



THE VICTORIAN BAR INCORPORATED

REPORT -

**WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT
PROGRAM**

AND

**MEN'S MENTORING
PROGRAM**

HELD AT THE LEGAL TRAINING INSTITUTE,
UNIVERSITY OF PNG, PORT MORESBY,
15-16 JULY 2017

INTRODUCTION

On Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 July 2017, the Victorian Bar team led by Philip Corbett QC delivered the Women's Empowerment Program and the Men's Mentoring Program to students at the Legal Training Institute, Port Moresby ("LTI"), as an adjunct to the Advocacy Training Workshop which concluded on 14 July 2017. Team members delivering the programs were Trevor Wallwork, Benjamin Lindner, Paul Kounnas, Emma Pepler, Maya Rozner and the Honourable Justice Elizabeth Hollingworth.

The Women's Empowerment Program for women law students was conceived by Christine Melis in 2014 (then at the Victorian Bar) and first ran in 2015 with funding from the Australian Government Justice Services and Security for Development Program in PNG ("JSS4D"). It was well received by the women, the LTI and JSS4D and the program was successfully repeated in 2016. The program culminates with the matching of female law students with mentors from the Victorian Bar.

In 2017, for the first time, the Victorian Bar team also offered a mentoring program for men. The men's program was conceived in response to feedback from male students at the LTI in 2016. The men's program, and in particular the mentoring component of the men's program for 2017 was supported and funded by JSS4D.

On Saturday, the programs for men and women ran separately from each other but side by side at the same venue. Male and female students had morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea together, otherwise participants were kept separate during presentations and discussion. This was to promote candor and open discussion, especially among women participants who can easily feel intimidated by male counterparts (although this year we perceived that due to a younger cohort this was less prevalent).

A copy of the programs as delivered are attached. The discussion sessions take place in a casual, informal setting, with seating arranged in a circle and the participants and Victorian Bar team members facing one another.

THE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

Approximately 22 female students participated in the program, with 19 women remaining after lunch on Saturday and 15 submitting evaluation forms. The program was not compulsory for students, unlike the Advocacy workshop, which is mandatory for graduation and admission to the profession.

The program begins with an introductory "ice-breaker" session where students take turns to "tell their story" of how they come to study law. Many of the stories are very moving and personal. Feedback on evaluation of the program by female participants found the introductory session extremely valuable, for example: *"I liked the informal setting and how relaxing and open the atmosphere was for us to share with each other stuff we would not normally talk about"* and *"I most liked that we got to learn about each other on a more personal level and each of our experiences."*

A new session was introduced to the women's program in 2017, in which 3 female graduates of the LTI from 2016 attended the program and formed a panel to discuss with students their experience after graduation – applying for and finding a job, experiences as a junior lawyer at work, billable hours, work-life balance. This session was extremely successful. Students felt comfortable asking questions of the graduates and the graduates were fantastic in sharing their tips and advice. Student feedback from this session was universally positive and it has been incorporated into the program for future years.

This year, the team is extremely grateful to the Honourable Justice Hollingworth for her valuable time and energy in leading discussion in the women's program, especially on topics such as fostering relationships with other lawyers and courts and challenges faced by women in the law. The team received feedback on evaluation of the program by students that: *"I learned a lot from the Saturday session. I for one felt privileged to be advised in the empowering women section by Her Honour Justice Hollingworth"* and *"I was empowered. I felt that I learned a lot in having confidence in myself as a woman. Coming from a male dominated society, I thought differently of myself. I am now more confident and more sure of myself and my career in the future."*



THE MEN'S MENTORING PROGRAM

Approximately 26 male students participated in the program, with 17 men remaining after lunch on Saturday and 14 submitting evaluation forms.

The program opened with the same "ice-breaker" activity as the women, asking students to "tell their story" of how they came to study law. The response from the men was overwhelmingly emotional and moving, with three of the male participants in tears as they told stories of family hardship and suffering. Feedback from one student reflected the feeling in the room: *"a story from the heart is better than any narrative."* Students asked for members of the Victorian Bar Team to also "share their stories" and this has been incorporated into the program for 2018.

The team noted with interest that at least one third of the men disclosed in introductory session that they had made the decision to study law on the urging of their mother, as a result of seeing their mother suffer discrimination and hardship at the hands of their fathers or out of a determination to improve social justice for women in society. At the conclusion of the "Gender Equality" session conducted by the team in partnership with Mrs. Wavuri Komberg, HCM Manager of the LTI she noted that the male students appear to have a good understanding of gender equity issues and she felt that she was "preaching to the converted".

Male students gave enthusiastic feedback about the health and wellbeing sessions conducted by Philip Corbett QC, with special interest in strategies to cope with work stress whilst maintaining family relationships and the importance of diet and exercise. The students were also pleased to share their hobbies and interests with each other and to promote the formation of closer relationships with each other. As with the women, the sessions led by 3 male graduates of LTI on their experiences finding work, as a junior lawyer and in court were extremely successful and will be repeated in 2018.

Other feedback indicated that a number of the men wanted the program to include discussion on *"lawyers' unethical social relationships,"* in particular *"male lawyers' behavior toward female clients and other non-lawyer females in the society at large"*. In order to try to accommodate this request, two new discussion topics have been introduced into the program for 2018 entitled "Showing leadership in gender equality" and "Professional relationships with female clients".

The Men's Program was extremely well received by the male students, the LTI and JSS4D and it will be repeated (subject to satisfactory funding) in 2018.

JOINT SESSIONS ON SUNDAY

Male and female students were brought together for two short joint sessions on Sunday. The internet research session by Emma Pepler and Paul Kounnas conducted on Sunday 16 July 2017 was universally praised by the men and women who attended it. They were not aware of Paclii functions Noteup or Lawcite and loved being taken to photos of Victorian Bar team members on the Vicbar website.

This year the team held a more detailed discussion with students about the mentoring program between students at LTI and the Victorian Bar, including discussions about the responsibility of students to make and maintain contact with their mentor and the benefits of having a mentor at the Victorian Bar. Student feedback suggests that this session was successful in bringing the advantages and obligations of having a mentor at the Victorian Bar to the attention of students. An informal review of the 2017 mentoring program is proposed to be carried out in 6-12 months.

Most of the students wanted the programs (advocacy and mentoring) to go for at least another week and cover subjects like appeals, legal drafting, job interviews, further opportunities for work or study in Australia and more on ethics, professional conduct and the consequences of misconduct for a lawyer.

Both programs will be reviewed for presentation to LTI students again in 2018. Recommended changes are reduction of the program from two days to one day, elimination of formal opening and closing sessions and commencing the program at 8.30am on Saturday and finishing at 3.00pm so that students can catch public transport home. In consideration for those students unable to attend the program on a Saturday for religious or other reasons, it is also proposed in 2018 to videotape less sensitive sessions of the program such as health and wellbeing, internet skills and mentoring so that all students can have access to those sessions regardless of whether or not they attended the program.



The team would like to thank Wendy Pollock from the Vic Bar Office for her dedicated assistance with the co-ordination and presentation of the men's and women's programs. Her input to both the planning and delivery of the two programs was invaluable.

The Chairman of the Committee would especially like to thank Maya Rozner for her commitment to the programs and hard work to ensure a successful and rewarding outcome. Maya faced considerable difficulty in organizing the program at short notice and in the face of uncertainty and caution (at the LTI and from JSS4D) about the utility of the Men's program. Both programs were a success and any concerns about the utility of the Men's program or loss of the integrity of the program for Women were soon allayed. A difficult job very well done!

Maya Rozner
Pacific Rim Sub- Committee

P D Corbett QC
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25 July 2017

