

ALWU NEWSLETTER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AOTEAROA LEGAL WORKERS' UNION

ALWU BY THE NUMBERS

600+ members

Across 80+ workplaces

120+ new members in the last month

PROGRESS REPORT

What has ALWU been doing since our last newsletter?

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

ALWU was formed by a group of young legal workers who wanted to see change across legal workplaces. However, we knew we did not have a formal mandate as representatives of legal workers across Aotearoa. Accordingly, ALWU held its first election in September and the results were announced at our first AGM in Wellington on Thursday 5 September 2019.

We are pleased to report that your elected executive has a diverse range of representatives from across the country, with executive members now based in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin. We'll be introducing the executive over the coming weeks.

Expanding our diversity is a priority for ALWU, and we are always on the look out for support - if you would like to be more involved with ALWU, we'd love to hear from you at contact@alwu.org.nz, or via our social media channels.

WORKPLACE INFORMATION SESSIONS

In September, ALWU ran information sessions at 5 firms for over 120 legal workers. More sessions are planned for the coming months. These sessions are informal discussions about what ALWU is doing and a chance for workers to voice concerns, ask questions and suggest areas where ALWU may be able to help.

A concern voiced at these workplaces has been employers' attitudes to union membership. A reminder that it is illegal for your employer to discriminate against you on the basis of union membership, or to tell you not to join the union. Membership of ALWU is also confidential - we will not tell your employer that you are a union member (unless required for collective bargaining purposes).

ALWU IN YOUR WORKPLACE?

ALWU will keep getting out and talking to our members about what matters to them. We want to hear from you, and with executive members now based in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, we can come to you. Get in touch if you would like ALWU to visit your workplace!

ALWU ▼

AOTEAROA LEGAL WORKERS' UNION



NAT'S NEWS

Natalie Weyer is the executive manager at Kathryn Dalziel Barrister. As part of our newly elected executive, Natalie shares some thoughts for administrative and business staff at legal workplaces.

Good day members and a very warm welcome to our first edition of the Newsletter as your newly elected executive on ALWU. I am delighted to be part of this incredible team and I look forward to working with them and getting to know you all.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Let me introduce myself. I am Natalie Weyer, born and bred South African, part Aussie, part Kiwi – did I hear anyone say identity chaos? My husband and I immigrated with our 2 (now teenage) children to New Zealand in 2014 and as we go into our 5th year in this beautiful country, I feel incredibly lucky to now call New Zealand my home. My accent is terrible (and terribly confusing) and therefore I promise I will avoid speaking to you at any public forum at all cost.

I will stick to the typing – after all, that is how I earn my keep!

As I write this, I find myself reflecting on my journey throughout my career. I have worked in law firms in 3 different countries over the last 18 years. If there is one common denominator that runs like a golden thread throughout them all, it is without a doubt, that administrators need more support.

TALL POPPIES

One of the first things I was told when we came to New Zealand was to watch out for the “tall poppies”. I have never heard of this syndrome before, but I was soon to find out that it is a very real concern. I found myself wondering why there is a name, somewhat derogatory if I may say so, for people who work hard. People who refuse to be mere seat warmers. I have to say, I struggle with this. I cannot help but wonder if this “syndrome” is a catalyst for the “I only do what I’m paid to do” attitude that I have seen so many times amongst, dare I say, non-fee earners. This is where the vicious circle starts.

MY DREAM JOB

My resume will show that I have always been a bit of a job-hopper. I’m not particularly proud of it, but it’s also a reflection of the fact that I have always been on the look out for opportunities where I can be better, grow and learn. And with every job, I am proud to say, I have done exactly that.

Recently, I have been lucky enough to land my dream job. I didn’t know what my dream job was supposed to look like, but what I did know is that it was not doing the “morning-tea-to-lunch-to-afternoon-tea-to-home-time” every single day, year after year. Surely, as a PA, there must be more to my career? You will get to know more about my job (as a PA) in the coming months, but I will say this for now – my job, as such, haven’t changed much. But what has changed was a boss who genuinely cares. She challenges, encourages and teaches me, in a safe space, every day. That is exactly the support that I talk about above.

Imagine a legal industry where your administrator is proud to tell people where she works. Imagine she’s the tall poppy, not because there is work to be done (yes that also) but more importantly, because she values her job, and her fear of failing you is more important than her fear of getting in trouble. Imagine a world where the hierarchy between fee earners and administrators are non-existent, because she works for the business as much as you do. Imagine she wanted you to succeed as much as the other way around. Imagine she felt supported enough, to be the tall poppy. Now imagine – she didn’t, and you didn’t, and the vicious circle continued.

Until next time!

THE BIG PICTURE: BROADER ENGAGEMENT

What else has ALWU been doing this month?

FIRST UNION

ALWU has a thirst for FIRST - as part of its ongoing engagement with other unions around the country, ALWU met with FIRST Union twice in September. The first of those meetings was introductory in nature. FIRST Union provided valuable insight into how unionised workers affect change in their workplaces, while recognising the different challenges facing legal and other professional workers.

Unfortunately for ALWU, legal workers tend not to own trucks they can stop in the middle of a state highway! The second meeting focused on how we can help each other, with FIRST Union offering training and associated materials to assist ALWU delegates in their workplaces.

LABOUR INSPECTORATE

The Labour Inspectorate ensures compliance with employment standards by identifying and investigating breaches and taking enforcement action. It also works with industry and sector leadership and other key parties to strengthen the systems that underpin employment standards compliance.

ALWU met with the Inspectorate in September to discuss our first campaign on minimum wage. The Inspectorate was strongly supportive of ALWU's actions and shared ideas for modelling best practice compliance - watch this space as we develop guidance for legal workplaces to ensure accurate time recording and compliance with minimum standards.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Marlon Drake is well-known to many as former President of Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA). Marlon has now been elected as ALWU's student representative. This month, ALWU has started strategising about how best to engage with and represent the views of the law student body. ALWU is planning to send Marlon and other members of the executive to speak to law schools around the country - if you're one of our treasured student members, keep an eye out for an information session soon!

I LOVE THE CONCEPT OF PROMOTING INCLUSIVITY AND KINDNESS AND THE FACT THAT, FOR THE FIRST TIME, A COLLECTIVE VOICE CAN BE RAISED FOR THOSE THAT WORK IN THE LEGAL INDUSTRY. THERE HAS BEEN TOO MUCH ISOLATION AND POWERLESSNESS FOR LEGAL WORKERS WHO SIT AT THE BOTTOM OF WHAT HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN A VERY HIERARCHICAL CULTURE.

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Frances Joychild QC, Barrister

MEME CORNER

Some comic solidarity to provide relief from the strain of collective action. Submit to us at contact@alwu.org.nz.

