



2010 CHILDREN'S LAW AWARDS

Promoting the Rights of Children and Young People

MEDIA RELEASE

WINNERS OF THE 2010 CHILDREN'S LAW AWARDS AND SPECIAL BULLETIN OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS LAW RESOURCE CENTRE

16 APRIL 2010

The 2010 Children's Law Awards Ceremony was held on Friday 16 April 2010. The Awards were presented by the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Honourable Catherine Branson QC. The 2010 Children's Law Awards recognise the achievements and commitment of those individuals and organisations who advance the legal rights and interests of children and young people across Australia.

The National Award for Outstanding Legal Representation of the Rights and Interests of Children & Young People

Robert Croser, legal representative for children in the Adelaide Youth Court since 1981

Over the last 10 years, the number of children found to be at risk of abuse or neglect, and the number of children under care and protection orders has continued to rise nationally. Rob Croser has represented the rights and interests of children in this difficult area since 1981, acting in the majority of applications made to the Adelaide Youth Court under the Children's Protection Act.

The empathy and compassion shown by Rob when representing children is extraordinary. He goes beyond his brief to ensure that appropriate support services are put into place for the children. Magistrate Penny Eldridge SM said that Rob Croser exemplified "exceptional dedication and commitment" to the rights and interests of children and young people. He has been seen as an "indispensable reference source" for all involved in the jurisdiction.

The judges were very impressed with Rob Croser's extraordinary commitment and accomplishments over 30 years. He has developed a strong rapport with, and earned the trust of, his clients -- including children and young people from highly diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds. At the same time, he is regarded as a leading authority in this field by members of the judiciary, the public service and the Ministry.

The National Award for Outstanding Contribution to Advocacy in Policy or Law Reform to Advance the Legal Rights and Interests of Children & Young People

Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, a non-government body that has advocated for law and policy reform in the area of youth justice

The conditions at the Magill Youth Training Centre (YTC) for remandees and detainees had been described in *The Australian* as a “hellhole” and the UN Youth Ambassador, Chris Varney, described it as “a living children’s rights abuse hell”. The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA) successfully campaigned in 2009 for the South Australian Government to reverse its decision not to replace the Magill Youth Training Centre for remandees and detainees.

YACSA has advocated for law and policy reform in the area of youth justice since its inception in the 1980s. YACSA’s 2009 Magill YTC public campaign exposed the conditions within Magill YTC and drew attention to broader issues of children’s rights in relation to detention and rehabilitation. The campaign generated positive debate, included and empowered children, and was supported by a large number of organisations.

The judges were very impressed by YACSA’s development of innovative and effective strategies to win over community and political support in relation to the nature and conditions of juvenile detention at Magill YTC, a notoriously challenging area of public policy. YACSA’s campaign was persistent, but subtle and respectful, and was inclusive and empowering for children and young people.

The Media Award for Raising Awareness of Important Children’s Legal Rights Issues

Louise Sutherland and the BURN project - a project of Legal Aid NSW in partnership with Community Prophets.

Many children and young people misunderstand the criminal law and do not realise that they can be held accountable for someone else’s actions if they participate in a crime as a group. Through her work as a criminal legal practitioner at Legal Aid NSW, Louise Sutherland became aware of this startling lack of understanding and took action.

After undertaking a successful program of legal education workshops across NSW, Louise, with the support of Legal Aid NSW, working in partnership with Community Prophets, coordinated and made making of the short film *BURN* and its interactive website. *BURN* is a major Legal Aid campaign on youth crime prevention and education. The film and website illustrate to young people how the law works in complex group situations in an understandable, interactive and practical way. The website also contains teaching resources and other legal information.

The judges were very impressed the consultative and inclusive nature of this innovative and successful project, which centrally involved children and young people in its development. A central part of Legal Aid NSW’s community legal education program, *BURN* has been shown to over one hundred schools and youth groups and informed over 13,000 students and young people.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

The National Award for Outstanding Legal Representation of the Rights and Interests of Children & Young People

- **Anna Radonic** has been the principal solicitor at Youthlaw, Young People’s Legal Rights Centre Inc Victoria since it was established in 2001 and has worked for over 25 years as a lawyer in the legal aid sector with a focus on the representation of children and young people. Anna has modelled service delivery and professionalism that is youth friendly, respectful, informative and responsive.
- **Joe Harman** has acted as a solicitor and Independent Children’s Lawyer in Family Court and NSW State care proceedings for nearly 25 years, advocating for the rights and interests of

children. He was integral in the Children's Case Program (CCP) pilot through the Parramatta Registry and has engaged in an extensive speaking, teaching and training program to improve the representation of children and young people. He has helped to set a high standard for, and contributed to a culture of Legal Aid in the area.

The National Award for Outstanding Contribution to Advocacy in Policy or Law Reform to Advance the Legal Rights and Interests of Children & Young People

- **Katrina Wong** is the convenor of the NSW Youth Justice Coalition and is the Children's Solicitor at Marrickville Legal Centre. She is the head author of a number of submissions and reports that advocate for improvements to the way young people are treated by police, government and the legal system. This included the *Bail Me Out* report, a report on the study of young people in detention, which was a driving factor behind the amendment to section 22A of the NSW *Bail Act* and her successful advocacy for changes to NSW fines legislation.
- **Nicholas Tucker** is the Chairperson of the Protect All Children Today (PACT) Board and has been a successful advocate for child witnesses. His major research project has resulted in significant improvements for child witnesses, impacting on the District Judge Benchbook and best practice framework and the implementation of legislation. A network of 70 PACT volunteers provide support to child witnesses and PACT now provides feedback on the issues facing child witnesses to key stakeholders and government departments. As Chairperson of the PACT Clinical Committee, Nick has been directly involved in the provision of written responses in relation to several proposed legislative changes.

The Media Award for Raising Awareness of Important Children's Legal Rights Issues

- **Human Rights are Aussie Rules** is a project of the Eastern Community Legal Centre. Recognising the need for community education, Eastern Community Legal Centre developed a forty-minute performance, *FRED's Fair Play*, focussing on the four FRED human rights principles (Freedom, Respect, Equality, and Dignity) outlined in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The play has been seen by thousands of students in schools, community festivals and sporting days across Victoria. It presents complicated human rights principles in a way that is easy for children to relate to, rather than as abstract ideas or technical legal jargon

SPECIAL BULLETIN: HUMAN RIGHTS LAW RESOURCE CENTRE

To coincide with the 2010 Children's Law Awards, a special edition of the Human Rights Law Resource Centre bulletin has been released. The bulletin contains articles that consider a number of human rights and legal issues affecting children and young people in particular. The bulletin is available on the Human Rights Law Resource Centre website: < <http://www.hrlrc.org.au/>>.

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