

Welcome to the latest edition of the Victoria Legal Aid newsletter Diversity News. This edition features reports about the Victorian Human Rights Charter, new Victoria Legal Aid booklets and brochures, and our program of family law workshops. You will also meet Victoria Legal Aid's new legal resources co-ordinator, Kerrie Soraghan.

Victoria Legal Aid embraces new Human Rights Charter

In 2006, Victoria took the historic step of enacting a Charter of Human Rights. Apart from the Australian Capital Territory, no other State or Territory in Australia has a charter.

The charter came into full effect at the start of this year. It is based on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966. It contains twenty well-known rights that enable people to live with freedom, respect, equality and dignity (such as the right to liberty and the right to fair hearing). It also contains specific rights about legal aid in criminal proceedings.

Courts and tribunals are now required to interpret all legislation in a way that is compatible with human rights. All public authorities (including VLA) are required to act in a way that is compatible with human rights and give human rights proper consideration in decision making.

VLA is optimistic that the Charter will deliver benefits to all Victorians, particularly those who are socially or financially disadvantaged.

The Charter provides a framework that VLA can use to protect its client's human rights by:

- reinforcing rights in existing criminal, family and civil cases
- supporting law reform submissions
- reviewing and improving VLA policies and procedures
- requiring other public authorities (such as the Police) to act appropriately.

Kerrie Soraghan: keen to communicate

Kerrie Soraghan is Victoria Legal Aid's new legal resources co-ordinator. Her role includes organising the translations of VLA's community legal education publications, such as brochures, information sheets and web pages.

She is well aware, though, of the need to think beyond the printed word as a form of communication with Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities.



Kerrie Soraghan, Victoria Legal Aid's new legal resources co-ordinator

'Part of my role here is to bring into focus the languages and the groups that we want to target effectively,' Kerrie says. 'For example, how do we reach the people we want to reach? How do we best get knowledge about the law to various groups?'

Kerrie's immediate previous employment was with the Department of Human Services, where she wrote specific newsletters about the closing down of Kew Cottages, the institution that, in the 1980s, was home for 900 disabled people. Kew Cottages officially closes this April, after seven years, many of them controversial, of placing its residents into less-institutionalised housing.

At the Department of Human Services Kerrie wrote a regular newsletter for the 700 staff who were part of Kew Cottages, and another newsletter for the families of the residents, their advocates and community groups.

For many years a social worker in the western suburbs, Kerrie says the work with Kew Cottages 'gave me a feeling of contributing to something I believed in.'

No doubt she is hoping that her role at Victoria Legal Aid will be just as fulfilling.

New English-language publications

How to run your family law case (formerly the *Self represented litigant's kit*) has been updated and will be available soon. This publication is a do-it-yourself kit to help people prepare a family law case and represent themselves in court. The kit also outlines alternatives to going to court, such as family dispute resolution.

Chapters include Applying to court, Preparing for children or property matters, Where there is family violence or child abuse, Preparing for an interim and final hearing, Affidavits, Disclosure and subpoenas, What to do on the day and once an order is made. There is also a detailed Where to get help section.

New features include a guide to legal words and new procedures in the Melbourne Family Court of Australia. This edition has undergone a substantial plain English edit for reader accessibility.



You and family law – a short guide has been updated and will be available soon. This publication has been developed for culturally and linguistically diverse readers and offers an introduction to family law. Chapters include Separation and divorce, Family violence, Family dispute resolution, Children, Dividing your property and a section on Where to get help.

You can order these free family law publications online at www.legalaid.com.au or by calling 9269 0223. If you have any questions concerning these family law publications, please contact Sabina Crawley, legal resources co-ordinator on 9269 0439.



Disagree with a Centrelink decision?

A new brochure about appealing Centrelink decisions is part of VLA's latest free publications. The brochure outlines how VLA specialists in social security law can help people who disagree with a Centrelink decision.

Who pays for a grant of legal assistance?

This new two-page fact sheet explains how grants of legal assistance work and how VLA clients may be asked to pay back some of all of their legal costs. This information has been developed for anyone who is interested in applying for a grant of legal assistance.

People and work is back in print. It has been updated to include changes to the law since July 2007. Most of these changes are in the chapter Understanding your employment conditions and relate to information about the Australian Fair Pay and Conditions Standard.

There is also more comprehensive information in the following chapters: Sorting out your pay, Getting superannuation, and Health and safety at work.

These free VLA publications, and many others produced by Victoria Legal Aid, can be ordered by visiting www.legalaid.vic.gov.au or by calling 9269 0223.

Family law workshops

Victoria Legal Aid is running free family law information workshops in Melbourne and Dandenong for people involved in preparing a family law case and who may have to represent themselves in court.

Workshop 1 is an introductory workshop to help you get started. It covers:

- an introduction to the Family Law Act and courts
- applying for and responding to a court order
- what to do at court.

Workshop 2 provides information on preparing for the hearing. It covers:

- preparing documents for final trial
- witnesses
- how to appeal.

Workshops are held at:

- Melbourne Family Court on the last Wednesday of every month, phone 9269 0223 or 1800 677 402 (country callers) to book
- Dandenong Family Court on the first Wednesday of every month, phone 9767 7111 to book.

At the workshop you will be given what is known as a self-represented litigant's kit. This free kit will help you prepare your family law case and represent yourself in court.

Legal Information Service

This VLA service provides free legal information via telephone in English and 14 other languages, from Monday to Friday between 8.45 am and 5.15 pm.

Telephone 9269 0120 or 1800 677 402 (Country callers)

Arabic	9269 0127	Polish	9269 0228
Cantonese	9269 0161	Russian	9269 0315
Croatian	9269 0164	Serbian	9269 0332
Greek	9269 0167	Spanish	9269 0384
Italian	9269 0202	Turkish	9269 0386
Macedonian	9269 0477	Ukrainian	9269 0390
Mandarin	9269 0212	Vietnamese	9269 0391



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