

Young Women in the Profession

By Ashley Marsh,
Co-President,
Northern Territory Young Lawyers

One topic affecting young lawyers nationally is the recruitment and retention of women in the legal profession. This is an issue directly related to young lawyers, as a substantial proportion of lawyers leave the profession in the first five years of practise, including many women. The available data shows that achievements in recent years towards gender balance and equality in the law are once again being reversed.

Recent media attention and public scrutiny attracted by the high-profile case of a former staff member of a large law firm in Sydney who made claims of sexual harassment and victimisation against her former employer is also likely to have a negative effect.

We see a need for ongoing monitoring and vigilance if gender balance and equality in the law are to be achieved. Generally, law firms are now looking at ways to promote the advancement of women lawyers to senior positions and new ways to incorporate flexibility into the workplace. There have also been calls to entice lawyers to stay in the profession by diversifying workloads of individual lawyers.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission is currently conducting research into the experiences of women in the legal profession. The 'Women in the Law' project will hand down the findings of its research in mid-2012, and should be an indicator of the status of women in the profession.

Women involved with NTYL

NTYL is fortunate to have a number of female young lawyers that attend our meetings, and who actively serve on our committee. Being a volunteer organization, we are grateful to our hard working female committee members. In promoting the role of young lawyers in our profession, they are excellent role models and representatives of the firms where they work.

Olivia Go

One such hard working member of our Committee is current Co-President Olivia Go. Olivia has been involved with NTYL since coming to the Northern Territory and was a member of our General Committee 2011. We are lucky to have her at the helm for 2012.

Olivia is originally from Manila in the Philippines. She first came to Australia to study in 2006, at the University of Adelaide. Following completion of a stint in the UK, Olivia returned to Adelaide in 2008. After graduating in 2009, she was admitted as a Lawyer in South Australia in May 2010.

In 2010 Olivia also came to the Northern Territory to take up a role as a Supreme Court Associate to the then Chief Justice Brian Martin. In 2011 Olivia took up position at Halfpennys Solicitors and conducts

a wide variety of matters in the Criminal, Litigation and Commercial areas of the law.

Olivia is also known for her smiling face and good humour. Outside of work she enjoys playing tennis and baseball, and also enjoys travelling.

As a Lawyer in the Northern Territory, Olivia sees value in the Profession as a small and collegial environment of which she feels privileged to belong. She sees the law as an honourable profession and is proud to have successfully completed her studies prior to her first admission.

On living and working in Darwin, Olivia finds it a place with a great lifestyle and environment, and particularly





Traci Keys

Director of Conciliation, Policy, and Law and Registrar of the ADC



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enjoys the sunsets. Darwin is also closely connected culturally and

geographically with parts of Asia. This is important as from time-to-time Olivia flies overseas to visit family.

On the role of women in the profession Olivia recognises that women lawyers and in particular graduates and those in their first years of practice must have guidance and support from those around them, and this is key to the issue of the retention of young women lawyers. Those in the profession also have to remain vigilant to ensure that we achieve and maintain gender equality.

Olivia looks forward to continuing her role as Co-President of NTYL throughout 2012, and continuing as an active member of the profession, and of the community. ●

How did you get into the law?

Law was not my first career choice. I trained to be a professional ballet dancer and was studying dance at Adelaide University when a fellow dance colleague and flatmate was arrested for shop lifting. She asked me to come to court with her. This was my first time ever in a court room and I was fascinated by the process. A year later I enrolled in law school.

Tell us about your current role?

I work for the Anti-Discrimination Commission as the Director of Conciliation Policy and Law. It is a very broad role that encompasses managing the complaints area, acting as Registrar for our Hearings, representing the Commission in appeals, providing legal and policy advice to the Commissioner and acting as Commissioner in the Commissioner's absence.

What are the most satisfying aspects of your role?

It is really satisfying when I get a quick, effective outcome that works for all parties. I also derive great satisfaction out of progressing access issues for vulnerable members of the community. Access to fair process, information

and justice is something that very much drives me as a lawyer.

What are some of the challenges facing women in the law?

I think law is a less challenging career today for women than it was 20 years ago thanks to the ground work of many other women who had it much tougher. I think, however, challenges remain.

Managing a career and children remains one of the big challenges for female lawyers. Increasingly employers are seeing the benefits of accommodating staff with children (male or female) and seeing the long term benefits for organisations of flexible workplace practices. I am extremely lucky to have a very accommodating boss and for this I am very appreciative. However, it remains difficult for women to meet work and home pressures and to know when and how long they can afford to take career breaks.

What are you currently reading?

Talking about Jane Austen in Baghdad, which shares emails between a UK journalist and an English Literature lecturer in Iraq. It reveals the harsh realities of life in Baghdad particularly for women and religious minority groups. ●