

News from Alice Springs



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- Continued or improved opportunities for networking or mentoring at a variety of levels in careers.
- The need to address issues of about flexible work practices with employers and for lawyers who appear as advocates in the courts.

To ensure regional coverage we held events in both Katherine and Alice Springs in March.

Katherine impromptu women lawyers lunch

In Katherine we held an impromptu Women Lawyer's lunch at the Finch Café which was attended by lawyers and paralegals from NAAJA, Katherine Women's Legal Service, NT Legal Aid Commission's Katherine office and NAAFLS. It was wonderful to meet lawyers new to Katherine and those committed, hard working practitioners who have been practicing in the region for a number of years. These practitioners all work in very busy work environments and the work they do every day with many disadvantaged and vulnerable clients is work to be admired.

NTWLA in Alice Springs joined the NT Anti-Discrimination Commissioner for lunch on Wednesday 28 March to discuss the #metoo campaign and how the progress of this movement depends on our engagement with our workplaces and communities.

Commissioner Sievers addressed the gathering on the challenges and opportunities we face in supporting the evolution of this campaign beyond a trending hashtag, and the ensuing conversation between practitioners and the Commissioner quickly got down to practical details.

Practitioners discussed the challenges to their raising and pursuing sexual harassment complaints in the workplace, including:

- General ignorance of types, degrees and nuances of sexual harassment that constitute grounds for complaint.
- A lack of familiarity with external complaint avenues, such as the Anti-Discrimination Commission and NT Working Women's Centre.

- Absent policies and procedures to deal with sexual harassment in workplaces, particularly those that offer support and deal with the common situation of a direct supervisor being both perpetrator and first point of complaint.
- The consequent inhibition that lack of trust in complaints processes causes potential complainants.
- How the fear of potential supporters or witnesses being friends with a perpetrator, or incurring a negative reputation, inhibits complaints in a small profession and town.
- The lack of coordinated services offering non-legal support to complainants.
- Workplace cultures which pressure women 'toughen up' or 'put up' with sexual harassment, perpetuated by both men and some experienced women who have endured it.
- Persistent framing of complaints and policies as 'political correctness gone mad'.
- The strictures and reinforcement of gender biases created by over-policing male-female professional relationships that undermine its intended preventative effect.

Fortunately, there are things we can do as individuals, lawyers and allies to address these challenges and the problem of workplace sexual harassment. Commissioner Sievers underlined our unique capacity as a community of lawyers to support our clients, each other, and other working women in our broader community—whether supermarket shelf-stackers or senior public servants.

Apart from providing legal advice to clients in our professional and pro bono capacities, and community education activities, there are lots of practical steps women lawyers can take to progress change.

One strategy discussed at length was starting conversations. Whether with principal legal officers,

boards, managers or human resources departments—asking whether employers have adopted and employ effective policies and procedures on sexual harassment and complaints is worth a few chats. The strong arguments include the burdens that sexual harassment and failing to address it will impose upon staff morale, retention, the employer's reputation and the 'bottom line'.

Where concerns about ridiculing or dismissal of the prospect exist, we can initiate these conversations with other colleagues to create awareness of what really constitutes sexual harassment, undermine cultures of compliance and build support for mechanisms that constructively deal with it. We need to include our male colleagues in these conversations too, to whom we can provide insight from experience and suggest practical acts of solidarity, support and bystander intervention, as well as recommending organisations and online resources for further information for male champions of change.

Alice practitioners are keen to learn about the workplace sexual harassment policies and best practice recommendations that our Society has adopted and endorses.

New members and renewal of membership

NTWLA welcomes new members those not currently practicing and law students. The membership period is due to expire on 30 June 2018. The Committee is currently offering membership from now until 30 June 2019 for \$50 (which includes fourteen months membership for the usual price of 12) and there are reduced rates for student members of \$25. You can contact us or obtain applications for membership by emailing us at ntwomenlawyersassoc@gmail.com.

