

New team; same dream

In November 2017 the CLANT AGM was held in the NAAJA Boardroom. Russell Goldflam, our Human Rights Award winning, gypsy clarinet and limerick enthusiast President stood aside after six tireless years in the role. His contribution to the association has been exceptional. As the newly elected President, I have been left with enormous shoes to fill.

Our new committee spans the jurisdiction with representatives from Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs and comprises members of the Bar, private firms, the DPP, the Commonwealth DPP, the NT Legal Aid Commission and NAAJA.

The CLANT membership has continued to grow and we now are proud to boast in excess of 140 members. At the 16th Biennial Bali Conference in June last year we celebrated the 30th anniversary of CLANT in the gardens of founding President, Colin McDonald's, beautiful villa in Ubud. It was a time to recognise and reflect on both the growth of the association's membership and the determined lobbying, advocacy and general 'boat rocking' of previous committees.

Hard work lies ahead for this committee. We have the most severe and stringent mandatory sentencing laws in the country. We have a broken youth justice system that now has an apparent path to effective reformation but as yet no concrete commitment from either the Federal or Territory governments to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission. We require a collaborative approach to dealing with criminal justice issues. Underlying criminogenic factors must be mitigated by way of increased funding and infrastructure in the Health, Education and Housing departments including in remote communities.

The over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, women and children in custody and the shameful rates of imprisonment in our jurisdiction carry a costly toll on our community in both financial and human terms. The number of persons with mental health issues in custody on supervised orders because we have no appropriate community based health services and treatment facilities is unacceptable in a first world country. The lack of appropriately qualified persons to provide reports to the Courts creates extreme delays for these vulnerable persons and is something that must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Holistic and therapeutic strategies that attempt to engage and identify 'at risk' persons prior to or at the commencement of criminal offending is crucial to minimising both crime rates and incarceration. Long term commitment is required to make generational change. We cannot fear controversial policy reform including the de-criminalisation of certain drug offences in favour of educating and voluntary rehabilitation options. Diversion should be extended as a sentencing option for adults. Mandatory sentencing in all forms must be abolished. Pro-social community engagement and specialised youth officers must be embraced by the NT Police. Police procedures and processes must take on the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

Just prior to Christmas I met with the Attorney General and raised these issues and more. This committee hopes to continue to have a meaningful and open dialogue with the current government so as to achieve real reform, the success of which will eventually be measured in decades to come; not in quick fixes, chest beating and tough on crime rhetoric.

We continue to share the dream of a true and equitable system of criminal justice.

Marty Aust

President CLANT