

Grant Will Fund Production of Domestic Relationship Booklets

Castan Centre Faculty Member Dr Adiva Sifris has been awarded a Victorian Law Foundation grant to develop two booklets to help improve understanding and access to the legal system in Victoria. She will co-author both booklets with Castan Centre post-graduate member Ronli Sifris.

The first booklet will be a step-by-step guide to registering, and revoking registration of, de facto relationships on the new Victorian relationships register. The register, created by the *Relationships Act 2008*, will enable heterosexual and same-sex couples living in a 'domestic relationship' to register their relationships in Victoria and for recognition of such relationships to be ex-

tended to other contexts.

The second booklet will focus on provisions of the legislation dealing with the division of property and the payment of maintenance in the event of relationship breakdown. It will also explain the procedures and financial consequences of parties in a domestic relationship entering into a relationship agreement.

This legislation represents a significant advance in rights related to family life, and in removing discrimination against heterosexual de facto and same-sex couples. The new legislation amends 69 existing Victorian Acts to provide for recognition of registered relation-

ships. These user-friendly guides will help the public and the legal community navigate this complex area. The aim is to have the information disseminated as widely as possible. The Castan Centre will assist with distribution. Both booklets will be available in print and on the Internet in PDF form. Copies will be given to community legal centres and organisations.

Dr Adiva Sifris's main area of research interest is family law. She completed both her LLM thesis, entitled De Facto Property Rights in Victoria, and her PhD thesis, entitled Children and the Lesbian Homo-nuclear Family: A Challenge for Australian Family Law in the New Millennium, at Monash University.

Grey Group and World Vision Sponsor LLM Prizes



The Castan Centre has recently secured sponsors for two of its human rights subjects in the LLM Program.

The Grey Group has agreed to provide a \$1000 prize for the best student in the subject *Children's Rights in International and Domestic Law*, taught by Dr Paula Gerber, for the next three iterations of the subject. Thomas Kane of the Grey Group recently presented the prize to the inaugural winner, Joanne Lau (see picture at left).

International aid agency World Vision has agreed to sponsor a \$1,000 prize for the best student in *International Law and Economic, Cultural and Social Rights*, also for the next three iterations. This new subject will be taught by Dr Gerber for the first time in 2009.

For a full list of subjects available in the 2009 LLM (Human Rights) program, see the article on page 3 and visit www.law.monash.edu.au/postgraduate/masters-law-hr.html.

Junior Academic Awarded Prestigious Fellowship

Ronli Sifris, a PhD student and post-graduate member of the Castan Centre, has been awarded the Professor John Harber Phillips Fellowship for 2009. The Fellowship is awarded to a young postgraduate student to attend the Greek/Australian International Legal & Medical Conference, held every second year in Greece. The 12th annual conference, to be held on the island of Samos in June 2009, will attract a cohort of Australian and International leaders in law and medicine.

The Fellowship was awarded on the basis of Ms Sifris' resume and an abstract of her paper *Laws Prohibiting Abortion: a violation of the right to health?*

The paper argues that restrictive anti-abortion laws relating to early-term abortion are in violation of international laws protecting the rights of women to optimum health. For example, such laws arguably violate Article 12 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* which protects the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

"The empirical evidence demonstrates that there is a direct correlation between laws relating to abortion and the safety of abortion procedures - the more restrictive the laws, the higher

the incidence of unsafe abortion practices," states Ms Sifris.

Ms Sifris stated that "this conference is a great opportunity for me to meet many people from around the world who are researching in areas that are both similar and different to my own research areas." Ms Sifris commenced her PhD, entitled *Reconceptualising Restrictions on Reproductive Freedom as Torture or Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment* in 2008 as part of the Rethinking Mental Health Laws Project in the Law Faculty, headed by Federation Fellow, Professor Bernadette McSherry.