

WOMEN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION ACT

NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S NOTE

Welcome to the last newsletter of the current Committee! The **AGM – on 21 September 2016** - is just around the corner and we look forward to ushering in the next phase of the Committee. This year, we will be proposing an amendment to our Rules to increase the number of general members on the Committee from six to eight. This is a reflection of our growing membership base and increasingly busy calendar of events. Please consider nominating for a position!

Work continues in earnest for the ACT Women Lawyers Awards 2016. There is still a week to go before nominations close – so if you haven't done so already, don't miss this chance to have your achievements recognised. I have been humbled by the response of our sponsors who have been willing to support this event – **Lerida Estate, ANU College of Law, BMW Rolfe Classic, The College of Law, Watts McCray, MLC Advice, Gillian Beaumont Legal, Duesburys Nexia and Empower Resolve.**

It is shaping up to be a sensational celebration. Tickets for the Gala Dinner will go on sale shortly after nominations close – stay tuned.

In June, we were delighted to have our long-standing sponsor, Michael Miller of MLC Advice, present a seminar on 'Your Career & Finances'. As someone who is acutely aware of the financial issues that impact women lawyers over the course of their career, Michael's seminars are always well received. We are grateful for the time that he gives up for the benefit of our members.



A few weeks ago, we held our first ever **Partner Forum Lunch hosted at Clayton Utz**, which was a great success. This provided lawyers with the opportunity to hear the frank advice and experiences of women leaders in our profession. So much can be learned from hearing what has worked for, and motivated, other women to meet the challenges of becoming a partner.

CLAYTON UTZ

Thank you to our stellar participating partners and a special thanks to Jennifer Wyborn of Clayton Utz for arranging the generous sponsorship of this event.

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We recently helped seek out mentors for the women law student [mentor program](#) es-tablished by the [ANU Women in Law Organisation \(WILO\)](#).



The program is now up and running and we congratulate the WILO team for its leadership with this initiative. I was heartened to receive many messages from women lawyers willing to be mentors even after the program closed. Happily, we will be calling on your generosity again soon as a group of women law students from UC will shortly launch a similar program for women law students at UC. We are delighted that the UC students have been inspired by the WILO program and we thank Professor Patricia Easteal for supporting them in this endeavour. We look forward to celebrating both programs at a cocktail evening in late October.

Coming up, we have our ever popular [Judicial Mentoring Lunch](#) on 15 September 2016 hosted at [King & Wood Mallesons](#). Thank you to our Pa-

tron, Justice Hilary Penfold, for organising the impressive line up of judges, magistrates and tribunal members for us! This is a truly unique opportunity to hear their experiences and advice in an informal setting. This event was booked out within an hour or two of going live! For those who missed out this time, we will endeavour to make way for a larger venue next time and perhaps move to an evening format.



Prue Bindon at the inaugural Partner forum

From a policy perspective, current initiatives include the [Young Lawyers Pay & Conditions Survey](#) – which is now open for completion. Thank you to our Events Chair, Angela Li, and the ACT Young Lawyers for helping to get the Survey up and running for another year. Please encourage anyone you know in their first 5 years of practice to complete the Survey. The more responses we get, the greater the quality of the data and the

more useful the results will be. Don't forget that anyone who completes the Survey goes into the draw for a \$100 David Jones voucher!

We are also looking closely at the revamped [Equitable Briefing Policy](#) recently launched by the Law Council of Australia. This Policy has the potential to make serious progressive changes in briefing practices in Australia – not just in terms of volume but also in terms of value. We are considering various options for helping to promote the Policy and we expect this to be an ongoing project. I am grateful to members of the Commonwealth Office of Legal Services Coordination who shared some time with us recently to discuss ways in which equitable briefing practices may be promoted and encouraged.

Finally, I'd like to thank the Committee wholeheartedly for their commitment over the past year. It has been a busy one and an absolute delight collaborating with all of them to promote our objectives. From the early morning meetings at the Street Theatre to late evenings and weekends too – I am immensely grateful.

Prue Bindon
President, WLA ACT

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YOUR STORIES: WORKING FLEXIBLY

In our March newsletter we shared the story of Kim Back of Maurice Blackburn Lawyers and her experiences with flexible working arrangements. The working flexibly stories are designed to continue the conversation and sharing of practical experiences amongst lawyers who use flexible working arrangements. Written policies are important, but sharing our experiences helps to ensure that those policies have life, can be reflected upon, and improved.

In this issue we hear from Juliette Ford, Director with Farrar Gesini Dunn Lawyers (FGD). Juliette has been instrumental in implementing a workplace culture that is built around flexibility as the norm, not the exception. In doing so, she acutely appreciates the business case for workplace flexibility.

WLA: FGD is often recognised for its innovative workplace practices. What sort of flexible work arrangements do you have in place?

Juliette: Well firstly, we have departed from the traditional

office space that most firms operate in. This was because we decided that the way we work had outgrown the traditional office environment. Those structures created hard barriers.



Instead, we have what would broadly be described as an 'activity based workspace'. However, within that, we recognise that our people have different styles of working and different needs throughout the day, so we have created separate spaces within the office plan to cater for these. For example, some areas are reserved for quiet work, some for telephone calls, and so on. This helps to manage both the introverts and extroverts.

It's important to be ok with having kids come into the office where our people need that to juggle their commitments. We have areas in our office where kids can come in and watch TV or play games. This creates added work efficiency. And as a family law firm, our clients should feel comfortable about bringing their kids to our office.

Moving to an activity based work environment meant we also had to move towards a 'paperless or less paper' office which is fundamental to liberating staff from the physical impediments of working flexibly. Admittedly – going paperless was a big change for some of us (me included!) but once we made the decision, we haven't looked back. It is about changing the way you think and appreciating that just because things have always been done a certain way doesn't mean they have to continue to be done that way.

Aside from the physical environment, FGD has always encouraged conversations of flexibility and change, so we have built a platform where there is no fear about exploring something 'different'. Ann Northcote, one of my fellow directors recently analysed who was in the office and

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when and the jigsaw puzzle of different hours and days was amazing. It certainly has become 'our norm'.

We don't measure performance by attendance in the office. We obviously look at the typical financial measures but also the other contributions of each person. We have a work from home policy and we don't have specific start and finish times. This applies across the board - to partners, lawyers and PAs. Everyone can work from home, everyone has access to a laptop.

My practice and the practice of many in our office is designed so that there are two lawyers assigned to each matter. This is 'business-wise' as it creates a real ability to be flexible and to ensure that clients have access to a seamless experience. It also has a strong business case as it opens up time for senior lawyers to nurture other relationships and gives junior lawyers more autonomy and experience.

WLA: As a principal of a firm which offers flexible work arrangements, what have your experiences been in having flexible

work arrangements as part of the firm culture?

Juliette: Our strategic plan makes it clear that women are valued - "Work environment which supports our lives and values women"- we chose to make this point expressly as it is an important 'signal' of our culture. It often generates some discussion which is why it is there - to bring to the foreground the question of what managing a professional career looks like for men and women in our office going forward. It is a positive statement of inclusivity.

Something we are mindful of is ensuring that our flexible work culture is legitimate, authentic and reasonable. It can't be 'optically' flexible but not 'practically' flexible. For example, flexible work arrangements need to be managed properly so staff aren't taking a few hours off in the afternoon and then working until midnight every day because their budget has not been adjusted. This has been something that we have been carefully managing.

What our flexible workplace culture has enabled us to do is to embrace the 'whole' person - that is, when we employ someone, we don't just em-

ploy his or her brain isolated from the other aspects of life which make that person dynamic and interesting and someone we want to employ and represent FGD. A culture which employs the 'whole person' means that staff will want to stay, be enthusiastic about their work and therefore do their best work..

There is a significant cost in losing staff and reemploying. Staff take with them cultural knowledge and experience, not just legal experience. And it can take a long time to build that up in a newly hired lawyer. We have had around 5-6 women return to work after taking time off for family arrangements including fellow Directors. Flexibility should not just be the domain of employees - but also the owners. This is a measure of our success.

WLA: What advice and points would you have for partners / directors / principals wondering how to embrace flexible work arrangements and use them to benefit their firms?

Juliette: In the legal profession there is always going to be some pioneers in this area and those who are open to

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change. On the other hand, there will be many people more comfortable with a traditional approach. But in my experience, it is critical for people to be open to thinking about things differently and trying out new ideas. To be effective as a culture, flexibility must be seen to be across the firm - it can't be reserved for one or two partners. That isn't a culture.

Particularly for small to medium firms, I would ask them this question:

“What is your succession plan?”

Unless you have one, your values and business will disappear. The bottom line is that you need to create an environment where your lawyers want to be in business with you in the future. Aim to understand what is going to work for them, and then set up those arrangements. And turn your mind to it 10-15 years in advance, not a year before you're ready to move on.

Partners need to look at ownership differently and more laterally. A workplace culture that supports the whole person fosters loyalty, trust, commitment and longevity. There is your succession plan.

WLA EVENT: PARTNER FORUM

WLA ACT held its inaugural 'Partner Forum' at Clayton Utz on 11 August 2016. The aim of this event was to provide our members with an opportunity to network with women partners in Canberra, and to have informal discussions about their experiences and their 'path to partnership'.

Research shows that there is a significant gender gap in the legal profession in the most senior levels. Women still form less than 25% of the partners despite a greater proportion of women now graduating with law degrees.

It was a common theme amongst the young lawyers at the event that they appreciated having women partners as role models within their firms and that having women in senior positions made a significant difference to their aspirations. It was particularly interesting to hear from our partners about their unique experiences, their insights into the challenges they faced, and how they achieve a work/life balance. Here are some of the 'hints and tips' from the partners:



The inaugural Partner Forum

- (a) Be brave; don't be afraid to take risks.
- (b) Consider if the firm you are working for is the right fit for you. Partnership is a big commitment, and you want to make sure you are going into business with other like-minded people.
- (c) Call out attitudes or behaviours that don't sit right with your values.
- (d) Invest in yourself.
- (e) There is no one formula to becoming a partner. The partnership model will keep changing and the key is to learn to adapt to new circumstances.

We would like to thank the following partners for their generosity:

- **Jennifer Wyborn** - Clayton Utz
- **Melanie McKean** - HWL Ebsworth

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- **Simonetta Astolfi** – Maddocks
- **Deborah Rolfe** - Malignis Edwards Johnson
- **Caroline Atkins** - DLA Piper
- **Noor Blumer** – Blumers Lawyers
- **Cristina Huesch** - Alliance Family Law
- **Shelley Mulherin** - McInnes Wilson
- **Annabel Griffin** - King & Wood Mallesons
- **Julie Dobinson** - Dobinson Davey Clifford Simpson
- **Lois Clifford** - Dobinson Davey Clifford Simpson
- **Debra Parker** – Watts McCray
- **Louise Morris** – Chamberlains
- **Alice McCormick** – Minter Ellison

We would also like to extend a very special thank you to Clayton Utz who kindly sponsored this event (including providing a delicious lunch!).



MEET A MEMBER – DR LORETTA ZAMPROGNO

This issue, WLA would like to introduce you to Dr Loretta Zamprogno, Deputy Chief Solicitor with ACT Government Solicitor.



Why did you join WLA?

I used to attend ACT Law Society Law Council meetings on behalf of the (then) Australian Corporate Lawyers Association, and I was always impressed by the reports given by WLA representatives, including Nithya Sambasivam when she was WLA President. Nithya is now a lawyer in my office, the ACT Government Solicitor, as is Tamara Sullivan, WLA ACT Vice-President. A couple of years ago WLA had a membership drive and at that time Tamara was WLA's Treasurer. It was clear that it was time to sup-

port such a wonderful organisation.

What WLA event are you looking forward to, and why? Or alternatively, what WLA event have you enjoyed attending this year and why?

It's hard to choose, but at the moment I would say I'm so pleased to see WLA ACT's support of the Women in Law Organisation program. I really hope that many WLA members will offer themselves to mentor women law students of the ANU, and to share their experiences in the legal sector from across the public, private and tertiary education fields.

Who is a professional that inspires you and why?

Lynn Du Moulin, currently ANU Legal Workshop Senior Lecturer and Coordinator of the Master of Legal Practice completion courses, and for many years before that Special Counsel (e-Commerce) with the Health Insurance Commission until, through various machinery of government changes, she rose to Deputy General Counsel within the Department of Human Services. Lynn has been an inspiration to me in several ways, including through her passion about inter-

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disciplinary approaches to legal practice, and in the post-graduate education and training she delivers. In the 25 years I've known her, I've always found Lynn deeply interested in a wide range of specialisations, with an ever-enquiring mind, and well-informed about how other fields can enhance the work that lawyers undertake. Her training and mentoring law graduates and young lawyers is selfless and has been highly valued by a succession of lawyers and students. The generosity of Lynn's time with colleagues shows a genuine care which we should value highly in whatever career or workplace we find ourselves.

If you could give one piece of advice to your first-year professional self, what would it be?

Definitely to join an organisation like WLA or the Young Lawyers Association. Having relocated across three jurisdictions over a number of years while I was studying law as an external student and working, I didn't have a network of friends outside of my law firm when I came to Canberra in 1990. Joining an organisation whose members were in the same profession, and with whom I could have shared common experiences,

would have given me an interest to balance the long hours of legal practice. That's why I think WLA is such a vital organisation for the legal profession in the ACT.

PUBLIC SECTOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ACT CONFERENCE

The Public Sector Women in Leadership ACT conference will be held in Canberra on 15 and 16 November and may be of interest to some of you. You can access the event website [here](#).

We are pleased to let you know that we have secured a special discount of \$100 off the registration price for any registrant who is a WLA ACT member. The offer code CC*WLA is now available for our members to use to receive the discount.

This discount is in addition to the current earlybird saving of \$400 for registrations before 9 September 2016.



INAUGURAL ACT WOMEN LAWYERS AWARDS

Nominate now for the ACT Women Lawyers Awards 2016!

Nominations for the inaugural ACT Women Lawyers Awards 2016 are still open.

There are many outstanding women lawyers in this jurisdiction and it is important that we recognise and celebrate this talent.

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You can nominate yourself, another lawyer or your organisation. We are inviting nominations in the following categories:

1. Woman Lawyer of the Year
2. Firm/Organisation of the Year
3. Woman Lawyer of the Year – Private
4. Woman Lawyer of the Year – Government
5. Woman Lawyer of the Year – Community or Academic
6. Woman Lawyer of the Year – Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander or Culturally & Linguistically Diverse
7. Woman Lawyer of the Year – Early Career

Go to our [awards webpage](#) for all the information you need to nominate.

Winners will be announced at a Gala Dinner on 3 November 2016 at Old Parliament House where we will be delighted to have journalist, author and broadcaster Annabel Crabb as our speaker. Block out your calendar!

Nominations close midnight on 9 September 2016.

We are grateful to our sponsors for making the ACT Women Lawyers Awards 2016 possible.

Are you interested in being a sponsor of this event? Contact us at contact@wlaact.org.au to discuss opportunities.

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