



VICTORIAN ALCOHOL & DRUG ASSOCIATION

ENEWS – daily electronic news, views and drug information
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2004 VAADA AGM

VAADA held its 2004 Annual General Meeting on Thursday 30 September 2004. There were three ordinary board positions, along with one non-metropolitan position open for nomination. Eight nominees stood, seven for the ordinary board member positions whilst Geoff Soma (WRAD) was elected unopposed for the rural position.

Following the elections, VAADA would like to welcome Dr Alison Ritter (Turning Point), Mr Geoff Soma (WRAD), Ms Jenny Blakey (Mary of the Cross Centre) and Mr Sam Biondo (Fitzroy Legal Service) as the four new members who will join returning members Neos Zavrou, Nic Bolto, Charlie Stewart, David Brunt and Stephen Mihaly.

VAADA would like to sincerely thank retiring board members Dr Rodger Brough, Mr Gordon Storey and Mr Trevor King for their dedicated and tireless service to VAADA in the last two years. We look forward to continuing to work closely with Rodger, Gordon and Trevor on various VAADA activities in the future.

Based on legal advice, VAADA also proposed a number of constitutional changes as part of an ongoing effort to be classified as a Deductible Gift Recipient. This classification will provide VAADA with additional scope in applying for funding with charitable trusts and enable VAADA to better leverage the current funding it receives. VAADA is thankful to the membership who unanimously endorsed the proposed amendments.

We would like to thank all nominees and members who attended and were heartened to see such high standard and passion for the AOD sector amongst nominees. We sincerely hope all who stood remain involved with VAADA. Both the secretariat and the board will be working hard to ensure that members have the opportunity to be involved and ensure that VAADA represents the sectors interests.

Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) Forum

Following the AGM, VAADA hosted its EBA forum 'How much will we be paid?' to explore the future of salaries, terms and conditions within the alcohol and other drug sector.

Dr Rodger Brough, drug and alcohol physician at WRAD outlined the trends and future options for the sector in meeting increasing salaries, terms and conditions for workers in the AOD sector. Mr Gerard Mansour, CEO of Kindergarten Parents Victoria (KPV) was the keynote speaker and discussed the experiences of KPV in establishing an EBA for kindergarten's around Victoria.

The forum participants unanimously decided that VAADA undertake a scoping exercise with a view to informing a possible EBA and passed the following motion: *'This meeting believes it should be an important priority for VAADA to do a scoping exercise of the Victorian AOD sector workforce pay and conditions, with a view to informing a possible EBA, minimum wage and conditions versus unit costing campaign. Further, that this meeting supports this scoping exercise encompassing a comparative unit costing analysis with similar fields'*. Further information regarding the EBA and future forums will be available through VAADA in the future.



L-R: Neos Zavrou (President), Charlie Stewart (Treasurer) and Carol Bennett at VAADA's AGM

Month in Review

VAADA Submission on Underage Drinking

During September VAADA wrote a submission to The Minister for Consumer Affairs, John Lenders MP, on the proposed Bill to amend the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998*.

VAADA welcomed many of the proposals, particularly around tightening enforcement powers and liquor licensing laws. However, VAADA expressed concern about a proposed amendment allowing liquor vending machines within licensed premises. VAADA contended that this would enable greater access to minors and already intoxicated persons, undermining legislation on the tightening of controls, liquor licensing laws and related harms.

VAADA also recommended that the government commit to some of the more challenging strategies that are likely to have the greatest impact on underage drinking, including: alcohol taxation and pricing reforms; the regulation of advertising sponsorship and media campaigns; hypothecation; positive broad spectrum campaigns to address underage drinking.

The Bill will be introduced in the forthcoming Spring Session of Parliament. A copy of the submission is available on the VAADA website.

Letter to Victorian Federal Politicians

In the lead up to the Federal election VAADA distributed a letter to all Victorian Federal politicians seeking their policy position in relation to key drug and alcohol election issues including:

- Sustainable funding for non government alcohol and drug agencies
- Intensive drug treatment support for complex clients
- Reducing harm to the children of drug users
- Workforce development for the alcohol and drug sector
- Translation of research into an effective tool for the alcohol and drug workforce.

VAADA received responses from all parties who provided broad support for the issues raised. Subsequently, in a media release VAADA acknowledged this support but highlighted its disappointment with the low profile that drugs issues have received in the lead up to the Federal election, particularly during a time of increasing drug related harm in Victoria. VAADA highlighted current statistics and urged all parties to join in on the debate regarding drugs. A copy of the media release is available at www.vaada.org.au.

VAADA's 2004 Annual Conference

VAADA's 2004 annual conference, '*Are we doing a good job? Exploring the public image and quality of services for people with alcohol and drug problems?*' will this year focus on major issues confronting the sector in Victoria.

The 2004 VAADA conference will be held on 6 and 7 December 2004 at the William Angliss Conference Centre in La Trobe St, Melbourne. VAADA is currently calling for abstracts. The closing date for abstracts is the 15th October 2004.

The conference will explore some of the current major issues facing the sector:

- What is good practice in the AOD sector?
- Is the AOD sector meeting recognised quality standards?
- How does the AOD sector work with other related sectors?
- Are there particular areas within the AOD sector that require improvement?
- What are effective strategies that agencies have used to improve their practice and community standing?
- What are the perceptions of the alcohol and other drug sector amongst AOD clients?

The conference will be opened by The Hon. Bronwyn Pike, Minister for Health and will follow with a great line up of presenters including Mr Jim Stynes (The Reach Foundation), Ms Cheryl Wilson (ADCA), Major Brian Watters (ANCD), Mr Daryl Smeaton (AERF), Ms Cath Smith (VCOSS), Ms Deb Tsorbaris (Council to Homeless Persons), Ms Georgie Ferrari (YacVic) and many more.

If you would like any further information please contact Litsa at VAADA on 03 9416 0899.



Mr Gerard Mansour and Dr Rodger Brough
at the VAADA EBA Forum

YOUR SAY

**Mr Sam Biondo, Community Development Officer, Fitzroy Legal Service and
VAADA Board Member**

'How well does the Law Deal with Drug Using Offenders'

Someone with a much clearer sense of logic than myself once informed me that the law and justice have very little in common with each other.

Although a seemingly naïve concept, the implications of this somewhat simplistic statement are illuminating, if for no other reason than it throws into doubt the ability of the law to deliver absolute solutions in the application of justice.

The increased focus on the law and law enforcement as a means of promoting and mobilising harm reduction strategies is a case in point. The heavy hand of the law, the application of compromised and often embittered legislation seeking revenge, rather than understanding, highlights the general failure of traditional approaches within our legal and criminal justice system.

While debates around the effectiveness of law enforcement approaches have raged for years, few consider that our legal system is making substantial inroads into the very complex world of drug use and abuse or for that matter plain old harm minimisation.

Increasingly, many legal and non-legal practitioners consider the law to be an impediment to the development of appropriate and lasting solutions. Some of the more obvious observations to be derived might include:

The failure of current prohibition laws in stemming illicit drug use and abuse

While there remains a significant and still generally dominant view that punitive legal sanctions for drug offences often act as a deterrent there has been for some time a view that prohibition remains fundamentally flawed in its application as it impedes substantial moves towards rehabilitation, merely exacerbating existing social, health and financial problems.

Legalisation and decriminalisation of drugs while controversial may be no worse solutions in some people's views.

Regulation of supply could in effect remove some of the stigma associated with drug use, as well as some negative activities of illegal markets.

The possibility that this might even stabilise the quality of supply, thus allowing users to focus on their own life, health and family needs in a more positive and less chaotic way could be an additional bonus.

To a large extent the law has failed to deliver in these areas.

The need to improve policing practice

While some police generally understood the reality of drug use, many still don't, and are caught in a dysfunctional operational paradigm. The effect on the community of police drug blitzes does little more than criminalise many who are vulnerable and displaces the problem elsewhere.

The combination of restrictive legislation, high demand, and a flow of money increases the vulnerability and opportunity for corruption and the spread of double standards. The legacy of the law as practiced on the ground creates cynicism in most having any dealings with it.

Attempts at creating drug diversion programs, better police training and use of referrals are welcome additions, but still remain piecemeal in an overall sense.

Limitations of current court system

Apart from showpiece programs like the CREDIT program or the Drug Court pilot, the Victorian court system has in general failed to recognise the nature of addiction and to address the underlying causes of criminal activity. Punishment rather than rehabilitation has and continues in large to be the primary focus during sentencing.

A holistic, flexible and responsive approach to rehabilitation is what is really needed. At issue is the need for better tailoring of rehabilitation programs to meet specific needs, the setting of realistic goals with respect to rehabilitation, the recognition of the risk of relapse and appropriate levels of financial support to the service delivery system.

The law needs to adapt and work in tandem with the service delivery system in addressing many of these issues



Continued on page 4...

Calendar of Events

11 October	<p><i>'C.H.O.O.F.E.R. Cannabis: Health, Other Options, Feelings, Education, Resources' - EDAS and Monashlink Community Health Service</i></p> <p>A 6 week group for young people (15-21 years) with connections to the Cities of Monash & Knox, who want to learn more about cannabis, and develop skills and strategies to reduce harms, cut down or stop using. Starting on 11 October, 4-5pm at Monashlink CHS, Glen Waverley. To register call Naomi at the Eastern Drug and Alcohol Service (EDAS) on 9803 0300.</p>
13 October	<p><i>Youth Mental Health Festival/Open Day – ORGYEN Youth Health, Moonee Valley and Melbourne City Councils</i></p> <p>The Youth Mental Health Festival will feature a range of activities, stalls and workshops for young people. For further information or to conduct a stall, workshop or health promoting activity please call Maree Sidey at ORGYEN on 8346 8222</p>
14 October	<p><i>'Substance-related brain injury: what does the research tell us and how can we respond?– Southern Health Addiction Seminars</i></p> <p>Presented by Mandy Philactides, A&D Acquired Brain Injury Clinician/Consultant. Held from 2-3pm in Lecture Theatre 2, Monash Medical Centre, 246 Clayton Rd, Clayton.</p>
29 October	<p><i>'Parenting and Substance Use – What are the issues and what are we doing about it?' - Moreland Hall Lunchtime Seminar Series</i></p> <p>Presented by Dr. Lynda Cambell, Koula Neophytou and Sandra Mazzone. Held from 12.30-1.30pm at Moreland Hall. For information or to register to attend please phone 9386 2876</p>
14-17 November	<p><i>APSAD 2004 National Conference – Beyond the Drug</i></p> <p>The 2004 APSAD conference will involve exploring the individual, political, social and other contexts critical to effective prevention and treatment. Will include keynote speakers from around the world and from a variety of disciplines. To be held at the Esplanade Hotel in Fremantle, WA. To register or for more information visit www.apsad.org.au.</p>
Advanced Notice	<p><i>Course for parents of young people experiencing A&D problems – AGENDAS</i></p> <p>AGEnDAS is running a series of free, structured group courses for parents of young people 14-25 yrs who have problematic alcohol or drug use. The 8 week courses run for 2hrs per week at AGENDAS in Bayswater. For information about starting dates of the next course or to register your interest please phone Margo on 9721 3688</p>
Advanced Notice 6-7 Decemeber	<p><i>'Are we doing a good job? Exploring the public image and quality of services for people with alcohol and drug problems' - 2004 VAADA Annual Conference</i></p> <p>VAADA will be hosting its annual conference to be held over two days on Monday 6th and Tuesday 7th of December, at the William Angliss Conference Centre, Melbourne. The conference will be launched by The Hon. Bronwyn Pike (Minister for Health) and presenters will include Jim Stynes (REACH), Cheryl Wilson (ADCA), Brian Watters (ANCD), Cath Smith (VCOSS), Georgie Ferrari (YacVIC) and many more. <i>Please note that the deadline for Call for Abstracts is 15 October 2004.</i> For more information please call Litsa on 9416 0899.</p>

Your say – Mr Sam Biondo
...continued from page 3

Conclusion

The law by itself is a very blunt instrument limited in a whole range of ways including black letter law, the skill and interpretation afforded to it by its practitioners, the value structure and attitudes of those who sit in judgement and the desire by governments which have it within their powers to try new things to address old problems.

Unfortunately, in the area of drugs, change comes ever so slowly and incrementally. Yet despite all this there is some hope for change with the advent of recent initiatives such as the has been occurring within the Victorian Court system, hopefully this will herald some other new and undoubtedly more effective approaches than has occurred in the past.

