

MEDIA RELEASE

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GRAY PUKSAND & SHAPE HELP VICTORIA LEGAL AID MAKE BOLD OFFICE MOVE

With the legal industry long considered the last bastion of the mahogany row of offices, Victoria Legal Aid has boldly embraced a modern open-plan office and adopted activity-based working in its sleek new Melbourne address.

National architecture and design practice, Gray Puksand partnered with national fitout and refurbishment company SHAPE to recently complete the design and construction of the 8751-square-metre office across three floors at 570 Bourke Street.

Around 550 Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) workers were brought together under one roof over a year-long transition from various CBD locations that also marked a desired cultural change and opportunity for teams to work better together through proximity.

VLA managing director Bevan Warner said: “We wanted to give staff the flexibility to step away from their desks during sensitive calls, and opportunities to connect with colleagues with different skills who they may not see but could help them to better help our clients. It was also important to create an environment that is warm but professional for our staff working in the high pressure environment of the justice system every day.”

The new supported open-plan office at 570 Bourke Street in Melbourne has been designed by Gray Puksand to offer a more welcoming environment to both clients and staff by replacing the imposing walled offices and intimidating corridors with vibrant cafe-style spaces, collaborative work areas, quiet zones and meeting “cubbies” and booths.

More formal meeting rooms were also an essential part of the design for when client confidentiality and privacy is required.

Victoria Legal Aid hopes its new work environment will create a more social workplace culture and overturn the traditional hierarchy of the legal fraternity by literally breaking down the walls.

To avoid any workplace culture shock with the shift to a new open way of working and to get the design right to meet all of VLA’s needs, a staff consultation process comprised of workshops and needs analysis interviews was undertaken by Gray Puksand before the design and build began.

“Their Victoria Legal Aid project team understood that the outcomes of the pre-design workshops were the most important part of the project and they set time aside for it, got people on board and got them to commit to the process,” said Gray Puksand interior designer and partner Heidi Smith.

The sunlit focal point of the office is a central 10-storey glass atrium with a stairway between floors. Health and well-being of staff was a prime consideration with the addition of standing desks and plenty of natural light filling the office and access to two roof decks.

The office was built as part of the Charter Hall portfolio with all the latest sustainability and technological innovations with the aim of securing a 4.5-star NABERS energy rating.

SHAPE Australia CEO Peter Marix-Evans said it had been an exciting project to be involved in for a client boldly embracing significant workplace change.

“We believe we have helped create an innovative new work environment that VLA staff will be excited to arrive at each working day,” Mr Marix-Evans said. “We also think the VLA’s clients will feel more comfortable without the intimidating design of a traditional legal office.

“Australia is leading the world in its willingness to radically alter the traditions of the legal fraternity and transition to open plan offices where transparency is balanced by sensitivity.”

With open-plan activity-based workplaces increasingly adopted by Australia’s top companies, VLA hopes its new office will assist in both attracting and retaining the most talented staff.

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About Victoria Legal Aid:

Victoria Legal Aid helps people with their legal problems. We provide free legal information focusing on prevention and early resolution, as well as more intensive legal advice and representation in criminal, family, youth and children, and civil law matters. We focus on protecting the rights of Victorians and representing those who need it the most.

About SHAPE:

SHAPE is one of Australia’s largest specialist fitout and refurbishment companies, with an annual turnover in excess of \$500 million and a staff of more than 300 people nationally. SHAPE has offices in each mainland state and territory and is a privately owned company. SHAPE delivers projects across the hospitality, commercial, health, industrial and education sectors.

About Gray Puksand:

Gray Puksand has earned a reputation as being leaders. Our modern, visionary designs emerge from contemporary social, cultural and technological evolutions. As an Australian



multi-studio architecture, interior design and graphic design practice, our experience in design enables us to forge cutting-edge, sophisticated work. The national team consists of accomplished and imaginative professionals who produce exemplary designs for clients worldwide.