

WORKING COLLABORATIVELY:

COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES AND VOLUNTEERS

Community Legal Centres (CLCs) are independently operating, not-for-profit, community-based organisations that provide free legal services to the public, focusing on disadvantaged people and those with special needs. Located throughout Australia, CLCs have strong links with their communities and draw on the generous contributions of thousands of volunteers.

Volunteers' contributions to CLCs

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. These volunteers expand the capacity of CLCs to deliver frontline services and assist with law reform that improves the fairness and effectiveness of laws.

The majority of volunteers are lawyers or law students, but there are also volunteer social workers, social work students, administrative assistants, migration agents, community legal educators and people helping in administration and management.

Who is a 'volunteer'?

NACLC defines a 'volunteer' as a person who has, as an individual, made a personal choice and commitment to provide their skills and experience to a CLC or, more commonly, to the CLC's clients, free of charge and from their own personal time.

The NACLC National Census of CLCs 2013, found that of the 149 CLCs that responded to questions about volunteers, 87.9% (131 CLCs) reported utilising the skills and expertise of volunteers. Across these 131 CLCs, 4,588 volunteers contributed a total of 24,113 hours per week.

The main categories of volunteers were:

- lawyers (2,558 volunteers contributed 7,563 hours per week to CLCs)
- law students (1,492 volunteer contributed 13,311 hours per week), and
- administrative assistants (227 volunteers contributed 1,418 hours per week).

Mental Health Law Centre WA

The Mental Health Law Centre is a Perth based community legal centre, specialising in providing legal support to people with a mental illness, and community legal education about mental illness law and policy.

Since 2013, working closely with the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Services (CRS), the centre has assisted

seven people to gain experience and confidence in the workplace after a physical injury or mental illness. These volunteers have been involved in a variety of work, including undertaking data entry in the clients' database, casework data entry and research, updating the centre's membership database, providing administration support to the library and branding for the centre's brochures and annual report.

The CRS volunteers have contributed **1,440 hours of work** since March 2013, valued by the centre at **\$30,240**, based on an administration clerk wage rate.

Sandra Boulter, the centre's Principal Solicitor and General Manager says, "It has been a rewarding experience to help the CRS placements to learn and/or refresh their administration skills, which then makes them more employable. Our Administration and Finance Manager, Ivi Sanchez, interviews and works closely with our volunteers. The centre has benefited from their voluntary contributions with the necessary tasks around the centre and has enjoyed their positive contribution to our team".

One of the CRS placements provided the following feedback on their volunteer experience:

"My experience at the Mental Health Law Centre has been personally inspiring and positive. For four weeks I have been training as a CRS placement, to get back into the workforce and for me I couldn't have been given a more supportive workplace to train in. My confidence was at a fairly low ebb having not been in the work place for over 18 months. In just four weeks I feel like my confidence has been restored and have felt totally supported, encouraged and respected by everyone in this organisation to ease back into the flow of a working life. I have also been pleasantly surprised at how my clerical skills have improved over the four weeks. I can now confidently use the Mental Health Law Centre as a benchmark for how a professional office should operate and how people in the workplace should treat people and how in turn to be treated." ■



A Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service volunteer on the front desk at the Mental Health Law Centre

Assisting clients with resolving consumer issues

Consumer Credit Legal Service WA

The Consumer Credit Legal Service WA (CCLSWA) provides legal advice and representation to consumers in Western Australia in the areas of credit, banking and finance, as well as in some aspects of the Australian Consumer Law. CCLSWA also takes an active role in community legal education, law reform and policy issues affecting consumers.

CCLSWA uses the services of volunteers in fulfilling its objective to assist and advocate for consumers facing credit and debt problems or who have disputes with suppliers about goods and services.

Volunteers are generally law students or graduate students who commit to one day a week for a period of at least 6 months. Laura Pilsworth and Aleks Rozbicki are two volunteers, who have been providing their time and skills to CCLSWA for over 18 months and nearly 12 months, respectively.

Among the ways CCLSWA volunteers such as Laura and Aleks assist are by taking instructions from clients seeking legal advice through the telephone advice service; undertaking research and drafting initial advice (with guidance from lawyers) on a range of credit, debt and consumer related matters; helping in the preparation and the delivery of CCLSWA's community presentations to schools, advocates and financial counsellors; and assisting lawyers in their file work, by attending client interviews, undertaking research and drafting file notes, letters and client statements. All of these activities support and strengthen CCLSWA's ability to deliver services to the WA community.

David Kernohan, CCLSWA's Centre Manager, considers the volunteers invaluable: "Volunteers enable CCLSWA to leverage our limited resources, develop and strengthen our capacity, and deliver a high quality of legal advice and advocacy work."

In return, students have the opportunity to develop their practical legal skills. One volunteer law student considered that "CCLSWA offered me inimitable practical experience working with a team dedicated to an admirable cause. Volunteering at CCLSWA gave me the opportunity to work extremely closely with experienced lawyers, an opportunity which is invaluable to law students. This allowed me to very quickly pick up the skills necessary to communicate effectively and efficiently with clients, and to draft and deliver legal advice. The learning curve is a steep one, however the close watch of the lawyers allows volunteers to be confident in their work. It was an incredibly rewarding experience." ■



Volunteers from Consumer Credit Legal Service WA, Aleks Rozbicki and Laura Pilsworth

Consumer Action Law Centre VIC

The Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC) is a Melbourne based community legal centre and advocacy organisation dedicated to advancing the interests of low-income and vulnerable consumers, and of consumers as a whole.

CALC provides free legal advice and pursues litigation on behalf of vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers across Victoria, and is the largest specialist consumer legal practice in Australia. CALC also provides legal assistance and professional training to community workers who advocate on behalf of consumers and operates a financial counselling centre, MoneyHelp, a not-for-profit email and telephone financial counselling service providing free, confidential and independent financial advice to Victorians experiencing financial difficulty.

Kate Sandford started volunteering with CALC in January 2013. At that time she was a second year Juris Doctor (JD) student at Monash University, questioning the practical application of the law she was studying. "Volunteering at CALC has been fantastic for me, it's really helped me to see how my theoretical legal studies get applied in the community," Kate says.

Kate now regularly volunteers for a full day each Friday, and she appreciates that the centre always makes sure that their volunteers have interesting tasks to do. Amongst the wide variety of work Kate has undertaken at the centre has been a long term project to develop a database monitoring the effectiveness of CALC's helpline, assisting lawyers on legal matters, undertaking research and performing file closings.

Kate said she was "conscious that it's often difficult to find a volunteering position and this has been an incredible opportunity for me." ■

Getting involved in community events



Volunteers assist with all of the community events organised by Flemington & Kensington Legal Centre such as the Community Forum in 2013. Volunteer, Reem Yehdago, is pictured second from the left.

Flemington & Kensington Community Legal Centre VIC

Flemington & Kensington Community Legal Centre (FKCLC) in inner west Melbourne has been in operation since 1980. The Centre has developed particular expertise working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Like all community legal centres, FKCLC relies on a team of volunteers, who not only bring a broad range of skills and experiences, but also diverse cultural backgrounds and linguistic skills. FKCLC's staff of **11 mostly part-time employees is supported by a team of 28 day and 22 night volunteers**. On any given day up to seven volunteers are supporting the centre's services.

Reflecting the diverse backgrounds in the Moonee Valley and Melbourne Local Government Areas it services, the centre particularly encourages volunteers to remain aware of the different cultural values within the local community, and actively seeks volunteers who are fluent in languages other than English. Currently, **approximately 60% of FKCLC's volunteers speak another language** – including Arabic, Somali, Bahasa Indonesia, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, French, Spanish, Italian and Greek.

FKCLC's Manager, Trish Cameron sums up the impact of these volunteers: *"Our centre would not be here without them. The assistance they provide is essential to our practice and to the volume of work we undertake."*

For example, volunteers assist FKCLC with all of the community events that are held. In 2013, volunteers assisted with organizing and setting up public forums in order to strengthen the community response to the

Victoria Police inquiry into racial profiling. The forum in 2013, held at the North Melbourne Community Centre, prioritised community voices and was attended by over 60 people, with one FKCLC volunteer, Reem Yehdago, speaking on the panel.

INDIVIDUAL PROFILES:

Fia Walker, originally from Indonesia, is a law student at Monash University. Fia has been volunteering at FKCLC for the past two years and Trish Cameron says *"assists in every area of our practice."* Among her varied tasks, Fia has helped out on reception, acted as a paralegal for some of the centre's regular clinics, undertaken research projects and submitted documents to court registries and briefs to counsel.

George Ghobrial, originally from Egypt, is an accountant. He studied law as a postgraduate student. He has been volunteering with FKCLC for over a year. George was recently admitted as a lawyer and is volunteering full-time to gain experience and to assist the centre. A native Arabic speaker, George works closely with the FKCLC's Principal Solicitor on case files, and also in the centre's weekly Wills and Powers of Attorney Clinic.

Heather Boyle worked in the mental health sector for many years before her retirement. For the past six years Heather has coordinated FKCLC's reception on Tuesday and Thursday each week. Trish Cameron says that Heather is highly appreciated by the centre's staff and clients, she adds continuity to reception duties and is a kind and familiar face for clients. ■

Volunteers in CLCs: what they mean in numbers

Some of the community legal centres located in cities, especially those located near universities, have large numbers of volunteers, who vastly extend the CLC's capacity to provide legal services. A number even have long waiting lists of people wanting to volunteer.

For example, Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC) in Victoria estimates that with its **volunteer input from lawyers and paralegals, the centre is able to operate up to 8 additional free legal advice clinics per week**. In 2013/14, these weekly volunteer contributions saw clients provided with nearly **2,000 free legal advices**. PCLC estimates that their volunteers **donate nearly \$200,000 worth of lawyer and paralegal hours per year**.

As Andrea Staunton, PCLC's General Manager of Volunteers and Education, comments, *"Our 170 lawyer and paralegal volunteers bring great skill, energy and compassion to their roles as they support our clients and strengthen our organisation's ability to service our local communities."*

Meanwhile, at Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) in Melbourne, volunteer lawyers and paralegals assist clients and provide casework support at the Box Hill and Boronia evening and day advice service, as well as a range of other volunteer roles. **ECLC estimates that volunteers contribute over 6,000 hours, with a dollar value estimated to be well over \$700,000, per year.**

Fitzroy Legal Service likewise draws upon the expertise of volunteer lawyers and law students. Currently the organisation has around 210 active volunteers working across the day and night advice services, as well as volunteers assisting the social action team with matters of public interest and community legal education. The input of volunteers is vital to providing **over 1,000 service hours to clients every year with the average night service volunteer putting in around three to six hours per fortnight. Daytime volunteers contribute from one to three days per week.**

At Launceston Community Legal Centre in Tasmania, the organisation has over **52 volunteers as part of the Legal Literacy Volunteer Program**. Through this program, local people are trained to provide guidance to members of the community about understanding legal documents and refer them if necessary to lawyers for legal help on matters ranging from accessing Centrelink benefits to neighbourhood disputes, to restraint orders. Nicky Snare, Chief Executive Officer of LCLC, estimates that these **volunteers contribute well over 4,500 hours worth of services every year.**

Unlike these centres, some CLCs rely solely on volunteers. For example, Roma Mitchell Community Legal Centre in South Australia, an unfunded community legal centre, is operated by a committed group of **16 management volunteers from a core base of over 100 members and a flow through of about 50 volunteers per annum**. These volunteers enable the centre to offer a holistic service to clients that focuses on frontline legal advice and includes referral to related services such as financial and other counselling and mediation assistance. ■



Volunteer lawyers, Richard Edmonds and Carol Barton, discuss client cases at Eastern Community Legal Centre



Volunteer Reception, Information and Referral Worker Laura Kane confers with Carol Barton at Eastern



Helen Gay is the Volunteer Night Service Coordinator at Eastern

Increasing legal literacy in communities



Volunteer Coordinator of the Legal Literacy Volunteer Program, Beylara Ra, providing an information session to the Tasmanian Police about the work of the program and the Launceston Community Legal Centre

Launceston Community Legal Centre TAS

Since Launceston Community Legal Centre (LCLC) established the *Legal Literacy Volunteer Program (LLV)*, the profile of the organisation has grown and its client numbers have increased. When the LLV program commenced in 2010, LCLC was assisting nearly 700 people per annum, now that figure has more than doubled to over 1,500.

“It’s because we have a stronger presence in the community,” Nicky Snare, LCLC’s Chief Executive Officer explains. “Our 52 legal literacy volunteers are now placed in ten venues such as community health centres, Centrelink offices and at LCLC itself. The police and the Magistrate’s Court also refer people to LLV program volunteers for assistance.”

The LLV program assists people to identify when they should speak to a lawyer prior to signing a document that may have ongoing ramifications, such as a family law arrangement about children or a Centrelink form. As Nicky explains, *“The legal literacy program empowers communities to educate individuals and address problems at the early stages, before adversarial legal intervention is required. It has also helped LCLC build partnerships with the wider community sector.”*

Prior to starting, each legal literacy volunteer must undertake basic program training in ethics, self-care and mental health first aid. These training sessions are designed to build the confidence and skills of volunteers. Volunteers also attend all the community legal education training LCLC conducts on areas of law such as residential tenancy law and disability discrimination awareness.

The LLV program **volunteers come from a variety of non-legal backgrounds and include people looking to re-enter the workforce and 32% of the volunteers who have left the program have done so to take up paid employment.** ■

Celebrating long-term volunteers

Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre NSW

Leonie Sinclair is a private lawyer based in Nowra who is a long standing volunteer with Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre.

Having grown up on the New South Wales South Coast, Leonie was involved in the initial consultation undertaken by Illawarra Legal Centre regarding the need for a community legal centre to service the unmet legal needs of the Shoalhaven region and South Coast.

Shoalcoast opened its doors in 1999 and today provides free legal services to people of the Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla and Bega Valley Local Government Areas. In addition, women living in the Bombala, Cooma-Monaro, Palerang and Queanbeyan Local Government Areas are provided assistance through the centre's South East NSW Women's Legal Service.

Leonie has been a member of the centre's Management Committee since the centre's establishment, including stints as vice president and president. In this capacity, Leonie has supported all aspects of the role of the Committee. Leonie has also supported the centre by providing mentoring and support for our lawyers when required.

In addition to her contributions to the centre's management committee, Leonie has accepted referrals of legally aided clients with difficult cases which she has fitted into her very busy private practice, and

organised her private law firm to assist Shoalcoast on a pro bono basis to deliver Wills Days to the local Aboriginal community.

"Leonie has always been a strong advocate for the role of Shoalcoast in improving access to justice for socially and economically disadvantaged people living on the South Coast of NSW and in addition, since 2007, for women living in South East NSW," says Shoalcoast's Coordinator Kerry Wright.

"Despite being an extremely busy and well respected private lawyer Leonie has always provided quick responses to any questions put to her by Shoalcoast lawyers regarding legal matters, particularly in the areas of her specialist knowledge: family law, wills and probate."

"Shoalcoast staff and management greatly appreciate everything that Leonie has contributed to our organisation over the past 15 years," says Kerry Wright. ■



Long-serving volunteer Leonie Sinclair from Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre

SouthPort Community Legal Service VIC

Having initially volunteered at Fitzroy Legal Service in the early 1980s, Ben Piper joined the SouthPort Community Legal Service (SPCLS) as soon as it opened in 1988.

SPCLS was created to meet the legal needs arising from the demographics of the South Melbourne and Port Melbourne areas at the time, which Ben says was around 25% over 60-years-old and 25% living in public housing. Despite that, money could not be found from the usual sources of legal aid funding to support a community legal centre. Instead, funding was found from local government, which was much more aware of the needs of those areas at the time.

Today funded by Port Phillip Council – the only community legal centre entirely funded by a local council in Australia – the SPCLS provides a free legal advice, legal assistance and referral service to anyone who lives, works or studies in South Melbourne or Port Melbourne. Reflecting the legal needs of its local community, the service has developed specialist areas in wills and probate and offers home visits for older people. While the service is staffed by a part-time administrator and a part-time Principal Solicitor, the bulk of the service's work is carried out by volunteer lawyers and community workers.

Ben, until recently a public servant, has served in a voluntary capacity as president of the SPCLS' Management Committee since early 1993, and continues to be a legal adviser on the night advice service. ■

"I was once given the opportunity to contribute to the provision of free legal advice while I was still a student. I enjoyed the experience so much that I joined my local CLC as soon as I had finished uni. The enjoyment continues, so I am still at it, 32 years later. During my time as a volunteer I have worked with lots of wonderful people and I have had lots of priceless experiences. Although it hasn't always been a bed of roses I can highly recommend CLC volunteering to anyone starting out in the law. In fact one of the things I most love about volunteering is the opportunity to work with those who are just starting out. It is very uplifting to see so many talented people entering the profession."

– Ben Piper

Celebrating long-term volunteers

Darwin Community Legal Service NT

Darwin Community Legal Service (DCLS) began in 1991 when volunteer lawyers started providing free legal advice sessions in Darwin and surrounds. The service received funding soon after, allowing it to expand its geographical coverage and the range of matters on which it provided assistance.

Today, DCLS is a generalist community legal centre providing free legal advice and information and community legal education, as well as engaging in efforts to improve laws and policies for people who are disadvantaged.

DCLS warmly welcomes the contribution of volunteers who act as supervising lawyers, legal advisors and session coordinators for its free legal advice clinics, which are held three times a week in Darwin, Casuarina and Palmerston.

DCLS particularly appreciates the contribution of Ron Lawford, who has been volunteering with the centre for close to two decades.

Ron came to the law later in life, having been admitted to the legal profession in 1995 at the age of 56 after a career as a pilot. His volunteer efforts at the DCLS are focused on the weekly Palmerston clinic on Monday evenings, where he is the supervising lawyer.

Ron reports feeling rewarded from his work with the clinic, which also provides him with an opportunity to

keep in touch with the grassroots part of the law. Ron says that most clients coming to the clinic are bringing “*the day-to-day legal issues affecting working people – financial matters, family disputes, motor vehicle transfers that have been misrepresented in some way, employment and contractual disputes.*”

When not volunteering or managing his own legal practice, Ron regularly flies to various places around Australia in a homebuilt aeroplane, and on weekends teaches people how to fly.

Maureen Wright, the Volunteer Coordinator at DCLS, says that the service is “*fortunate to have several volunteers who have been with us from the beginning of DCLS which, with Darwin’s transient population, is a rare thing and very much appreciated by us.*”

“When people first begin to volunteer, they are often enthusiastic, but after so long, I know Ron must enjoy his participation with DCLS, otherwise he wouldn’t still be doing it nearly 20 years on.” ■



Ron Lawford from Darwin Community Legal Service has been volunteering for close to two decades

Gold Coast Community Legal Centre & Advice Bureau QLD

The Gold Coast Community Legal Centre and Advice Bureau is the Gold Coast’s only funded and accredited full-time operating community legal centre. Servicing the half a million residents of the Gold Coast community, the centre provides free legal advice, financial counselling and general information and referrals.

The centre’s mission is to maximise access to professional legal and financial counselling advice and services for people who would otherwise be unable to access such advice or services.

The centre utilises volunteers to augment and support its five employed lawyers. The centre’s reception is run by volunteers – who are equipped to provide general referrals to government and other services and organisations who may be able to assist clients with their problems. Law students also gain practical experience at the centre while undertaking their studies.

Rae Devlin has been **volunteering with the centre for over 24 years**, making her the centre’s longest serving volunteer.

According to the centre’s Principal Solicitor and Coordinator, Victoria Shiel, Rae has seen many people come and go over the years and has survived many changes and many challenging clients and situations.

“Rae brings a wealth of experience and knowledge and is always happy to assist new volunteers and staff. Rae says coming here is part of her life now and she enjoys all the people contact and helping out where she can. Rae has a rich and varied life and also volunteers at Lifeline, is on the Probus committee and enjoys holidays and travelling with her husband,” explains Victoria.

Victoria acknowledges the centre’s debt to Rae and its other volunteers: “*We are so grateful to volunteers like Rae who give their time and expertise to us and their contribution makes us able to see many more clients and people in need of legal and financial help on the Gold Coast.*” ■



Rae Devlin has volunteered at the Gold Coast Community Legal Centre and Advice Bureau for over 24 years

Working with volunteers: from students to practitioners

Western Suburbs Legal Service VIC

The Western Suburbs Legal Service (WSLS) is an independent non-profit community organisation which provides free legal advice and assistance to people who live, work or study in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne, particularly in the city of Hobsons Bay.

WSLS is a generalist service most commonly providing assistance and advice in relation to Centrelink matters, consumer and criminal law, debts, infringements, family law, motor vehicle accidents and tenancy. WSLS also provides a night advice service on Monday and Tuesday evening each week, when first time clients can arrange an appointment.

Opened in 1978, the service has only a small number of paid staff and therefore relies heavily on the work of volunteers, including lawyers, students and local people. Unpaid volunteers assist in various aspects of the service's operations, including in administration, providing advice and advocacy, contributing to community education projects, undertaking research and campaigns, and working on reception.

Reflecting his interest in community law, Richard Adamczyk **started volunteering at the WSLS when he was a law student at La Trobe University and has continued to volunteer in the 11 years since.** Now working in insurance law, Richard still volunteers on a fortnightly basis with the WSLS' night advice clinic.

"It is very satisfying to be involved with the service. I genuinely get a sense of being able to give back to the community with the wide and varied issues that I come across. It is that sense that motivates me and I hope to continue to volunteer long into the future," Richard says.

According to Cathy Assini, a lawyer at WSLS, volunteers assist the service to not only meet its current demand, but also expand its casework service. Volunteers also help to increase community awareness of both the services offered by the WSLS, and in relation to legal issues and legal rights.

"We are fortunate to be supported by a dedicated group of volunteers. Initiatives such as the night service exist in part thanks to the commitment of these individuals and in turn are an important part of our strategy in contributing to access to justice for the community." ■



Former law student volunteer and now volunteer lawyer, Richard Adamczyk

Youthlaw VIC

Youthlaw is Victoria's state-wide free community legal centre for young people. Located in Melbourne's CBD, Youthlaw is a community legal centre that assists, empowers and advocates solely for young people under the age of 25. Whether it is helping someone complete a Victims of Crime application, get out of an unfair contract or run a test case about police powers, Youthlaw works every day for some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Louise McNeil was a second year graduate law student at the University of Melbourne when she began volunteering with Youthlaw at the beginning of 2013.

Prompted by a desire to use her legal education to assist young people, Louise says she learnt some valuable lessons during her year volunteering with Youthlaw:

"The first is that there is enormous need for the work Youthlaw does. The demand for specialist legal services for young people is huge, but due to limited funding difficult decisions have to be made about who Youthlaw has capacity to assist. With hundreds of young people in insecure housing, dangerous situations and with little access to their rights, it is vital that Youthlaw continues to grow to accommodate this need.

"Another thing that volunteering with Youthlaw opened my eyes to was how tough life is for so many young people in my own city. While I comfortably complete my law degree, young people just down the road are living in rough family environments, dealing with addictions, with huge debts hanging over their heads, or with limited future prospects due to a criminal record.

"Something I found particularly special about Youthlaw is that every staff member is genuinely passionate about helping young people access their rights. Their work isn't easy – especially in the face of limited resources – but seemingly simple actions like helping someone deal with their fines can have a lasting meaningful impact on the lives of these young people.

"I am incredibly proud of the important work Youthlaw does and the small way I was able to assist as a volunteer."

Louise today continues to be involved with Youthlaw as a Board member, and is excited to see the centre continue to grow and develop, helping even more disadvantaged young people. ■



Former volunteer and now Board member, Louise McNeil

Working with volunteers: from students to practitioners

Geraldton Resource Centre WA

The Geraldton Resource Centre (GRC), a non-profit organisation providing a range of free services to people experiencing disadvantage in the Mid West and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia, first commenced operations in 1984.

Servicing a land mass equivalent to the size of Britain, the GRC today comprises 14 individual and diverse services providing the community with access to information, advice and support. These include the provision of information, legal advice and/or case work in relation to legal, financial and tenancy issues, dealing with financial hardship or crisis, having a low income, a disability, being geographically isolated or experiencing cultural or language barriers.

With 38 staff and an enormous catchment, GRC is heavily reliant on volunteers, particularly providing assistance during periods when lawyers are on leave.

Nando Muccilli first volunteered at GRC when he was a law graduate, as part of his Practical Legal Training placement requirements. Since his initial student placement, Nando has returned to GRC on an annual basis to volunteer – a contribution that requires him to relocate away from his home and family in Perth to spend time seeing clients at the CLC in Geraldton. Nando's assistance is **particularly valuable because he volunteers at times when the GRC's Principal Solicitor or General Lawyer are on leave – in effect enabling the GRC to continuously offer its general legal services to disadvantaged people in communities.**

Operations Manager Chris Gabelish says, "Nando's volunteering at these times means that we are able to continue to provide assistance in the vast array of legal issues that we encounter on a daily basis such as family law, employment law, compensation, various civil issues, wills and estates – essentially any conceivable legal problem." ■



Geraldton Resource Centre volunteer, Nando Muccilli

Marrickville Legal Centre NSW

Like many community legal centres, Marrickville Legal Centre (MLC) could not provide accessible legal services as extensively as it does to the community without the assistance of its wonderful team of volunteers.

Opening its doors in Sydney's inner west in 1979, MLC provides accessible legal services to the diverse communities across the many Local Government Areas in its catchment, focusing on clients who are socially and economically disadvantaged.

MLC draws on the contributions of a broad range of volunteers, including lawyers and students.

- Front desk volunteers offer support by answering telephones and providing information and referrals to the public, other workers and clients
- Law students and graduates play a vital role in MLC's evening advice sessions as legal assistants – taking instructions from clients, undertaking research and assisting with taking notes during client interviews
- Volunteer lawyers provide services on a roster at MLC's legal advice nights on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, supervised by a lawyer from MLC
- MLC has a Practical Legal Training (PLT) program, in which law graduates develop important work experience skills while providing services to clients.

MLC's Executive Officer, Catherine Dornan, values the centre's diverse volunteer team: "Our volunteers vastly improve our ability to respond to the tidal wave of need in the community. Without them we simply would not be able to offer assistance to the amount of people we do. Our volunteers are as diverse as our community and bring diverse perspectives and skills to MLC. We are very grateful for their generous work."

Un-Ai Jo was a front desk volunteer at MLC for 6 months in 2013, and is now part of the PLT program.

"I always felt like a valued member of MLC. The lawyers and paralegals were open, supportive and acknowledged the work that the volunteers did every roster. I was given maximum exposure to the spectrum of legal problems that arise in day-to-day life. I had frequent client contact and received ongoing assistance from a supervisor who looked after my welfare. MLC exposed me to things that could never be taught by textbooks." ■



Un-Ai Jo (centre) with MLC's Information and Referral Officer, Maria-Elena Ang, and fellow volunteer Tom Mortimer

Award winning volunteers

Kingsford Legal Centre NSW

Dave McMillan began his contribution to community legal centres by volunteering at Redfern Legal Centre (1977-1978) and Marrickville Legal Centre (1981-1983). Since 1987 he has volunteered every second Tuesday night at Kingsford Legal Centre (KLC).

This means that **Dave has volunteered in the sector for over 30 years!**

KLC's Director, Associate Professor Anna Cody, conservatively estimates that **Dave has advised over 1,550 people in his time at KLC.**

Until he recently retired, Dave's day job was at Legal Aid NSW's Civil Division.

Dave says that his motivation has changed over the years: *"When I first began volunteering I was working in private practice so a big part of it was about doing work for those who could not afford it and where it was more likely to be really needed (as compared to my day job).*

"Later when I began working at Legal Aid, it was also about the importance of community legal centre work filling in the gaps where legal aid did not assist much, or at all – and also to make sure, when I was working at the nearby Bondi Junction Legal Aid office, that we worked more cohesively.

"Now it's a bit about sharing the experience that I have gained over the years. But having said that, at all times and in so many ways I have gotten back way more than I have ever given."

According to Anna, *"Due to his extensive experience dealing with the complex needs of disadvantaged clients, and his in-depth knowledge of civil law, we allocate Dave the clients with the most complex and multi-layered issues.*

"Dave is a highly skilled, compassionate and committed lawyer who is deeply valued as a part of the centre. He maintains a highly professional approach to each client he sees and is incredibly patient and thorough with clients, both in understanding their life situation and their legal issues. Because of this he is a superb community lawyer."

Dave also supports other volunteer lawyers at KLC who are newer and less experienced.

In 2013 Dave won the Community Legal Centre NSW award at the Law and Justice Foundation Justice Awards, as an individual who has demonstrated outstanding commitment to improving access to justice in NSW, particularly for socially and economically disadvantaged people. ■



Dave McMillan speaking at the Law and Justice Foundation's annual Justice Awards ceremony



Volunteer lawyers, Tom Porter and Tim Mitchell, working with a law student at Kingsford Legal Centre

As part of Kingsford Legal Centre's 30th birthday celebrations, the organisation recognised its volunteer lawyers who have been helping Kingsford Legal Centre for more than 10 years. Dave McMillan, Danny Grynberg, Sue Mordaunt, Ross Buchanan, Mike Steinfeld, Sharon Katz-Vidor and Margot Morris were each given a letter of appreciation from the UNSW Vice-Chancellor and a 'Social Justice Hero' T-shirt.



Volunteer lawyer Danny Grynberg wearing his Kingsford Legal Centre 'Social Justice Hero' T-shirt

Award winning volunteers

Peninsula Community Legal Centre VIC

The General Manager of Volunteers and Education at the Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC), Andrea Staunton, knows exactly the impact of volunteers at the centre: *“Our volunteers not only bring great dedication and skill to our organisation, they greatly strengthen our capacity to provide free legal services, allowing for up to 75 additional client appointments to be made each week.”*

PCLC is built on a vision for a fair and inclusive society that promotes and protects human rights and equality before the law. In providing free general legal services to Melbourne’s outer south-eastern communities, PCLC utilises the skills and work of volunteers to extend and enhance its operations and service delivery.

The Centre is grateful for the contribution of some **150 skilled and committed volunteers**, some of whom have been with the centre for more than a decade. PCLC’s volunteers include qualified lawyers who provide free legal advice, paralegal volunteers who undertake administrative and other non-legal tasks and a voluntary Management Committee who provide strategic governance and direction for the centre.

In 2013, with pro bono support from Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, PCLC presented long service awards to **17 volunteers who had donated 10 or more years of service – a cumulative total of over 255 years!**

PCLC’s highest distinction, the Kath Neilsen Memorial Award – created in 2002 to recognise a volunteer who has made an outstanding contribution – was in 2013 awarded to **Amanda Humphreys, a lawyer volunteer who has been with the centre for 15 years**. Amanda, an accredited family law specialist who was recently accepted into the International Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, has assisted clients on a volunteer basis for many years, and in 2013 became a mentor to staff lawyers in relation to complex child support and family law matters.

As Andrea Stanton says *“Amanda’s unfailing generosity in sharing her time and expertise is greatly appreciated, and we commend her on receiving this Award.”*

The previous winner in 2012 was local barrister, Victoria Campbell, who began volunteering with PCLC while studying law as a mature age student and juggling the demands of working part-time and raising her daughter as a sole parent. Victoria commented, *“I am very proud to be associated with such an important and dynamic organisation, which is founded on a fundamental belief that I share – that access to justice is the right of all people, irrespective of their capacity to pay for services.”* ■



Amanda Humphreys (right) with her Kath Neilsen Memorial Award in 2013, with General Manager of Volunteers and Education, Andrea Staunton



Previous winner, Victoria Campbell with her Kath Neilsen Memorial Award for 2012

Promoting fairness in the criminal justice system

Intellectual Disability Rights Service NSW

People with intellectual disability are disproportionately represented and greatly disadvantaged when in contact with the criminal justice system, an environment where their rights are not always understood or upheld.

The Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS) is a community legal centre that provides legal services to people with intellectual disability throughout New South Wales. IDRS's services include the provision of legal advice and legal representation in select matters; policy and law reform work and community legal education with a view to advancing the rights of people with intellectual disability. It also runs a pilot *Parenting Project* that assists parents with intellectual disability who are at risk of having a child removed by the Department of Human Services.

IDRS operates the Criminal Justice Support Network (CJSN) which provides trained volunteers to people with intellectual disability when they come into contact with the criminal justice system, particularly at police stations and at court.

CJSN provides after-hours on-call volunteer lawyers to provide over-the-phone legal advice to people with intellectual disability who have been arrested. In addition to volunteer lawyers, CJSN runs an after-hours service providing volunteer support persons to attend the police station to assist the person arrested to understand and uphold their rights and understand legal terms, in particular Apprehended Violence Order and bail conditions, and to help the person to avoid breaches. Volunteer support people also accompany clients who are defendants or victims of crime, to court to ensure that they understand and contribute as much as possible and that their rights are upheld.

The CJSN's team comprises **approximately 120 volunteers**, who in 2012/13 **provided a total of 1,483 supports, representing an increase of 17% on the previous year.** The service operates in Greater Sydney, the Illawarra and Shoalhaven, the Hunter region, Central Coast, Riverina area, Mid North Coast of NSW and Central West – with an Outreach Coordinator, based in IDRS' Sydney office, able to provide assistance by telephone and arrange for a support person in other regional areas of NSW.

While most CJSN volunteers do not have prior experience working in the legal field, they enthusiastically take on the huge challenge of



The IDRS Criminal Justice Support Network volunteers pictured with their certificate of recognition, having won in the Hunter regional award category for 2013 NSW Centre for Volunteering Volunteer of the Year Awards

understanding the legal system well enough to be able to explain it to clients.

Alex Faraguna, the CJSN Manager, says that *“We are frequently amazed and humbled by the dedication and commitment of our volunteers. For police station supports, we phone them during the evening or at the weekend, to ask them to travel to a police station to assist a client. Court support volunteers are there for the ‘long haul’ and provide a high standard of practical and emotional support for clients. Some of our volunteers do this for us every week of the year.”*

CJSN's volunteers help their clients to understand and exercise their legal rights by assisting the client in communicating with the police or their lawyer, by ensuring plain language and short, easily-understandable questions are used and by regularly checking the client's understanding; offering emotional support to help the client to stay calm and focused; explaining what is happening to the client so that they can make informed choices; and advocating for people with intellectual disability accused of a crime to be helped in reducing their offending behaviour through diversion from court and the provision of disability and other community services rather than through punishment via the criminal justice system. ■

“CJSN clients can be challenging to work with at times. Our volunteers provide the best service they can, even when their client is verbally abusive, or is charged with serious offences such as those involving violence. For example, CJSN has a number of clients involved in sexual assault matters (as defendants or victims), and such matters can be very sensitive and distressing to hear. Our volunteers have the fortitude and maturity to understand that regardless of the nature of the alleged offence, people with intellectual disability require, and are entitled to, support and assistance in order to receive a fair hearing.”

– Alex Faraguna

From practical legal training to justice advocates

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

Some other legal assistance providers also benefit from the contributions of volunteers. One example is from the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS).

Established in 1973, VALS plays a vital role in providing referrals, legal advice and information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria. With three areas of specialisation – criminal law, family law and civil law – VALS acts as an effective bridge between the legal system and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Michael McKenna initially started with VALS as a volunteer in November 2012, on an initial three week placement as part of his Practical Legal Training (PLT). Michael subsequently stayed on as a volunteer one day a week for about six months. During this period Michael worked on an ongoing project – the development of a manual containing summaries of relevant sentencing cases, a resource that has proven useful to all of VALS' criminal law team when they are representing clients.

Michael volunteered with VALS because he had a strong interest in criminal law and held *“the ideals of the criminal justice system in high esteem.”* Michael was particularly aware of the difficulties faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and found it rewarding to utilise his skills and knowledge to help people in need.

Michael says that his favourite part of volunteering was *“seeing how a not-for-profit criminal law practice works.”*

Michael is now employed by VALS and works full-time in the criminal law unit. In this capacity Michael provides criminal law assistance, most particularly in relation to summary and indictable offences and driving offences. As well as sharing the court work in metropolitan Melbourne, Michael travels to regions within Victoria to ensure continuity of service provision in regional areas.

VALS has provided opportunities for volunteers throughout its existence. Indeed, VALS was created by volunteers, and has a proud tradition of providing exceptional experiences to its volunteers which then go on to serve them well throughout their professional life. VALS has an established volunteer program which has two intake periods per year and continues to provide unique opportunities for its volunteers across a range of skill sets, from office administration, community development, social justice policy and advocacy through to the practice of law. ■



Former Practical Legal Training placement, Michael McKenna, now works as a full-time lawyer at the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

Michael found it rewarding to utilise his skills and knowledge to help people in need.



Kelly Cassidy (left) at her legal practitioner admission ceremony, with Leah Billeam. Leah was Kelly's PLT supervisor at the Pilbara Community Legal Service

Pilbara Community Legal Service WA

Michael from VALS is not the only student who has transitioned from undertaking their Practical Legal Training (PLT) at a legal assistance service to joining the staff. Kelly Cassidy is another example.

Kelly obtained PLT work experience with the Pilbara Community Legal Service in Western Australia via NACLC's PLT placement service at legal assistance services in regional, rural and remote (RRR) areas.

Kelly was employed first as a tenancy advocate and then as a lawyer. As Leah Billeam, Kelly's PLT supervisor and the supervising lawyer at the Pilbara Community Legal Service's South Hedland office, commented, *“Kelly is fitting in beautifully with the organisation!”*

The program currently has a total of 57 RRR CLCs, Legal Aid offices, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, offering PLT work experience opportunities. The project places around **100 law graduates for PLT in RRR services each year.** ■

Helping our specialist women's services

Women's Legal Service VIC

While Women's Legal Service Victoria (WLSV) attracts a substantial group of talented and passionate volunteers, often lawyers and law students, one volunteer's contribution stands out at WLSV.

Kathy Fawcett has been a volunteer with WLSV for over 14 years, contributing two half days per week over that entire period – that's more than 3,000 hours!

Kathy only recalls missing one of her shifts during that whole time and says that volunteering *"is a privilege and a very important part of my week."*

Kathy is passionate about helping marginalised people access the law and ensuring those clients are not alienated or disadvantaged by the nature of the legal system. Kathy describes access to justice for vulnerable people as *"a constant work in progress"* and reminds lawyers, police and *"those higher up"* not to *"forget the basics"* in making sure everyone in the community can understand and have access to the law.

The WLSV is a specialist community legal service providing free and confidential legal information, advice, referral and representation to women in Victoria. The centre specialises in issues arising from relationship breakdown and violence against women.

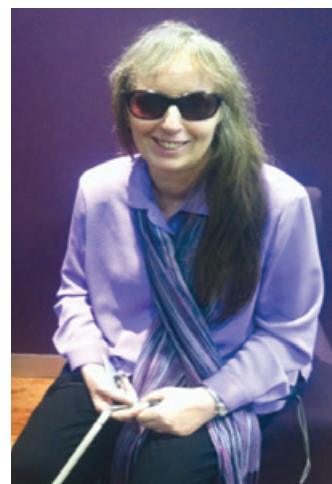
WLSV's CEO Joanna Fletcher says that *"Kathy supports vulnerable members of our community in many ways: volunteering with court network, supporting self-represented litigants in the Supreme Court of Victoria,*

acting as an independent third person for the Public Advocate's Office and working as a Bail Justice."

Kathy assists WLSV's lawyers at court on a Monday morning by supporting women who are waiting to see a duty lawyer for help in obtaining an intervention order to protect them from violence. Kathy sees her role as looking out for victims of violence and *"helping to keep the women safe"* while they are at court. On Wednesday mornings, Kathy assists WLSV's admin staff in the office by answering phones and assisting with enquiries.

Kathy says her work with often-traumatised women experiencing violence or relationship breakdown makes her feel lucky to be *"involved in a small way in people's lives"* as it enables her to witness the *"strength, bravery and determination of the human spirit."*

Joanna Fletcher is very appreciative of Kathy's contribution to WLSV, saying *"The alignment of WLSV's values and work with Kathy's generosity and passion has meant a huge volunteer contribution for the women of Victoria."* ■



Kathy Fawcett, a volunteer at Women's Legal Service Victoria

Women's Legal Service QLD

Sophia Bookallil is a family law specialist who has been **volunteering with community legal centres for more than a decade.**

Since November 2007 Sophia has been a regular volunteer at the Women's Legal Service (WLS) in Queensland, a specialist community legal centre providing free legal and social work services to Queensland women with family law and domestic violence matters. A high proportion of women who access the service have experienced domestic violence.

Sophia is a volunteer lawyer on a monthly basis at the WLS' evening sessions, a free after hours program aimed at assisting women in need of legal advice and support in relation to family law matters. As one of more than 100 volunteer lawyers at the centre, Sophia provides legal advice on individual client's concerns, whether that be in relation to domestic violence, child protection, child support, property settlement or complex family law matters.

"I volunteer because I want to help women (people) who have no other options for legal advice or representation and who are just as worthy of the legal assistance as others who can afford to pay for advice/assistance," says Sophia. *"I also volunteer because I want to give back to the community and see the legal profession as having a strong element of service."*

WLS provides more than 3,500 advices to Queensland women each year. Principal Solicitor, Kara Cook, recognises the invaluable contribution of volunteers like Sophia: *"Volunteers increase the service's capacity to see clients and assist more women who we would otherwise be unable to reach given our limited funding and resources."* ■



Sophia Bookallil volunteers on a monthly basis at the Women's Legal Service QLD

Seniors singing for social change

Townsville Community Legal Service QLD



Some of the Seniors Creating Change group at the Respect for Seniors March, held on World Elder Awareness Day 2013

It's not often that singing seniors in a regional Australian city make it on the world stage – but Seniors Creating Change have done just that.

Seniors Creating Change (SCC) is a grassroots preventative legal initiative supported by the Townsville Community Legal Service (TCLS) to raise awareness of elder abuse.

Established in 1991, TCLS provides general legal advice, casework and representation and a range of specialist services, including the Seniors Legal and Support Service (SLASS). SLASS – aimed at the seniors comprising 9% of Townsville's current population – provides legal advice, support and social work assistance to people over 60 at risk of, or experiencing, elder abuse, mistreatment or financial exploitation.

The multi-disciplinary team's innovative approach to client work in 2011 saw the establishment of SCC, an initiative focused on seniors empowering themselves to call for an end to elder abuse and to raise awareness of root causes such as ageism and social isolation. Based on a public health model and underpinned by the United Nations Principles for Older People, the SCC strategy involved the formation of a singing group, supported by a music therapist and theatrical director.

SCC made its spectacular public debut at a flash mob at Stockland Shopping Centre in Aitkenvale in June 2011, an event viewed more than 8,000 times on YouTube. Now comprising more than 60 seniors from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds, the group meets each Saturday to practise, and has performed dozens of times at community events and venues around Townsville.

A review of the SCC's first three years has revealed the initiative's far-reaching impact. Within the group, seniors have been empowered to create change; externally they have been educating the community about issues of ageism, elder abuse, neglect, disempowerment and social isolation in the community; all the while providing a positive image of ageing.

On 13 June 2014, a report on the first three years of SCC, *Seniors Creating Change: From Idea to Intervention*, was launched at a Mayoral Reception following the Respect for Seniors Street March.

And much further afield, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in New York has asked if they can use some SCC images to promote positive ageing on their website. ■

Volunteers bringing expertise to CLCs

Employment Law Centre of WA

The Employment Law Centre of Western Australia (ELC) is a not-for-profit community legal centre providing free and confidential legal advice and assistance to thousands of vulnerable Western Australian employees each year in relation to employment law. ELC's client base includes those with disabilities, young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, single income families and people with literacy issues. In addition to up-to-date information and referrals, ELC provides comprehensive, tailored advice free of charge to employees who could not otherwise be able to afford legal assistance. ELC also contributes to law reform by regularly making submissions in relation to matters of concern to WA employees.



Samantha Maddern with then WA Attorney General Christian Porter, accepting the 2010 Attorney General's Community Service Law Award

Due to limited funding and significant demand for its services, a vital aspect of ELC's services are its weekly evening legal service, which offers clients the opportunity to meet with volunteer lawyers. These lawyers generally advise at least two clients each during every evening legal service session – they may review legal documents, draft correspondence or submissions, or advise on the merit of a client's case.

Samantha Maddern is a highly regarded, experienced workplace relations and employment practitioner who works as Executive Counsel at Herbert Smith Freehills. Samantha has provided advice and expertise to the ELC as a volunteer since 2007.

Toni Emmanuel, ELC's Principal Solicitor, says: *"On many occasions, ELC would not have been able to assist particularly vulnerable clients without Samantha's invaluable assistance. Her expertise, quality advice and empathetic manner in relating to very vulnerable clients have been invaluable to ELC's service provision. Samantha frequently goes above and beyond for ELC clients, doing further pro bono work on her own time for particularly worthy matters."*

In addition to her regular evening legal service appointments, Samantha has volunteered to provide cover during a period of leave taken by ELC's Principal Solicitor – previously it has been very difficult for the Principal Solicitor to take leave. Samantha has generously volunteered her time to attend ELC, to review and sign off on advice given by ELC paralegals in the Principal Solicitor's absence to ensure the smooth and responsible operation of this service.

Toni Emmanuel adds, *"Samantha's energetic approach and continued commitment have had a direct and positive impact upon the Western Australian community. She has played an important role in extending the services ELC has been able to provide to disadvantaged clients who would not otherwise be able to access justice."*

Samantha was awarded the 2010 Attorney General's Community Service Law Award for her outstanding and sustained contribution to the WA community. ■

More volunteers' statistics from the NACLC National Census of CLCs 2013

129 CLCs responded to questions about the work undertaken by their volunteers. These included:

- **direct legal service delivery (80.6% or 104 CLCs)**
- **administrative support (67.4% or 87 CLCs)**
- **law reform and policy work (49.6% or 64 CLCs)**
- **"other" (20.9% or 27 CLCs)** – this category included legal research, information technology support, communications, governance and developing human resource policies.