

Turn and face the strange

by Trent Wallace

August 1, 2018 marked my first day on secondment from Australian Government Solicitor (AGS) to the Australian Pro Bono Centre (Centre). Prior to my interview with John Corker and Gabriela Christian-Hare, I did my due diligence on the staff of the Centre. What was I, the Aboriginal misfit junior lawyer from the Central Coast, going to bring to the Centre? My authentic self. I wasn't going to put on a façade that they would easily see through. I didn't even wear a suit to my interview!

There 's gonna have to be a different man...

As I set foot on the University of New South Wales Kensington campus (with acknowledgement to the traditional land owners – the Bedegal people of the Eora Nation), I felt the frenetic pace of activity, it seems the “never stand still” motto rings true here. We are generously housed within the law faculty alongside organisations such as the Diplomacy Training Program, Youth Law Australia and Grata Fund. Working alongside these organisations, you feel a sense of power and pride in the work that's being done. UNSW holds a long commitment to social justice, with the Aboriginal Legal Service being housed here in its infancy stages.

And these children that you spit on

As they try to change their worlds

Are immune to your consultations

They're quite aware of what they're goin' through...

Navigating through budgetary constraints and funding uncertainty means we must take a creative and efficient approach to our work. Our team may be small, but our passion for growing pro bono is large. Through the AGS pro bono program, led by Geetha Nair, the Centre has been generously provided with secondees. The work is varied, and we are all provided with a voice concerning the issues that arise. I'm the Centre's first Aboriginal worker and I am grateful that I can contribute my cultural input. It's often the case that Indigenous people experience difficulty within the workplace,

and I have heard many horror stories. Cultural competency and safety of Indigenous staff is paramount and goes to the heart of Indigenous staff retention rates, but this does not come naturally to most workplaces. I am grateful that my lived experience is heard, understood and appreciated here and at AGS. Please see my Law Society Journal article detailing my identity here:

<https://lsj.com.au/articles/i-the-awful-aboriginal/>

Don 't tell them to grow up and out of it...

During my brief time here, the Centre has undergone major transformations, hence the title of my piece and paying homage to David Bowie's hit Changes. Sue Hunt left the Centre earlier in the year and I miss our morning conversations. It's pertinent to note my own sadness at losing John Corker (JC as I call him). The work he has done for the Indigenous community and the career he has leaves me in awe, but JC remains humble and hungry for the next challenge. I will miss seeing his huge grin whenever he discusses something he is passionate about. JC is always up for a yarn and gives me great insight to a profession I am so junior in. I seek his advice on various topics as there isn't much he doesn't know! This leads me to our new CEO, Gabriela Christian-Hare or GCH as I call her. GCH will continue her amazing career as the Centre's leader. Alongside the adorable pictures drawn by her two wonderful children, there's a photo of her sitting next to her former boss, Mr Tony Blair.

There's also the Master of Laws from Oxford, obtained whilst being a first-time mother to a newborn in a foreign country. This dedication to excellence provides endless inspiration and I look forward to seeing what is next for the Centre.

Ch-ch-changes.. ■

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