

In conversation with Oliver Hanrahan, Paralegal

Indigenous participation in the legal profession

Indigenous representation in the legal profession is slowly growing. In 2018, the [NSW Law Society's National Profile of Solicitors](#) reported that 519 solicitors (0.7%) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Oliver Hanrahan is a Paralegal in the CSO's Child Protection practice group. He is a proud Wiradjuri person, who grew up in Sydney. His ancestors are from Wallerawang NSW.

In August 2021, Oliver will join the CSO's Graduate Development Program as a graduate solicitor. His goal is to become a barrister, supporting Aboriginal people. He is an avid bodyboarder/bodysurfer and music maker who loves to tell a joke or two.

Oliver shares his experiences of working at CSO and his advice for aspiring lawyers and offers his views on what the legal profession can do to better support Indigenous legal professionals.



Oliver, wearing Aunty Joan Tranter's possum skin cloak, made by Professor Michael McDaniel, University of Technology Sydney.

What is your background?

I'm Wiradjuri. My mob is from Wallerawang, but my family is now spread about across NSW. Two of my aunties are elders in the communities they live in, in Blackheath and Blayney.

What did you study at university?

I studied a Bachelor of Sound and Music Design, with Honours in Arts, at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS).

Leaving school, my plan was to become a music producer. After talking with the lovely people at the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at UTS, I decided to do a Juris Doctor at the University of Sydney.

Why did you want to become a lawyer?

I wanted to help Aboriginal people in a meaningful way. Entering the legal profession seems like the best way to advocate for the interests of Aboriginal people.

Who are your mentors?

My true mentors are my parents! But I should really say thank you to everyone in the Child Protection team at the CSO, the staff at the Redfern Aboriginal Legal Service, the staff at Marrickville Legal Centre, and the various teachers at Sydney Uni who have mentored me through the beginning of my career.

Why should people from Indigenous backgrounds consider becoming a lawyer?

So that Indigenous voices and perspectives are meaningfully reflected in our legal system.

When an Indigenous person has a legal issue, having an Indigenous person with legal expertise assisting them leads to better outcomes.

Indigenous lawyers will better understand their lived experience and issues. They are going to be the best legal advocates for Indigenous clients and communicate more effectively with any Indigenous community organisation, for example, that is party to or otherwise involved in legal proceedings.

How important is it for Indigenous people to have Indigenous lawyers as role models?

Indigenous people need more role models who are lawyers so that they have a larger network of Indigenous lawyers to guide them and mentor them.

I think it's vital to have role models that Indigenous people can relate to, because it creates an instant connection. If you can see yourself reflected in your role models, you believe that you can do the things they do.

Young Indigenous people need support and encouragement from education providers to build them up to believe that they can be a lawyer and contribute something meaningful to their community.

What can Indigenous lawyers do to guide the next generation of Indigenous lawyers?

I think the most important thing Indigenous lawyers can do is to continue establishing strong networks with individual lawyers, law firms, the courts and universities. They should share experience-based knowledge with young indigenous lawyers and students at networking events or employ them if they can!

What do you think the industry could do to better support Indigenous people's participation in the legal profession?

The best thing the industry can do to support Indigenous lawyers is hire more Indigenous lawyers! The sense of community and camaraderie that comes from Indigenous people working together is undeniable.

My hope is that Indigenous people in particular are in more positions of power in our legal system and have more autonomy to manage the legal affairs of Indigenous people.

What networks/support groups are available for Indigenous lawyers?

Some places to get in touch with for support and opportunities include [Ngalaya](#), the [NSW Bar Association](#), [Legal Aid NSW](#), and the Indigenous student services at the university you attended.

What advice you would give to an Indigenous person thinking about becoming a lawyer?

Don't think too hard about it – if you hesitate, you'll talk yourself out of doing it. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do it, especially yourself!

Why did you choose to work at CSO?

I chose to work at the CSO because of the fantastic things I had heard from friends and colleagues about the graduate program and because of its reputation as an exceptional place for young lawyers to learn and train.

What advice you would give to someone applying for a job at the CSO?

Do a bit of research into the CSO, know which practice areas you're most interested in and don't get disheartened about getting knocked back the first time you apply.

Someone from the CSO also gave me this advice about applying for jobs generally: show that you really want it. If you really want the job, that attitude will be evident in your cover letter and interview.