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Launch of the Victorian Association for Restorative Justice

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At the practice front

Launch of the Victorian Association for Restorative Justice

Peter Condliffe

Restorative justice has been described as a philosophy that views harm and crime as violations of people and relationships. It is a holistic process that addresses the repercussions and obligations created by harm, with a view to putting things as right as possible. Restorative justice is best practised when guided by restorative values and principles and when those most affected are both the focus and the directors. Restorative justice programs (usually associated with a process called 'conferencing') have emerged over the past 25 years as a dynamic alternative to current criminal justice practice and more recently in educational and corporate sectors.

The newly formed group called the Victorian Association for Restorative Justice (VARJ) brings together a range of people interested in restorative justice in that State. Victoria has been criticised for lagging behind the other Australian jurisdictions in the provision of restorative justice services. Why Victoria?

Victoria has prided itself on being at the forefront of criminological research and practice. Strangely it seems to lag behind all other States when it comes to implementing restorative justice principles and processes into its systems.[1] Many Victorian policy makers and administrators may say this is due to the State's good record and there is no need for such new approaches. As the State lags further behind however the ability of it to develop and deliver services which have become expected and well established in other States will become more and more difficult. In recent times the Melbourne daily *The Age* has been running an attack upon the criminal justice system, particularly that relating to juveniles.

Recent victim dissatisfaction with court processes and outcomes could be partly overcome if the Victorian Government adopted more extensive use of restorative justice processes like conferencing. For example, the ACT has recently introduced legislation which will set up a specialist Restorative Justice Unit and deliver these services to juveniles and then, after the first year of operation, to adults.

Victoria lags, however, not only in the criminal justice system but also in schools. It is important that we who live and work in Victoria understand these developments and what may be planned for the future.

There are some encouraging signs nevertheless. For example, the Victoria Police strategic plan for 2003-2008 'The Way Ahead', at page 13 states, '[i]n implementing partnership policing the effectiveness of our approach will be reflected in… greater use of non-punitive responses to certain kinds of offending such as diversion, restorative justice and counselling.' Prospective amendments to the Victorian *Children and Young Persons Act 1989* will incorporate restorative justice processes for the first time.

It is against this backdrop that VARJ has been formed. Its constitution outlines its purposes as follows:

- 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 justice.
- To develop and promote agreed standards and principles for evaluating and guiding restorative practice.
- To encourage, and to undertake, research on restorative justice.
- To provide a forum for the sharing of information, knowledge and experiences about the use of restorative practices.

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For any ADR Bulletin reader who may be interested please contact me at my email or phone below and I will be happy to forward a membership flyer so that you can be kept informed of upcoming activities. ●

Peter Condliffe is a Barrister and President of VARJ and can be contacted on email at pc@vicbar.com.au or phone 03 9225 6888.

Endnote

1. See: 'Difference, difference everywhere … Restorative Justice in Australia' (2004) 6(10) ADR Bulletin.

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diary and happenings

- **CEDR** is holding its **10th International Summer School** on 21–27 August 2005 at Lake Maggiore, near Milan, Italy. The course will provide mediator skills training leading to assessment for CEDR Mediator Accreditation. Places are limited. Visit www.cedr.co.uk/index.php?location=/training/programmes/summerschool.htm or email training@cedr.co.uk to register or for more information.
- The **World Mediation Forum V Conference**, jointly hosted by the **Institut Universitaire Kurt Bösch** and **World Mediation Forum**, is being held on 9–11 September 2005 at the Congress Centre 'Le Regent', Crans Montana, Switzerland. The Conference, entitled 'Mediation: A New Culture of Change', will bring together mediators, academics, lawyers, psychologists and all who support mediation to resolve conflicts, including former Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific countries, Africa and South America. The English language program is available in PDF Format at www.mediate.com/world flyer+grand+anglais20041125c.pdf. For additional information and online registration, see mediation.qualilearning.org and www.mediate.com/world.
- **Mediation and Training Alternatives** is holding **The International Advanced Mediator Training Course** on 25 September–1 October 2005 at San Pietro in Valle, Umbria, Italy. The course is designed to develop and deepen the skills of mediators who already have experience in mediating commercial disputes. The program includes analysis of cross-cultural and complex cases, mediator dilemmas and challenges, and the development of bespoke processes. Visit www.mata.org.uk or email david@mata.org.uk to register or for more information.
- The **Bond University Dispute Resolution Centre** in conjunction with **AIFLAM** is conducting a **Basic Mediation Course** on 28–30 July 2005 at the Sofitel (formerly the Grand Mercure Broadbeach), Gold Coast, and an **Advanced Mediation Course** on 22–25 September 2005 at the Sheraton Noosa Resort. The Basic Mediation Course is a basic course designed for those interested in the application of mediation in the commercial, building, community, family, environmental and planning areas. The Advanced Mediation Course is designed for those who have received prior training in mediation and who are experienced mediators, and will provide skills training and deal with topical issues in the theory, principles, applications and organisation of mediation. Email DRC@bond.edu.au or call 07 5595 2039 for more information and registration details.
- **LEADR** is holding its **8th International Mediation Conference** entitled **'Waves of Change'** on 31 August–2 September 2005 at the International College of Tourism and Hotel Management, Sydney. For more information, or to express interest, visit www.leadr.com.au.
- The **Trillium Group** is conducting **4-day ADR Certificate Workshops (Level 1)** and **Advanced ADR Certificate Workshops (Level 2)** in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Townsville throughout 2005. For more information call 1-800-636-869 toll free or 02 9036-0333 or visit www.thetrilliumgroup.com.au.

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