



Clontarf and NAAJA Careers and Legal Education Day

On Thursday 28 August, approximately 45 young men from the Clontarf Foundation in Darwin participated in the second annual Aboriginal Youth Legal Education and Careers Day. The day was organized by the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) in collaboration with the Clontarf Foundations operating at Kormilda College, Casuarina Secondary College and Palmerston Senior College. The event was kindly hosted by the Northern Territory Supreme Court which provided the Jury Muster Room and three court rooms for the morning. The event was designed to give young Aboriginal men a better understanding of how the justice system works and to encourage them to think about embarking on a career in the sector.

Increasing the representation of Aboriginal people working in the law and justice sectors is crucial to overcoming the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal people incarcerated in the NT. At present, 76% of young people in the NT Youth Justice Court are Aboriginal, notwithstanding that 30% of the population is Aboriginal. Furthermore, at a conservative estimate, one in 20 Aboriginal men in the Northern Territory is in jail today, and this figure is worsening every year.

The day commenced with an address by the acting Chief-Justice Southwood, who warmly welcomed the participants, provided the students with an introduction to the work of the Court and some

generous words of encouragement. NAAJA CEO Priscilla Collins then gave an inspirational speech about overcoming racism and other adversities. Her presentation was drawn from her insights as a young woman in Alice Springs who became the head of the biggest Aboriginal media company in Australia, before she moved to NAAJA where it has grown three-fold under her leadership.

next table. The panel of vocational speed dates consisted of Paul Turner from FORWAARD Residential Rehabilitation Centre, Cameron Versteegh, Career Support Officer and Barb Falla, Account Consultant from Aboriginal Employment Strategy, Sherryn Killmister, Recruitment Coordinator from GTNT, and Wynita Barbour from the NT Government Indigenous Cadetship Support Program. The students

compare their preferred sentence with that of our volunteer 'judge'.

The students also attended a 'Protecting the Environment' session, jointly presented by Andrew Wellings and Gary Lindner from the Kakadu Rangers, and David Morris from the Environment Defenders Office. The session provided an introduction to careers involving



Left: Clontarf student, Alan Mummery, deliberates on the sentence during the 'You be the Judge' activity. **Middle:** Gary Lindner explaining his work with Kakadu Rangers to enthralled Clontarf students. **Right:** Justice Southwood addresses the Clontarf students at the opening of the Careers and Legal Education day.

NAAJA lawyer, policy officer, and Lurijta/Wombaia woman, Natasha O'Connell, told the young men about her background as a Client Services Officer at NAAJA and how she worked hard to get into university and study law to recently become admitted to practice as a lawyer. She talked passionately about her position as policy officer and the role of social justice in empowering others and combatting injustice and disadvantage.

The second part of the morning saw the students divided into four groups to rotate through four half hour activities.

The first activity was "Vocational Speed Dating" in which students were given five minutes to quiz professionals from a range of backgrounds about their jobs and career paths before moving to the

asked some probing questions and were given a brief insight into a variety of careers. Prizes were also awarded for the best question, by each presenter.

The second activity was a "You be the Judge" Sentencing Hearing presented by NAAJA's Community Legal Education team. The students were involved in a mock sentencing exercise, in which they devised the scenario, including the particulars of the offending and the offender's background. The students then played the roles of prosecutor, defence lawyer, police and judge with the role of the offender played by the NAAJA community legal educator with Stanislavski-inspired precision. The students were provided with an opportunity to consider the criminal law process and sentencing principles in deciding the appropriate punishment for the wrongdoer, and

caring for country and included stories of crocodile relocations, chasing rogue 'unlicensed' magpie geese hunters and working with Traditional Owners to protect their country.

The final activity was an exciting and interactive presentation by school-based Youth Engagement Police officer, Constable Nicolette Kreppas, who presented on Cybersafety. Students were given a demonstration of the dangers of identity fraud, as well as the laws around cyberbullying and on-line scams. This was a thought provoking session that gave students a greater understanding of the dangers of on-line transactions as well as the importance of self-regulating on-line behaviour.

The day was a great success. Clontarf students were able to meet a number of professionals from a broad range of careers and learn about the justice system from professionals within it. ●