

NT Women Lawyers Association

by Melanie Little, President

Interpreters for Aboriginal people

NTWLA has now made a submission to the Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner inquiry into "The Provision of Interpreter Services in Aboriginal Languages by the Northern Territory Government". The submission supported the need for interpreting services and referred the Commissioner to the rules governing legal practice and in particular the importance of acting on instructions.

Domestic violence forum

The Community Forum on Domestic Violence and the Law entitled "Who are you listening to?" - on 26 March, 1999 was well attended. NTWLA was pleased to be one of the co-sponsors of the Forum, together with the Domestic Violence Legal Help (a service of Darwin Community Legal Service), the Top End Women's Legal Service, and the NT Legal Aid Commission.

Mandatory sentencing

Mandatory sentencing remains an issue in the NT. By the time this edition of Balance has been published a seminar will have been held by the NT Council of Churches chaired by former High Court Judge Sir Ronald Wilson. The seminar will address the question "is there something better than mandatory sentencing?". In 1998 NTWLA resolved to oppose mandatory sentencing. It remains the case that adults and juveniles in the NT are being imprisoned on a daily basis for offences which they would ordinarily receive community based sentencing options.

It is of particular concern to me as a legal practitioner that people with intellectual disabilities are sentenced without any opportunity for a creative sentencing package which could have addressed a whole series of issues in that persons' life. Indeed, such cases used to be some of the most challenging from a defence point of view - now these cases are an indication of the injustice of the situation.

Trials Through Time - Law Week May 1999

'Trials Through Time' will be performed by NT Women Lawyers on 23 May, 1999 at 7pm at Brown's Mart for Law Week 1999. Once again this venture is being supported by the Law Society and the Public Purposes Trust. We have had many people volunteering for acting parts (now, why does that surprise me?) but we still need script writers, backstage and front of house volunteers. Please contact Barbara Tiffin (89 815266).

Money matters seminar

On 25 March, 1999 a very successful seminar was held in the Clayton Utz Board Room entitled Money Matters. I am sure that all participants will be better prepared for their next review. Speakers were Nic Mitaros (Clayton Utz) and Karen Green and Lesley Fahzey (Deloitte). Westpac provided participants with information. The seminar was well attended and I would like to thank Sam Miles for all her work organising the event.

Reconciliation

We are hoping that members will attend the "Women and Reconciliation Luncheon" for Reconciliation Week 27 May - 2 June, 1999. We will let you know the details when they are finalised.

Schools project

NTWLA members will be talking to Nightcliff High School, Kormilda College and O'Loughlin College during the next school term. The theme of the talks will be equal opportunity. Let us know if you have any ideas for other topics which could be presented to schools in the area.

Women at risk in NT prisons

Following a report in the *NT News* that women prisoners deemed at risk were held in the remand section of the prison at Darwin (that is the male section), we wrote to the Minister of Correctional Services. We have now received a reply and we are following up that issue in the near future.

1999 Projects will be finalised after the quiz night - when we have a budget to work from. Some of the main priorities will be the Work Practices Survey and Mentoring.

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NOTICE TO THE PROFESSION

Justice Dean Mildren has requested that all practitioners note the following:

- in 1998 he made an official order that all mobile phones are prohibited from his court
- there is an order signed by Justice Mildren to this effect placed on the public entrance door of his courts
- any person, including practitioners, bringing a mobile phone into his court risks being dealt with by his Honour for contempt of court.

Notwithstanding that a mobile phone may have been turned off before being brought into the court, the phone itself still receives signals. These signals interfere with the electronic court recording equipment and will result in the failure of the recording equipment to record anything received contemporaneously with the receipt of the signal by the mobile phone.

It has been suggested that practitioners obtain lockers so they are able to divest themselves of their mobile phones prior to proceeding to the court room. It may not be practical for the Sheriff's office or the Registry to mind the phones of all practitioners and requests may soon be denied.