

Victoria the pilot state for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. "I feel like I've got a unique opportunity to drive some of the change that needs to happen," she says, "because of the nature of the breadth of the issues that I have responsibility for."

Feedback: While the year has seen Ombudsman reports criticising care in disability and child protection, and reports of abuse of mental health patients, the sector has been generally impressed by Wooldridge's community consultation and her efforts to make departments more accountable.

Simon Griffiths

entrepreneur

084

I'll drink to that: There's nothing unusual about a bright young entrepreneur opening a bar in Melbourne, but 29-year-old Simon Griffiths' planned city digs, Shebeen, has a twist – all the profit goes to help others. Griffiths will sell beers, wines and ciders from developing nations and send the money back in the form of humanitarian aid. He's tasted a cosmopolitan range of brews recently. "I love the Mexican beers," he says, "and the Ethiopian beers have surprisingly different flavour profiles."

Toilet paper: Griffiths won the people's choice award at this year's Sustainable Brands Conference in California with his environmentally sustainable toilet paper project, Who Gives A Crap (WGAC), and he was named as one of eight people who will share in \$1 million kickstart funding from the Australian Centre for Social Innovation's Bold Ideas, Better Lives Challenge. He plans to give some profits from the online sale of the "green" toilet paper to overseas water sanitation projects.

Fiona McLeod

barrister

085

On the case: Fiona McLeod is no stranger to disaster. After leading the Commonwealth legal team in the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, the 47-year-old barrister has been senior counsel for the Commonwealth in the Queensland floods inquiry, where she has seen first-hand the "raw grief" of the people who suffered in the floods. "What has struck me is the remarkable resilience of our communities, that they do have this strength and determination to rebound from these disasters," she says.

And still going: McLeod is running several crime compensation cases, pro bono, for women sold into sex slavery. She started this work after seeing the documentary *Trafficked*, by Luigi Acquisto, which moved her to (successfully) pursue a crimes compensation award for its subject, a Thai girl called Ning. "I just was incredibly moved that this could happen to any of our daughters, any of our women." She is running a civil case against the owner of the brothel where Ning was enslaved.

Peter Seidel

lawyer

086

Who: Peter Seidel, partner at law firm Arnold Bloch Leibler, is leading a group racial discrimination claim in the Federal Court against members of Victoria Police, the Chief Commissioner of Police and the state of Victoria. Together with the Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre, the 46-year-old is acting on behalf of 11 African youths from Flemington and North Melbourne.

What: The youths allege police assaulted them in a series of incidents in 2008, used excessive force in arrests and racially taunted them. "We say that's abhorrent if it's true," says Seidel, who is acting pro bono. "Melburnians abhor racism, it disgusts us and this is designed to increase community confidence in policing."

Why: The landmark case will test the Racial Discrimination Act (in the wake of the Andrew Bolt decision) and determine whether police have an issue with racial profiling. Seidel also wants police to issue stop-and-search written receipts to increase accountability.

2011 MEMORABLE MOMENTS

October 3

Buy a tram ticket and you're a saint, apparently: *The Age* reveals widespread fare evasion on trams with route No. 96 (from St Kilda to East Brunswick) the biggest magnet for fare evaders, with 30 per cent of travellers riding for free. Which seems a conservative estimate: how often do you see somebody validate their ticket?

October 4

Renowned publisher Diana Gribble, of McPhee Gribble, (publisher of Tim Winton) Text Media (publisher of Hazel Hawke) and Private Media (owner of Crikey), passes away at 69 after battle with cancer. "She was a pole star to her family and friends and colleagues," wrote her friend and long-time collaborator W.H. Chong, "her influence, her soft power, was immense and deep."

October 14

The Mercy Hospital delivers a record 77 babies in 72 hours.

October 26

The Queen of England visits Melbourne, is mobbed by schoolchildren in Federation Square, opens a hospital, rides on a tram.

October 29

Qantas CEO Alan Joyce becomes household name for all the wrong reasons as his airline grounds all flights with no notice. Many have their honeymoons ruined, vow to never fly with Qantas again.

November 1

Not even by a nose: closest Melbourne Cup on record as Dunaden beats Red Cadeaux by what? – a millimetre? – in a photo finish.

087

Anj Barker

domestic violence campaigner



Anj Barker's right hand does a lot of things. In the mornings, it grips the rail attached to her bed, helping her get up. During the day, it controls the joystick of her wheelchair. At awards ceremonies and high schools, it presses palms with people inspired by her story. But at the moment, Anj Barker's right hand, which lies at the end of her only fully functioning limb, is giving us the finger. The gesture is not meant to offend, but to communicate. Brutally bashed by her ex-boyfriend at 16, Anj suffered substantial brain injuries and for years couldn't speak. But she could move her right hand, so she developed a characteristically cheeky sign language: thumbs up meant yes, flipping the bird meant no – or that she was in severe pain.

Nine-and-a-half years later, and not only can Anj speak – albeit in crushed syllables and short, concentrated bursts – but she's using her hard-earned powers of communication to teach high school students about the warning signs and repercussions of domestic violence.

Her courageous story earned the 26-year-old the title of Victoria's Young Australian of the Year for 2011. She re-enacts the announcement, holding her fist beneath her chin as if she's speaking into an invisible microphone, then feigning shock, letting her jaw hang slack. "I was gobsnacked," she says. As part of the award, she's met cricketer Adam Gilchrist, prime minister Julia Gillard and, most recently, the Queen.

It's a story she's not afraid to retell. She grew up in Benalla, a pretty blonde who represented her town in basketball and broke high jump records. "I was in the 'popular group,'" she says of her time at school, making ironic air quotes with two fingers of her right hand. When she was 14, she fell for an older guy and over the next few years their rollercoaster relationship became abusive.

They broke it off on New Year's Eve 2001, but remained in contact, and on a cool March night in 2002 they met at the deserted Benalla school grounds. He wanted to get back together. She didn't. The abuse that had marked their relationship exploded into horrific violence.

He tried to strangle her, kicked her in the ear, slammed her head against a metal park bench and

then stomped on her face, snapping her jaw. As she lay unconscious next to a tree, a shoeprint embossed on her bloody, swollen cheek, her attacker told the first person on the scene: "You can f---ing look after it now." He was later charged and jailed.

She spent eight weeks in the Royal Melbourne Hospital, five months in rehab and two years and three months in a nursing home. Her brain injuries were extensive and progress was slow.

"We used to have to lubricate her eyes because she couldn't blink," says her father, Ian, 56. It was nine months before she could move her thumb and five years before she could talk. Listening to the story of her recovery, Anj cheekily pokes out her tongue.

Even that simple gesture took her five months to relearn.

Now she types into a laptop, which reads her speech aloud, and since 2004 she's told her story to some 14,000 students: on the kitchen bench of her small flat are two bunches of flowers from schoolchildren at Roxburgh College in Melbourne's northern suburbs, which she had visited just that morning. After the presentation, a year 9 girl came up to her mother, Helen, 52, and said: "What I take away today is hope – hope you can get through anything in this world and achieve what you want if you just work hard enough at it."

Since her life changed in 2002, this inspiring young woman who'd "try anything once" hasn't let a wheelchair stop her from having new adventures. She's ridden in a helicopter and a V8 supercar and has even gone skiing at Mount Buller (using a sit-downski). Now that she's living in central Melbourne, she likes to visit cafes and go to the movies.

Nor has she lost her romantic side. Tacked to the wardrobe is a list of her goals. One reads: "Only reply to messages from guys I'm interested in, let them chase me." Another says: "Take things slow when I first start dating..." "The other day, she was telling me she wants a loving, caring man," says Helen. After a pause, she adds: "But he has to be good."

While Anj's right hand gives us the finger, her left hand lies rigid in her lap. The wrist is cocked at an alarming angle, the fingers curled into a frozen claw. On the middle finger is a small heart-shaped ring.