

Whistleblowers Australia Inc.

New South Wales branch

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NEWSLETTER, FEBRUARY 1995



"All it needs for evil to prosper is for people of goodwill to do nothing" - E. Bourke.

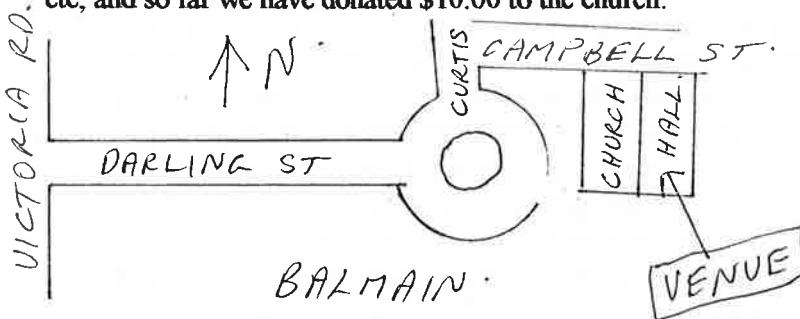
MEETING TIMES

Every Monday, at 8.00 pm, "Sharing and Caring" meetings.

The next General Meeting is on Sunday, 5 March at 1.30 pm

The next Committee meeting is on Thursday, 16 March at 7.00 pm.

PLEASE NOTE-All meetings are now held at our new venue, the Presbyterian Church Hall, Campbell Street, Balmain. The Reverend Ivan Ransom has kindly donated these facilities for our use and we thank him again for this. We will continue to collect donations during each meeting, for Tea, Coffee, etc, and so far we have donated \$10.00 to the church.



LETTER FROM THE NSW PRESIDENT

Hi Everyone,

First of all, I apologise for any confusion caused by the incorrect meeting date in a previous newsletter.

A lot has happened since the last General Meeting where we split up into small groups under the direction of Charles and conducted mini workshops on how to improve the Whistleblowers Association. Charles got a tremendous amount of data which we hope to use in the near future.

The next General Meeting, which is at the new location in Balmain (see above), will be a "Sharing" meeting as we have been told that the Monday night sessions have been of immense value.

I would like to thank Bob Hunter, who is in the process of sending a letter to various organisations to ask for donations for the WBA. I would appreciate members' help if they could make a list of names addresses and phone numbers of organisations around their area who may be interested in donating to the WBA.

I would also like to thank Debbie Locke for finding us a fantastic venue at Balmain.

I also extend my appreciation and gratitude to Colleen for all the time and effort she put into producing the WBA's high quality newsletters over the last few months. She has unfortunately advised me that she will no longer be able to do this and, on behalf of WBA, I have sent her a thank-you card and flowers to wish her well in the future. I hope you will bear with us as this newsletter has been hastily put together by a few willing volunteers.

At the last Committee Meeting we discussed the usual problems of lack of funding, time and resources and we desperately need more "active members". The jobs the Committee specifically needs to fill are Secretary (To take minutes at meetings) and Newsletter Editor and we would appreciate any offers of assistance in these and other areas.

See you at the next meeting,

Regards, Bob Amato, President

LETTER FROM THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Dear Members,

I have received a constructive letter from Barry O'Keefe, the ICAC Commissioner, who has asked us to highlight the problems which our members have had with the ICAC. He has expressed a desire to meet with a delegation of Whistleblowers to get feedback with a view to addressing Whistleblower problems.

I find this very encouraging as one of the difficulties that we have had in the past, while Mr. Temby was Commissioner, was lack of personal communication between WBA and the ICAC.

It now seems that the results of the questionnaire which was sent with the last Newsletter will be taken seriously by the ICAC. I would therefore appreciate it if all those people who received the questionnaire could return it as soon as possible.

I have also received a letter from Rod Settle from the school of Law and Legal Studies and Faculty of Social Science at La Trobe University (Victoria), telling us that he has got funding from the Australian Research Council for a study on Whistleblower Protection Legislation in Australia.

Another matter of interest is that I have received a copy of the Annual Report of Public Concern at Work (the legal charity in London). They gave evidence to the Australian Senate Committee on whistleblowers. Their report shows clearly the great benefit of having such a body to advise whistleblowers preferably before they blow the whistle. They say that so far whistleblowers who have come to them for advice beforehand have not been victimised after they blew the whistle.

Regards, Jean Lennane

SHARING AND CARING MEETINGS

Ivan Ransom is in the process of composing a preamble to our meetings for the next newsletter which will include the fact that all matters are to be kept confidential and that we should gain confidence from each other by having had the courage to stand up against unethical and corrupt bureaucracies.

These meetings have been operating for the last 3 weeks and have been a huge success. Ivan Ransom has attended one of these meetings to provide advice and support which was much appreciated. On Monday, 20 February, a member from the A.C.T. Branch attended to share her experience and provide support.

One of the themes of these meetings has been the effect upon, and attitude of, family and friends who find it very difficult to understand what we are going through, and why we persist for so long with the issue. It becomes more and more apparent that only other Whistleblowers who have "been through the mill" can really understand the stress and emotions these situations evoke.

Coming to these meetings can provide you with a supportive and understanding environment and you may get useful ideas and advice from members who are further down the track. Remember, you are not alone, and we hope that in the future, more networks will develop among fellow whistleblowers.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

On Sunday, 12 March, at 1.00pm, Whistleblowers are having a social lunch at "Sizzlers" in Mosman. This is just a relaxed social get-together so come along and make some new friends. We hope to see you there- you won't be able to miss a table of Whistleblowers.

MEDICAL ISSUES

One of the common problems many whistleblowers suffer, due to the extreme levels of stress and anxiety they experience, is depression which has a very wide range of symptoms. These include apprehension, difficulties in concentration, racing thoughts, feelings of loss of control, loss of confidence, irritability, apathy, guilt, to name but a few. Prolonged periods of stress and anxiety can lead to further vicious cycles of stress, anxiety and depression itself. Obviously a good diet, plenty of exercise and stress management and relaxation techniques will help enormously towards relieving this situation. However some whistleblowers have been prescribed a course of anti-depressants which they have found to be of help as these can act to correct chemical imbalances which can arise in some of these situations.

OTHER NEWS

Charles Willock has spent a great deal of time preparing an article for the Lawyers Reform Society to bring Whistleblower issues to the attention of a hopefully, innovative group of lawyers. A common experience of whistleblowers has been poor quality of legal services and lack of awareness within the legal profession of the problems experienced by whistleblowers. Let's hope this article achieves a lot to redress this situation in the future.

The NSW Protected Disclosures Act is to be proclaimed on the first of March 1995. This gives persons employed under the NSW Public Sector Management Act, 1988, the right to make disclosures relating to corrupt conduct, maladministration or serious and substantial waste in the Public Sector to the ICAC, the Ombudsman or the Auditor General, without fear of a Breach of Confidence action or Defamation action being made against them. Under certain circumstances, such disclosure can also be made with the same protection, to a minister or a journalist. However, if anyone is considering doing so, they should seek legal advice first. If such a disclosure is made and for some reason the person making it cannot claim protection under this legislation, the protections at Common Law are extremely complicated and not particularly strong.

Despite the many flaws with this legislation, it is at least a substantial step in the right direction and has only been achieved after years of campaigning by Jean Lennane and other Whistleblowers. It just goes to show that individuals, who stand up and persevere with what they believe in, can achieve change.

One whistleblower has recently successfully established in a conciliation process at the Industrial Relations Commission that he was unfairly dismissed after "blowing the whistle" internally on serious maladministration. Mind you, he has not yet had this confirmed in writing but it looks hopeful.

Joe Catanzariti, who writes a column on Legal Affairs in the Australian each Saturday, reported an interesting case on 18 February. A coach of a sporting club had spoken with embarrassing honesty at the club's annual presentation night, upsetting the CEO, sponsors, players and parents. He was dismissed three days later and his dismissal was later found to be unfair. Joe Catanzariti made the following comments: "What one learns from this case is the importance of employees being free to speak their minds and give their honest opinions" and "It would be unpalatable if employers were able to control every word their employees uttered in the course of their employment."

This seems to bear relevance to what "whistleblowing" is all about, i.e., the right of individuals to speak out against irregular practices.

INTERESTING COURSES

There is a workshop titled "Winning Personalities" on Saturday 11 March, from 1.30 pm to 5.00 pm at the North Ryde Community Church. Registration is \$25.00. If anyone is interested, call Margaret on 02-887 2928.

LETTERS

We would like to hear news and views from other Whistleblowers and branches and welcome contributions to our newsletter. A copy of this Newsletter is sent to whistleblower committee members in each state and territory with the hope that each will keep us informed about what is going on in their neck of the woods.

Dear Bob,

I just wanted to put a few words down to acknowledge my appreciation of all that has been achieved to date by a group of dedicated, unpaid, volunteers in the first days towards resolving the problem all whistleblowers face. To start with, thanks to Debbie and Greg for providing their home as a venue for committee meetings and to Debbie for finding an alternative (free) venue for our meetings, thanks to Charles for the hundreds of hours he has put into writing letters and getting us all motivated at the general meeting on 4 February, thanks to Colleen for producing the first few newsletters which were of a standard we will find hard to match, and thanks to you for organising the Monday night sessions. Last and definitely not least, thanks to Jean Lennane for setting things in motion and for keeping going despite all the odds. I marvel that she has had the energy to keep on going.

I also add that I have found the Monday night sessions to be of incredible value, much more than I had expected, and I hope that they continue and expand in the future.

Yours gratefully, Lesley

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the former National President of WBA, John McNicol, for the help he gave me after I was unfairly dismissed and victimised in 1991. I had been a casual teacher and a friend of management was given my job. Mr McNicol helped by writing letters to the Director General, I was reinstated in March 1992, to a job closer to my home.

Sue Buchanan

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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Social Organiser	Debbie Locke	02 810 3526
Media Liason	Charles Willock	02 411 4420