

encounter. It will, therefore, be useful not only for Family Court applicants but also as a reference for counsellors, social workers and mediators.

The book is divided into 12 chapters beginning with an overview of the steps in the divorce process and explanations of legal terms. This is followed by chapters which describe in more detail the functions of the family court, the principles of the Family Law Act, how de facto relationships are managed and what readers need to know about children, finance and property. In addition, there is a very useful section on the operation of the Child Support Scheme which few people understand thoroughly. The author also devotes a chapter to resolving disputes without going to court before finally describing 'the litigation pathway' in terms of costs and procedures. The penultimate chapter on alternatives to the court system seems to be oddly placed in the book and might possibly have been better nearer the beginning but this is minor criticism.

Although the language of the text is accessible, the overall style of the

writing is somewhat detached and legalistic. This makes the text rather 'dry' and depersonalised. For example, while legal terms are explained in the first chapter and in the glossary, detailed descriptions of procedures can, at times, sound a little pedantic. The book is therefore a DIY manual to be dipped into when needed rather than read from cover to cover. This characteristic distinguishes it from other books on divorce which are about dealing with the personal, practical and emotional, as well as legal, events of the separation and divorce process.

Nevertheless, this is a thoroughly detailed and useful guide to the law and the legal requirements of the divorce process in Australia. It contains a comprehensive index for quick reference purposes and will be a very helpful handbook for those who must apply to the Family Court. It is also a necessary addition to the 'divorce' library of academics, students and workers in the field.

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Working the System

A Guide for Citizens, Consumers and Communities

Public Interest Advocacy Centre/Pluto Press Australia (reprinted 1997); 107 pp; \$19.95

Working the System is one of the outcomes of a project by PIAC which aims to 'enhance responsiveness and representativeness' in our democratic institutions and improve the accessibility of the legal system. As part of the overall project, *Working the System* is 'specifically designed to help citizens, consumers and communities improve their capacities to be effective advocates'.

The book is both descriptive and prescriptive in that it explains, in easy accessible language, how our parliamentary and legal systems work and illustrates ways in which citizens can use the system to influence policy and law.

Section One gives a brief overview of the changing cultural, social and economic environment in which the modern advocate must operate. The corporatisation of our institutions and government, the rise of consultancies and professional lobbyists, require a more sophisticated understanding and approach by those wishing to promote public interest issues. As the authors

point out, 'understanding how law and public policy is developed is an essential first step in effective participation and advocacy'. As daunting as this may appear, the authors provide actual case examples where ordinary citizens — in contrast to lawyers and professional lobbyists — have successfully navigated their way through the system and won.

Section Two focuses on the Parliamentary law making process and how the public can influence that process through Question Time, petitions, parliamentary committees and lobbying. Tips for successful lobbying, how to form a delegation, picking the right forum and whom to target, provide the novice advocate with a step by step exposition on the fine art of advocacy and the 'ladder of participation'. To illustrate the effectiveness of good planning and choice of strategy the authors provide a detailed account of the process adopted by the Disability Safeguards Coalition who won their battle to establish an independent forum to hear complaints and monitor service delivery.

The government and public service are the subject of Section Three. Subtitles include community consultation, complaints bodies and government inquiries, and most importantly for the community activist or public interest advocate, how to challenge government decisions. The latter outlines the various ways in which an individual or group can challenge government decisions. These range from a simple phone call, a request for an internal review through to external bodies such as the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, other specialist tribunals and the Ombudsman. Procedures and legal rules applicable to the different forums are explained as are the likely costs associated with your choice of venue.

Section Four turns to our much maligned legal system. It provides an overview of the court system and alternative dispute mechanisms. It addresses those apprehensive questions: Do I need a lawyer? How do I find legal representation? Am I eligible for legal aid? Further, it covers options, costs and benefits, as well as, 'six hints for working with a lawyer', and questions to ask your lawyer.

The final section contains a glossary of the legal and political terms used in the book and a directory of community legal centres, investigative and review bodies, as well as legal and government information services.

The format may seem a little simplistic for lawyers and trained advocates, but it needs to be remembered that the book is aimed at community groups and the general public. As such this 'how-to', 'can-do', format achieves its purpose. The book's only drawback is that its focus is NSW and thus the directory only covers that State.

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