

President's Report 28 November 2019

This has been a great year for VADR. We have a terrific committee who have organized a lot of excellent events and who work hard and well together behind the scenes to ensure that the many different needs of VADR members are met in the best way possible.

Continuing professional development is of course one of our core functions, not only for accredited mediators, but for everyone. By enabling members to network with other mediators in the same or allied areas, these presentations, workshops and the Private Practitioners' group, also enable members to network and get support. Mediation, like teaching, can at times be a rather isolated profession.

We have had eight metropolitan events, and a regional workshop in Daylesford in March. The focus of that workshop was on subjects relevant to the many mediators who operate outside Melbourne, although we had a lot of people who came up from Melbourne for the day, and in some cases, for the weekend. All five speakers were very well received, and the food prepared by committee member Catherine Davis was enthusiastically commented on. We hope that many more will come to the next workshop at Daylesford on 21 March next year, details of which will be supplied shortly.

In May, Mieke Brandon who was in Melbourne to launch the new edition of her book *Mediating with Families*, took time out to present on "Reflective Practice and Decision-Making", and the following month in a fascinating talk, Susan Hamilton-Green spoke about the value of intake, having recently conducted research on the topic. We have found that one of the strongest interests of members lies in discussing how to deal with difficult clients, and two excellent speakers, Ena Shaw and Grant Lester, presented on the topic in the second half of the year. Andrew Bickerdike gave a detailed and thoughtful review of the family law system in August and the following month Michael Mitchell and David Bryson spoke thought-provokingly about the distinctive characteristics of conciliation which they suggested is really a separate profession, although largely using the same skill set. In October, we had a joint and very topical event with the Victorian Bar and Resolution Institute when a panel of three speakers discussed Australia's failure to sign the Singapore Convention on Mediation in August. And finally, today, Mike Jensen, who is the business partner of VADR member Peter Singer, talked about the need to have real conversations in the workplace, and to use conflict as a starting-point for creative problem-solving.

In addition to these events, VADR is also very fortunate that past Committee member, Ian Smith, has stayed on to run the Private Practitioners' Group, which has provided valuable support to private practitioners for three years now, meeting every two months.

CPD is one of the essential requirements for nationally accredited mediators, of whom we now have over 70. The number of accredited mediators is likely to rise as the Dispute Settlement

Centre of Victoria is no longer accrediting its panel mediators. VADR has a separate Accreditation Sub-Committee, ably chaired by Anthony Grimes. It's a big workload for a purely volunteer staff. Anthony liaises with the Mediator Standards Board, sometimes raising accreditation problems with the Board and if you have any comments on the problems associated with accreditation, we should be glad to receive them. I should note that this year we have continued the assessment of the simulated mediation, which enables students and occasionally others to become nationally accredited. VADR also assists many of our family dispute resolution practitioners to become accredited with the Attorney-General's Department through the operation of our Complaints Process, which is a requirement of accreditation with the Department.

The number of VADR members has continued to rise, perhaps reflecting an increase in the profession generally but perhaps also because mediators realise that VADR offers a good deal for the \$95.00 annual fee. We are able to keep fees so low because of the work of our volunteers, the Committee of Management and a few others like Ian Smith. At the moment, we have a great committee, as I said earlier, who all contribute in different and often innovative ways to the running of what is now quite a large organization. Catherine Davies stepped up to the Treasurer's role at the end of last year and has done an excellent job. Anthony, our Secretary, also has the somewhat onerous responsibility of the Accreditation Sub-Committee, and Ena, our Vice-President, has assisted in the placement of many students who have joined VADR, and in organizing the assessment of role-plays. I would like to say thank you to them, and to all members of the Committee for the energy and enthusiasm they have put into their work this year. We also could not manage without our admin assistant, Alison, who runs the Bulletin, which keeps you in the loop about CPD offered by other dispute resolution organisations, liaises constantly with members, and generally enables the organization to run smoothly.

Thank you also, the members, who come to events, send lots of positive feedback, and provide us with lots of useful information which we can pass on to other members. I trust that you will all enjoy this time with family and friends, and we look forward to seeing you all next year.

Postscript. I forgot to put the president's report up on the website at the end of last year and was reminded to do so recently by Committee member, Catherine Davies. When I read through it again, it was almost as if it belonged to a different world, and it would have been hard then to imagine how much things were to change only a couple of months after the report was presented. We were only able to hold two face-to-face events before we had to close down that avenue, including the PD at Daylesford where hopefully we will be able to provide PD again face to face in the not so distant future.

All the mediators I have spoken since the pandemic began have shown great resilience and adaptability in these very difficult times. Many of you have now become familiar with different

internet platforms in delivering your work, particularly those mediating and facilitating in government departments and agencies and teaching in the universities, as well as family dispute resolution practitioners whose workload has been particularly heavy. Hopefully when I present the next report in November, we will be looking forward to an easier future but in the meantime, I have to say that VADR's mediators are doing a marvellous job and working incredibly hard in doing it.

Deborah Macfarlane