

RRR; a Young Lawyers' dilemma

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Moving to the Northern Territory is likely to present exciting and interesting challenges for a young lawyer. It would be fair to say that most of us migrate to the Territory for the professional experiences we just wouldn't receive anywhere else.

The lifestyle is also a major draw card ... it's laid back, the markets are delicious and you can swim in magical rock pools on weekends. Many a young legal gal also knows the male to female ratio. There are many reasons to move here and to stay; however, unfortunately the reasons to leave are escalating.

RRR strategies usually focus on recruiting those living outside the jurisdiction and trying to keep them there. But it is also important to nourish the local legal talent. The Territory is unique in that many young lawyers grew up here, studied here and want to stay here.

When the Law Society Northern Territory asked young lawyers what would make them leave and what would help them stay, we received a huge number of confidential responses. This represents the concerns young lawyers have for their careers and how much they want to voice these concerns.

So... How do they feel?

It is important to mention the responses were not limited to financial support to encourage retention. Almost all of the feedback received indicated a greater need for

emotional support and professional development. In the Territory, we are getting young lawyers here... now it's about keeping them.

Financial worries

The major issue was the high cost of housing.

Paying rent or paying off a mortgage is difficult noting the usual wage of a young lawyer. Rent can be anywhere over \$200 a week per person in Darwin and Alice Springs. If someone is earning around \$50,000 a year in their first few years of practising, this can make it particularly hard to make ends meet.

The Law Council of Australia's Working Group is exploring issues to deal with this problem, including subsidised or free housing and salary packaging options for mortgage and rent assistance. This is something the Society would like the Northern Territory Government to contribute to.

Other monetary suggestions to increase retention included the subsidising of HECS payments, paid professional development interstate and flights home to see family and friends.

Non financial pressures

The high work load and stress compared with a relatively small wage left a number of young lawyers feeling burnt out and underappreciated. This was especially pertinent for those

working for Legal Aid organisations all over the Territory. A lack of emotional support and mentoring was a big issue.

This is something the legal profession really needs to focus on; finding the time and the resources to teach, to listen and to foster. It is just so difficult when everyone is so busy these days.

I remember at the ceremonial sittings of the retirement of then Chief Justice Martin when he said,

"It is a matter of regret that time and budgetary constraints today deny young practitioners those invaluable opportunities to learn by watching and working with experienced advocates. The luxury of time that I had in the '70s has disappeared."

This comment really stuck with me.

The Northern Territory is such a wonderful place to live and to learn. I hope the Federal and Territory Governments understand how integral it is to have a sound legal pool in all areas of the Territory and begin to help young lawyers out, not only for them but so the community has access to legal advice and representation.

The Law Society will be working closely with the Law Council of Australia and lobbying to Government to improve conditions for young practitioners. ●