A better deal for members

By Eva Scheerlinck

With the end of the financial year fast approaching, I have been reflecting on our achievements over the last year. It has been a busy time yet again for the association, as well as a time of growth and renewal.

Our board has worked hard, and had the daunting task of seeing in a new identity for the organisation. Thanks to the support of the directors and other office-bearers within the Lawyers Alliance, this transition has been well received and we have taken to our new name and expanded remit with great zeal.

The Alliance has addressed a variety of issues this year and participated in numerous inquiries. Addressing tort reform continues to be a major priority and we have been actively engaged in reviews in NSW, Queensland and Victoria, in particular. A formal inquiry by the NSW Upper House is perhaps the most significant of these reviews, with the inquiry scheduled to take a year to complete. This is much more time than the Ipp Panel was given to recommend changes to the common law system back in 2002 – when it had only three months in which to recommend the dismantling of centuries-old law. NSW, some of you may remember, made significant changes to the law of negligence before the three-month Ipp process was even complete! How uncanny that it took less than three months to overhaul long-established common law principles, but 12 months to review the injustices that these 'reforms' have created.

Case studies have become a significant focus for the Alliance over this past year. Inspired by our sister organisation in the US, we have started creating one-page case studies featuring the stories of real people whose lives have been turned upside-down by their injuries and their fight for compensation. These case studies feature photographs and a succinct and hard-hitting description of the injustices suffered. The people who have agreed to tell their stories are brave individuals and we thank them for their courage. They help politicians understand how knee-jerk legislative reactions to increased insurance premiums impact on the lives of real people; people who vote. Such personal stories are hard to ignore and we need more of these from you.

The Alliance has also been working hard on improving services to our members. The website has been completely overhauled, bearing little resemblance to its former self. The site is now full-colour, and has a members-only section. Australian Lawyers Alliance News (affectionately known as ALAN) is now online and together with our other public affairs initiatives, is fully text-searchable. Our conferences and other events are listed on the site and members can register and pay for these online. Our membership directory is also searchable on our website and our expert database can now also be accessed by members online.

Precedent has also received a significant face-lift. Now in a new full-colour format, its high-quality articles continue to be relevant and informative.

Our expert database, thanks to the generosity of our members, has also been significantly boosted this year. The response from members to our expert drive has been sensational. All members will benefit from this sharing of information with colleagues, making more leading experts available to you.

New dedicated staff positions have been created to further improve our service to members. A full-time Communications Manager is looking after media issues, a full-time Publications Officer is dedicated to bringing you a quality journal and diary, and an extra part-time person in our public affairs department is helping us to better represent your clients' rights in parliament.

Much hard work lies ahead in both our lobbying activities and member service development in 2005. With a record number of CLE/CPD-accredited events planned, and many individual rights battles to fight, we look forward to your continued participation and support. ■

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