

First Nations pathways to the Bar



Natasha Case Alinea Chambers

On a cold and rainy night in June, members of the New South Wales judiciary and New South Wales Bar Council, along with barristers and solicitors in private and public practice, descended to the basement of the NSW Bar Association. They included the Hon Chief Justice Andrew Bell, the Hon Justice Michael Slattery and Chris Ronalds AO SC, founder of the NSW Bar Association's First Nations Committee and many of the programs it administers. The assemblage gathered to celebrate and reaffirm the NSW Bar Association's 20-year commitment to supporting pathways for First Nations students and solicitors to becoming members of the New South Wales Bar.

The chair of the First Nations Committee, Tony McAvoy SC, introduced keynote speaker the Hon Justice Louise Taylor, who spoke frankly and compellingly of her personal journey to the Bench. Justice

Taylor reflected on her elevation to the ACT magistracy and then the ACT's Supreme Court after many years as a solicitor advocate without having gone to the Bar, as well as the prejudice she encountered along the way and how she dealt with that. Her Honour addressed some comments directly to the First Nations students and solicitors present ('head down, bum up'), as well as members of the profession involved in working with victims of crime, in particular, First Nations women who might not be 'model' victims.

The deputy chair of the First Nations Committee, Damian Beaufils, then convened a panel of First Nations lawyers comprising Justice Taylor, barrister Andrew Smith and solicitor Merinda Dutton, who discussed the role of mentoring in their careers.

All barristers, judges and First Nations law students who would like to become involved in the First Nations Mentoring Program are invited to find out more by visiting nswbar.asn.au/becoming-a-barrister/first-nations-lawyers-and-law-students. **BN**

