

WOMEN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION ACT

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PRESIDENT'S NOTE

With a new year just around the corner, now is the perfect time to reflect on what we've achieved and to start setting goals for the year ahead. For many of us, career progression is one of these goals. In this issue we have sought to collate insights and tips from successful women lawyers from different backgrounds and career paths with the aim of assisting to further empower others to progress their careers and increase the representation of women lawyers in the profession.

First up in this issue our #womenlawyersoftheact interviewees from pages 2 to 5 share their insights and words of wisdom about everything from making partnership to flexible working arrangements and the varied trajectories a career in law offers.

Continuing on with the theme of career progression, at page 6 we hear from the hard-working team of law students behind the Women In Law Organisation (WILO) Mentoring Program about the importance of the program and mentorship for women law students heading into the legal profession.

In this issue, we also hear from Anca Costin from Blackburn Chambers, Siobhan Mullins from Separate Together and Shalini Sree from Elringtons Lawyers. Anca shares her unique story of her career path to the bar, her experience coming from a culturally and linguistically diverse background and the importance of mentorship. Siobhan discusses what it's like to take the leap and start your own practice, and the importance of having a career vision or goal. Shalini shares with us her top 5 tips based on her own experience for women seeking to progress in their career.

We are very proud to have hosted so many affordable and engaging events for our members throughout 2019. Some of the highlights from the past few months have been our annual Judicial Mentoring Lunch, a seminar on buying your first home hosted by Michael Miller from MLC Advice and our annual End of Year Drinks! A full recap of these events can be found on pages 12-13.

We have been very busy preparing for a great line up of events in 2020. To kick off 2020 we are pleased to announce that tickets for our first event of the year are available from today! This will be a screening of Just Mercy at Palace Electric on 6 February 2020. Head to page 11 for further details.

We are pleased to be able to offer discounted part-year membership rates for the remainder of the 2019-2020 year. This is a great opportunity to sign up as a member if you haven't already so that you can enjoy a range of benefits including free attendances and discounted rates for our upcoming events. See page 5 for further details.

As always, if you or anyone you know might be interested in contributing to our newsletters by way of interview or article we can be contacted at contact@wlaact.org.au, via our Facebook page or Instagram page.

We take this opportunity to wish our members, friends and families a happy and safe holiday season. We look forward to seeing you all in the new year.



-Danielle Mildren, WLA ACT President

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YOUR STORIES: #WOMENLAWYERSOFTHEACT

IN THIS ISSUE, WE MEET SARAH ROSS-SMITH, PARTNER AT ASHURST



We recently caught up with Sarah Ross-Smith, partner at Ashurst to discuss her views on achieving your career goals, what it's like to be a female partner and her favourite binge tv recommendations.

ASHURST HAS RECENTLY BEEN AWARDED THE WORKPLACE GENDER EQUALITY AGENCY'S EMPLOYER CHOICE FOR GENDER EQUALITY. HOW HAVE YOU BEEN SUPPORTED IN THE WORKPLACE AS A WOMAN LAWYER?

I think like many lawyers (and not just women lawyers) I have benefitted from flexible working arrangements – whether that be part-time or working from home as my personal needs have required. Often women need that as primary caregivers to children or parents but increasingly we are seeing that male lawyers are accessing that as well which is great. I think the more men work flexibly, the more that challenges the stereotypes

of what it is to be a "typical" lawyer, I am thinking now of some of my male colleagues who are very successful and who provide real role models for both male and female lawyers to see that there is more to life than being in the office. That life outside the office matters, that family matters!

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU SEE PREVENTING WOMEN FROM ACHIEVING THEIR CAREER GOALS TODAY, AND HOW MIGHT WE START TO FIX IT?

I often look at my younger female colleagues and think – do you know how good you are? Men are often very eager to tell you of their accomplishments, but women can be quite reticent and almost shy in sharing their successes. Sometimes that holds them back and I would really urge young women to look at what they have achieved and ask if they are valuing themselves. Because that reluctance could mean you don't get a promotion or a raise when you deserve it.

PEOPLE SAY THAT THE VIEW FROM THE TOP CAN BE ISOLATING. DO YOU FIND IT LONELY AS A FEMALE PARTNER? PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR SUPPORT TEAM.

I am really fortunate in that four of our six partners in the Canberra office are

women so I don't feel lonely at all as a female partner. In a broader sense, we have a terrific group of female counsel, senior associates and lawyers who started the Canberra Office's Women's Network to really make sure that gender issues were being addressed and we are joined by our male colleagues in a lot of the work that we do. At a national and global level our Managing Partner, Paul Jenkins (who himself is a Male Champion of Change) instituted a group of female and male partners who are part of Ashurst's Committed to Change program which meets via phone to share ideas about promoting gender equality.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BINGE-WORTHY TV SHOW AT THE MOMENT?

The OA Part 2 – but I am concerned that it is going to be way too long until Part 3 comes around. So I am waiting for Terrace House – the Japanese reality TV show which is utterly addictive. Think Big Brother, with housemates who enter the house with life "goals" and leave when they feel their time is "up". No humiliating "public votes you off" process. And hilarious Japanese commentators who often help explain the cultural context for non-Japanese viewers... Next season should be out in mere days.

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WE CAUGHT UP WITH CLAIRE CARTON, PARTNER AT GRIFFIN LEGAL



CAN YOU TELL US A BIT MORE ABOUT YOU AND HOW YOU CAME TO HOLD THE POSITION OF PARTNER AT GRIFFIN LEGAL?

In 2009 I left my previous firm and started Griffin Legal with two colleagues. Our aim was to create a modern law firm which recognised where law, and society more generally was heading. Flexible work was a cornerstone of this, but equally so was a focus on providing high quality practical legal services.

IT IS INSPIRATIONAL THAT ALL 3 PARTNERS AT GRIFFIN LEGAL ARE WOMEN, CAN YOU TELL US HOW THIS CAME ABOUT?

The current partner structure of all women was not deliberate. Initially the firm had two female and one male partner. The current all female partners are each there because of their skill, commitment and client following. As the new generation of lawyers comes through, with a majority of graduates being women, I expect we will see more corporate and

commercial firms like ours with only female partners.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU AND HOW HAS THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIRM/THE FIRM SUPPORTED YOU IN THAT REGARD?

I value the firm's continued focus on delivering high quality practical legal services in a sustainable way in terms of the wellbeing of ourselves and our staff. Sure, we have a focus on quality and operating a profitable and sustainable business, but we also recognise this can be achieved without needing to work the long hours behind a desk. The original partners recognised this, as do the current partners. We work flexibly daily and weekly depending on our personal needs and our client's requirements. We allow staff to choose how they work – and it can be full time, part-time or remotely – this has remained constant since we started. This structure has supported me personally as a mother of four and as I have pursued community contributions on various boards.

WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST ENJOYABLE ABOUT WHAT YOU DO?

I spend a lot of my days now working with not-for-profits and charities. These clients are contributing in many positive and different ways to our society throughout Australia, and I enjoy being in a position to help them. I also thoroughly enjoy working in what is a dynamic time for our society generally – we are faced with change on many fronts and with that comes the opportunity to contribute to how the

legal profession responds to these challenges for the decades ahead.

COULD YOU GIVE US A GLIMPSE OF A WORKING DAY IN YOUR LIFE?

I like to head into the office around 7.30am-8am (after making school lunches). After spending some time getting organised for the day, I will generally have a coffee catch up with a client or colleague, and then my day is spent reading/reviewing/settling, on the phone or in client meetings – these days usually on the topic of governance, contracts or employment related matters. As a partner your role becomes about helping clients around the strategy of responding to issues and settling work rather than on drafting or research. Tuesday's I am on school pick up, but subject to anything else happening I like to head home just before 5pm. Friday's, I either don't work or I work remotely.

DO YOU HAVE ANY WORDS OF ADVICE FOR THOSE WISHING TO MAKE PARTNER OF A FIRM ONE DAY?

In a world of flexibility and work-life balance I'd encourage young lawyers not to forget that hard work is still required for success and certainly for becoming and remaining a Partner. Working hard doesn't necessarily mean long hours but it means being smart about how you work and learn. In the early years, practitioners should focus on developing solid legal skills and then on building client relationships while at the same time ensuring they earn and maintain the respect of their peers - not just in their firm but within the broader legal community.

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WE ALSO CAUGHT UP WITH KATRINA MARSON, DIRECTOR, CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ROYAL COMMISSION; CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM TEAM (ACT GOVERNMENT)



CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR CAREER JOURNEY SINCE GRADUATING FROM LAW SCHOOL?

I went straight to the DPP to do my practical legal training there, and completed my GDLP while working as a policy officer/instructor for that first year. I then applied for a junior prosecutor position and was successful. I moved into the family violence unit, then went to Legal Aid on secondment in the criminal practice, before returning to the DPP in the sexual offences unit. I am now on secondment to Legislation Policy and Programs in JACS, as Director of the Child Abuse Royal Commission Criminal Justice Response Team, leading the implementation of that Royal Commission's criminal justice recommendations in the ACT. I am also Acting co-Director of the Criminal Law Team currently.

WHAT DID YOU ENJOY MOST DURING YOUR TIME AT THE ACT DPP?

I really valued the opportunity to get on my feet so early in my career. In a small jurisdiction where the DPP has carriage of summary matters, you begin your advocacy career almost

immediately as a junior prosecutor. A steep but valuable learning curve.

WHAT DOES BEING A DIRECTOR AT A LEGAL POLICY DIVISION IN THE ACT GOVERNMENT ENTAIL?

As a Director I find that I need to bring some vision, but couple it with a pragmatic approach to bring policy intentions to life. I need to be a problem solver, and I frequently rely on my practical experience of the criminal justice system. It's also about managing people, and attempting to meet my staff's interests while working to achieve the organisational priorities. I take a pretty collaborative approach, and don't presume I know everything or have all the answers. Often it's about asking the right questions of the right people.

WE HAVE ALSO LEARNT THAT YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR INTEREST IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE LAW. CAN YOU TELL US WHAT SPARKED YOUR INTEREST IN TAKING THIS FURTHER WITH THE CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP, AND THE WORK YOU HAVE BEEN DOING AS A FELLOW?

I majored in gender studies in my Arts degree, and that academic focus also shaped my Law degree in the electives I took. Then my Honours thesis examined the efficacy of sexual offence law reform compared to preventative education in reducing the incidence of sexual violence. I sort of stumbled into the topic, but it sparked an interest in sexual violence

prevention that would stay with me, and I suppose demonstrates that early on I saw the criminal justice system as only one part of a bigger picture.

Notwithstanding that interest, I did go into an area of law that focuses on responding to sexual violence once it has occurred. Similarly, my current work focuses on improving those responses. But my interest in prevention was only reinforced by my time in practice, and I always harboured a desire to do more with prevention.

When I learned about the Churchill Fellowship – which provides grants for research proposals in literally any area (I mean literally – from the preservation of mid-century modern architecture to improving teenagers' financial literacy) – I thought it might be an opportunity to look more closely at prevention through education. I was awarded a Fellowship to research international perspectives and practical experience in the design and implementation of relationships and sex education. I travelled to Ireland, the UK, Germany, Holland, Canada and the USA in pursuit of this research, and learned more than I ever could have imagined. I've now written up my findings in a report (Ignorance is not Innocence (can be downloaded [here](#))) which details the case for comprehensive relationships and sex education, necessary design features, implementation success factors and mitigating risks to implementation.

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YOU ARE INVOLVED IN A NUMBER OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF WORK, WHAT ARE THEY AND WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO PARTAKE IN THEM?

I sat on the governance committee of the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre for five years, and it was humbling to contribute to such a vital service. I have also been tutoring in Evidence Law and sometimes also Criminal Law for the past several years at the ANU, which I find really rewarding. I sometimes write articles for media

publications or blogs, and am also about to finish a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education. I also sometimes speak to students at the ANU about careers or leadership, or about my area of research. I just like to contribute my time and energy to the Canberra community in whatever way is useful.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR SOMEONE WHO IS UNSURE ABOUT WHETHER THEY SHOULD BE PRACTISING LAW AND IS EQUALLY

INTERESTED IN PURSUING A ROLE IN POLICY?

Without a doubt I see tremendous value in breadth of professional experience. I am grateful I have had the chance to do both practice and policy – each informs the other, and has allowed me to develop different skills. My advice would be, if you're interested in both don't feel you have to make a choice between them, nor that you will be limiting yourself to either option. You don't have to chart your life course from the get go, try your hand at different things.

DISCOUNTED PART-YEAR MEMBERSHIPS

WLA ACT is pleased to offer [discounted part-year membership rates](#).

Part-year membership rates are now available for the remainder of the 2019-20 year. Ordinary Memberships are reduced from \$75 to only \$40 and Associate Memberships are

reduced from \$40 to only \$20. Further discounts apply for [Corporate Memberships](#).

WLA ACT membership offers a range of benefits including attendance at WLA ACT events for free or at discounted rates, and access to our

policy publications, news and communications, and initiatives. Membership remains free for lawyers working for community legal centres and Legal Aid, and students.

[Join now](#) to take advantage of the reduced rates and the fabulous events planned for 2020.

CALL FOR CORPORATE CLOTHES DONATION

February 12-14, 2020 | 12 noon till 2:00pm – Meyer Vandenberg, Lv 2, 121 Marcus Clarke Street

The fabulous Meyer Vandenberg Second-Hand Corporate Clothing

sale is back! Now in its second year, this event is any fashionista's haven for bargain buys.

If you've got designer threads and accessories, clean out your cupboard now.

Donate your unwanted clothes to Meyer Vandenberg, and we'll stock the racks of our corporate clothing sale.

Proceeds to Stella Bella Little Stars Foundation.

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WOMEN IN LAW ORGANISATION (WILO) MENTOR PROGRAM TIFFANY, PHYLLIE, MACCALLUM AND AMBER



From left to right is Amber Barney, Tiffany Wilken, Phyllida Behm and MacCallum Johnson

WLA ACT recently caught up with current committee members of The Women in Law Organisation ('WILO') at Australian National University (ANU) to learn a bit more about them and to chat about some success stories from the program.

WILO runs a mentoring program which pairs women studying at the ANU's College of Law with professional women in the legal sector. Tiffany Wilken, Phyllida "Phyllie" Behm, MacCallum Johnson and Amber Barney are the current committee members of WILO, having taken these leadership roles from the creators in 2017. Unfortunately, Amber was unable to join us for the interview.

TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOU

After moving from NSW to pursue a double-degree of Public Policy and Law, MacCallum is now in her final year of study. In addition to studying and her work with WILO, MacCallum works as a research officer at the ANU Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, is the Canberra Branch Director of Young Australians in International Affairs and is the Deputy Chair

of Future Strategic Leaders Program at the Institute for Regional Security.

Tiffany moved from Western Sydney, NSW to complete her law degree at the Australian National University, where she is now balances study with working 3 days a week at Legal Aid ACT.

Phyllie is a Canberran who is in her fourth year of a combined Bachelor of Arts (philosophy)/Law. Phyllie works as an administrative and research assistant at Blackburn Chambers.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO YOUR CURRENT ROLE AT WILO?

Phyllie: I did the program in the Second Semester of 2016. Immediately after I completed the program, one of the women who set it up was looking for people to take over running the program. My mentor was nice and I thought "why not give it a go?" I was looking for a law curricular outside the competitions. As the program was organized by young women it seemed like a positive co-curricular I could be involved with. All of us were mentees in the 2016 program and came on board in 2017 and the women who started the program are now all off doing amazing things.

Tiffany: When I moved to Canberra I didn't know anyone, my mentor was one of the first people I met in Canberra. Having that relationship made settling into Canberra life so much easier, and made connecting to the legal industry and gaining experience much smoother. I wanted to be able to match other mentees and mentors

who might also be new to Canberra and who need those connections.

Phyllie: That's one of the great things about the program, it is pretty flexible and we can match people based on their applications and what they might get out of the program, not just academic achievements. The program has grown a lot from around 30 mentors in 2017 to 60 mentors in Semester One 2019.

MacCallum: Like Tiffany and Phyllie, I was a mentee with the first round of the Program. The calibre of the mentors was outstanding. When the opportunity arose to be involved in running the program I thought it would be a good way for me to contribute to letting others have the same good opportunity.

WHAT ARE SOME SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE PROGRAM?

Tiffany: I really enjoy the panel events. We will see a lot of students coming in stressed about their future career options but hearing the diverse stories of the panel members helps to alleviate that stress.

Phyllie: Yes, there's a lot of stress regarding clerkships for students and it really helped with that stress when they heard that not one panel member had been involved in formal clerkship programs and are now very accomplished.

Tiffany: It definitely takes the stress off. Women studying are dealing with the pressure of working, trying to get experience, do extra-curricular activities and maintain good grades so it

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really helps seeing and hearing women who have been employed with or without doing all of these things.

Phyllie: One experience I enjoyed hearing was of a friend who ended up working for the same firm as her mentor. Hearing that story was great. Having said that, success from the program doesn't always mean, resulting in a job and I think there are a lot of stories we don't hear as we don't always get feedback.

Tiffany: Absolutely, not all relationships between mentors and mentees are the same and a lot of the good 'success' stories are private in that relationship.

MacCallum: Having initially been a mentee in this program, I like going to the end of semester celebrations and seeing women from different backgrounds intermingling and supporting each other. To me, that's the success story of this program.

Tiffany: the end of semester celebrations see women students mingling with graduate lawyers through to partners. There is no standard mentor/mentee relationship.

Phyllie: The end of semester celebration is a really nice event where women lawyers from a wide range of backgrounds are able to celebrate with a cocktail, relax and mix without an agenda. It's a special event for students, who don't necessarily attend a lot of functions like this and it is nice to relax and mingle without an agenda.

WHAT'S ONE BIT OF ADVICE FOR MENTORS, OR THOSE LOOKING TO BE MENTORS?

Tiffany: tell us if there is a problem. We will often hear after the program is over that mentors don't want to pester their mentees, but have not heard from the mentee.

Phyllie: Agreed, we have a shortlist so if a mentor is paired with a non-responsive mentee, there is someone else who will absolutely take the position. It's also good to see mentors encouraging mentees to seek opportunities and apply for roles etc. they are interested in. We see mentees being really receptive to this.

Another point is that mentees really enjoy being able to attend their mentor's workplace if an opportunity arises to do so.

MacCallum: I think mentees really appreciate open and honest advice as it helps them prepare for their future careers.

WHAT DO YOU PERSONALLY ENJOY ABOUT THE PROGRAM?

Phyllie: I really like being part of the program and the positive and supportive culture around the program.

Tiffany: The four of us are now in a position to support each other through our studies. Additionally, I like helping give students more exposure to the wider Canberra legal network through their relationships with their mentors.

MacCallum: I agree with Tiffany and Phyllie. It's a nice connection in the group and to the broader student and legal community.

WHAT DISTINGUISHES THE WILO MENTORING PROGRAM FROM OTHER STUDENT MENTORING PROGRAMS?

Phyllie: I think WILO is distinguished by being an organic and student run organisation.

Tiffany: The cocktail event at the end of each semester is special. We have had some really wonderful speakers join us at our cocktail events and it also gives mentors and mentees a great opportunity to mingle in a friendly environment.

Phyllie: Thinking about our speakers, we've been fortunate in that in the past we've been joined by judicial officers and law graduates who are now not practicing as lawyers. It's great exposure for mentees to see the ways their careers can potentially develop.

MacCallum: the program is quite open to mentees from a range of backgrounds and stages in their degree. It's not restricted by subject matter or the stage a woman is at in her degree, although we do preference later year students.

Phyllie: the program has been running for three years now and we expect to see that continue. It's great having a program with such longevity.

The Women Lawyers Association of the Australian Capital Territory is proud to support the program and we encourage members who are interested in mentoring to **sign up**. Applications will open again in early 2020.

You can stay up to date with the program by connecting with them on [LinkedIn](#) or on [Facebook](#).

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POWER OF PERSEVERANCE ANCA COSTIN, BLACKBURN CHAMBER



Anca Costin, barrister at Blackburn Chambers was recently called to the bar after a successful career as a litigation solicitor in Canberra.

We asked Anca to share her reflections and insights about her career path to the bar and her experience coming from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

This newsletter is about career progression. To me, that's achieving goals. You might want to reach a certain position in a law firm, or a government department, or going to the Bar or simply be happy and content with your professional life. I am not that bold to think that I am able to give advice on any of these circumstances. We all have different goals and different personal circumstances that may make it easier or harder to achieve those goals. All I can do is to share my experiences and the lessons learned on the way.

I have recently been called to the Bar but my journey to get there has not been a common or easy one. My Australian story started 10 years ago. Shortly after moving to Canberra I decided to enrol in a Diploma in Law course as my Bachelor of Laws from Romania was not fully recognised. Deciding to study law again came naturally. That was mainly because, from a very young age, I had enjoyed studying, expressing ideas but more

so understanding, discovering and advocating for fairness. Returning to law school offered me exactly all of that.

My legal career began in 2013 with the ACT Human Rights Commission. There, I had the opportunity to work and learn from some wonderful people, including Dr Helen Watchirs, the ACT Human Rights Commissioner. During that time, I also volunteered one day a week at the ACT/NSW Aboriginal Legal Service whilst also completing my Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice at ANU.

After one year at the Commission, I was offered a role as a litigation solicitor with Elringtons Lawyers, working in their Canberra and Queanbeyan offices. My role at Elringtons allowed me to do a variety of litigious matters that exposed me to a plethora of very interesting and diverse range of cases in different jurisdictions. That experience gave me the confidence to start considering a career at the Bar.

Without a doubt, the experience gained at Elringtons was the catalyst in developing my advocacy skills. After four years at Elringtons Lawyers, I was approached by Bradley Allen Love Lawyers to join their Employment Law team. The role offered me the opportunity to continue to gain further expertise in employment law, one of my main areas of interest, working alongside, and sometimes against, specialists in this field. BAL offered me the opportunity to refine my writing skills and work on some very interesting employment law matters.

I will forever be grateful to all my mentors, formal or informal, who

have helped me in many ways to become a better lawyer.

Mentors are important, and they can show you the way and guide you in your journey, but you are the one who has to walk it and sometimes, that involves difficult pathways. However, when you are faced with adversity, that should only reinforce that you are on the right pathway. Not many important things in life come easy.

My decision to become a barrister did not come as naturally as the one to study law. At the end, it was a consensus decision taken with my husband and our parents. As with everything in my life, once I had a goal set, all I had to do was to figure out a plan to achieve it and then start working to put it into practice. It is a simple concept that works. It reminds me of the wonderful quote (or variations of it) attributed to Thomas Jefferson: "I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the luckier I get".

The other point that I had to consider when deciding whether to go to the Bar or not, was that English is my second language. Given that language and communication are the main instruments or the tools of the trade of our profession, speaking English with an accent may be seen as a hindrance. In addition, being a female barrister may be even less enticing for some. Notwithstanding that, I am grateful and in the same time indebted to the legal community as I had the opportunity to work as a solicitor, and now as a barrister, and feel included from the beginning. It shows that times are changing, and diversity is more accepted and embraced in the legal profession.

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Change takes time but we can all contribute to it, in different ways.

In 2017, I decided to become a mentor with Women in Law Organisation (WILO) created under the auspices of ACT Women Lawyers Association. Becoming a mentor was my way of giving back to students coming from a similar background as myself. I have enjoyed spending time with each mentee and, by the end of the program, becoming friends with each of them. I believe that law students who come from a diverse

background, including linguistically diverse, can see that change is happening in the ACT, and they may be more persuaded to take certain paths in relation to their legal careers that they might not otherwise have done so.

I was surprised to discover that I was the only barrister doing the practical bar course at the NSW Bar Association who spoke English as a second language. I am not aware of any other barristers in the ACT coming from a linguistically diverse

background, where English is not their mother tongue. I am confident that things will change as we become more embracing of diversity in the law.

Every time I have set up a new goal, I have found it exhilarating, sometimes even more than achieving the result itself because I always know that once the goal is well cemented in my mind and I have become invested in it, the result would inevitably follow.

CAREER GROWTH SIOBHAN MULLINS, SEPARATE TOGETHER

Siobhan Mullins is the founder of Separate Together, a Canberra based online family law firm that specialises in helping couples and individuals to separate and divorce amicably. Siobhan is also a best-selling author and multi-award winning, collaboratively trained divorce consultant (lawyer).

We asked Siobhan to share her reflections and insights on starting her own firm and her career goals.

To put it indelicately, my 2018 year sucked. 2019 on the other hand has been a year of growth. I became a best selling author, won two legal industry awards, was named a finalist for a further four legal and business industry awards and my firm was named “one of Australia’s most innovative firms”. So, what made 2019 the year of fruition after a personally awful 2018 year? Let me wind it back.

After completing a social science degree and then completing my LLB and GDLP in the following two years, whilst working four-five days a week and studying more than a fulltime load, I was admitted to practice in 2013 at 23 years. I practiced at a private family law firm before starting my own law firm, Separate Together, at aged 27.

Being aware that there is a deficit of private practicing female lawyers around the 4-6 year post admission mark, my goal when I was first admitted was to make it past five years in private practice. I wanted to make the most out of my career before I had a family. I felt that longer term; the profession wasn’t conducive to proportionate work-life equilibrium due to the pressure of billables, long hours and the nature of the work.



I never, ever would’ve believed that I’d be bold enough to leave the security of a permanent job for my own start up law firm. I certainly never had any desire to be a business owner or wear the responsibility and stress of trust accounting.

Noting an unmet market demand, the trend of unbundled legal services across other practice areas and technology integration, I discovered a way in which I could create a job for

myself. In doing so, I could build a business based on my own values and provide myself with more flexibility and autonomy than the traditional lawyer role could and ever did. And hence, Separate Together was born. Perhaps unsurprisingly, at now aged 30, my career goal and vision for the business has changed.

I’ve evolved from simply wanting to have five years PQE, to creating a job for myself to now running Australia’s leading online family, award winning law firm, and having a BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) in under seven years of practice.

In terms of what got me to where I am today, I was well mentored before starting my own firm. 2018 tested my resilience, perseverance, passion and dedication for law, (characteristics which I believe are important as a lawyer and human being), which has paid dividends this year.

I believe that working out what you don’t want in life early on in your career—whether it be in a relationship or work, is just as important as working out what you do want. Starting from a place of ‘no’ at times helps to establish those all-important boundaries for us as female lawyers.

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5 IMPORTANT LEARNINGS SHALINI SREE, ELRINGTONS LAWYERS



Shalini Sree is one of only four Accredited Specialist in Property Law in the ACT and a director of Elringtons Lawyers. Having been appointed Director at 28 years old in 2016, she became one of the youngest and only female director/ partner of the firm in the firm's 120 years of history. She is also an Executive Board Member of Home in Queanbeyan, a charitable organisation set up to provide assistance and accommodation to the homeless – especially those suffering from mental health.

We ask her to share some learnings from her experience thus far and advice she would give to a younger version of herself.

Thinking back, if I had to give a younger version of myself advice on career progression, there would be a never-ending list of advice! However, if I had to summarise my list into 5 important tips/ learnings, they would be:

1. FIND AND CONNECT WITH MENTORS

In my opinion, one can never have too many mentors and mentors can come in many forms. There's always so much to learn from those around us! A mentor or network of mentors can assist with offering unbiased views, advice and perspective on one's day-to-day practice and career

progression. I personally do not believe there is a need for a formal mentor-mentee relationship – in fact, I think that formal structures can sometimes inhibit relationship development that would otherwise form organically. Ask someone out for a coffee catch-up – you'd be surprised how many people would be happy to oblige a catch-up request if you ask nicely! Personally, I have a network of mentors – all of which relationships have formed organically, either in the course of day-to-day practice or in attending networking functions. I would attribute a big part of who I am today to my mentors who have helped guide me along the way (and they continue to do so till this day).

2. FIGHT FOR YOUR SEAT AT THE TABLE

It is incredibly important to do the work and prepare actively to earn your seat at the table. Once the preparation is done, trust yourself and your preparation and be fearless in asserting your purpose in that space – whether that is welcomed by the others at the table or not. Be focussed on creating an impact and know that sometimes that could mean having to disrupt the norm.

3. HAVE UNWAVERING FAITH IN THAT EVERY EXPERIENCE HAS A COLLECTIVE WORTH

This includes every job, every opportunity, every sacrifice, every struggle, every "no" that was ever said to you and every joy-stealer you have had to endure. More often than not, it is difficult to see how much all of the experiences you have are collectively worth but keep pressing forward because one day you will look back

and connect the dots. You will also learn that it is the toughest experiences that teaches the greatest lessons. So, the next time you are experiencing a tough time, know that you are simply in the process of adding another worthy tool to your collection!

4. TAKE OWNERSHIP OF YOUR SUCCESS

Growing up, I was always taught to not talk about my accomplishments. I'm a terrible self-promoter – and still am! It's also well-researched fact that women less likely to draw attention to themselves and take ownership of their successes. Generally, women tend to attribute their accomplishments to other people, their families or work team. That's all very nice but experience has taught me that often, it is those who visibly take credit for their own accomplishments who are rewarded with promotions and gem matters. I am not at all suggesting that one makes a lot of pretentious noise – because that puts others off! I would, however, advise the younger version of me and encourage others to learn to master the art of taking ownership of success with ease and sincerity. It certainly requires skill to state your value and accomplishment without coming across as pompous or making others feel uncomfortable. But hopefully with practice, it will get easier.

5. NETWORK AND FOCUS ON BUILDING A PRACTICE

I would give the same advice to every young woman starting out today – start networking as early as possible in your career as the people you meet when you start out will likely become important contacts later in your

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career. I fell into networking because I started my first job in a small firm and naturally, had to network to generate my own work. In my opinion,

networking should form a core part of everyone's career development plan. It is critical to build relationships to win work which would in turn support

career progression. Of course, be yourself when you network because it is a lot easier (and fun) to network when you can be completely yourself!

UPCOMING EVENTS

JUST MERCY SCREENING

Thursday, February 6, 2020
5:45 PM - 8:30 PM
Palace Electric, Nishi Building

[Purchase Ticket](#)

The Women Lawyers Association of the ACT is proud to present a special event screening of *Just Mercy*.

A powerful and thought-provoking true story, *Just Mercy* following young lawyer Bryan Stevenson and his history-making battle for justice. After graduating from Harvard, Bryan has his pick of lucrative jobs. Instead, he heads to Alabama to defend those wrongly condemned or who were not afforded proper representation.

One of his first, and most incendiary, cases is that of Walter McMillian, who, in 1987, was sentenced to die for the notorious murder of an 18 year old girl, despite a preponderance of evidence proving his innocence and the fact that the only testimony against him came from a criminal with a motive to lie. In the years that follow, Bryan becomes embroiled in a labyrinth of legal and political manoeuvrings and overt and unabashed racism as he fights for Walter, and others like him, with the odds - and the system - stacked against them.

Tickets are \$10 for members and \$20 for non-members. Each ticket includes a glass of wine and a choice

between a small popcorn and an ice cream.

The screening starts at 6:30pm sharp. Attendees are welcome to arrive from 5:45pm and we ask that you are seated by 6:20pm.

Tickets can be purchased [here](#).



Maddocks

Thank you to [Maddocks](#) for their generous sponsorship of the event.

2020 WOMEN LAWYERS AWARDS – SAVE THE DATE

Friday, October 23, 2020
6:30 PM - 11:00 PM
National Gallery of Australia
Parkes Place East Parkes, ACT,
2600

WLA ACT is pleased to invite you to save the date for our Gala Dinner to present the winners of the 2020 ACT Women Lawyers Awards.

This is a premier event in the WLA ACT and ACT legal community calendar. Join us for a delightful evening of food and wine with your colleagues and friends to celebrate the achievements of ACT women lawyers.

Sponsorship opportunities for the 2020 ACT Women Lawyers Awards

are available. See our [website](#) for further details or feel free to contact us at sponsor@wlaact.org.au

Further details will follow.

Stay tuned on WLA ACT's [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#) for more upcoming events!

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RECENT EVENTS

MLC ADVICE SEMINAR: HOW TO BUY YOUR FIRST HOME

On 24 October 2019, Michael Miller, from [MLC Advice Canberra](#), shared valuable advice with our members on how to save for your first home.



Michael provided an overview on some of the changes practitioners can implement into their saving plans to help achieve the goal of buying their first home. Michael's recommendations included:

- Being mindful of 'lifestyle creep' which relates to that often unnoticed increase in our spending in line with salary increases can be detrimental to saving goals. We should reward and enjoy ourselves but be mindful about what we are spending our money on.
- Making use of the government 'super saver' scheme
- Talk to a mortgage broker about how any personal debts will be treated when you apply for a home loan

- Tips for paying down your loan faster through the use of redraw & offset accounts, mental accounting and eliminating bill shock
- Allow yourself some money for your personal essentials - thankfully, it's not necessary to cut out the daily coffee in order to reach that savings goal!



Michael was joined by Andrew from [Clear Cut Finance](#). Andrew shared helpful information regarding the process of buying a first home from his perspective as a mortgage broker. Some really helpful takeaways from Andrew were:

- Be in control of your money by working out a budget and making use of separate accounts to pay your bills and for savings
- Avoid Lenders Mortgage Insurance on your home loan with professionals packages for legal professionals
- Make sure that you understand the criteria for

meeting the first home buyer stamp duty concession well in advance of your purchase



It can sometimes seem almost impossible to get a foot on the property ladder and everyone really appreciated the information from this session. The information shared provided a clear pathway towards first home ownership.

We would like to thank the ACT Law Society for providing the venue for this event.

Michael Miller is a longstanding sponsor of the ACT Women Lawyers Association. We are grateful for his generous sponsorship and ongoing support.



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JUDICIAL MENTORING LUNCH

The Women Lawyers Association of the ACT held its fourth annual Judicial Mentoring Lunch on Friday 22 November.



At this sold out event, we were joined by Chief Justice Murrell and Justice Loukas-Karlsson of the ACT Supreme Court, Justice Walker, Magistrate Campbell and Magistrate Taylor of the ACT Magistrates Court and Presidential Member Daniel of ACAT.



Each of these distinguished guests shared personal experiences about their journey to the Bench and advice about the art of balancing work and family life. The importance of strong support networks for women in the workplace, irrespective of career stage, was also a strong theme discussed throughout the lunch.



The event was attended by a diverse group of women in the legal field, from legal students to practicing lawyers, who expressed that it provided a terrific opportunity to gain insights from respected judicial officers about how to set and achieve career goals and maintain a long and successful career in law.



We are appreciative of the attendance of our esteemed guests and grateful for their generosity in sharing their inspiring stories and experiences. We also extend our sincere thanks to King & Wood Malesons for their continued generosity in sponsoring and hosting this event.



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END OF YEAR DRINKS



To celebrate the end of another great year, we headed to Molly for the WLA's annual end of year drinks on 5 December 2019.



We were treated to a night of cocktails and canapés, and socialising with our lovely members!

Thanks to all who attended, and we wish all our members a safe and happy holiday season.

WOMEN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION ACT

CALL FOR WLA ACT SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS

Are you interested in getting more involved with the WLA ACT?

WLA ACT currently has subcommittee positions available on the Communications subcommittee. The role of the Communications Subcommittee is to support the functions of WLA ACT, including

maintaining the website, social media platforms and sending out information about events, policy involvements and other news important to our members.

The role provides an opportunity to work on a great committee, alongside a group of committed and

impressive women all working for the interests of women lawyers in the ACT.

WLA ACT also welcomes students interested in the position. If you are interested, please email communications@wlaact.org.au for further information.

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN LAWYERS UPDATE



Australian Women Lawyers

For those that do not know, as a member of WLA ACT you are automatically a member of [Australian Women Lawyers](#) (AWL). WLA ACT elects a representative to sit on the AWL Board and to be the voice of the ACT's women lawyers on a national stage. Kirsty Easdale is WLA ACT's current AWL Director.

AWL held its Annual General Meeting in Melbourne on 9 November 2019. The AWL Board of Directors for 2019/20 is:

- President: Adrienne Morton (TAS)
- Vice President: Leah Marrone (SA)
- Treasurer: Astrid Haban-Ber (Vic Bar)
- Secretary: Rosslyn Chenoweth (NT)
- Ann-Maree David (Qld)
- Ella van der Schans (VIC)
- Holly Lam (NSW)
- Kirsty Easdale (ACT)
- Charmaine Tsang (WA)

The Board looks forward to representing Australia's women lawyer bodies in 2020, and is busy

planning the 2020 conference to be held on 28-29 August 2020 in Melbourne. The one day conference will be held at [The Windsor](#). Chief Justice Susan Kiefel will be giving the key note address, and there will be a gala dinner on 29 August 2019. Be sure to save the 28-29 August 2020 in your diaries now.

AWL has recently signed the [Freedom from Discrimination Statement](#) and lent our support to Equality Australia's efforts to lobby against the unbalanced provisions in the proposed *Religious Discrimination Bill*. We will be making our own submission on the proposed Bill, which is due by 31 January 2020. If you would like to assist with the drafting of this submission, please let Kirsty Easdale know. Kirsty can be contacted at kirsty.easdale@minterellison.com.

AWL's platforms

- [Facebook](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Website](#)

Constituent Bodies

- [NSW](#)
- [QLD](#)

- [SA](#)
- [TAS](#)
- [NT](#)
- [Victorian Women Lawyers](#)
- [Women Barristers Association Victoria](#)
- [WA](#)



Contact

If you have any questions about AWL, or the other women lawyers associations in each State and Territory, please contact Kirsty Easdale via contact@wlaact.org.au.

Kirsty Easdale

AWL Board Director (ACT)

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#READING LIST

EASY TO START, HARD TO PUT DOWN ENTERTAINMENT ACROSS ALL MEDIUMS

What we can't put down is Margaret Atwood's long-awaited sequel to the Handmaid's Tale, *The Testaments*. Whether you've read the book or watched the TV series, you're bound to have questions about what happened to Offred. Read more [here](#).

What we're watching is newly released Season 3 of *The Crown*. Our all-time favourite royal soap opera finally returns for a third season after a two-year wait. This is set to be the most scandalous and captivating season yet which dives into the life

and reign of Queen Elizabeth II. If you're not yet a die-hard fan, the good news is that you've now got 3 seasons worth of episodes to binge watch and catch up. Find it on Netflix [here](#).

PICK OF THE PODCASTS - WHAT WE'RE DRIVING HOME TO

A Podcast of One's Own with Julia Gillard. Join Julia Gillard in her role as Chair of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at King's College London as she hosts her own podcast with prominent female leaders around the world from a variety of different workplaces. It's inspiring, thoughtful and enjoyable. You can download and listen to it [here](#).

Ladies We Need to Talk
Want to know how to close the orgasm gap? Riding your hormonal rollercoaster blindfolded? Can't find contraception that works for you? You're not the only one. Ladies, We Need To Talk is a show for women, by women, and dives head first into the tricky and taboo topics we often avoid talking about. Join host Yumi Stynes as she tears open the sealed section on life. Listen to it [here](#).

Seize the Yay
Join Sarah Holloway, "lawyer turned funtrepeneur" as she interviews some of the most inspiring men and women about how they found their "yay" in life. Sarah's interviews explore all of the ups and downs they have experienced on their journey as well as their tips and insights along the way. If you are in need of a bit of inspiration or motivation this is the podcast for you! Listen to it [here](#).

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HEADLINES

SARAH HANSON-YOUNG WINS DEFAMATION CASE

[Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young wins defamation case against David Leyonhjelm](#)

Australian politician and Greens representative, Sarah Hanson-Young has succeeded in her defamation case against her former political opponent David Leyonhjelm after he

made comments to her in 2018 suggesting she was. In this article Sarah describes this as a win for all women.

This article provides a brief overview of the reasons for the judges decision and why the defendant's defence failed.

Mr Leyonhjelm was ordered to pay Sarah Hanson-Young a sum of \$120,000 which Sarah has said she will be donating to charity.

YOUNGEST FINNISH PRIME MINISTER

[Finnish Minister Sanna Marin, 34, to become world's youngest PM](#)

Sworn in on 9 December 2019, Sanna Marin has become the youngest Prime

Minister in the world at just 34 years of age. Sanna leads the Social Democratic party of Finland and was sworn into a new government alongside four other female party

leaders in the ruling coalition and a government consisting of 12 female ministers and seven male ministers.

This edition of the newsletter has been compiled by Lee Usher-Clarke

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