

Six Questions for...

Castan Centre Associate Azadeh Dastyari



What did you do prior to coming to Monash University?

I was working with Professor Mary Crock from Sydney University on a project that looked at the treatment of 14 separated Afghan children going through Australia's refugee determination process. All the children we studied have been recognised as refugees but many have been irrevocably damaged by the trauma of the process, the separation from their families and the impact of mandatory detention.

Which area of human rights law are you most passionate about and why?

I am interested in all areas of human rights law but I am particularly passionate about the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. People who have been forced to flee their homes in search of protection are some of the most vulnerable in our society. How we treat those who come to us for help says a lot about who we are as a people.

Stop Press: Azadeh has been awarded the prestigious Fulbright Postgraduate Alumni (W.G. Walker) Scholarship to study at Georgetown University, Washington, in 2008. The Scholarship is awarded to the highest ranked Australian Fulbright postgraduate. Azadeh has also been awarded a Lionel Murphy Scholarship to support her PhD studies on her return to Australia in 2009.

How do you think the new government will deal with refugee and migration issues in Australia?

I was delighted to read that the new government is abolishing the 'Pacific solution' and will no longer detain and process asylum seekers in Nauru. However, I am disappointed that the government will still use Christmas Island as a detention centre and will not give asylum seekers on the island the same rights enjoyed by those who apply from within Australia. I also hope that the new government will reconsider the policy of temporary protection visas, which are incredibly costly to taxpayers and which leave refugees in limbo for many years.

What do you enjoy most about teaching?

I enjoy watching students learn. There is nothing like being there the moment the penny drops.

If you had to give students one piece of advice, what would it be?

Try to relate everything you are learning to the real world and ask yourself how the law affects actual people. Being aware of the societal impact of the law can make even the dullest topic exciting to study.

Do you enjoy living in Melbourne? What do you miss about Sydney?

I love Melbourne! There is so much to do in this wonderful city but I do miss my family and friends in Sydney. I travel back there often to see loved ones, which is not good for my bank account or my carbon footprint. I'm going to try to do that less this year.

Alexander Pung

Castan Centre Local Intern

Why did you do an in-house internship?

I have always had a strong interest in human rights (in the sense that everybody should be entitled to freedom from oppression and equality of opportunity, not the let's-all-live-on-communes-and-pick-fleas-off-each-other's-backs kind of way).

What inspires you about human rights?

My main area of concern lies in the more traditional field of civil and political rights rather than issues such as climate change or animal rights (not that I run down helpless woodland animals in a Ford Territory in my downtime). I had always believed that it was the function of the law to protect vulnerable and marginalised groups in society, both in Australia and internationally, and those in the field of human rights are working hard towards this goal.

What did you do during your in-house internship?

We worked on a project for the Oxford University Press (who are preparing a database of international law decisions) writing case notes on decisions by the various UN bodies—the Human Rights Committee, Committee Against Torture. It was actually quite interesting (really!). I guess you had to have been there.

What do you hope to do in the future?

In the short-term, possibly complete my Masters at Monash in human rights. After that I would like to find work in that area with a non-governmental organization (Red Cross or Amnesty International) or a firm that has a strong focus on social justice