



VADR Presidents's Report

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Report for the Year 2021/2022

President's Report 2022

This is the third President's Report since COVID-19 began. We are no longer in lockdown, but the number of people infected with COVID-19 is high and again increasing. We still haven't resumed our face-to-face CPD events, although we are hopeful and are planning that this will happen in 2023. Certainly, when compared with last year, when we became the world's most locked-down city, things are improving.

Speakers

We had ten CPD events this year, featuring speakers on a wide variety of topics. As you know, unlike most mediation organisations, VADR provides these presentations at no charge to members, which is particularly important to nationally accredited mediators, who need to carry out 25 hours of CPD over each two-year period of accreditation.

One advantage of Zoom, as mentioned last year, is that we can easily accommodate speakers from interstate and even from overseas. The well-known originator of transformative mediation, Professor Baruch Bush, was able to speak to us directly from the USA at 10pm New York time, and after his prepared remarks, he answered questions until midnight, which was a real privilege. Professor Bush is 75, so I guess we were lucky he is a night owl, and after more than a year of COVID-19 in New York, where so many people died, he said it was the most fun he had had for a long time.

Elizabeth Rosa and Katelyn Betti addressed us from Queensland on what workplace mediators can learn from family dispute resolution. A very popular presentation was made from South Australia by Greg Rooney, discussing how the way he now conducts mediation has changed over the years since his initial training.

Another event many found very interesting was psychiatrist Professor Manjula Datta O'Connor's talk on domestic violence within marriage involving people from the Indian subcontinent. In addition to being a well-known physician, Professor O'Connor has a real gift for storytelling which illuminates her research and practice. Murray Bickerdike and Zandy Fell displayed a similar knack in their presentation, *Using the Mediator Skill Set to Resolve Workplace Conflict*.

There's no doubt that speakers are able to convey the benefits of their experience much more effectively when theory is illuminated by a real-life example. We saw this again when David Moore spoke on group conferencing in his talk *Setting Relationships Right*. David's academic expertise combined with his decades-long experience in the area and an ability to choose relevant examples really brought the topic to life.

Finally, conciliators and mediators in government increasingly provide a lot of work for ADR practitioners, and we had three speakers from this area: Richard Clancy spoke about online proceedings at the Fair Work Commission and other changes necessitated by COVID-19, a panel discussed the new conciliation function of the Victorian Ombudsman and Sean Coley gave a fascinating presentation on *Parliamentary Committees as ADR*.

It has been extraordinary to learn from all the different speakers we have heard this year just how extensively ADR has permeated a large number of very different areas since its beginnings in the late 1970s.

Next year, as I have said, we do plan to have some face-to-face presentations. We feel this is essential because our mediators have told us how much they value the personal contact and networking opportunities offered by these events. However, many mediators,

particularly in the Sole and Private Practitioners' Special Interest Group, have also told us how much they appreciate being able to attend a much larger number of events through Zoom, particularly people who are interstate, in outer suburban Melbourne or country Victoria, unable to come in to the CBD after work at night or prevented from attending for some other reason. So, we are going to trial face-to-face mediations with Zoom for those who wish to attend a presentation in this way. Many events will continue to be run on Zoom – obviously, those with speakers from interstate or overseas but also where Zoom is the speaker's medium of choice.

Membership

I am pleased to report that although a number of our mediators left the profession this year, retiring early or moving to other areas, our numbers have risen, albeit more slowly than in previous years, and we had around 420 financial mediators on 30 June this year. We have continued to provide support to those mediators who have lost work due to COVID-19, and the situation seems to be improving for some, though not all, self-employed mediators.

One big gap which, disappointingly, has not been rectified is that the DCSV is no longer providing mediation for community disputes but, rather, are currently assisting VCAT. The DCSV made available a really good, cheap service to help resolve disputes in the community. It also employed a lot of mediators, who have had to look elsewhere for employment. Many retired and no longer practice, resulting in a real loss to mediation and to the Victorian public. I really hope that the incoming government, whoever they are, will prioritise reinstatement of the valuable services the DSCV formerly provided.

The number of nationally accredited mediators has continued to grow, increasing yet again the almost entirely voluntary workload of the Accreditation Sub-Committee, headed by Committee member Anthony Grimes. I say 'almost' because Alison, our admin assistant, provides sterling assistance. We aim to provide accredited members, as well as FDRPs registered by the Attorney-General's Department, with all the services they require, including professional

development, a complaints process, notification of job offers and assistance with developments in their profession, such as the recent update to the registration of FDRPs. We also anticipate changes to national accreditation following the review of the MSB's operations this year and last year.

Finally, several of our mediators have lost accreditation during COVID-19 because they were unable to practice, so we have arranged a Refresher Day this December to enable them to regain national accreditation.

Thanks

VADR could not function without the help of its volunteer committee. Every committee member devotes many hours every year to VADR business. Firstly, I would like to thank Con Slump, who has decided to retire. He has been on the Committee for several years now and his contribution has been much appreciated. Special thanks go to Anthony Grimes, who is both VADR Secretary and the Chair of the Accreditation Sub-Committee; Ena Shaw, VADR Vice-President, who has been of great assistance in a number of areas; Catherine Davies, our Treasurer, a fiddly and somewhat thankless task; Jeff Katz, who handles various legal matters; and Katerina Tsipos, who usually handles Zoom but was unable to be with us today. This is not to forget Marguerite Desmond, Jodie Grant, Susan Hamilton-Green and Ghada Maher. The dedication, intelligence and good-humoured cooperation of all Committee members is really valued.

I would like to thank Ian Smith for all the work he has put into the Sole and Private Practitioners' Special Interest Group over many years. He retired as a co-convenor mid-year because he needs to focus now on his PhD and his new granddaughter. Thanks also to co-convenor Murray Bickerdike, for taking up the reins where Ian left off, and to Jodie Grant, who has been a co-convenor for quite a while now.

Finally, I think all VADR members owe thanks to Alison, who really puts herself out to help any member or potential member who

needs help, and whose ability to carry out the administrative work of VADR is exceptional.

Let's hope that by this time next year, the dangers of COVID-19 will largely have passed and we'll be leading 'normal' lives again. In the meantime, I wish you all Season's Greetings and a very Happy New Year.

Deborah Macfarlane
President
VADR
15 November 2022

