

# Human Rights Careers Series – revamped

By Monique Hurley



*Louise Searle discusses her work with World Vision as Andrew Beswick from Amnesty International Australia listens in*

The Castan Centre's human rights careers series expanded this year as it was transformed into a Human Rights Careers Week. Consisting of three seminars featuring eight speakers in all, the week provided insight into the multitude of careers available to law (and non-law) students interested in working in the human rights field.

The first of the seminars focused on domestic human rights careers. Kerin Leonard, the Manager of the Legal Unit at the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, completed, but did not always enjoy, an Arts/Law degree at University. She reassured students that even though torts law might sometimes be uninspiring, there is light at the end of the tunnel. For Kerin, this light was a job that combined her passion for criminal justice with human rights law at the Commission, where she conducts policy, contract and advice work on the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act and other legislation.

The Charter is also the focus of Elizabeth Wall's work in the Human Rights Unit of the Victoria Department of Justice. Having originally completed an Arts degree in Criminology, Elizabeth later undertook a law degree before doing the State Government Graduate Program, which is how she found her way into the unit. Elizabeth's role centres on ensuring that the public service implements the Charter. This involves, among other things, organising and running education and training programs.

Lawyer Anna Serry, who manages the Victorian Bar Pro Bono Scheme at the Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH) completed an Arts/Law degree at University. Having worked at Arnold Bloch Leibler and at a commercial law firm in New York, Anna wanted to become involved in a non-government organisation. She landed the job at PILCH's on returning to Melbourne and is now involved with matters ranging from immigration to employment and discrimination. Anna's advice to students was that work such as commercial litigation can actually be the perfect experience for working in the non-profit sector.

The second seminar centred on international human rights careers. Louise Searle, a Senior Advisor in the Humanitarian Protection department at World Vision, offered a fascinating perspective into working for a major international humanitarian organisation. Initially a registered nurse, Louise's love of travel prompted her to apply to work at World Vision, where she focuses on providing training and technical support on international humanitarian law. Louise told the audience that World Vision looks for potential employees with fluency in a 2nd language, postgraduate study, experience doing volunteer work and travel overseas.

Andrew Beswick, Campaigns Manager for Amnesty International Australia suggested that prospective applicants need to know not just about the law, but also about social change. Andrew elaborated that experience speaking out on an important human rights issue would further be beneficial to prospective applicants. Andrew also offered insight into his role at Amnesty, which involves analysing the best ways to address human rights issues in a practical manner.

The final seminar was held in conjunction with the Australian Red Cross for students interested in international humanitarian law and international criminal law. Elli Lewis spoke of her experience working for the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). After University, Elli secured an unpaid internship at the ICTY while studying in Holland. She found working with victims distressing and rewarding, mentioning that she worked on a case which involved the torching of a village in Macedonia which killed five Albanians. Elli also said that obtaining paid work with the UN is extremely difficult and that unpaid internships are the easiest way for people to initially get involved.

Arts/Law graduate Devon Whittle then spoke of his internship with the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Devon was assigned to a Chamber of three judges worked mainly on a contempt of court case where he spent time in Court, performed research and evaluated evidence. Devon emphasised the importance of drafting a good application when applying for positions with the UN and recommended that students try and get some of their academic work published or do some work for a defence counsel.

Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) intern John Molloy then spoke about his 6 month internship in Cambodia. John worked in the pre-trial Chamber which investigate the actions of the Khmer Rouge, which held power between 1975 and 1979. John found this experience interesting, given the French influence on local Cambodian law, and found his role extremely challenging given the advanced age of most of the defendants in cases that he worked on.

The guest speakers offered a unique insight into human rights careers, and the many attendees found their stories an inspiring alternative to the traditional pathways to careers in commercial law. The week was a great success, and the Centre hopes to repeat it in 2011.

**Videos from each seminar can be found on the Castan Centre's YouTube Channel [www.youtube.com/user/CastanCentre](http://www.youtube.com/user/CastanCentre)**