

# PATRICIA TOOP

By Maarten Vlot



**P**atricia (Patsy) Toop is a partner of Clark & Toop Lawyers, and a board member of WISE Employment services.

Wise Employment is a national not-for-profit organization and is one of the largest specialist disability employment services in Australia.

WISE commenced operations in 1988, as an employment agency for people with an intellectual disability. At that time, considering people with an intellectual disability for employment was a novel concept and it took a lot of hard work to change that mindset.

From these early days, it became clear that it was not only people with an intellectual disability who faced difficulties in obtaining employment. From the early 1990s onwards, the provision of employment services was being extended to people with a physical, psychiatric and sensory disability.

WISE now has 10 offices throughout Victoria, NSW and Tasmania.

Patsy has been a board member of WISE for over a decade. She was a logical candidate for this position because she has a long-standing record of protecting and promoting the rights of injured and disabled people. She is renowned for her tenacity in protecting the rights of disadvantaged people and for her dedication to social justice issues.

Patsy has been practising in the area of personal injury in Melbourne for over 20 years and has pioneered many cases. For example, she was one of the first lawyers to take on the tobacco industry for smoking-related illness and death.

Patsy was interviewed in the ABC's *Four Corners* program about the close relationship between some of the large law firms and the tobacco companies. She highlighted the inequity inherent in a situation where the resources of the defendant were infinitely larger than the plaintiff's resources.

She was ultimately vindicated when it was found that the tobacco industry had indeed had a policy of document destruction.

Together with Gary Clark, Patsy started Clark & Toop lawyers in 1999, and Gary Taylor joined as partner shortly thereafter. The combination of these very experienced compensation lawyers has made the firm one of the most successful in Melbourne. In terms of workers' compensation claims filed for clients, Clark & Toop is now one of the largest firms in Victoria.

When one of the employees of Clark & Toop was diagnosed with terminal cancer, Patsy (together with Gary Clark) supported him in a truly admirable fashion, gaining the respect of the entire Melbourne legal profession.

Patsy has lived all her life in Williamstown, the peninsula located at the mouth of the Yarra River, which was originally Melbourne's first seaport. When the Port of Melbourne Authority disbanded the original maritime precinct, Patsy took it upon herself to protect this site and have it remain a functional part of her beloved Williamstown. The not-for-profit Seaworks Foundation, of which she is vice-president, is now developing plans for a unique working maritime precinct.

The same site recently served as a venue for Patsy's birthday party. True to her character, the best party in Melbourne was lit up by a fantastic fireworks display. ■

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