escape criticism either.

The Reichstein Foundation, through a private donor, provided a small grant to the HRWG to employ a Research Co-ordinator and to initially publish around 200 copies. The HRWG thanks:

- Reichstein Foundation and Anonymous Donor for their support
- Caroline Lambert, Research Co-ordinator and co-author
- Researchers and authors: Chris Atmore (St Kilda Legal Service), Kylie Smith (RMIT Union Legal Service), Charandev Singh (Brimbank CLC) and
- Flemington and Kensington CLC for the use of its premises, computers and coffee for the “overnighters”.

Unfortunately, HRWG has not the time, money or resources to publish further copies of “Right Off”, or to arrange translations into languages other than English, at this time.

ASIO powers

The HRWG made a written submission to the Senate Inquiry into the proposed extension of ASIO powers to detain and question persons suspected of having information about terrorism. Authors Damien Lawson (Western Suburbs LS) and Kate Allen (Consumer Credit LS) were invited to give oral evidence before the Inquiry in Melbourne in November 2002.

National Human Rights Register

HRWG organised training in the use of the National Human Rights Register for members of the Federation in August 2002. Liz Turner, from the Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace conducted the training, which gave participants a thorough introduction to human rights issues at a community level. In December 2002, a member of the HRWG helped launch the National Human Rights Register.

Human rights violations of any kind can now be documented on-line at:
<http://www.melbourne.catholic.org.au/ccjdp/>

Equal Opportunity training

Because CLCs are so under funded, it is often very difficult to undertake professional training in areas fundamental to our practices. However, the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria agreed to conduct training in anti-discrimination and equal opportunity law and complaint handling for members of the Federation, in August 2002, at a nominal cost. The training was well attended, especially by rural and regional CLCs.

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights

In November 2002, the HRWG assisted in the bringing together, for the first time, Victorian members of Australian Lawyers for Human Rights. Along with Julie Debeljak of the Monash University Castan Centre for Human Rights, Chris Maxwell of the Victorian Bar, and Simon Rice of ALHR (NSW) a

member of the HRWG spoke to a group of around 100 lawyers about human rights in the context of community law. Thanks to Siobhan McCann of ALHR for getting this forum up and running.

Lawyers for Peace Rally

In March 2003, a member of the HRWG was one of several speakers against Australia's involvement in the War in Iraq, at a rally of lawyers outside the Victorian Supreme Court. The rally attracted around 400 lawyers and was organised by the Federation of CLCs.

Simone Elias

Flemington/Kensington Community Legal Centre

professional standards committee

The year marked a period of transition and development in Victorian CLC's professional standards review systems. Difficulties were overshadowed by positive achievements and constructive trends. Two compulsory professional indemnity insurance scheme members' meetings were held, in September 2002 and May 2003. Centres continue to recognise the importance of participation in these meetings and the benefits to all Centres under the scheme. The second meeting saw the happy expansion of the standards committee, with three recruits joining existing members. It was slow in coming, but by year end most Centres had participated in the cross-check conducted for the first time in accordance with our new national scheme manual. The cross-check is really at the heart of the scheme and enables us to learn from and support each other. During the year we continued work on reform priorities in the area of professional regulation of CLC lawyers, obtaining helpful pro bono assistance from Howard Obst of Minter Ellison. The Department of Justice is now actively deciding upon necessary reforms. We look forward to another year of challenges and changes to enhance the standards and reputation of all community legal centres!

Nick Batten (North Melbourne Legal Service)

for Gary Sullivan

Chairperson, Professional Standards Committee

program development working group

State Budget Submission

The Federation employed Greg McConville to prepare a Budget submission to go to the State government. Greg produced a submission within a very tight timeline based on previous work and submissions and input from CLCs.

Key areas in the submission for funding were:

- CPI and wage increases
- Centres to have a minimum of three EFT workers
- Outreach to rural and regional areas with out CLCs

- Loadings for servicing rural and regional areas
- Support and training unit for the Federation
- Contingency funds
- Counselling and debriefing service
- Capital equipment fund

The submission was costed and sent to the government prior to the State elections. The “Lilac squad” was a sub group of the Program Development (PD) Working Group established to lobby around the submission. Representatives met with advisors of the Attorney General to advocate the proposals.

We were successful in securing increased funding for CPI and wages, some increased grants to under funded CLCs and access to the government debriefing service.

Lobbying workshop

In April we organised a very successful lobbying training workshop, attended by more than 25 people. The speakers at the workshop were: -

- Heather Horrocks, a former advisor to Federal and State Ministers and ALP organiser
- Rob Hudson, newly elected ALP MLA for Bentleigh and former Director of VCOSS
- Andrew McIntosh, Shadow Attorney General and Member for Kew
- Amanda George, experienced CLC lobbyist

We gained many good tips and insights into lobbying our local members and relationship building to improve awareness of the needs of and issues in the community.

Computer training

The PD group recognised that many centres needed IT training after receiving new computers and other equipment from government funding. A survey of CLCs needs was undertaken and VLA was approached to provide training in those areas identified. While the request to VLA was not successful, some training was provided in Microsoft Excel through the expertise of volunteers at the Environment Defenders Office.

Thanks to the following members of the Program Development Working Group: - Robin Inglis (VALS), Suzy Fox (St Kilda), Patricia Lauria (Eastern), Marcus Williams (Footscray), Elsje Van Moorst (Geelong), Helen Constas (Pensinsula), Lynise Pamment (Mental Health), Beth Mellick (EDO), Jenny Blakey (Fitzroy), Ian Horrocks and (for particular items) Debbie Kirkwood (both of the Secretariat).

Suzy was convenor until September and Jenny was convenor for the remainder of the year.

We did heaps and should congratulate ourselves!

*Jenny Blakey
Fitzroy Legal Service*

refugee and immigration working group

The Refugee and Immigration Working Group started meeting formally at the beginning of 2002. The Group agreed priorities for 2003 would include the following: -

1. Responding to urgent unmet legal needs of refugee and asylum seekers, including those holding temporary protection visas (TPVs)
2. Supporting TPV holders (Bridging, Humanitarian and East Timorese) including addressing their special needs and offering support to community groups who support TPV holders
3. Lobbying/law reform and policy development activities
4. Keeping refugee and immigration issues on the CLC agenda and working towards forming a National Network

During the year, the Group has pursued a range of projects, including: -

- Surveying all CLCs to identify services available for TPV holders and the level of interest in expanding services for TPV holders
- Holding a World Refugee Day half-day seminar, conducted in partnership with RMIT University Refugee and Asylum Seeker Project
- Raffle for Asylum Seekers Resource Centres
- Participation in Northern TPV Service Providers network
- Offering community legal education seminars at the Asylum Seekers Resource Centres

*Maria Pizzi
RMIT union Legal Service*

rural regional and remote network

The Rural, Regional and Remote Network (RRR) provides an opportunity for RRR centres to share ideas with respect to the provision of services to diverse geographical and cultural communities. The ability to source our communities is tested by the sheer size of our catchment areas. The network enables unique and successful modes of working with our communities in the areas of client work, community legal education and law reform to be shared and supported amongst the centres.

At the beginning of 2003, the network saw a change of convenor and we are grateful for the work undertaken by Bernadette Edmanson.

During the past 12 months, we met with specialist legal centres to discuss referral methods and joint projects for community education. The joint projects have been beneficial in providing links to specialist expertise and

raising the knowledge base of RRR centres. We also commenced a project to provide a generic poster with details of specialist centres and provision for the poster to be adapted for each RRR centre with their details. Much of the work is being undertaken by students at Geelong CLC.

The network has supported the establishment of a Rural Law Website by the Victoria Law Foundation and is looking forward to having further input into this initiative.

Members of the network have had input into various Working Groups and Federation activities, such as the Strategic Plan. They have also participated in the National Network and both the State and National Conferences.

Jane Anderson
Gippsland Community Legal Service

social security working group

The Social Security Working Group met six times in the last year. The group, whilst small, includes workers from Flemington-Kensington CLC, Youthlaw, Werribee CLC, Geelong Welfare Rights (based at Geelong CLC) and the Welfare Rights Unit. The Group alternates between meeting with staff from Victoria Legal Aid's (VLA's) "Social Security Clinic" to discuss case related issues and at the Federation to discuss 'law reform' type issues.

The major activity of the WG in the last year was to run a day long workshop for CLC and VLA staff in conjunction with VLA's Professional Education section on social security law issues. The workshop run in late February was a resounding success with over eighty people participating from across the sectors and the State.

The group wishes to acknowledge the hard work put into the Group by Lee Archer who was one of the major agitators for the resurrection of the Group. Lee's input will be missed and the group wish her well for the future.

The great majority of CLC clients are in receipt of some sort of social security payment and therefore the issues that affect social security are of vital importance to our clientele.

Peter Horbury
Welfare Rights Unit

violence against women and children

working group

This year has seen a number of positive developments in the area of government and police response to family violence. VAW&C has lobbied for the Federation to have representation on the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence (SSCRFV), which is an initiative of Victoria Police and the Office of Women's Policy. We are now represented on that committee and recognized as a valuable contributor to the issues of domestic violence, the legal system and its impact on women and children. This has led to our Working Group being represented on a number of other committees, which include the following:

- Flora Culpan - *Domestic Violence Court Reference Committee*
- Joanna Fletcher - *Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence (SSCRFV)*
- Debbie Kirkwood - *Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Sexual Assault*
- Melissa Morgan- *Violence in the Workplace Committee*
- Belinda Lo - *Men's Behaviour Change Program Pilot Project*
- Karen Milgrom - *Professional and Community Education Subcommittee of SSCRfV*

The Working Group has formed linkages with the Victorian Women's Refuges and Domestic Violence Services (VWRADVS) legal sub-group. We have had meetings with Magistrate Anne Goldsbrough and provided comments on the Magistrates Family Violence Protocols and Courtlink Orders. We are also working closely with the Federation's State Network of Intervention Order Court Support Services (SNIOCSS) to monitor court procedures. The proposed changes to the Crimes Family Violence Act have provided the Working Group with many opportunities to contribute our knowledge and experience to a wider community group.

VAW&C have also met with the Victorian Law Reform Commission in relation to the Commission's Sexual Offences Interim Report and Defences to Homicide. We anticipate that we shall be contributing to, and writing submissions on the proposed changes to the law once the Commission finalises its findings.

At last year's National Conference in Melbourne, the VAW&C conducted several workshops in relation to family violence, intervention orders and law reform.

Over the past year the Working Group has prepared submissions to the Inquiry into Crime in the Community, VLRC Sexual Offences Discussion paper and Inquiry into Child contact arrangements in the event of family separation ("presumption of joint custody")

In addition, we are currently working on the following issues:

- Review of Crimes Family Violence Act
- Meeting with representatives of the Children & Young People's working group to discuss overlap between youth and women's needs in relation

to domestic violence and the review of the Crimes (Family Violence) Act

- Magistrates Family Violence Protocols

We have had an extremely eventful past year and look forward to another busy year ahead. We thank the members of VAW&C for their passion and commitment to the myriad of issues related to violence against women and children

*Flora Culpan (Broadmeadows CLS) Co-Convenor
Belinda Lo (Brimbank CLC) Co-Convenor
Violence Against Women and Children Working Group*

federation representatives and nominees

law institute of victoria

For the past four years I have been actively committed to represent the sector and have served on the five-member executive of the Council since 2001 as Fifth Executive Member, Treasurer and during 2003 as Vice President.

In 2002 I chaired the Audit Committee (finances) and Membership Committees (member services and fees). In both capacities the Law Institute of Victoria (LIV) committed itself to the phased-in reduction of membership fees and improved services. On the table at present is the concept of significantly discounted membership by Centres of the LIV thus enabling each Centre to access the resources available through the LIV. Discounted Membership of LIV - designed at providing CLC lawyers with access to the Institute's resources such as library, discounted professional education, membership of well resourced sections and committees, as well as membership deals - excellent prices on mobile phones etc. The corollary is also that there are many avenues for Federation members to influence policy change through the LIV Committee structure.

A study of what the membership wants and what membership of the LIV means was conducted. The overwhelming response was to contribute to a meaningful profession and to be proud of the achievements of lawyers. Translating this into the day to day and improving the image of practicing lawyers remains as big a challenge as it has since the Middle Ages, but perhaps there are better tools around for this task today.

Avenues of representing the needs of the sector in policy making were undertaken through a number of Committees. These include participation in the Pro Bono Secondments Committee, which arose partly in response to the introduction by the State Government of the requirement of legal firms to commit resources to pro bono work to be eligible to participate on the Government's panel of lawyer. The Committee considers and seeks applications for placements of lawyers for six month full time secondments with specialist and generalist Centres and with VLA. The evaluation of the pilot is due to be completed shortly.

The Access to Justice Committee is principally concerned with pro bono and legal aid issues. The LIV has operated its own pro bono scheme for many years and in 2002 entered into an arrangement with PILCH for its administration. The Legal Assistance Scheme (LAS) joins the PILCH and Vic Bar schemes to provide an integrated pro bono scheme in Victoria.

Mandatory continuing legal education is on the way with the Attorney-General Rob Hulls flagging that unless the profession consider it, consider it done. This is in line with the eastern seaboard states and links into the work being done by law societies and the Law Council to provide for a workable model of a national profession. The mandatory CLE scheme is likely to be points based and likely to operate along similar lines to that of mandatory CLE for lawyers in NSW. It is not expected that compliance will be onerous and obviously there are opportunities for the Federation to take up in providing legal education for community sector lawyers.

As a Board member of PILCH in a CLC capacity, I have seen a sister Federation Member operate with an extremely high level of accountability and expertise, on a shoe string and without the comfort of ongoing funding.

Some of the issues which are particularly pertinent for the CLC sector include Practising Certificates and the introduction of new CLC Rules by the LIV, (or more properly the Victorian lawyers RPA Ltd). Pending the introduction of legislative changes (I understand these will be considered as part of the proposed amendments to the Legal Profession Act) the Federation and the LIV have both considered what is appropriate to protect CLC solicitors. During 2002 recommendations were made that CLC lawyers could practice with either a Corporate or a Principal Practising Certificate. This will remain the position until the introduction of amendments to the Legal Profession Practice Act. It has been proposed that a new category of practicing certificates for community legal centre lawyers ought to be introduced. However, I am aware that this is regarded by some Federation members as creating a potential for the creation of a second class practicing certificate. To provide certainty for CLC practitioners, until the introduction of an amended Act, the LIV introduced new practice rules, which came into operation in September 2002.

Regulation of the Profession

As at the time of writing the Attorney- General's decision regarding the model of regulation for the legal profession is imminent. The Federation and the LIV

originally took quite different views about an appropriate model. Movement on both sides has meant that the model proposed by both organisations is now very close. A proposal was made this year to substantially alter the Federation's position on the regulatory model, however a decision was taken at the Federation General Meeting in April 2003 not to alter the Federation's position.

Prosecutions

Concern at the length of time taken to bring prosecutions of solicitors led to changes in procedures between Victorian Police and the LIV regarding prosecutions. Overall there is no increase in the number of defaulting solicitors but there have been ever increasing delays in the investigation and charging of this group. The Police and the Fraud Squad have entered into a protocol to assist communication and tracking of the progress of prosecutions.

Being Vice-President has brought challenges (political and personal), many meetings, much reading, attending functions like the opening of the legal year and giving a reading at St Paul's. A first for this Welsh non-believer.

In an unexpected turn of direction in my professional life I have recently accepted an appointment as full time Commissioner at the Victorian Law Reform Commission to conduct the reference into the Crimes Family Violence Act. This appointment means that I have resigned from the Law Institute and Brimbank Community Centre. I will no longer be in a position to offer myself for election for President in 2004 and I am disappointed not to have the opportunity of representing the legal aid and community legal centre sectors as President as this is long overdue. Thank you to all members of the Federation who have supported and challenged me over the years I have spent in the sector and keep on challenging.

Judith Peirce

Brimbank Community Centre, Vice-President Law Institute Victoria, CLC and VLA Representative.

statewide steering committee to reduce family violence

Lack of coordination in the systems and services intended to address family violence has, for a long time, concerned workers in the domestic violence sector who have observed women and children "falling through the gaps". The Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence was established on 1 August 2002 with the aim of reducing and preventing family violence in Victoria by coordinating responses to family violence issues across government and non-government organisations. The Committee's work is occurring in the context of a number of other initiatives around family violence in Victoria, including the establishment of a Family Violence Division of the Magistrates Court and the upcoming Victorian Law Reform Commission review of the *Crimes (Family Violence) Act*. Together, these initiatives

represent a fantastic opportunity to make positive and practical changes for women and children in Victoria experiencing family violence.

The Statewide Steering Committee is co-chaired by the Victoria Police and the Office of Women's Policy and has representation from key government and non-government agencies including Victorian Community Council Against Violence, Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce, No to Violence, Royal Children's Hospital, Centre Against Sexual Assault Forum, Victorian Women's Refuges and Associated Domestic Violence Services, Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service, Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre (including country representation), the Childrens' Court, the Magistrates' Court, Department of Justice, Department of Human Services, and Department of Education and Training.

After considerable lobbying, the Federation of Community Legal Centres was invited to join the Committee in March 2003. Federation also has representatives on the committee's Codes of Practice Sub-Committee and Professional and Community Education Sub-Committee.

The Statewide Steering Committee's work since March 2003 has focused on the development of a Best Practice Framework for an Integrated Response to Family Violence. Discussion on the committee has been energetic and positive in the face of this very ambitious goal and it is hoped that the draft Framework will be available for consultation later this year. There is a great deal of motivation and goodwill among committee members and the organizations they represent to see this work, together with the other initiatives mentioned earlier, result in simpler and better systems and services for women and children experiencing family violence.

Joanna Fletcher
Women's Legal Service Victoria

victoria legal aid - community consultative committee

The Victoria Legal Aid Community Consultative Committee (VLA CCC) has continued to operate throughout 2002/2003, with the following membership:

The Hon Justice Cummins – Supreme Court
The Hon Judge RG Williams - County Court
Her Hon Justice Linda Dessau - Family Court of Australia
Mr Mark Woods - Solicitor
Ms Helen Constan - Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) Inc
Ms Wendy Taylor - Court Network
Dr David Neal - List W
Mr Fonda Gazi - Family Youth and Civil Division, VLA

Ms Fiona Hayes - Attorney General Chief of Staff
Mr Frank Guivarra - Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services
Mr Julian Gardner - Public Advocate
Mr Stephen Gianni - Brotherhood of St Lawrence
Mr Phillip Goldberg - Melbourne Magistrates Court

Having been elected as Federation's alternate delegate to the VLA CCC in 2002, I have attended three meetings at times that Helen Constas has been unable to attend. Although it was initially unclear whether I would be restricted to observer status only, the Committee has been happy to acknowledge that I have full speaking rights on behalf of Federation.

I attended my first meeting in the company of Ian Horrocks, when Federation had been requested to prepare a presentation entitled "The Year in Review in Community Legal Centres". Ian and I delivered a joint presentation, giving the other members of the Committee, among other things, an overview of the numbers and types of clients seen by community legal centres, projects undertaken by community legal centres, and the funding realities under which community legal centres operate. The presentation seemed to be generally well received, and hopefully brought some realities home to other members who would otherwise have little or no understanding of what community legal centres do.

The meetings of the VLA CCC usually encompass a presentation about some aspect of Victoria Legal Aid's practice, or an update or information about proposed changes within Victoria Legal Aid. For example, information has been presented on the simplified grants process, Victoria Legal Aid's strategic plan, the equity and access review, budgetary outcomes, and internal restructures within Victoria Legal Aid.

Sarah Vessali
Federation Representative - VLA Community Consultative Committee
Women's Legal Service

victorian state representative report

national association of community legal

centres

The National Association of Community Legal Centres is an association of States and Territories comprising 207 funded and unfunded CLCs in Australia. The NACLCLC advocates on policy, program and infrastructure issues providing support for sixteen issue-based national networks.

This year NACLC staff and Networks worked hard and strategically against a background of worrying policy directions from the Commonwealth Government.

Conference 'Does Australia Need a Bill of Rights?'

I attended the conference on behalf of NACLC. Almost all speakers argued Rights were not adequately protected and that more needed to be done to address this imbalance. The one exception was the Commonwealth Attorney Daryl Williams who argued that Australia was significantly different to all other western democracies with Parliament being an effective check on rights abuses. The Attorney pointed to the negotiations taking place in the Senate about the Anti Terrorism Bills as proof of the robustness of the system.

NACLC Strategic Planning

NACLC priorities determined at its December 2002 General Meeting:

- To be an alternate voice on justice (including the Legal Aid campaign) and develop an effective communication strategy
- Avoid restrictions to Translator Interpreter Service
- National Conference
- Indigenous Women's Network Support
- Centre support on Program Issues
- Funding Campaign and Federal budget submission
- Network Support
- Professional Indemnity Insurance/Self Insurance
- Australia Law Online
- Pro Bono/Volunteer Effort

National Conference

The 2003 National Conference was originally to be in New Zealand, unfortunately when this became too expensive Tasmania volunteered to host the Conference instead. Victorian CLC worker Annie Nash, who organised the Conference last year, again has the job to organise the 2003 Conference and is putting together an exciting agenda.

The NACLC produced a paper to help restart discussion about justice and the role of government and legal aid policies. A roundtable discussion at the 2003 National Conference helped focus attention on this issue. A strategy document has been produced to seek improved funding in the 2003/2004 year.

Program Issues

Commonwealth Government initiatives such as the development of a new model service agreement lasting three years, the introduction of service standards and the introduction of a new national data system have all been assisted and improved by input from the NACLC.

Joint Residence

The National Association, the National Women's Network, National Welfare Rights network and many individual Community legal centres have written explaining that a presumption of joint rebuttable custody will not be a useful

policy initiative. The experience of Community Legal Centres and the National networks enable them to bring important expertise to the debate about this issue.

United Nations Status

The United Nations granted NACLC official NGO status which entitles NACLC to make submissions to the UN.

Other Activities

I was involved in debates about fee levels, was an NACLC member of the National Pro Bono Resource centre and attended some Australian Legal Aid Forum meetings and ACOSS Law and Justice Sub Committee meetings.

NACLC Staff

Julie Bishop joined NACLC as the new Director and like James McDougall her predecessor has been a very effective director. Brook Lennon joined the Administration and Vicki Harding continues to provide support to networks and members. Justin Finighan has been employed by the Commonwealth government to help work through the many problems associated with the introduction of the new national data collection system. Justin's knowledge of CLC's and their I.T. needs has helped ensure that the system works for Centres as far as possible.

Thanks to program development Working Group and in particular the convenor, Jenny Blakey for their advice and support over the year.

Robin Inglis

NACLC Victorian State Representative

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

victorian council of social services nominee

This past year has been an interesting one at VCOSS. VCOSS has been through a transitional period having appointed a new CEO Cath Smith who came to the organisation from a Community Aid Abroad/Oxfam background. In this time Cath has complemented the early work of the previous CEO Dimity Fifer who has moved onto Australian Volunteers International to be their new head, but at the same time has brought a new approach to the organisation.

While there has been continuing consolidation of relations between VCOSS and the State Government and the community sector on the one hand the past year has also seen the opening up of various divisions of thought and philosophy. While VCOSS has continued its role as an active participant in fostering the development of better programs and relations between the Government and the broad welfare sector, there have been times where the new wave rhetoric about community partnerships and capacity building have been sorely tested. The ongoing debate and discussion about the sort of

Funding and Service agreements under which the welfare sector has been asked to operate is a classic example. VCOSS has been in the forefront of organising a community wide campaign to send a clear message to Government that the Welfare sector is bursting and grossly under funded.

Apart from the ongoing questions of dealing with Government there has been a continued focus on the development of strategic alliances and partnerships with a broad range of community organisations. Attempts have been made to bring peak organisations together on a variety of topics ranging from funding to training issues. A key strategic endeavour is the bringing together some of the large service providers with the hope that they may speak with one voice.

As usual VCOSS has had to battle with restrictive budgets and financial pressures and in part this is lending weight to a closer look at a range of its operations including the 'Just Policy' magazine. During this period the magazine has become a national publication with various partnership being fostered with other state COSS's as well as the nationally focussed ACOSS.

Also during the past year, VCOSS put considerable effort into the development of a platform, which during this election year replaced the traditional annual State Budget submission. The State election platform demands formed the basis of the VCOSS policy positions of which included:

- Family Policy
- Employment
- Education
- Justice
- Housing
- A strong Community Services Sector

Much of the focus of VCOSS policy work has subsequently revolved around the five areas of demand contained in the election platform. Of particular interest to CLCs, considerable supplementary work has been undertaken in the Justice area. VCOSS has been producing regular Statistics updates and analysis in the areas of crime and the prison system and taken a more forthright role in the area of Juvenile Justice.

VCOSS has been a strong contributor to a number of Inquires, which have been held in our sector and made contributions in relation to ASIO/terrorism, sentencing, welfare reforms and others. As per usual it has been a very full year for VCOSS, funding levels remain tight and the demands for consultation and the seemingly never-ending reform agenda never seem to end.

Sam Biondo
Fitzroy Legal Service

victorian peace network

Born less than a year ago, the Victorian Peace Network (VPN) has grown to be a powerful, local voice for peace in the context of the 'war against terror'. Work by Damien Lawson from the Western Suburbs Community Legal Centre was pivotal to the successful establishment of the now broad network of over 60 affiliates comprising Trade Unions, Religious, Environmental, and Activist organizations. Damien was also instrumental in encouraging the Federation and individual legal centers to support the work of the VPN, particularly in its opposition to the war on Iraq. In response, the Federation has played an active role as an affiliate member of the VPN by:

- ▣ Passing resolutions opposing the war on Iraq
- ▣ Attending planning meetings of the VPN
- ▣ Supporting rallies (featuring the great NO HOWARD t-shirts)
- ▣ Providing marshals to rallies
- ▣ Providing advice about activist's rights
- ▣ Offering representation and referrals to activists
- ▣ Organizing a rally of over 400 "Lawyers Against the War" on the steps of the Supreme Court
- ▣ Supporting a petition to the Commonwealth Attorney General concerning the illegality of the war.

Although the war on Iraq is now officially 'over' (thanks George) the VPN remains to be a strong network in the struggle for peace and has broadened its purposes accordingly. Apart from maintaining this presence, there are many legacies of the network to interest CLCs including:

- ▣ Lessons on developing large activist networks
- ▣ Discussions about human rights and the International Criminal Court
- ▣ The need for better activist training and legal advice

Thanks go to all in the Federation who have participated in the work of the VPN and the struggle for peace generally.

Peace

*Peter Noble
Victorian Peace Network Representative
Fitzroy Legal Service*

conferences

national conference 2002

Community Legal Centres National Conference Melbourne



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***'Congratulations to Annie Nash and the organizing Committee on a great result' -
Coordinating Committee***

Inclusive Activism-Confronting the Politics of Exclusion

The Annual National Community Legal Centres Conference 2002 held in Melbourne and hosted by the Federation of Community Legal Centres was a raging success. There were around 400 delegates from throughout Australia – with many coming from remote regions of the Centre, Far North and Western Australia. 125 delegates (more than 25%) came from Victoria.

Well-done Victorian Centres!

Split across three main venues – the conference involved more than 80 workshops, training sessions and events that were developed by community legal centres, National Networks and colleagues of Community Legal Centres. These events characterised the diversity and richness of our sector and our work.

Keynote speakers included Monica Morgan from the Yorta Yorta People. Monica spoke passionately about the effects of systematic genocide on Indigenous communities - from invasion through to present time. Monica was followed by Paula Abood – Paula addressed the conference on 'predatory race politics'; the context of refugee policy and campaigns and the impact of these policies on Arabic and Muslim communities.

Dr Patricia Ranald from the Public Interest Advocacy broadened the discussion to Globalisation, wealth, poverty and exclusion – and connected many of the issues raised by Monica and Paula to broader trends in global society, politics and economics.

The 2002 Conference was organised using a model of a commercial conference administrator (Debretts) alongside a community development worker (myself) and conference committee with representatives from the Federation, NACLCL and the National Network of Indigenous Women's Legal Services. Most of the people involved in organising the 2002 conference were critical of this model in their evaluation and recommended that the conference be organised by a Conference Organiser managed directly by the NACLCL office. This model was adopted in organising the 2003 Conference in Hobart.

One of the features of the 2002 Conference was the high level of involvement and support of so many people, from within and outside the CLC sector. This resulted in the Federation being able to host an accessible conference, which displayed enormous diversity and richness of content.

Resolutions for the 2002 Conference are available at www.naclcl.org.au.

Annie Nash

National Conference Organiser/Community Development Worker

state conference 2003

The previous state conference to this year's event was in April 2001. The Co-ordinating Committee felt it was important to organise another conference this year given that it was more than two years since we had all gathered on state business. The task of organising the event fell into the laps of Mishelle and Jen. We invited members to let us know what they wanted and with the assistance of Simone and Robin we began to organise the content, invite the speakers and facilitators, book the venue, caterers, and so on.

Sessions were developed to assist members with training opportunities, activism in law reform and to move forward with the implementation of the strategic plan.

During the planning stages conference organisers met with the Victoria Law Foundation as they were keen to assist with sponsorship of the conference. They arranged for calico bags to be printed and offered major financial assistance towards the conference dinner. The Law Institute of Victoria were also very generous. The Federation of Community Legal Centres would like to thank both the Law Institute of Victoria and the Victoria Law Foundation for their generous support of the event, each provided \$2000 towards the venue, entertainment and specific expenses.

Popularity of the event was unprecedented. We assured the Trades Hall Event staff that there would be no more than 140. It was overwhelming when the numbers blew out to almost 200. Thanks to Jim for keeping us calm and to Paddy for the drinks. Mishelle and I exchanged so many emails as we managed to maintain and develop our sense of humour.

As all who attended have confirmed, the conference dinner was a spectacular event as we celebrated the thirtieth (or thereabouts) birthday of community legal centre land. Highlights of the dinner were the food (thanks to Cavell), the cake (see pic – thanks Marie), Amanda George's speech covering the history of activism in community legal centres, the honouring of volunteers with long service, the wonderful party atmosphere, the fabulous master of ceremonies, Tanja Kovac and the fantastic Zydeco Jump who kept us dancing until the early hours.

Finally, Mishelle and I would like to especially thank Liz, Marie, Debbie and Ian at the Secretariat for all of their tremendous hard work.

See you all next year.

*Jen Anderson
Job Watch
Coordinating Committee Member*

projects

disability access project

This project was carried out between January and June 2003 and was a project of the Disability Working Group of the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

By their very nature, Community Legal Centres (CLCs) provide legal assistance to people who are disadvantaged, many who also have a disability. It is a priority that CLCs provide accessible services that welcome people who are disadvantaged.

The project aimed to raise the awareness in CLCs of issues, barriers and solutions that impact on people with disabilities around their access to and participation in CLCs. A report was prepared to highlight the key findings of the project and make recommendations based on responses and input received from CLCs. Responses from a survey of CLCs in Victoria provided a snapshot of the current level of access to and participation within CLCs in the

areas of employment and volunteering; physical access; casework and community legal education; communication; and values and attitudes.

Responses from centres clearly show that whilst CLCs have considerable issues to overcome to ensure access for people with a disability, they are genuinely concerned about equitable access and participation and have already implemented many strategies to increase access. These responses indicate a clear recognition that the need to address inadequacies in the provision of services for people with a disability should be a high priority for the sector. This raises the need for the Federation to ensure that the process for implementing recommendations clearly indicates the delegation of responsibilities, preferably through an identified group or person.

Other key recommendations highlight the need for a Disability Action Plan, policy development and education/training on disability issues. A process to monitor the implementation of the report is also seen as a key recommendation.

Thank you to all workers who contributed to the project, whether it was as part of the reference group and/or pilot group, completing the survey, offering suggestions and recommendations, working on barriers that your centre could overcome, and last (but by no means least – from my point of view), supporting the project worker.

...now comes the hard part....

Hopefully, this report will not be put on a shelf to collect dust, with everyone thinking our job is done.

This report marks the beginning of a process that needs to engage all CLCs in order to increase levels of access and participation to CLCs for people with disabilities.

*Jill Richardson
Project Worker
Disability Access Project*

community law website

Work towards the establishment of CLC website capacity has been going on in one form or another for more than four years.

In brief, the establishment of CLC website capacity has gone through a feasibility and scoping study stage, preparation of project brief, to tender to web builders and a decision made regarding the preferred tenderer.

The report *Making the Most of the Internet: Enhancing and Extending CLC Services* (April 2000) was prepared in consultation with Victorian Community Legal Services (CLCs) to ensure a coordinated approach to the development

of electronic communication within the CLC movement, and the development of models suitable to the service delivery of Victorian CLCs.

This Study was funded by the Victoria Law Foundation.

The goal and aims for this project are:

Goal

Community Law Online for metropolitan, regional & rural communities will establish CLCs' Internet presence as a strategic tool in providing innovative services to metropolitan, regional & rural communities, sharing knowledge & information between metropolitan, regional, rural & specialist CLCs, and in the practice of community law.

Aims

1. Increase access to a comprehensive range of online CLC services for metropolitan, regional and rural communities, community workers and other stakeholders.
2. Reduce barriers limiting or denying access to community legal services, and extend legal service reach.
3. Facilitate access to other relevant legal information and assistance sites - via links.

Subsequent to the completion of the Feasibility & Scoping Study, various submissions for implementation funds were made however these were unsuccessful.

In his media release of 29 April 2002 the Attorney General, Robert Hulls, stated that:

"...Community Legal Centres (CLCs) would receive...\$130,000 to create an interactive Website to facilitate communications between CLCs." Of this amount, \$63,645 has been contributed to the Community Law Website the remainder being allocated to broadbanding CLCs, and providing some online (Butterworths) legal resources.

We proceeded to employ Lawscape Communications Pty. Ltd. to prepare a brief calling for tenders from website builders and provide us with expert advice; and a fairly long process of developing up the site plan, finalising the brief and interviewing and selecting the appropriate website builder was undertaken. This process was commenced late in 2002 and only recently completed with the signing of a contract with the successful tender (WebCorrect). We have also recruited a skilled project worker to see this project through to its successful implementation. We welcome Steve Womersley on board.

WebCorrect will be providing the site build by way of "modules", which allow for further add-ons and enhancements; this seemed the best way forward.

Additionally, there will be a “core” Community Law site, with “site-lets” available for all CLCs who wish to participate.

Future and on-going work which will keep us very busy over the next 12 months includes:

- Work and training with individual CLCs to assist with the establishment of their specific local/regional site-lets.
- Further development of website content and other website initiatives.
- Investigate and, if feasible establish, a team of IT volunteers/pro bono options to ensure on-going maintenance and development.
- Investigate and pursue funding/resource options including from government, private sector, sponsorship etc., establish links and dialogue with potential funders/sponsors and commence process of gaining funds/resources, to resource on-going maintenance and development.
- Investigate possibilities for developing partnerships/joint ventures with relevant stakeholders (eg. VLA, educational institutions, private practice/industry and VicNet), establish links and dialogue with potential partners and if practicable, commence process of establishing relevant partnerships/joint ventures.
- Prepare submissions for funding and/or proposals for partnerships where applicable.

Elsje van Moorst
Geelong Community Legal Centre

financial statements

auditors report

(insert)

quick guide to federation members

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