



Auckland Women  
Lawyers' Association Inc.

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## IN THIS ISSUE

- Letter from the President
- An interview with  
Helen Melrose –  
inaugural President of AWLA
- International Womens Day:  
8 March 2009
- President's Function
- Dress for Success
- AWLA Submissions on  
the Domestic Violence  
(Enhancing Safety) Bill
- Review: *MacBeth*
- AWLA Application  
for Membership
- AWLA Executive Committee  
Contact Details

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*Anisa Barrowclough*  
and *Sally Fitzgerald*

# NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2009

## From the President...

The AWLA Executive has been very busy working to bring you our ambitious agenda of events for 2009. Our Historical Subcommittee has been working hard to pull together our flagship event in July to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our incorporation. We are looking to host a grand dinner party and bring to you a speaking panel of highly successful women lawyers who have been actively involved in AWLA over the years. You will see in our newsletter an interview with Helen Melrose, AWLA's inaugural president. We are delighted that Helen will be one of our key speakers at the midyear function.

With the continuing challenges facing the economy, and the variable reporting on the issue that we see in local news media, we wanted to bring to you first hand an opportunity to hear directly from the experts.

We are also acutely aware that the current economic climate offers special challenges for women, and AWLA has been in contact with the charity *Dress for Success* which offers women entering the workforce access to a wardrobe of work attire. So, dig out your old suits and work clothes which AWLA will collect and deliver to *Dress for Success* – a notice will be coming around soon with more details.

We have also renewed our focus on the design and layout of our website and logo, and you will see some changes in that space in the coming weeks. We do invite your feedback, as we are looking to make the site a more valuable information tool for members and the public, so please feel free to let us know your thoughts.

*Sarah Carstens*  
**President, AWLA**

## **AWLA is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.**

The AWLA Executive wants to ensure that we have a good store of information about AWLA between 1984 and 2009.

We are seeking any information which members may have about AWLA. Those members who have been past presidents or have served on AWLA's executive are likely to have stories, memories, documents, photos and other items that we would like to include in the AWLA archive, whilst members generally may be able to provide us with anecdotes, photos, details about previous events/people that have made an impact on them.

We would like to capture AWLA's past before it disappears.

Could anyone with information please contact [awla@extra.co.nz](mailto:awla@extra.co.nz)



Sarah Pidgeon recently sat down with **Helen Melrose**, the inaugural President of the Auckland Women Lawyers' Association to discuss her career and the founding of the AWLA.

Helen Melrose, a founding partner of the all-women boutique commercial law firm, Burke Melrose, decided to become a lawyer in the 5th form at Epsom Girls Grammar School and never wavered from that conviction. After obtaining her law degree from the University of Auckland, she was admitted to the Bar in 1972. She recalls going to interview for a position as in-house counsel at Mobil Oil only to be told that they did not accept women for such positions. So instead, she joined a small general practice law firm in Auckland. In her early years of practise, she appeared in the District Court for a defended hearing with Maureen Southwick (now Queens Counsel) as the opposing counsel. It was the first time that two women had appeared against each other in a court in New Zealand, so it aroused a great deal of interest at the time.

However, some of her court appearances did not go as positively. She recalls appearing before Justice Perry in a room full of gowned male counsel on a High Court list. When she rose to announce herself Justice Perry asked "could you come a little closer dear?" Her embarrassment at not being taken seriously was palpable.

Perhaps it was these early experiences that led her and other women to establish the Auckland Women Lawyers Association in 1984. Indeed it was the Hon Margaret Wilson who first approached Helen Melrose and Nancy Dolan with the idea of establishing a women lawyers' organisation. Gill Gatfield's book "Without Prejudice" records that, at the time, the organisation was set up as an organisation separate from the Auckland District Law Society, run by women to address women's concerns. These concerns were three-fold: equal employment, equal pay and equal advancement opportunities. The purpose of the organisation was to provide a network and support-system for women lawyers throughout the Auckland region in order to overcome the barriers faced by women in law firms to achieve equality. In doing so, a driving force behind the organisation was the desire to support the advancement of their members through to the highest levels of the profession: as Queens Counsel at the Bar, partners in commercial law firms and as members of the Judiciary.

It is Helen's view that the organisation would not have survived if it were not for the support of men in the legal profession. In particular she cites Justice Ted Thomas

and Justice Robert Chambers, and the Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Palmer SC as having been particularly supportive. The AWLA was also fortunate to receive the support of the Auckland District Law Society who were very encouraging. There were not many senior women lawyers at this time, but Helen Melrose also recalls the support of Justice Potter, who was soon to become the first woman president of the Auckland District Law Society in 1988, as well as Margaret Vennell and Dame Silvia Cartwright.

However, in spite of all her hard work helping other women to progress through the profession, Helen faced her own challenges reaching the top. She recalls that it took her 12 years to reach the level of partner whereas it took her male contemporaries only 6 to 7 years to do so. She also recalls the challenges she had as the only woman partner of the firm Chapman Tripp Sheffield Young (after Chapman Tripp & Co merged with Sheffield Young & Ellis in 1985). While generally speaking her male colleagues in the partnership were supportive of her, she did find it hard being the only woman partner, striving to make the practice of law easily accessible and acceptable for the women in her firm.

Eventually Helen decided to strike out on her own to establish her own boutique law firm with Michelle Burke in 1995. The law firm specialised in securities, corporate and commercial law, with a particular emphasis on the retirement industry. This practice expanded in 2003 into banking and finance law when Gill Goodwin joined the partnership. Helen is proud of the firm she has helped create, which provides good quality commercial work and the ability to work in a supportive environment. It is with this in mind that she encourages other women to make the career/life-style choices that are right for them. For Helen, she has found her niche in a boutique law firm, which may be a career path for other women to consider.

Just as Helen is proud of the law firm she helped to establish, she is also proud of what the organisation she co-founded has achieved. She considers that the AWLA has grown to be a very professional, credible and relevant organisation to women lawyers. In her view, the AWLA has made great strides in supporting women in society in general and she looks forward to the organisation's continued success.

***"She recalls going to interview for a position as in-house counsel ... only to be told that they did not accept women for such positions."***

***"... [AWLA] was set up as an organisation ... run by women to address women's concerns."***

***"The purpose of the organisation was to provide a network and support-system for women lawyers throughout the Auckland region in order to overcome the barriers faced by women in law firms to achieve equality."***

## International Womens Day: 8 March 2009

By Ling Yip

***“Unifem has four strategic goals: reducing women’s poverty and exclusion, ending violence against women, halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls and achieving greater equality in democratic government in times of peace and war.”***

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) celebrates International Womens Day (IWD) – March 8 with an annual breakfast. This year’s breakfast was held at the Ellerslie Convention Centre on 9 March 2009.

The event was as usual well attended by a diverse group of women from school students to professional women.

Unifem is the women’s fund at the United Nations, set up in 1976 to provide financial and technical assistance to programmes and strategies aimed at fostering women’s empowerment and gender equality.

Unifem has four strategic goals: reducing women’s poverty and exclusion, ending violence against women, halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls and achieving greater equality in democratic government in times of peace and war.

This year’s keynote speaker was Dr Yvonne Underhill-Sem. Dr Underhill-Sem has impressive credentials including Director of the Centre for Development Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Auckland. She has also been Pacific

Regional Co-ordinator of a global research and advocacy network called DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) and is involved in the Pacific Women’s Triennial Conferences.

Dr Underhill-Sem and her three colleagues spoke glowingly about the recent Association of Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) Conference held in Cape Town in November 2008, which they attended. Each of the speakers spoke about opportunities that such a conference provided including sharing ideas and strategies to advance gender equality with like minded people from all over the world. The information and skills that the speakers have learnt from this conference will no doubt benefit the organisations that they each work with and the women that they are trying to reach out and assist.

It is now my sixth year attending this annual event and I have enjoyed each and every one of the Unifem Breakfasts that have been held. The International Women’s Day Breakfast is an event in my calendar that is not to be missed.

For more information on Unifem, please see: [www.unifem.org.nz](http://www.unifem.org.nz)

## President’s Function

We had our first function for the year, the President’s Function, in February at the wonderful rooftop area of the ADLS. The function was well attended and we were very lucky to have Anna Fitzgibbon the then President-Elect of the ADLS as our guest speaker. AWLA’s theme for this year is “Celebrating Success” and Anna’s successful campaign to win presidency of the ADLS is certainly worthy of celebration.

Following informal drinks and nibbles, we congregated to hear Anna speak. Anna was gracious to acknowledge that she would not be where she was today without the support of AWLA and the women of the profession. Anna noted “I think to be successful, women need support, and they need our support to achieve those heights”. One of AWLA’s primary objectives is to provide a supportive network for women so we were delighted that the organisation was able to successfully provide support to Anna in her successful bid for presidency of ADLS.

In her speech, Anna also reflected on the women who had set up AWLA and noted 25 years down the track the large number of women who still come to AWLA functions and thought this fact demonstrated the value of the organisation. It is AWLA’s 25th birthday this year, and we have lots of excellent things in store to celebrate!

Anna also spoke about the new structure of ADLS, which was a useful update for members, given the significant changes in the last year. Anna explained that she was in contact with NZLS and was looking for ways to improve the relationship with NZLS following the incorporation of ADLS last year. She noted that ADLS was working hard with new and prospective members and encouraged the profession to join. Anna said she was pleased with the uptake of new members to ADLS so far.

Sarah Carstens  
AWLA President

***“ I think to be successful, women need support ...’ ”***

***“It is AWLA’s 25th birthday this year, and we have lots of excellent things in store to celebrate!”***



**DRESS FOR SUCCESS**  
AUCKLAND

*Suits to Self-Sufficiency*

***“Dress for Success works to empower women to support themselves and their families despite difficult personal and economic circumstances.”***

***“Professional women are key to Dress for Success’ continuing ability to serve women in the community.”***

***“The people there were great – they provided not only practical help but emotional support as well. When you have been a beneficiary, you need guidance, not judgement, to give you the confidence to take the steps that get you back into the workforce.”***

## **DRESS FOR SUCCESS – Every Woman Succeeding**

Dress for Success is a not-for-profit organisation which helps low income and unemployed women to enter or re-enter the work force by providing free high quality clothing, accessories, confidence and grooming advice to boost their self-esteem and independence.

Dress for Success works to empower women to support themselves and their families despite difficult personal and economic circumstances. It strives to provide women in need with the opportunity to gain employment and through that personal strength and economic sustainability.

Since 1999, Dress for Success Auckland has assisted over 6,500 women. Its goal is to dress 3000 women per annum in Auckland by 2011 and in doing that assist each of these women to succeed. Dress for Success Auckland provides its services from leased premises in central Auckland and currently employs three part-time staff members. It is assisted by over 80 volunteers who conduct client dressing appointments six days per week. Dress for Success Auckland relies upon grants, fundraising events and support of various individual and corporate sponsors for professional advice and income to provide these services to the community.

Professional women are key to Dress for Success’ continuing ability to serve women in the community. The donated clothing that is provided is just part of that story. Dress for Success operates under the governance of a strong board of professional women from a broad cross-section with expertise in law, public relations, project and people management, business consultancy, policy and marketing. The skilled staff work with passion and are supported by a large number of volunteers. The support given to Dress for Success Auckland’s key fund raising events such as the Suit & Salad Luncheon and the Celebrity Waiters Dinner enables it to raise the funds it needs in order to provide its clients with the support and services they need as they enter or return to the workforce.

So what has Dress for Success Auckland achieved? Lavinia Adriene Touna, a former client has a success story that encapsulates the work Dress for Success does in the community.

Thirty-one-year-old Lavinia was on the DPB with two young children for two years before she was referred to Dress for Success Auckland. Thanks to the clothing

and support she received from the team, Lavinia has now been in the workforce for a few months and says she “loves every minute of it! My goal is to have financial stability for myself and my children, and I’m driven by the ambition to provide a better future for them.”

Lavinia attributes her new found confidence and independence to the help and support from Dress for Success Auckland. “The people there were great – they provided not only practical help but emotional support as well. When you have been a beneficiary, you need guidance, not judgement, to give you the confidence to take the steps that get you back into the workforce.”

Each year, thousands of New Zealand women like Lavinia attempt to enter the workforce after time spent raising their children, or being unemployed. Launching into the job market requires confidence, and Dress for Success helps build this in women by giving them interview-appropriate clothes, accessories and advice.

Every year Dress for Success Auckland compiles the results from its client surveys and these responses help keep the organization on track. This feedback also empowers their staff and volunteers.

Here is a summary of the results

- Over 90% found Dress for Success useful in preparing them for work, and they felt better about themselves following their dressing appointments
- 100% of clients would recommend Dress for Success to others
- 66% are aged between 18–35
- Over 66% have children
- 82% exist on less than \$25k per annum
- Over 50% are Maori or Pacific Islander
- 75% have NEVER owned a corporate suit

To provide its services, Dress for Success relies on donations from Auckland women in the form of clothing, accessories and financial support. Every \$125 raised helps Dress for Success support another Auckland woman back into work, and just as importantly helps makes a positive difference to her family and community.

Dress for Success invites supporters to ‘Adopt a Client’ by joining our Success Sponsors regular giving programme. From \$10 per month a donor can help to support another woman back to work.

*Continued on page 5 ➤*

## AWLA Submissions on the Domestic Violence (Enhancing Safety) Bill

AWLA recently called for its members to provide comments on the Domestic Violence (Enhancing Safety) Bill and sought the views of members about this important and significant change to existing protections for victims of domestic violence. AWLA's submission to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee supported the objects and intent of the Bill which is aimed at improving protection of domestic violence victims by strengthening Police enforcement of the Domestic Violence Act 1995, and distancing the victim from the 'responsibility' of an order. AWLA thought it important to support the Bill and to encourage the

Select Committee to consider further funding and training to Police officers nationwide of all ranks, to develop and maintain a greater understanding of the needs of victims of domestic violence, their reliance on the Police for enforcement and protection, and to promote greater awareness by the Police of their new obligations to all parties concerned in these circumstances. If members wish to receive a copy of the submission please contact Angela Hansen at Knight Coldicutt by email at [angela@kclaw.co.nz](mailto:angela@kclaw.co.nz) or on 09 306 1115.

### REVIEW

#### MacBeth

##### Unitec Theatre, Department of Performing and Screen Arts

Under the direction of Cathy Downes, a group of third year students at the Unitec Department of Performing and Screen Arts recently staged MacBeth, one of the most well-known of Shakespeare's tragedies.

The potentially difficult concept for this production was that the actors would each play a number of parts, with four or five different actors playing the roles of Lady MacBeth and MacBeth during the course of the play. Taking this a step further, women played the role of MacBeth in two Acts, while one Lady MacBeth was played by a man. It was testament to the skill of this group of actors, and to clever staging, that the audience had no difficulty believing in their characters, despite this.

Particular highlights included the famous scene of Lady MacBeth's madness ("out damn spot"), which was played with

sensitivity and conveyed a real sense of tragedy. Also impressive was the scene where MacDuff (another part played by a female actor) mourns his "pretty ones" who have been slain at MacBeth's behest – MacDuff's grief, turning slowly to anger was palpable.

The lighting and props used for this production added to the bleak tone of the play. An iron drum at centre stage was used to good effect as the witches' cauldron in Act 1. Later, when a lid was placed on the drum, water continued to drip onto it, creating a sense a tension and growing menace.

Overall an excellent production and another reminder of how important it is to see Shakespeare's plays on stage, rather than the page. MacBeth as performed by this group of Unitec students really came to life.

*"... MacDuff's grief, turning slowly to anger was palpable."*

*"To raise funds to enable it to help more women, Dress for Success is hosting its 'must attend' Celebrity Waiters Dinner."*

#### Dress for Success

To raise funds to enable it to help more women Dress for Success Auckland is hosting its "must attend" Celebrity Waiters Dinner. With the support from the Celebrity Waiters Advisory team of Tina Cross, Jennifer Ward-Lealand and Kay Gregory, the event is sure to be a great success. Guests will be entertained by the Lady Killers and Jennifer Ward-Lealand, surprise celebrity performances, and a celebrity waiter will be assigned to each table. One of a kind auction items will up for competitive bidding including the LBD (little black dress) Collection.

Anyone wishing to support Dress for Success and the significant contribution

— Continued from page 4

it makes to empowering women in the community is invited attend the Celebrity Waiters Dinner which is being held on Friday 15 May 2009 from 6.30pm – Midnight at the Hyatt Regency Auckland. Tickets cost: \$250 + GST.

Details about Dress for Success are available on [www.dressforsuccess.org/auckland](http://www.dressforsuccess.org/auckland). Those wishing to become a Success Sponsor, buy tickets to the Celebrity Waiters' Dinner or provide volunteer services can contact Dress for Success Auckland by email: [auckland@dressforsuccess.org](mailto:auckland@dressforsuccess.org) or by phone on 09 377 2762.



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## APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

1 January 2009 – 31 December 2009

New Application

Renewal of Membership

To assist us in maintaining accurate records please staple your business card (if available) here:

**OR** Provide the following details:

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Fax:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone (w):** \_\_\_\_\_ **(h):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Work Title:** *(please tick)*

- Solicitor     
  Associate     
  Partner     
  Consultant     
  Barrister  
 Corporate Counsel     
  Government Counsel     
  Student     
  Legal Executive  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Employer Name:** *(if applicable)* \_\_\_\_\_

**Practice Area:** *(eg commercial, family)* \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

We would like to be able to include details of new members in our newsletter and a membership directory.  
If you would prefer to have your details unpublished please tick here.

<b>Amount Paid:</b>	Full membership (including donation to the AWLA Margaret Wilson Scholarship)	\$65.00 + \$ _____
	Full membership	\$65.00
	Student/financial hardship	\$20.00
	Associate membership (non-lawyers)	\$65.00

Cheque enclosed for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheques payable to Auckland Women Lawyers' Association Inc. and send with this form completed to:

AWLA  
P O Box 6568  
Wellesley Street  
AUCKLAND

A receipt will be sent. No GST is payable.

By signing this application form you consent to the Auckland Women Lawyer's Association using your email address to communicate with you by email, including sending you our newsletters, information about our functions, membership renewal notices, and other matters.

## AWLA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2009 – CONTACT DETAILS

NAME	CONTACT DETAILS	ADDRESS	NAME	CONTACT DETAILS	ADDRESS
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			Ling Yip	Tel 277 7949 ext 706 Fax: 277 7960	David Rooke Law PO Box 64 342, Botany ling@davidrookelaw.co.nz

## 2009 PORTFOLIOS

<b>Membership &amp; Promotion:</b>	Marie Kissick & Kate Lane
<b>Mentoring:</b>	Anisa Barrowclough & Katrina Winsor
<b>Historical Committee:</b>	Angela Stafford, Katrina Winsor, Angela Hansen & Sarah Pidgeon
<b>Legislative Watch:</b>	Angela Hansen & Stephanie Earl
<b>Scholarship &amp; Writing Prize:</b>	Ling Yip