

WORKING COLLABORATIVELY:

COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES AND VOLUNTEERS

In 1972, the first community legal centre (CLC) was established in Australia by a group of dedicated volunteers. Forty years on, there are around 200 CLCs nation-wide, and the contribution and dedication of volunteers in community legal centres continues.

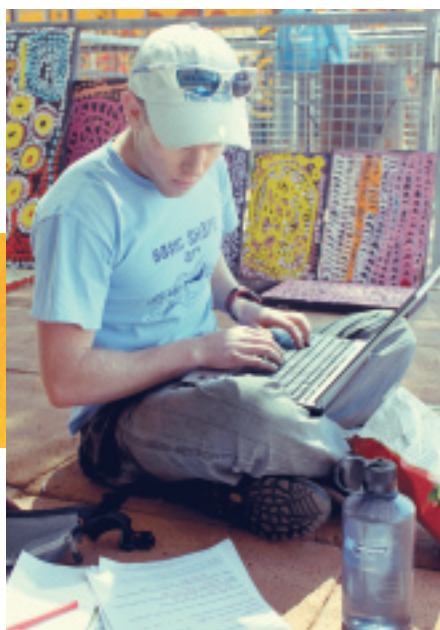
CLCs' capacity to attract, train, utilise and retain large numbers of quality volunteers is a major feature that sets them apart from other legal service providers.

Volunteers increase the capacity of CLCs to provide much-needed direct legal service delivery, community legal education and law reform advocacy.

In June 2012, the National Association of Community Legal Centres Inc (NACLC) conducted a survey of CLCs around Australia. Of the 106 CLCs who responded:

- **95.2%** utilised volunteers¹, and in these centres alone,
- **3637** volunteers contributed **8369** hours of work **per week**

The total number of volunteers and hours contributed would obviously be much greater from 200 centres.



A volunteer lawyer offers advice at an Artists in the Black 'Wills Workshop' in the Gibson Desert in WA

What are CLCs?

CLCs are independent, not-for-profit community-based organisations providing free legal and related services to the public, focussing on the disadvantaged.

Who is a 'volunteer'?

In the survey, NACLC defines a 'volunteer' as a person who has, as an individual, made a personal choice to provide their skills and experience to a CLC from their own time, and is distinguished from a pro bono partner.

VOLUNTEERS – THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

While the majority of volunteers are lawyers and law students, there are also volunteer social workers, social work students, financial counsellors, administrative assistants and others supporting the governance and management functions of CLCs.

The diversity of volunteers reflects the range of CLC services and their holistic service delivery model, where centres do not just provide a legal answer to a legal query, but attempt to address the complexity of the client's needs.

Volunteers contribute to CLCs in a range of areas, and often in more than one area. For example, at the 106 CLCs who responded to NACLC's survey:

- **89.2%** had volunteers working in direct legal service delivery
- **72%** in administrative support
- **48.4%** in law reform advocacy
- **40.9%** in community legal education
- **16.1%** in non-legal service delivery (e.g. social work or court support), and
- **16.1%** in governance or management

¹ For the CLCs who did not utilise volunteers, the main reasons provided were a lack of time or resources to provide adequate supervision, and lack of office space.

VOLUNTEERS – INCREASING THE CAPACITY OF CLCs

Volunteers educating young people about human rights

Volunteers with a range of professional skills have been integral to the development and delivery of the highly successful national human rights education program, Human Rights are Aussie Rules, established by the Eastern Community Legal Centre in Victoria. It has been rolled out in other regions with partners in the Northern Territory, at Darwin Community Legal Centre and in Western Australia, at the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre in Mirrabooka.

Human Rights are Aussie Rules is a schools-based education program that teaches children about human rights principles through fair play and good sportsmanship. It uses a range of child-centred learning modules including a theatre production, workshop and online game. The program has taught more than 20,000 young people about Freedom, Respect, Equality and Dignity. When launching the program, the Federal

Attorney-General Nicola Roxon said, “This [program] is a uniquely Australian way of teaching kids about their human rights through the great levelling medium of Aussie rules football”.

Volunteers provide educational, research and administrative support for the program on a week-to-week basis. A combination of law students as well as legal staff from a private law firm volunteer to deliver workshops at schools and community festivals.

The program has also drawn support from professionals and students outside the legal system, with a volunteer team of online game and website developers giving their time to produce the online game, Handball for Human Rights, doing the majority of the work including the design and evaluation.

Experts in the field of human rights education, sports development and administration, law and the arts also volunteer their time to participate in the program’s advisory board.



(ABOVE) A legal theatre production is used to entertain and educate children about human rights

(BELOW) Staff and volunteers from Eastern Community Legal Centre teach children that Human Rights are Aussie Rules



VOLUNTEERS – BRINGING INNOVATION

Seniors Creating Change flash mob at the local shopping centre



Volunteers creatively promoting the needs of older people

CLCs have a history of using volunteers in creative and innovative ways to build closer relationships and safer communities for groups that are marginalised and isolated. In order to raise awareness about elder abuse, Townsville Community Legal Service's specialist Seniors Legal and Support Service worked closely with volunteers to develop a grassroots preventative legal initiative known as Seniors Creating Change.

Funded through a Regional Arts Development Fund grant, Seniors Creating Change is a group of volunteers over the age of 55-years-old, who sing suddenly and unexpectedly – that is, they flash mob – about issues affecting older people. As a prelude to World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in 2011, Seniors Creating Change had their debut performance, when a group of around 30 older people aged up to 85-years-old, surprised shoppers at the local shopping centre. They stood up in the food court, peeled off shirts to reveal their group's red t-shirt and began to sing a civil rights movement song. The performance roused global interest with more than 5,300 hits from around the world on YouTube, articles on the Australian Human Rights Commission's Age Positive website and ABC Online, as well as calls for more local performances.

Seniors Creating Change has encouraged older people to access Townsville Community Legal Service for specialist legal help about issues affecting them. As Sonya Mitchell, Social Worker with the Seniors Legal



Seniors Creating Change is a group of volunteers committed to raising awareness about older issues

and Support Service said, "Many years ago, Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase 'the medium is the message'. The volunteers are both the medium and the message, allowing us to speak about the hard issues affecting older people in the community such as elder abuse and exploitation".

The group's latest efforts on 15 June 2012 saw the establishment of the inaugural Respect for Seniors march through Townsville, with the Mayor declaring the day Townsville Elder Abuse Awareness Day and the local Member of Parliament talking openly about elder abuse and acknowledging the important work undertaken by the organisation in the Australian Parliament.

The group has vowed that, in or out of tune, they intend to continue to move hearts, change minds, rev up policy engines and keep the anti-ageist conversation alive in North Queensland and beyond.

WHAT VOLUNTEERS SAY

In NACLC's survey, CLCs made reference to the diversity of volunteers in terms of experience, professional qualifications and duration of commitment. Volunteers are at various stages in their professional lives and their motivation for volunteering differs, from gaining work experience to networking with other professionals. In terms of their commitment, some volunteers only work at a CLC for a fortnight-long internship, while others have offered their time and skills over many years. One volunteer, Margaret Jones, who first volunteered at Redfern Legal Centre when it opened in 1977 and still works there to this day, has been recognised with multiple awards for her long service and extraordinary dedication.

Here's what some people had to say about volunteering at a CLC:

After working in a private law practice during the day, people often ask why do I go and spend another few hours at night providing legal advice to people who don't and can't even pay me. It's simple: I choose to volunteer at Caxton Legal Centre, because I believe in the work of CLCs and how their services from legal advice to community legal education help people at various 'crisis' points in their lives. Like all CLCs, I see Caxton as a place where those who cannot afford advice elsewhere, can obtain advice. It is rewarding, professionally and personally, to volunteer with an organisation that not only supports the administration of justice, but also promotes an overall understanding of our legal system through the provision of information and advice to the community.

– Raelene Ellis, Volunteer solicitor, Caxton Legal Centre, QLD

As a law student studying by correspondence, I initially volunteered at Peninsula Community Legal Centre to help with future job prospects and to get practical experience in a legal environment. Volunteering in a CLC such as Peninsula has exceeded my expectations. While I enjoy learning about the law, I equally enjoy hearing the different legal issues clients' face - it makes me appreciate the life that I've got! It has allowed me to gain an insight into how my community works, and this has helped me in my professional work with the local government.

– Monica Rooney, Volunteer law student, Peninsula Community Legal Centre, VIC

I've been with the Legal Centre for over a year now, volunteering one day a week, while completing my Arts/Law degree. My duties are varied; they range from tidying bookshelves to drafting letters of demand. I'm constantly impressed by the amount of care and attention afforded to each client and the social justice ethos, which is shared by all who work here. Law School can be pretty one-dimensional at times, and it's nice to be reminded that there are still people out there who take justice as more than mere rhetoric. But it's not just about the 'no problem is too small' attitude. It's rare to find such a nice bunch of people to work with, who are always willing to answer my questions and make sure I'm learning something every week too.

– Christina Wong, Volunteer paralegal, Flemington & Kensington Community Legal Centre, VIC



During National Volunteer Week in 2011, Margaret's commitment to Redfern Legal Centre was recognised with the Sydney Inner West Senior Volunteer of the Year Award

When Redfern Legal Centre was first established, I was working at a lawyer's office in Redfern and was asked by the law student volunteers who conceived the CLC philosophy to assist their work in the evenings as a volunteer office manager. There was no other service like it around, although soon enough the need for CLCs was identified and services were opening their doors all around the country. I continued my career in law offices as a managing clerk, but after retiring from the workforce I returned to the CLC several years ago. I am inspired by all of the solicitors and staff, and their commitment to ensure that all clients have access to justice. With my professional and volunteer experience, I see my role as educating each new intake of volunteers and helping them to develop the appropriate skills to assist our clients.

– Margaret Jones, Volunteer paralegal, Redfern Legal Centre, NSW

WHAT CLCs SAY

Kimberley CLS is located in the remote Western Australian town of Kununurra



Working together: volunteer solicitor, Judy Harrison, and Indigenous Women's Project Worker, Ruth Abdullah.

Kimberley Community Legal Services covers an area larger than Victoria and 96% of our clients are Indigenous. Our volunteers come from many different locations around Australia – there is no private law firm in the Kimberley and the nearest law school is in Darwin. Law graduates are recruited through a NALCL run project that allows them to undertake their practical legal training in CLCs in regional, rural and remote areas. Typically, law student volunteers fly over from east coast capital cities. Their commitment is outstanding and their contribution invaluable.

Every year, we have 2 lawyers and at least 4 law students who volunteer at the centre. The input of current volunteers greatly enhances our capacity to assist clients in the remote Kimberley. Without the tremendous ethical and professional engagement of volunteer lawyers and students, our service would be reduced, in a remote area with minimal services and where the most disadvantaged people live.

– Liz O'Brien, Director, Kimberley Community Legal Services, WA

From the time of its establishment to the present day, Fitzroy Legal Service has relied heavily on volunteers. Nowadays, volunteers are made up of people from a broad cross-section of society from lawyers and social workers to students and interested community members, however the prominent attributes of the volunteers, as a whole, are their dedication to social justice, and their desire to build up expertise in a wide range of areas of the law.

While we have 18 employed staff, our volunteer numbers are substantially higher; we have a total of 222 volunteers. Volunteers increase our capacity and help in many areas, from assisting with social action,

law reform and community development projects to working at the free legal advice night service. Most volunteers have extraordinarily busy lives, but still manage to make a regular commitment. We highly value this input and dedication, and how it is integral to the delivery of services to the local community.

– Robin Inglis, Executive Officer, Fitzroy Legal Service, VIC

The 23 volunteers who generously give up their time to assist us, make it possible to deliver a specialist statewide service to our client group – vulnerable women, who are requiring legal help with obtaining protection from domestic violence, navigating the family courts or understanding their rights in relation to sexual discrimination within and beyond the workplace. Volunteers enable the organisation to provide a seamless and responsive service to these women, who are frequently facing a terribly confusing and challenging time.

We realise that a specialist service must provide volunteers with specialist training. Prior to working with clients, all volunteers must undertake compulsory training, which sees them develop skills, including how to deliver a culturally appropriate service and how to respond to women experiencing domestic violence. We workshop and role play potential scenarios with volunteers, so they are confident and equipped when working in the main office, and with our Indigenous and rural outreach programs.

– Zita Ngor, Director, Women's Legal Service, SA

Without the support of volunteers, the capacity of the Arts Law Centre of Australia to provide legal help to creative professionals from filmmakers through to musicians across the country would be significantly curtailed, if not, impossible. For our clients, this would mean they would be unable to protect and enforce their legal rights, ultimately resulting in a devaluing of their creative contributions to cultural life and, often, their livelihoods.

Every year, over 200 volunteer lawyers increase our capacity to provide direct legal service delivery and community legal education. We have extensive volunteer panels, based in all states and territories, who provide individual legal advice sessions on areas of law such as copyright, contracts and trademarks to visual artists, musicians, filmmakers, writers and arts organisations. Volunteers also help out with Artists in the Black, a legal service operated by Arts Law that provides legal help in a culturally appropriate way to Indigenous artists, particularly in relation to protecting their intellectual property rights.

– Delwyn Everard, Senior Solicitor, Arts Law Centre of Australia

VOLUNTEERS – INCREASING THE CAPACITY OF CLCs

Volunteers working towards changing the law

In addition to CLCs providing direct legal service delivery to clients, CLCs advocate for a fairer legal system. At the Welfare Rights and Legal Centre in the ACT, the need for law reform of the fines enforcement system was identified through the Street Law program, a joint initiative with the CLC, Legal Aid ACT and the Aboriginal Legal Service ACT/NSW, which provides outreach legal services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Through these outreach services, lawyers were hearing about the mounting debts faced by clients as a result of incurring traffic and parking fines. In the ACT, there is no option to pay fines by instalments. As a result, clients were having their driver licences suspended for non-payment of fines, and were unable to have their licences reinstated until they paid their fines in full. In the ACT, it is estimated that 7,000 people have their licences suspended per year. For people who are disadvantaged, homeless or at risk of homelessness, this negatively impacts on their opportunities to secure accommodation, and access medical services, support services and employment.

Street Law lawyers identified the need for flexible options to enable people to deal with their fines and avoid having their driver licences suspended. Street Law recommended that the ACT Government allow people to pay by instalment, and through community work orders and personal development orders.

The 4 staff employed by Street Law drew on the knowledge and skills of 5 key volunteers and secondees from private law firms to prepare a submission. The assistance of volunteers was invaluable in researching the law and how it was applied. Volunteers also researched and compared the fines regimes in other states to support the recommendations for reform. Meanwhile, lawyers drafted the final submission and collected case studies to illustrate the scope of the problem.



In November 2011, Street Law published a submission, 'The Downward spiral: how a fine can cause homelessness in the ACT' and sent it to the ACT Government. In May 2012, the *Road Transport (General) Amendment Bill 2012 (ACT)* was introduced and passed, addressing all of the recommendations contained in the CLC's submission.



Volunteer law student, Michelle Gerig, greets clients at Flemington & Kensington Legal Centre in Victoria

CLCs lacking the resources to utilise volunteers

While there are many stories about volunteers building capacity and enabling CLCs to provide much-needed services to clients and engage in community legal education and law reform, there are also CLCs that have to meet service demand without volunteer contributions. For example, North West Community Legal Centre in Tasmania cannot use volunteers, as the small number of employed staff does not have the time to provide adequate supervision and training to volunteers.

Among the 1 part-time and 2 full-time lawyers, the organisation provides legal advice to up to 40 clients per week and conducts outreach legal services, sometimes requiring a 3 hour round trip, to clients who cannot travel to the centre for an appointment.

"We would like to have volunteers and they would certainly allow us to reach more clients and advocate for changes in the law, but we're stretched to capacity and simply do not have the time to provide the necessary supervision and training to volunteers to make them effective and responsive to the needs of the community", said Kirsten Abercromby, who is one of the two funded full-time solicitors.

Mike Steinfeld has been volunteering at Kingsford Legal Centre in NSW for over 25 years. His commitment was recognised in 2011, when he won the Community Legal Centre Award at the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW's Justice Awards



VOLUNTEERS – REMAINING COMMITTED TO CLCS



Formerly a volunteer, Fia Norton now works at the Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre. As the Acting Coordinator of Legal Services, Fia has helped build a partnership with staff from the Byron Community Centre (pictured here).

Volunteers building and changing their careers

Through a project run by NACLCL, graduate law students have the opportunity to undertake the work experience component of their practical legal training (PLT), a prerequisite to becoming a lawyer, in a regional, rural or remote CLC. Having completed her law degree, Fia Norton was one of the first students who was placed at Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre in Lismore, NSW.

For Fia, who had a successful career as a human rights policy manager in the ACT public sector, this was a significant personal and professional change, and one that would turn out to be long-term. After 5 months, Fia completed her PLT, and also decided to resign from her job in the public sector and move to Lismore, with the aim of securing work at the CLC.

“It was a risk as I had established a life and a career in Canberra, but I had connected with the CLC, the staff and the vibrant Lismore community. Completing my PLT on a volunteer basis at a CLC made me appreciate the grassroots social change that can happen in a community, and I wanted to be a part of that”, Fia said.

Fortunately, Fia’s risk paid off. She was soon working in the generalist legal practice and the specialist family law service, where she benefited from mentoring and training provided by the CLC’s senior lawyers. With time, Fia was running community legal education workshops in local high schools about employment law, and providing family law advice to clients referred from the local Family Relationships Centre.

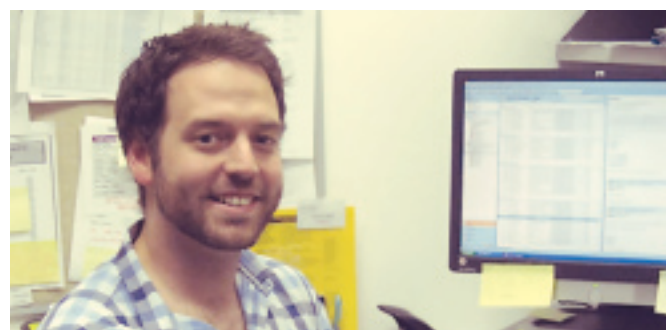
Fia is currently the Acting Coordinator of the Legal Service; a role that sees her managing the legal staff and outreach services, and developing partnerships

with stakeholders. At present, Fia is assisting the CLC to establish a new partnership with Byron Community Centre, where a lawyer now provides outreach legal advice to clients.

In 2000, I started volunteering as a law student at Warringa Baiya Aboriginal Women’s Legal Centre, a free statewide legal service for Aboriginal women, children and youth who are or have been victims of violence. I completed my practical legal training under the supervision of the Principal Solicitor, Rachael Martin, where I developed my legal skills in the areas of domestic violence, sexual assault and victims’ compensation. After I was admitted to practise law, I worked in a private law firm for a few years, and then travelled for a few more and was lucky enough to get a job with Warringa Baiya after the CLC received some additional funding. I have now worked at Warringa Baiya for almost 4 years and it is the perfect place for me and where I have wanted to work since my days as a volunteer. I believe that legal services should be free and accessible to everyone which is why community legal centres are so important. I feel lucky to work with a supportive team of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women and I am constantly learning from my clients about resilience and strength.

–Thea Deakin-Greenwood, Solicitor, Warringa Baiya Aboriginal Women’s Legal Centre, NSW

As well as NACLCL’s regional, rural and remote placement program, a number of CLCs offer the opportunity for graduates to undertake their PLT with them. One example is Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre in Western Australia, where graduates frequently continue to volunteer with the centre after they become qualified lawyers, with some going on to pursue a legal career in a CLC. “The graduates that go through the scheme are well prepared and are ready to work in the sector immediately upon completion”, said Karen Merrin, Executive Director of Northern Suburbs CLC.



Chris Hill was a pro bono worker from a private law firm, who started volunteering at Kingsford Legal Centre in NSW after his secondment was completed.

INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS

Effective and confident volunteers require quality induction, tailored training, and quality ongoing supervision, support and respect. CLCs provide excellent professional development opportunities for their volunteers. Through such training, CLCs have equipped several generations of lawyers and law students with the skills, experience and knowledge to look beyond mere legal 'remedies' to see and address all of the person's legal and related needs.

CLCs invest significant resources – from their very limited resources – into training and skilling volunteers to ensure that they can provide relevant high quality legal assistance in culturally appropriate ways. While volunteers increase the capacity of CLCs, the benefit they actually provide depends on such investments.

Employed staff at the 106 centres that responded to the NACLCLC survey invested:

PER WEEK:

- **1071 hours** supervising volunteers and pro bono workers, including checking all the legal advices and providing feedback or supplementary advice where necessary, and

PER YEAR:

- **8674 hours** providing general induction and training
- **2276 hours** providing additional training for direct legal service delivery (e.g. for lawyers, paralegals)
- **1396 hours** providing additional specialist training for non-direct legal service delivery (e.g. social work, court support)

CLCs participate in a sector-led quality assurance and risk management national scheme. CLCs each have their own policies, procedures and practices regarding the recruitment, training and use of volunteers, but these are backed up by minimum requirements and suggested good practices. At the time of the survey:

- **96.6%** of CLCs surveyed provided formal orientation and induction for their volunteers and pro bono workers

Generally, the Principal Solicitor and the CLC Manager primarily provided the training and supervision of volunteers and pro bono workers. Training was provided in all areas of community law and in practical skills including client interviewing, cultural awareness, legal practice management and effective referral and advocacy.



A group of volunteers and students being trained by a staff member at Fitzroy Legal Centre

Valuing and resourcing volunteers through training

Recognising the importance of providing high quality training, both within its own CLC and across the sector, Peninsula Community Legal Centre in Victoria developed the 'Valuing Volunteers Training Kit' to assist CLCs with recruiting, inducting, training and coordinating volunteers. This unmet need for a comprehensive resource

was funded by the Victoria Law Foundation, with significant in-kind support from the Chisholm Institute of TAFE. Following the success of the kit in Victoria, and with funding from the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department, the kit was adapted nationally along with a series of 'train-the-trainer' workshops.

"Providing a high standard of training to volunteers not only helps them to engage with and assist clients, but demonstrates that their role is important and valued by the organisation", said Helen Constat, Chief Executive Officer of Peninsula CLC.

Like many CLCs, Peninsula CLC continues to utilise the kit to train its volunteers. Peninsula currently has 128 lawyer and paralegal volunteers, who enable the organisation to operate up to 8 additional free legal advice sessions per week and assist over 1,600 clients a year.



Using the 'Valuing Volunteers Training Kit' to train a volunteer