



ABN: 41 473 082 653

**VICTIMS OF CRIME ASSISTANCE
LEAGUE (ACT) INC.**
Supported by the ACT Government

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

**Re: Public Hearing (22 March 2006) – Inquiry into Auditor Generals
Report No 4 of 2005: Courts Administration.**

VOCAL would like to thank The Standing Committee for the opportunity to attend the public hearing on 22 of March 2006. We hope our submission and comments were able to help the committee in its inquiry.

The Proof Transcript Of Evidence appears to be true and accurate.

Upon reading the transcript it is evident that there are some questions as to whether VOCAL'S submission is of relevance to the inquiry on Courts Administration. I would like to take this opportunity to clarify a few matters.

Recommendation 12, 13 and 14 in the Auditors General's Report calls for a more diverse range of court users to be surveyed. VOCAL had over 700 clients from various backgrounds who could have participated in the last financial year. Surveys will help to streamline court administration via direct feedback from court users. Completing a survey may also give court users a sense of satisfaction by commenting on the court system.

The brochure and video that were suggested could have a variety of uses for the courts and an organisation such as ours. VOCAL could use these to train volunteers, and to prepare court users in our venue with support workers on hand. The courts could have this video running continuously on some of the screens in the court foyer. Alternately a dedicated viewing room could be assigned. We believe that better prepared court users will directly improve the efficiency of the courts and improve attendance.

Co-operation between VOCAL and the Courts Administration as we pointed out is non-existent. VOCAL is funded by DJCS to provide court support

yet does not have an effective system to liaise with the Courts Administration. This lack of communication reduces our effectiveness. Feedback from clients also suggests that communication between Administration and Court users is inadequate. If a system is put in place where a court staff can either consistently liaise with us, or have a system whereby permission has been sought from clients at intake, to refer for help to other services such as VOCAL, these signed permission can then be placed in a tray made accessible by our volunteer support workers on a daily basis. Our services can be better utilised, courts administration workload reduced, and ultimately more efficient, timely and supportive communication will be made with court users.

We were asked at the inquiry about our client constituency. The following is an extract from our 2005 annual report outlining client types.

Clients:

VOCAL opened 508 new client files this year (an increase of 287 on the previous year). This comprised of 347 Primary Victims and 161 Secondary Victims. The number of ongoing clients who were receiving services and support is 228.

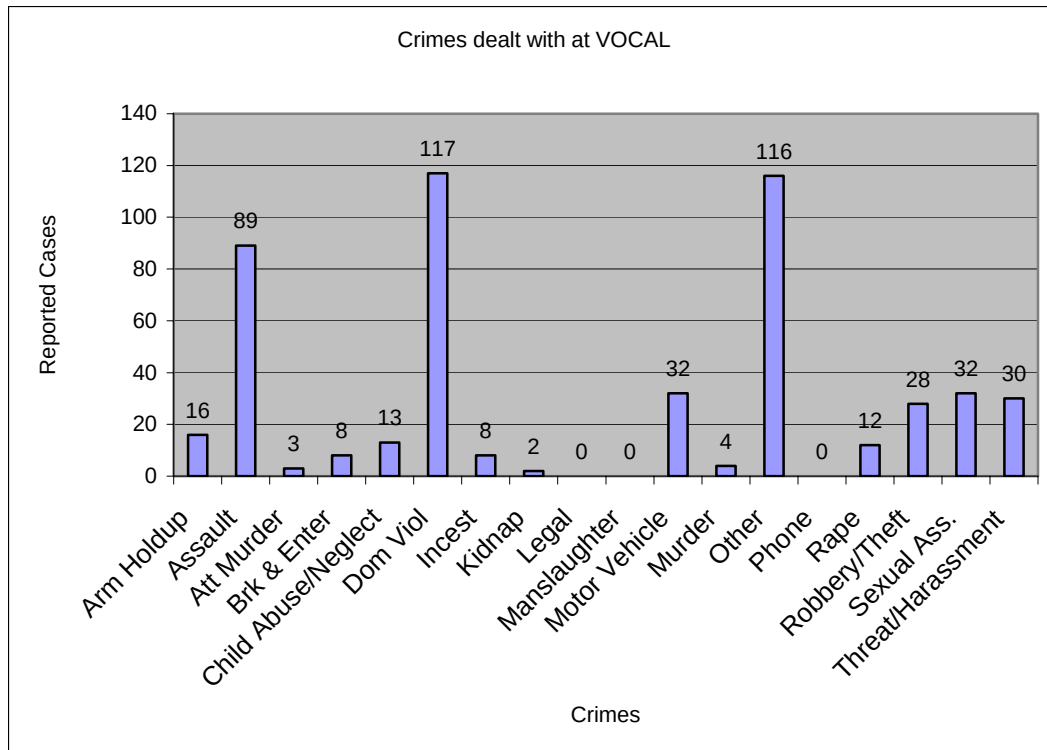
**TYPES OF CRIME DEALT WITH AT VOCAL
During 04/05 Period**

CRIME	02/03	03/04	04/05	CRIME	02/03	03/04	04/05
Murder	5	5	4	Threats/Harassment	18	32	30
Attempted Murder	2	7	3	Armed Hold Up	4	2	16
Manslaughter	1	2	0	Robbery/Theft	8	22	26
Assault	55	56	89	Kidnap	2	6	2
Rape	6	10	12	Motor Vehicle and hit and run #	5	4	32
Sexual Assault	14	23	32	Domestic Violence	41	59	117
Incest	3	3	8	Break & Enter	3	5	8
Child Abuse/Neglect	10	13	13	Other*	7	24	116

Total for 2004/05: 508

**Other includes: Arson/Drugs/Stalking/Conspiracy/Sudden Death/PCA incidents. Due to incidents involving multiple witnesses (Secondary Victims) this number has dramatically increased for the 2004/05 year.*

Motor vehicle includes hit and run, theft and vandalism of cars incidents for the year 2004/05



Re-Structuring the foyer is also a concern that needs to be addressed. This is not necessarily to speed up the process but to provide a better service to court users. Currently an application for a DVO or PO etc may take place in the foyer or the Legal Aid Waiting room, (not always in separate chambers). This unprofessional practice is disconcerting and embarrassing for clients and support workers. This may at times seriously risk breaching clients' privacy as well as inhibiting clients' responses to the Registrar when other parties are in the waiting area within hearing range, including the respondent and their counsel. The concept of a liaison between community organisations such as VOCAL and the courts would improve the efficiency of the courts administration.

I would like to take this opportunity to say that VOCAL attended the inquiry to assist the standing committee in further streamlining the courts and in turn benefiting court users. The attitude of Ms MacDonald (on P20 and 23) was unhelpful and unnecessarily aggressive, and disrupted our thoughts so that we were unable to present our views as we had wanted to with regards to the use of the waiting areas by Registrars to handle various matters. I have included these thoughts now in this letter. I hope you find these helpful. Please contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Yours Sincerely

Kurt Gruber
05/04/06