

Untapped opportunities

By Eva Scheerlinck



The Lawyers Alliance is fortunate to have four full-time law students working on its publications and educational programs this year. Three of them will be graduating at the end of this year and are currently looking for graduate positions. Each of them is confused about what the future holds, but more importantly they are disillusioned about their perceived options, having recently attended two law careers fairs in Sydney.

Only the large corporate firms (with a couple of exceptions) were represented at these fairs. The students feel like they are being pushed in a direction they don't want to go in, but don't know how to access information about the small- to medium-sized firms that do client work which is of interest to them.

It was not so long ago that I, too, was at university struggling with the same problem. If legal practice meant the big end of town, I wasn't interested. But I didn't know that there were other options out there, and I certainly wasn't equipped to access them.

So how do firms attract keen and clever graduates who want an alternative to multinational legal practices, when the students don't know who those firms are?

The Lawyers Alliance has about 1,400 members, not all of them solicitors. Of the 650 or so firms among the membership, some are sole

practitioners, some are small firms, others more substantial in size with offices in various capital cities. Yet it seems that final year law students don't know about them.

The Lawyers Alliance has not actively recruited law students as members of the organisation until this year. We are currently running an essay competition for law students to introduce them to our organisation and our values. Some branches are providing guest lectures at university law schools, or sponsoring mooted competitions. But while that might mean increased awareness of the Lawyers Alliance, the principles it stands for and the publications it produces, it still does not give students information about who our members are and why they might constitute a viable, alternative group of employers.

Should the Lawyers Alliance host an alternative law careers fair? Should firms be looking to promote themselves through the law schools themselves? Or get involved in the traditional law careers fairs and establish themselves in the graduate market alongside the big end of town? Should the Lawyers Alliance develop young lawyers networking events for graduates? Should the Lawyers Alliance try and develop a preferential hiring policy for those students who are members of the organisation and committed to its principles? All these questions have been spinning around in my head since my discussions with our student

volunteers. Perhaps members can also give it some thought. It would be a shame for students such as the ones working here to end up in commercial practice because all the available recruitment processes point them inexorably in that direction.

Meanwhile, the Lawyers Alliance remains committed to providing quality CLE/CPD to young lawyers, devising special programs to meet their needs. A series of four seminars for young lawyers to be held in Melbourne in April is attracting a lot of support. Once firms secure bright, keen graduates the Lawyers Alliance, through its paralegal and articled clerk membership program, plays a role in developing their professional skills and providing them with networks and support to engender camaraderie and loyalty. The challenge for firms working in individual rights protection is to enlighten graduates of the wonderful opportunities and satisfying work that lies within this area of the law. ■

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