JULIE ANNE WAGER

Julie Anne Wager was born at King Edward Memorial Hospital in Perth on 13 September 1962, becoming a sixth generation Western Australian. Her father was an Associate Professor in Engineering at the University of Western Australia and her mother ran the family home in Dalkeith. Julie attended the local primary school and completed her secondary education at Hollywood Senior High School. In 1980 she enrolled in the Law Faculty at the University of Western Australia. She obtained a Bachelor of Jurisprudence in 1984 and a Bachelor of Laws in 1985.

Magistrate Wager undertook articles at the Legal Aid Commission (WA) under the wing of Len Roberts-Smith QC. Following Legal Aid, she worked as a duty solicitor at the Children’s Court. She then joined the law firm of Clairs Keeley, where she specialised in family law. In 1988 she accepted an offer to return to the Legal Aid Commission as the acting solicitor in charge of the Criminal Law Division. Three years later she established her own law firm, where she specialised in criminal law for the next nine years.

In 1996 Magistrate Wager was elected President of the Criminal Lawyers Association of Western Australia for two years. From 1998 to 2000 she served on the Council of the Law Society of Western Australia and in 2000 acted as the Society’s media spokesperson on criminal law.

She was appointed a stipendiary magistrate in October 2000 to set up and preside over the Drug Court program in the Court of Petty Sessions in Perth.

The Drug Court of Western Australia was originally a two-year pilot program aimed at drug offenders who steal or commit other crimes in order to finance their habits. After pleading guilty, the offender’s sentence is postponed while he or she

1. Now a justice of the Supreme Court of Western Australia.
is before the Drug Court. During this time the offender must meet the stringent requirements of individually tailored programs established by the Court. Such programs include strict routine drug testing, allied to a system of penalties and rewards that will ideally result in total rehabilitation.

Does Magistrate Wager ever get emotional, considering the cases she has to deal with on a daily basis in the Drug Court? Of course, but she uses her emotions in a very practical and positive way to assist offenders to understand their problems and devise strategies to overcome them. She believes that solving an offender's problems involves looking behind the drugs and alcohol to discover the underlying cause of the insecurity and fear of reality that affects so many of the people who appear before her.

Magistrate Wager believes in calling a spade a spade and makes a determined effort to speak simply and directly to those who appear before her in the Drug Court in language they understand. She believes strongly that people being processed by the criminal justice system must know exactly what is happening to them and be made aware that their own actions and attitudes can influence the final outcome.

Magistrate Wager is a warm, approachable and down-to-earth woman, but at the same time highly professional and knowledgeable in the law. She has acquired a clear understanding of the problems of drug users, having been exposed to them for so many years as a solicitor and on the bench.

With regard to legal education, Magistrate Wager believes that articled clerks must receive adequate training and be encouraged to ask questions and take active roles from the start. She questions the modern view that students with the highest grades make the best practitioners and challenges this ‘narrow view of what a successful graduate is’. The principals of law firms should be responsible for the training of articled clerks and they should take this responsibility very seriously, she says, ‘as having a competent and confident legal profession depends on it’.

Overall Magistrate Wager believes that the criminal justice system works reasonably well in its present state and has done so for many years. She does not believe in sudden change, but rather advocates incremental and carefully considered reform. Change for the sake of it, she says, ‘is a dangerous thing’.

She has served on a number of committees including Justice Pigeon’s Committee on Child Witnesses and Children’s Evidence, and Justice Miller’s Committee for Assisting Unrepresented Appellants in the Court of Criminal Appeal (WA).

Magistrate Wager does not worry too much about the future. She is satisfied with where her career path has taken her. She is clear that whatever new and exciting opportunity awaits, a decision will only be made at that time.

Magistrate Wager is fond of contemporary music and sport. In her spare time, she maintains a rigorous daily gym routine and enjoys trekking and adventure holidays in remote and exotic locations.