



## **REPORT TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE INC.**

The Victorian Association for Restorative Justice Inc (VARJ) was launched by Judge Eugene Cullity QC (retired) and Marg Armstrong, Churchill Fellowship holder and educational consultant on 22 June 2005. The impetus for the formation of the Association came out of the holding of a one day symposium by La Trobe University on 6 October the previous year. In the lead up to the official launch the Association had already been incorporated. This occurred on 8 April 2005 and an organizing committee formed consisting of the following people:

- ❖ Peter Condliffe, President, Barrister, Specialist Mediator and Facilitator, 9225 6888.
- ❖ Mark Griffiths, Vice President, Senior Conference Convenor, Jesuit Social Services, 9387 7871; 0407 345 819
- ❖ Nigel Polak, Secretary, Family Relationship Advisor, Ringwood Family Relationship Centre, 9871 6303; 0411 804 030
- ❖ Kathy Douglas, Treasurer, Lecturer, RMIT, 0412111272; 99252945
- ❖ Marg Armstrong, Educational Consultant/Conference Convenor, Department of Education, 9794 3515; 0414 846 439
- ❖ Paul Ban, Consultant/ Social Worker, 9482 2204; 0412 313 744
- ❖ Carmel Benjamin, AM , Consultant, 9804 3645; 0418 195 005
- ❖ Tony Hayes, Coordinator, Family Group Conferencing Program, Jesuit Social Services, 93877871; 0400 574 214
- ❖ David Moore, Consultant, 0418 240 046, 9889 3891
- ❖ Paul Newland, Manager System Development and Quality at the Youth Substance Abuse Service (YSAS), 4158881; 0418534287
- ❖ Carol Smith, General Manager, Community Correctional Services, 8684 6523; 0419 134 219

As Justice Cullity stated at our opening not so long ago:

*“Restorative justice is a global movement finding expression across many areas of human endeavour-*

- *the family decision-making forums in child welfare,*
- *group conferencing in juvenile justice,*
- *workplace conferencing to resolve conflicts in employment,*
- *community conferencing as a crime prevention strategy*
- *school conferencing to deal with problem behaviours in educational settings (to name just a few applications).*

*At the cutting edge of practice, restorative justice processes are being used to address problems such as*

- *domestic and family violence,*
- *sexual and violent offences,*
- *healing the horrors of terrorism in Northern Ireland, for example, and*
- *major crimes against humanity are addressed through the truth and reconciliation commissions set up in East Timor and the more famous commission in South Africa.*

*All these processes are expressions of this global movement to use restorative practices to help empower individuals and communities to address problems that include wrongdoing and crime and achieve better outcomes.”*

Soon after the official opening the committee drafted a strategic plan in which the purposes of the association are spelt out and I repeat them here.

- *To promote the use of restorative justice in schools, the community, prisons, the criminal justice system, the workplace and any other situation where conflict arises.*
- *To disseminate information about, and act as a resource for, restorative practices.*
- *To develop and promote agreed standards and principles for evaluating and guiding restorative practice.*
- *To encourage, and to undertake, research on restorative practices.*
- *To provide a forum for the sharing of information, knowledge and experiences about the use of restorative practices.*

A detailed version of the strategic plan is also available for your consideration and suggestions.

## **Activities**

The committee has worked hard on delivering a number of presentations and group functions including:

- 19 October 2005, Expert Panel discussion on Restorative Practices in Victorian Schools,
- 23 November 2005, Seminar: "Judge Jennifer Coate (now of the County Court) on the Future of Family Group Conferencing and the Children's Court", Children's Court, Melbourne
- 26 April 2006, Colloquium: "Louise Glanville: a Conversation about the Neighbourhood Justice Centre", 5pm Collingwood
- 2 May 2006 Press Release: Police Youth District Officers and Restorative Practice
- 14 June 2006, Presentation, "Family Group Conferencing", 5pm Coopers Inn, Melbourne
- 26 April 2006, Louise Glanville, Director of the new Neighbourhood Justice Centre, to be opened in Collingwood.
- 10 August 2006, Annual General Meeting and launch of VARP website, 5pm Coopers Inn, Melbourne

The committee, led by our hard working secretary, Nigel Polak, has developed a website which will be launched at the AGM. We are encouraging members to visit the site and also to make suggestions for its improvement and development. Details and notes for all of our VARP events are available on the VARP website.

Members of the committee made a submission to the draft exposure draft of the draft Children's Bill. More recently we have tended for the provision of training and a video to the expanded group conferencing program under the new *Children's Youth and Families Act 2006*. We will keep you posted in regard to this. This offers the promise of developing training programs and related accreditation protocols.

Perhaps the most pleasing aspect of the first year of operation of the Association is that it has enabled people interested in the field of restorative justice to meet, get to know each other and to collaborate in ways which were not possible or seen as possible before.

Now with over 100 registered members we hope to build on the activities and achievements of the association so far and to make the next year an even better year ahead.

## **Prospective Goals of the Association for the Year Ahead**

### **Promoting Restorative Practices**

We look forward to the statewide expansion and launch of the juvenile justice group conferencing program in October 2006 the proclamation of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2006 in early 2007 that provides a legislative basis to the group conferencing program and the widening of its scope to include some young people on existing juvenile justice orders. We commend Jesuit Social Services in its advocacy of a credible young adult restorative conferencing proposal based upon the best elements of the juvenile program with appropriate adaptations derived from extensive consultation with key stakeholders including victim advocacy groups.

We look forward to the commencement of the Neighbourhood Justice Centre in the City of Yarra in early 2007 with the enabling legislation (Neighbourhood Justice Centre Act 2006) having explicit purposes in its objectives “to simplify access to the justice system and apply therapeutic and restorative approached in the administration of justice” (section 1 of the Act).

### **Standards and Principles for evaluating and guiding RP**

The association plays a key role in advocating for maintaining best practices and guiding principles. Too often Government sponsored evaluations focus on external easily obtainable statistics like throughput figures and recidivism. Then performance is judge and funding is based solely on these matters. While these matters have their place in evaluation we need to ensure that evaluation and standards relate to the goals of restorative practices

As we spread this approach further across the Victorian Community VARP plays a key role in maintaining standards of practice and improving understanding through better evaluation. We aim to build a thriving community of practitioners whether they are full time, part time, sessional, from varied backgrounds and communities in city and country.

We may even hold a special country meeting to symbolise our support for our country colleagues in Gippsland or Central Victoria in 2007.

### **Research and Training**

We need to encourage independent academic research based and better training in RP in Victoria. We are all trying to do certain things but its a bit ad hoc. (Kathy Douglas is doing a terrific job with her students looking at the issue of Neutrality and Conferencing.) Marg Armstrong and Mark Griffiths are training Melbourne University Law students this month. JSS have been involved in training all the new Police Youth District Officers.

The association plays a key role in providing a focal point for discussion on the latest research occurring in this area across the globe. How can Victoria make best use of this research to improve program performance here? What can we learn from other people's experiences? What should be our research priorities in Victoria? These are some of the questions we seek to answer in the next few years.

Australia has been a world leader in this field and has top class academic researchers such as Kathleen Daly from Griffith University and John Braithwaite from the ANU to draw upon. We need to think about our field as encompassing a range of models and programs like the Koori Courts and Victim Support services (including the victims charter which is due to be implemented). Our aim is to make RP in all these fields "the normal or preferred way of doing business", not the unique way restricted only to pilots.

How do we achieve this aim of dissemination? What training in RP for new youth workers, social workers, lawyers, police, correctional officers, Magistrates should be included in undergraduate and post graduate courses (for specialisations) What is required in training and research before RP can be effectively and appropriately used in sex offence or in domestic violence matters? These are some of the challenges of the future if our association is going to play its proper role in improving the life of the Victorian Community.

#### **Disseminating Information and acting as a resource for restorative practices**

VARJ is independent of the service delivery agents, and so has a role to play in defending the processes. It therefore can play a role in providing information and comments to media. This is something we need to concentrate more on in the coming months and it may be advisable for the Committees to now consider appointing one of its members the position of Media Liaison Officer.

#### **Thankyou**

We thank you for your attendance at the AGM tonight. Over the next twelve months we hope to further expand the membership of VARJ and look to those current members and interested people to assist us with ideas and suggestions for events to grow the association.

**Peter Condliffe**

**President**

**10.8.6**