



Important Information from the Chairperson of VOTA

Potential Merger with ANZATSA

Dear VOTA Member

In early March 2009 I travelled to Sydney to meet with the ANZATSA executive to discuss a potential merger between the Victorian Offender Treatment Association (VOTA) and the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abuse (ANZATSA).

Talks between myself and ANZATSA executive members prior to this meeting had identified for me that there a number of advantages for both organisations that would warrant further discussions around merging.

In this letter, I wish to inform you of the content of the talks that were held and discuss potential opportunities, as well as issues, that should be considered by the membership in regards to merging.

VOTA has existed since 1994, and has a history of providing a meeting forum for practitioners working within all areas of the sexual assault field including those who work with adult sex offenders, youth with sexually problematic and sexually abusive behaviours, victims and survivors of sexual assault and abuse and supporting services and workers across the field.

VOTA has set itself some high goals to achieve over the past 15 years, and at times has not been able to accomplish all it set out to do. However, looking back, some of the achievements that VOTA has accomplished stand out:

- VOTA provides a regular meeting forum for those who work in this difficult field. Meetings have been held monthly since 1994 with attendances from very few through to over 20 participants. Currently, an average attendance would be between 10 and 20 members on the third Monday evening of the month.
- VOTA provides an annual training program to members and non-members alike that has been very accessible cost-wise, and has helped to develop worker skills across the field.
- VOTA runs a successful bi-annual conference that has seen keynotes such as Robert Longo, Noel Tovey, Bruce Perry, Barbara Biggs and Phil Rich (upcoming 2009 conference) as well as outstanding programs of local and international presentations.
- VOTA auspices working groups and networks such as CEASE, the peak body representing services offering Therapeutic Treatment Legislation services to adolescents across Victoria.

A key reason for the forming of VOTA as a separate entity to ANZATSA was that at that time in 1994, ANZATSA clearly did not encompass those who worked with victims and survivors, and as such, our founders felt that VOTA offered something not available within ANZATSA.

VOTA membership generally sits between 100 and 200 members, the higher number being during the conference years. This is a similar membership size to ANZATSA. Additionally, VOTA is a not-for-profit, and is financially healthy as is ANZATSA.

Rationale for Considering a Merger

In my opinion, there are several points in favour of a merger with ANZATSA which I briefly outline here:

- ANZATSA has now taken a firm stance to be inclusive of victim and survivor services into the association. They have moved from including a victim services representative on their executive to ensuring eligibility for all board positions for practitioners from both the offender and victim/survivor treatment fields.
- To show this good faith, ANZATSA has changed their name from the *Australian & New Zealand Association for the Treatment of Sexual **Abusers*** to the *Australian & New Zealand Association for the Treatment of Sexual **Abuse***
- ANZATSA's recent biennial conference, 'Responses to Sexual Abuse: Safeguarding Human Rights' attempted to encourage dialogue between practitioners who work with those who have been abused as well as those who have abused by inviting victim focused keynotes and scheduling a number of workshops and papers on victim issues.
- Having two organisations within Australia and New Zealand with relatively small membership numbers dilutes the efficiency of these organisations to represent their members. A combined membership would increase the organisation's efficacy.
- In this merger consideration, whilst it makes sense to retain the international name (ANZATSA rather than VOTA), the Victorian "chapter" of ANZATSA would continue to retain a similar feel and meeting schedule as now exists.
- The ANZATSA executive is clear that they would want a Victorian Chapter to continue to organise and run a training calendar. One difference would be that what we offer at VOTA now could then be offered across the eastern states and New Zealand at least.
- Funding for training and meetings would be provided by ANZATSA.
- Discussion would be held in regards to the ANZATSA conference being run in Victoria as part of a rotation between Victoria, other states, and NZ. We would no longer run a bi-annual VOTA conference however we would be in a position to run an annual ANZATSA conference rather than bi-annual VOTA/ANZATSA conferences. This should increase attendance at the conference.
- Currently, both organisations spend a large percentage of their incomings on administration and web services. This could be centralised through a merger.
- Whilst VOTA has run effectively in regards to its core tasks, that generally comes about through your hardworking executive. Over at least the past five years we have had difficulty filling the four core executive positions and as such, from time to time, a large amount of the work has fallen on one or two people. I am not sure how sustainable this is. We would move from having a Victorian executive to being part of a national executive.

