



hume riverina
community legal service

ANNUAL REPORT
2010 - 11

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to acknowledge the financial contributions made by the following funding bodies for without their contributions we would not be able to provide the services we do:

**Commonwealth Attorney Generals Department
Victoria Legal Aid
Victorian State Government
NSW Legal Aid
NSW Public Purpose Fund**

PRINCIPAL LAWYERS REPORT

In my last 6 months as principal lawyer, I am pleased to report the wonderful success of 2 of our new projects; Family Law Focused Clinical Legal Education Program with Charles Darwin University (CDU) and the FRC/CLC partnership. Both of these have gone from strength to strength due to the dedication and commitment of all our staff, but in particular, Karen Keegan and Sarah Rodgers. If our Commonwealth Attorney General, Robert McClelland, made another visit to our service, he would be thrilled with how Federal Government money has been utilised. The CDU program has had a positive effect on the participating law students and their commitment to the community legal sector and to rural and family law in particular. And we have also successfully completed legal assisted family dispute resolution sessions as part of the FRC/CLC partnership and participated in training by the NSW Legal Aid Commission both of which have been organised by Sarah Rodgers.

Our other successes have been the appointment of Sarah Caplice as our Family Law Legal Aid lawyer who has hit the ground running and has shown she is not only a competent family lawyer, but a great team player as well.

Our Life Planning seminars have again proved to be our most popular CLE session presented in Benalla, Mt Beauty, St David's Care, Deniliquin, Finley and Community Support North East. We have also worked in close partnership with Villa Maria in presenting a series of these workshops throughout the North East of Victoria utilising the services of private lawyers under the coordination of our community project worker, Andrew Johanson.

On 10 January 2011 Karen Keegan took over as Principal Lawyer. I am sure the HRCLS will continue to grow under her leadership. I look forward to an easier work load working only 3 days per week as the NSW Outreach lawyer and being on the road for one day per week in the beautiful Riverina of NSW. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as Principal and seeing the service grow and develop, from 4 staff with only 2 lawyers, to our current size with our own stand alone office.

Karen Bowley

Lawyer (Principal Lawyer until 10 January 2011)

The Hume Riverina Community Legal Service [HRCLS] has had strong start to 2011, with increasing levels of casework and community legal education at the forefront. I commenced as the Principal Lawyer in January 2011, the HRCLS has undergone significant growth under Karen Bowley's leadership and continues to benefit from having her contribution as an Outreach lawyer and mentor to all staff. Thank you to Karen Bowley for her contribution to the good health of HRCLS and the team.

HRCLS moved to new premises in Hume Street in October 2010, while the old premises in Stanley Street had character, we are delighted with our new, more modern and accessible residence.

Continued....



Overall our outreach programs into NSW and North East Victoria continue, we are embarking on an unmet legal needs survey of our catchment area in 2011/2012, so the future structure of our outreach program could change.

January 2011 saw a re-introduction of the Principal Lawyer participating in a talk back session on local ABC Radio, where 'legal hot topics' are discussed, with callers ringing in with questions. Initially it was to be a monthly spot, but it has turned out to be a fortnightly spot, it is well received and it significantly contributes to the HRCLS profile across our catchment area.

Our hardworking team are involved in a variety of networks, memberships of Boards and Committees of Management, legal professional associations, organisation of Law Week and the coordination of Albury Cooperative Legal Service Delivery Coalition in NSW. We hosted Sophie Mirabella, the Federal Member for Indi at the Women In Law breakfast during Law Week, we have been visited by the Executive Officer from the Women's Legal Service in NSW and the Manager of the Dispute Settlement Centre – Hume Region, to name but a few.

Once again, HRCLS has had the benefit of the contribution and energy of our Practical Legal Training (PLT) students and volunteer students. We could not do the work that we do without the support and contribution by our local volunteer lawyers, who regularly attend on our clients at clinics. We appreciate and value their time and support.

The highlight of the year for me has been to be surrounded and supported by a professional and hardworking team. While reading feedback from CDU students, one particular comment stood out:

'...the whole team has an outlook which should be adopted by many other organisations. They strive to assist but it does not end there. They have no problem going that extra mile...'

HRCLS faces day to day challenges with clients who find themselves in desperate personal, physical and financial situations; facilitating access to justice for our clients and working side by side with our clients is a credit to each individual and to the team as a whole.

Karen Keegan
Principal Lawyer

HOURS OF OPERATION

9am to 5pm Monday to Friday

Telephone Advice & Information *

Monday 10am to 1pm

Wednesday 2pm to 5pm

Friday 10am to 1pm

Face to Face Clinics *

Wodonga Office on Tuesday evenings

Wangaratta Office on Tuesday evenings (fortnightly)

Family Law Assistance Clinics *

Wodonga office on Monday afternoons

Family Law Legal Aid *

Wodonga office as required

Rural outreach *

Lavington & Albury

Howlong & Corowa

Deniliquin & Finley

Corryong & Tallangatta

Mt Beauty & Myrtleford

Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service

Thurgoona

Wangaratta

Intervention Order Court Support Program

Wodonga Magistrates Court on Thursdays

Supervised Student Advice Clinic

Wodonga office on Monday afternoons

** Appointments essential*

STAFF

Permanent Staff as at 30 June 2011

HRCLS LAWYERS



Karen Bowley
NSW Outreach Lawyer



Sarah Rodgers
FLC/CLC Partnership lawyer



Andrea Georgiou
Victorian Outreach Lawyer



Karen Keegan
Principal Lawyer



Sarah Caplice
VLA Seconded Lawyer



Beth Simpson
Generalist Lawyer

ADMINISTRATION TEAM



Andrew Johanson
Community Project Worker



Tracey Walker
Legal Assistant



Brooke Morris
Albury CLSD
Regional Coordinator



Julie Garner
Administrator



Ashlie Barclay
Office Manager

Other staff employed during 2010-11:

Anne Baker—Administrator (temporary)

Kate Singline – Casework Audit Lawyer (temporary)

VOLUNTEERS

We here at the HRCLS find ourselves in a wonderful and very privileged position. We are so lucky to have such a successful and valued relationship with our volunteers. As at 30 June 2011 we have a team of 23 very talented volunteer lawyers and Graduate Law Students who volunteer their time at our weekly Wodonga and fortnightly Wangaratta evening clinics on a roster basis. Without them, we would not be able to run such successful and well attended advice clinics.



Dusan Jovetic



Dione Garwell



Derek Norquay



Dirk de Zwart



Eugene Butkowski



Allison Bruce

Volunteers as at 30 June 2011:

WODONGA

Peter Uniake (Slater & Gordon)
 Dirk de Zwart
 Emma Hill (Skinner & Associates)
 Eugene Butkowski
 Dusan Jovetic (Trivett Keating)
 Greg Duncan
 Derek Norquay
 Dione Garwell (Pogson Cronin)
 Veronica Haccou (Nevin Lenne & Gross)
 Allison Bruce (Robb & Associates)
 Tanya Klein (Kell Moore)
 Maralee Vogel
 Andrew Johanson (HRCLS)
 Sarah Rodgers (HRCLS)
 Ross Kearney
 Alex Mathews

WANGARATTA

Nancy Battiato
 Vic Campagna (Campagna Gray & Mallinder)
 Jonathan Green (Slater & Gordon)
 Kim Lamb (Graduate Law Student) (Slater & Gordon)
 Ailyn Libo-On (Slater & Gordon)
 Erin Quilliam (Nancy Battiato)
 Jodie Wells (Peter S Dunn & Associates)

2010-11

Advice provided (Wodonga clinic) 339

Advices provided (Wangaratta clinic) 45

PRO BONO WORK

CLAYTON UTZ

HRCLS is partnered with Clayton Utz, a large national law firm which gives us pro bono assistance in a variety of matters, whether it be discussing legal issues in a particular case, representing a client in litigation or providing facilities for meetings. In the latter category, Clayton Utz provided 2 conference rooms with catering and IT support for an all day meeting for Victorian RRR community legal centres in March 2011. There were over 50 CLC workers in attendance and without these facilities provided in central Melbourne, the day would not have been the success it was.

Below is an example of the way in which Clayton Utz has assisted a client:

FACTS: Elderly Client A presented to an outreach clinic wanting advice about her residential situation. Following the receipt of an inheritance, a family member had proposed to build her a “granny flat” which she could live in for life. She would be cared for by the family, with meals, social contact, and other help as required. Unfortunately, once her flat was completed, she was given an onerous contract to sign which almost entirely repudiated her rights to recover any of her investment. She signed under what appeared to be duress. Her residential situation made her completely dependent on a family member, who would not allow her access to legal advice. In fact, this woman was so socially isolated; her carer would not even allow her to meet with her “meals-on-wheels” deliverers. She lived in isolation and fear, and wished to recover some of her investment so she could afford to relocate to formal assisted living facilities.

OUTCOME: Her case was particularly specialised, as it involved investigating the terms of her contract, and the circumstances in which it was made. The complexity and sensitivity of the matter prompted HRCLS to seek pro bono assistance from Clayton Utz, our pro bono partner. We referred this matter to Clayton Utz, they reviewed the facts of the case and decided that they would provide pro bono legal assistance to our client. The matter is not yet resolved but we know that our client has a ‘Goliath’ fighting for her, she now has the best possible chance of recovering her money and moving to much safer and comfortable residential circumstances.

ADVICE & CASEWORK – general overview

As a generalist Community Legal Service, we are funded to provide legal advice, information and referrals. We provide these services in a number of ways in both face-to-face settings and over the telephone as outlined under Hours of Operation.

Our service is also rare as we are a cross border service (NSW & Victoria), and our lawyers must keep up-to-date with three jurisdictions, this includes the Federal jurisdiction. The types of legal issues that we advise client's on are quite broad and wide ranging, but the areas of law that we primarily give advice or information on are:

- ❖ Child contact/ contact orders (**663** advices given);
- ❖ Intervention Orders/Apprehended Violence Orders (**310** advices given);
- ❖ Divorce (**73** advices given);
- ❖ Property in marriage/de facto (**283** advices given);
- ❖ Consumer complaints (**79** advices given);
- ❖ Wills/probate - making/contest/obtaining benefit (**104** advices given).
- ❖ Neighbourhood disputes (**68** advices given);
- ❖ Motor vehicle accidents (**38** advices given); and
- ❖ Road Traffic Offences/ Fines (**63** advices given)

Our "Top 5" areas of legal inquiries were:

1. Spending time / living with (child) issues (663)
2. Intervention Orders (310)
3. Property in marriage/de facto (283)
4. Separation (104)
5. Wills, Probate & Estate issues (104)

Our "Top 5" areas of casework were:

1. Intervention Orders (182)
2. Spending time / live with (child) issues (154)
3. Property in marriage (28)
4. Wills, Probate & Estate issues (18)
5. Change name or birth records (16)

Our lawyers have been extremely busy this year. They have provided 1,534 advices to people within our catchment area:

Worker Name	Face to face	Telephone	Mail	Email
Karen Bowley	106	73	1	
Sarah Caplice	82	209	1	1
Andrea Georgiou	121	249		
Karen Keegan	95	8		
Sarah Rodgers	181	37		
Elizabeth Simpson	198	170		2

FAMILY LAW LEGAL AID ASSISTANCE

The Hume Riverina Community Legal Service staff includes a Victoria Legal Aid family lawyer and assistant employed through an innovative partnership between Victoria Legal Aid and the Community Legal Service sector which began in July 2006. Victoria Legal Aid offered six Victorian Community Legal Centres funding to provide a Family Law Lawyer and administrative support in areas which were not covered by Legal Aid offices or outreach programs.

Since 2006 the funding for this program has continued on an annual basis but in June 2010 the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service received the wonderful news that the funding for this program was made recurrent for 3 years (2010-2013).

Strong relationships have been cemented with a range of local service providers such as the Family Relationship Centre (FRC), the Magistrates, Local and Federal Magistrates Courts, Gateway Community Health Service and the Family Law Pathways Network. The relationships are evidenced by service providers regularly contacting our family law lawyer to clarify legal and legislative interpretation issues and requests for presentations for organisations that assist separated families.

Sarah Caplice joined the team in this role in September 2010 after Sharda Ramjas left the role in April 2010 and Sarah has been providing legal advice(both over the telephone and face-to-face), casework, court representation (for those eligible for Legal Aid) and Community Legal Education since that date as evidenced by the stats below.

Sarah is looking forward to the next two years in the role with hopes of expanding the casework and litigation from children and property to also include child protection matters, with the hope that the funding will once again continue for a further 3 years after that.

2010-11 (State Project 3)	
Total Advice Activities	293
Total cases open during period	124
- Open at period start	1
- New (opened in period)	123
- Still open at period end (ongoing)	52
Total cases closed during period	72
- Closed involving court representation	14
- Closed involving primary dispute resolution	4

CASE STUDY 1....

FACTS:

Client W [the mother] sought assistance in relation to DNA testing. The alleged father was not on the birth certificate, Centrelink requires the mother to take all reasonable action to claim child support from the child's father and the Child Support Agency had refused our client's application for child support as she could not prove that the father is the father of the child. Our client did not know the whereabouts of the alleged father, but she did have an address for his mother. A search of the electoral roll revealed that the father's address was the same as his mother's address. The alleged father's mother would not assist with any information as to the location of the alleged father.

Continued....

OUTCOME:

HRCLS assisted the client in seeking a grant of legal aid and then prepared an application for DNA testing. Initially an application for substituted service on the alleged father's mother was refused, but then it came to light that he may have been temporarily residing with his mother, the alleged father was then subsequently served. The alleged father failed to attend at Court, therefore Orders were made declaring that he is the father of the child, that he is assessed to pay child support and that the child's birth certificate is amended to add the father's details.

FAMILY LAW ASSISTANCE CLINIC

As part of the funding we receive from the Commonwealth Attorney Generals Department we run a clinic aimed at assisting clients who are self representing in family law matters. The clinic is available to clients who have a low income or are disadvantaged in their access to justice because of a particular issue such as disability, but are unable to obtain a grant of legal aid.

As part of the clinic, the HRCLS conducts a range of casework, including writing letters and preparing Court documents for clients.

We have assisted clients with their Court documents in matters such as:

- Change of name applications for children. We have assisted in a number of cases where the mother has sought to change the surname of the children without the father's consent, in circumstances where the father has not spent any time with the children for some time.
- Applications for parenting orders to spend time with children. We have assisted in a number of matters where the father has no arrangements to see the child and seeks an Order of the Court to allow him to spend time with the child.
- Divorce Applications, particular in cases where the spouse is unable to be located.
- Applications for passports to be issued to the children, without the father's consent. This is typically in circumstances where the father is unable to be found, or has had no involvement in the children's lives for some time.
- Parentage testing (DNA) applications.
- Family law property matters.

The only cost involved for clients is the payment of the Court filing fee (which is reduced for clients who have a health care card), and the fees of the process server (if required) to enable them to serve the documents on the other party.

The HRCLS also assists clients with negotiating parenting plans, Consent Orders and variations to Court Orders in cases where the parties have reached agreement, but the client wants help with documenting the agreement, and cases where the parties are waiting to attend mediation, but need help with arranging some parenting arrangements that can be followed in the interim until mediation can occur.

Continued...

The clinic empowers clients to seek an outcome in the Court where it might otherwise be daunting for a client to prepare the necessary paperwork to initiate proceedings. Clients can attend Court and represent themselves with confidence, because their Court documents have been prepared by a lawyer and they are provided with comprehensive legal advice and assistance through the process.

*the surname of her son,
ce 2005, and the father*

*sed to sign the forms to
is, so the HRCLS agreed
ing Court documents to
hild without the father's
he child's surname was*

LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO THE FAMILY RELATIONSHIP CENTRE

In 2009 the Attorney-General Robert McClelland announced that funding would be provided to Community Legal Centres to form partnerships with their local Family Relationship Centres as a pilot program. The purpose of the partnership is to provide legal assistance services to parties who seek to mediate their family law disputes at the Family Relationship Centre. Legal intervention at this stage can help clients to resolve their disputes as early as possible, and stay out of Court.

Since January 2010 HRCLS has been providing legal information sessions to all clients of the Family Relationship Centre, to help them understand the law. Feedback from attendees has been extremely positive, with most responses stating that the session has met their needs to the level of “very good” or “excellent”.



Karen Keegan & Karen Bowley at the launch
of the FRC Legal Information Session

The HRCLS also visits the Centre every Tuesday afternoon and offers 4 x 30 minute appointments for clients who are undergoing the mediation process at the Family Relationship Centre.

This year the HRCLS has:

- Delivered 45 legal information sessions, attended by 215 participants
- Delivered 39 legal advice clinics, attended by 74 clients

Continued...

In addition, the HRCLS can also attend mediation on behalf of the clients in cases where the issues in dispute are particularly difficult, the parties are in high conflict or one of the parties is particularly vulnerable. The HRCLS believes that both parties should be legally represented in such cases; however, no funding is currently provided for a lawyer to assist the other party.

An informal partnership has therefore been formed between the HRCLS and the legal assistance partner to the Wagga Wagga Family Relationship Centre. The Wagga Wagga lawyer travels to the HRCLS to assist the other party in Wodonga. In turn, the HRCLS lawyer travels to Wagga Wagga to assist at mediations.

This partnership is not funded, and the HRCLS wishes to acknowledge the valuable time and assistance provided by Joplin Carpenter, the Wagga Wagga lawyer, so that both parties are represented and best positioned to resolve their dispute.

2010-11 (FRC)	
Total Advice Activities	81
Total cases open during period	17
- Open at period start	0
- New (opened in period)	17
- Still open at period end (ongoing)	6
Total cases closed during period	11
- Closed involving primary dispute resolution	3

CASE STUDY 3....

FACTS:

Client B was referred to the HRCLS by the Family Relationship Centre for assistance at mediation. Client B was seeking to negotiate parenting arrangements with her former partner. The parties had a high degree of conflict between them and Client B was not comfortable with attending mediation on her own.

OUTCOME:

The HRCLS attended the mediation session and provided legal advice and support to Client B throughout the mediation process. The parties successfully negotiated an agreement about the parenting arrangements for the children.

FAMILY LAW FOCUSED CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

The HRCLS was successful in obtaining a grant of funding from the Commonwealth Attorney General to partner with Charles Darwin University (CDU) from the Northern Territory to develop a Clinical Legal Education Program, with a particular focus on family law. The HRCLS has established a program that enables law students who are studying family law or alternative dispute resolution at CDU to attend HRCLS and participate in two week placements.

The aim of this project is to:

- Increase the capacity of HRCLS to provide legal advice and assistance to clients
- Raise student awareness of issues relating to social justice and equity in the legal system
- Assist students to develop practical legal skills in family law and dispute resolution
- Promote to law students the benefits of working in a rural setting, and encourage them to work or volunteer in Community Legal Centres

The HRCLS staff have enjoyed the enthusiasm and vibrant presence that the students have brought to the office during their placements.

There have been significant benefits of having students assist at the HRCLS. They have been able to conduct additional work for clients in cases where the HRCLS may not otherwise have had capacity to assist. For example, the students have assisted clients through activities such as:

- Interviewing clients and taken instructions about the client's legal problem
- Preparing letters and Court documents under the supervision of a lawyer
- Assisting clients with legal aid forms and divorce applications
- Preparing fact sheets and brochures on various legal topics
- Conducting legal research

As a result of the program, the HRCLS has been able to establish an additional legal advice clinic on Monday afternoons, known as the "Supervised Student Advice Clinic", where clients can attend and receive free family law advice. At the clinic, students interview the clients, confer with the supervising lawyer about the legal problem, and then provide legal advice to the client.

Between 5 July 2010 and 17 December 2010, a total of 20 students attended a two week intensive placement at the HRCLS. During their placement, the students have also the opportunity to observe interim and final hearings at the Federal Magistrates Court, intervention order matters at the Wodonga Magistrates Court, visit the Post Separation Service in Albury and learn about the operation of the Children's Contact Service, the Parenting Orders Program and the Integrated Mediation Program (Family Mediation Service), visit the Family Relationship Centre, and to observe family law mediations conducted by HRCLS lawyers and private lawyers.

Many CDU law students study by distance and students have attended from areas such as Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Darwin and Brisbane. Students have provided extremely positive feedback following from their time at HRCLS. One student commented:

"The experience has been more valuable to me personally than all the theory programs to date. Nothing beats being able to speak with and read 'real people's' facts and situations".

Continued...

CASE STUDY 4....

FACTS:

Client Y approached the HRCLS for assistance with applying for a divorce from her husband. Client Y did not know the whereabouts of her husband.

OUTCOME:

A student on placement at HRCLS attended the Court hearing on behalf of Client Y, and successfully sought leave to represent Client Y in Court. The student applied for an order that allowed the Court to dispense with service of the divorce application on the husband, on the basis that he could not be located. The order was granted and the divorce was made.

GRADUATE LAW STUDENT PLACEMENTS:

The funding to establish a Clinical Legal Education program has also enabled HRCLS to have Graduate law students attend placements at the HRCLS. These placements run for several months, and allow students who have completed their law degree to complete practical legal training at HRCLS.

The benefit to our clients has been immeasurable, as our graduate law students have gained experience during the course of their placement that has enabled them to develop the ability to conduct their own independent casework for clients.

Here is what our graduate law students have had to say about their placements:



I have found myself a temporary home at the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service. As part of completing my Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice, I am doing my placement here at HRCLS. And what an experience it has been! I never know what is going to come across my desk next – telephone advice, clinics, family law work, generalist law work, research, assisting lawyers in court, travelling to outreach locations, preparing documents and stacking brochures. It's never boring around here! I have been very fortunate in the hands-on experience and skill development I have been able to acquire whilst completing my placement here. It is fantastic to see

HRCLS supplying a service to the local community and providing legal assistance for those who would otherwise not receive any. I grew up here in Wodonga and am pleased to be able to return after completing my law degree in Canberra, and to be a part of a service that supports the local community. I am very grateful for the time I have already and will continue to spend as part of the service. When I first started, I was told that one of the most important things HRCLS hoped they could teach me was not legal skills and knowledge, but rather, how to be a lawyer. Through observing a range of different lawyers at work in a range of different situations, I feel that I am well on my way to making that transition from student to lawyer, and have a solid grounding from which to launch my legal career. The compassion, competence and experience of the lawyers at HRCLS has shown me what kind of lawyer I want to be, and I am very grateful for the opportunity to learn from them.

Melanie Currie
Graduate Law Student

Continued...

Part way through 2010, I decided that it was time to start to gather some work experience, following the completion of my law degree in 2009. I called the HRCLS, only to find they already had full time volunteer students there. They did, however, encourage me to be available for the following year, and in the meantime, come to the Tuesday night clinics where community minded private practitioners see clients for a couple of hours on a Tuesday evening. This was my start. Hearing about tragic break-ups, battles about where the kids live, flooding backyards, and neighbours with fencing disputes.



In February, I started working three days a week at the service, and have loved every minute of it. The Service is genuine in its commitment to mentoring new lawyers, by letting them have a go at almost everything, albeit with a structured supervisory framework. Our clients generally don't have the luxury of choice. They are not lawyer shoppers. And yet, every person who comes through the door can expect a committed and concerned lawyer to turn their mind to their particular problem.

The work isn't always pretty, but it's pretty interesting.

Janet Osborne
Graduate Law Student

CASE STUDY 5....

FACTS:

Many legal matters which are presented to lawyers at the Tuesday night clinic end up with the PLT student's – particularly if they are not "run-of-the-mill" and require a bit of extra research. This was the case with a discrimination matter dealt with earlier this year. Client Z had experienced an unpleasant Saturday night at a nightclub, which culminated in his expulsion from the venue, on the basis that he was intoxicated. Client Z came to us, angry and humiliated, and wanting an apology. He was not only NOT intoxicated at the venue; he had not been drinking at all. The only mistake he had made was being disabled, and being on his own.

OUTCOME:

Client Z was able to give us detailed information about what had happened on his awful night out, and from this we were able to frame a complaint to the Anti-Discrimination Board. The conciliation conference that eventually took place between the parties gave us the opportunity to partner with the Disability Advocacy Information Service [DAIS], and they were able to provide support in the conference situation. For students, this matter was not only an opportunity to see something through from beginning to end, but also to look at what a "successful resolution" might mean to different people. In this case, the motivating factor for the client was not about monetary gain, but about standing up for an important principle. The HRCLS is what facilitates this type of "people power".

OUTREACH SERVICES

VICTORIAN OUTREACH:

Part of the core services that the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service provides to the community is the delivery of an outreach program to rural and regional areas of the North East of Victoria. At present, the HRCLS Outreach locations in the Victorian rural catchment area are:

- **Mt Beauty:** Neighbourhood Centre, 1st Tuesday of the month at 10 am – 11.30 am
- **Myrtleford:** Community Health Centre, 1st Tuesday of the month at 1.30 pm – 3.30 pm
- **Wangaratta:** Upper Murray Family Care, 2nd & 4th Tuesday of the month at 3 pm – 5 pm & 5.30 pm – 7 pm
- **Corryong:** Community Neighbourhood House, 3rd Tuesday of the month at 10 am – 12 noon
- **Tallangatta:** Community Education Centre (The Hub), 3rd Tuesday of the month at 1.30 pm – 3 pm

At these locations, a client is given a free 30 minute face-to-face appointment with the visiting solicitor so as to discuss their specific legal issue or concern and explore the options available to them. In some circumstances, the solicitor may provide some on-going assistance to the client, but this is done on a case-by-case basis and dependent upon the particular legal issue. The client is encouraged to be involved in the matter by conducting the majority of the work themselves as it promotes self-empowerment and ownership.

VICTORIAN OUTREACH ADVICE STATS 01/07/2011 – 30/06/2011

Mt Beauty 16

Myrtleford 12

Wangaratta 106

Corryong 17

Tallangatta 2

CASE STUDY 6....

FACTS:

Client A had a dispute with a bank who released funds without obtaining the proper authority from the client. The bank acknowledged liability but did not offer adequate compensation. Client A lodged a complaint with the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) and sought the HRCLS assistance in obtaining compensation for their incorrect actions.

OUTCOME:

HRCLS wrote to FOS requesting that Client A be awarded compensation based on several clauses of the FOS's Terms of Reference, including that the bank failed to act accordingly when Client A made a complaint and that the bank also breached their duty of care. After some negotiations, a successful outcome was reached whereby Client A accepted the bank's offer of \$1500.00 compensation.

Continued...

NSW OUTREACH:

NSW Outreach has continued to remain steady. We have had a couple of changes in this program. From 10 January 2011 Karen Bowley took on the role and is running the NSW Outreach program. We also had to make a change to one of the locations that we visited. We had to cancel Culcairn due to lack of numbers and replaced it with Thurgoona.

HRCLS has consolidated our weekly outreach to the Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS). A change in the way appointments are made has meant greater numbers of clients using the service. AWAHS now makes the appointments and at the same time organises transport of clients to ensure they attend, the same process that is used for the medical appointments. Just prior to the outreach time, HRCLS rings AWAHS to find out client names to enable us to do a conflict check.

In addition, we have attended staff meetings to talk to staff and barbecues to meet other visiting staff. We feel we are well on the way to establishing a successful medico-legal partnership.

Deniliquin and Finley continue to be well attended however Corowa and Howlong are experiencing difficulties. Deniliquin not only has fully booked appointments, but also requests CLE's on a regular basis. In Corowa we have not been able to find a suitable outreach location which has affected our numbers. In both Corowa and Howlong we need to do more work with service clubs to advertise our services and have started initiating CLE's to Probus and Rotary Clubs. Our Community Project Worker has also attended Network meetings in Corowa. Albury and Lavington continue to be well attended and Thurgoona, which we have only been attending for 6 months, is becoming well used.

- **Albury:** Intereach, 1st & 4th Thursday of the month at 1 pm – 3 pm
- **AWAHS:** AWAHS, every Wednesday at 1.30 pm – 3 pm
- **Corowa:** Lethbridge McGowan, 2nd Thursday of the month at 1 pm – 3 pm
- **Deniliquin:** Neighbourhood Centre, 3rd Thursday of the month at 10.30 am – 12.30 pm
- **Finley:** Community Health Centre, 3rd Thursday of the month at 2.30pm – 4 pm
- **Howlong:** Community Resource Centre, 2nd Thursday of the month 10 am – 12 noon
- **Lavington:** Lavington Library, 4th Thursday of the month at 10 am – 12 noon
- **Thurgoona:** Thurgoona Community Centre, 1st Thursday of the month at 9 am – 11 am

NSW OUTREACH ADVISE STATS 01/07/2011 – 30/06/2011

Albury 38
AWAHS 28
Corowa 11
Culcairn 3
Deniliquin 38
Finley 13
Howlong 10
Lavington 29
Thurgoona 7

Continued...

CASE STUDY 7....

FACTS:

Client A was arrested at night, while feeding her 2 children, for an alleged breach of an AVO. She was taken to a local police station, 40 minutes drive from her home and remanded overnight in a cell as bail was refused. The alleged breach was minor and it was eventually dismissed by the Magistrate but our client found herself and her children were traumatised by the arrest.

OUTCOME:

HRCLS pursued a complaint against the police for their decision to arrest our client and also for the decision to refuse her bail. We made a written complaint to the Local Area Command who dismissed the matter saying that our client had recourse through the court in relation to the matter. We then lodged a complaint to the Ombudsman who we feel did not take the matter seriously, merely telephoning us to let us know that they knew of the incident and did not consider that it warranted further action. HRCLS then sent a complaint direct to Professional Standards, to a contact that one of our lawyers had been provided at a meeting at a quarterly conference of our NSW peak body. At last, the matter was considered and referred to different levels of the police department. We referred it again to the Ombudsman, with more detailed information thanks to a local solicitor who had represented our client during the breach hearing and the Local Area Command contacted us to discuss the issues. Our client eventually received both a written and verbal apology but only for the refusal of bail issue. However, the face to face meeting with our client and the Local Area Command officer was a valuable exercise for all concerned and was greatly appreciated by our client.

DUTY LAWYER SERVICES

Our solicitors again represented people in the Wodonga Magistrates Court with the Intervention Order process. Once a week our solicitor, usually Beth Simpson, attended the court which sits alternately on Wednesdays and Thursdays. The HRCLS lawyer is often accompanied by students.

As in past years, we primarily assisted female Applicants in family violence situations, but on occasions have helped male Applicants and Respondents of both gender. Forms of cyber –abuse continue to occupy court time. So do issues between students at local schools. More frequently these matters are being referred to mediation rather than being listed for contested hearings in court. With the commencement of the Personal Safety Interventions Orders Act on 5 September 2011, most non-family related matters will be recommended for mediation before court listing.

Clients whose matters were listed for contested hearings were referred to private solicitors as we do not have time to prepare for such matters. However, most cases were resolved without the need for hearings.

The Integrated Response to Family Violence Network in Wodonga hosted an event in November 2010 called “Real Men Wear White Ribbons” in which the purpose was to raise awareness within the community about what is being done to address men’s use of violence against women. Andrew King from Mensline Australia was the guest speaker, supported by David Bacash and Damien Loiterton, and finishing with a Panel including Magistrate Gerard Bryant and Paul Bizzotto from Upper Murray Family Care. The event was well supported, particularly by members of the region’s new settler community, and plenty of questions were asked of the Panel.

Throughout the year, the Network hosted guest speakers Ian Barker (father of victim Angela Barker), Guy Moon who runs City Life Boxing and Police Officer Kevin Mack who talked about his role in providing education to schools regarding cyberbullying. This has led to focusing the Network upon the issues of inappropriate use of social media and particularly with young people for the remainder of the year.

During Law Week in May 2011, we did a presentation to members of the Uniting Church in Wodonga in relation to applying for Intervention Orders through the court. This led to some interest from the Border Mail and an Article about cyberbullying, sexting and fraping was published. (copy of the article can be found on page 30, **Annexure 1**)

HRCLS solicitors are available for further advice or community presentations about any of these issues.



HRCLS Lawyer Beth Simpson.
Photo published with article in local paper, The Border Mail on 23 May 2011

2010-11
olving
resentation (generalist)
159

SUBSIDISED WILL SCHEME

The Subsidised Will Scheme is now in its second year of operation and has seen an increase in the participation of local law firms from 10 to 16. Initially, most of the law firms participating in the Scheme were from the Albury Wodonga region, however several firms from North East Victoria and the Riverina of New South Wales joined the Scheme which has resulted in an increase as to the overall catchment area of the Scheme.

The Scheme assists people with limited financial capacity and health or social issues to obtain a professionally drafted will, power of attorney and enduring guardianship by a local private solicitor at a subsidised rate.

The procedure of the Scheme is as follows:

1. Client makes an appointment in the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service's (HRCLS) Subsidised Wills Clinic, which is currently held on a Thursday afternoon.
2. A solicitor from the HRCLS interviews and assesses the client's eligibility for the Scheme based on their financial circumstances and their particular vulnerability.
3. If the client is eligible, the solicitor then completes the Client Information Checklist and selects a participating local law firm.
4. The solicitor then sends a letter out to the client which includes the Client Information Checklist and applicable voucher(s) and information as to the firm they will be attending on.
5. The client then contacts the firm directly and makes an appointment to have the applicable documents drafted at a subsidised rate of \$50.00 each document, which is payable directly to the firm.

During the period of 01/07/2010 - 30/06/2011, 21 people were interviewed and assessed for their eligibility, with a total of 12 people satisfying the criteria. During this period, a total of 20 Vouchers were issued to these clients:

- Wills - 11 documents
- Enduring Power of Attorneys - 8 documents
- Enduring Guardianship - 1 document

COLLABORATIVE & COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL LAW WEEK – 2011:

'Law and Justice in your Community' was the theme of National Law Week this year. HRCLS partnered with the North East Law Association [NELA] and the Albury & District Law Society [ADLA], the Albury Local Court, Albury and Wodonga libraries and Consumer Affairs Victoria [CAV] to coordinate a range of activities across the region.

A summary of key events is as follows:

- Women in Law Breakfast, with guest speaker Sophie Mirabella, Federal Member for Indi.
- Law talks on Q & A on Debt Recovery, Wills and Power of Attorney and Family Violence – how to assist victims and perpetrators.
- VCAT & CAV forum at Wodonga Library for a Q & A on residential tenancies, owners corporation and alternative dispute resolution.
- A series of CAV talks on 'Refunds and warranties under the new Australian Consumer Law and "Tenancy issues – who is responsible for repairs and maintenance?"

All activities were promoted in local media, with the Border Mail publishing a front page article on the issue of family violence in the context of social media and new technology. Our HRCLS lawyer was quoted as saying "They say the rule is don't put anything on Facebook that you wouldn't want your nanna to read." (copy of the article can be found on page 30, **Annexure 1**)



Coordinator of the Law Council's Rural Recruitment & Retention Strategy Helen McGowan with fourth-year law student Jessica Furze and local young solicitor Danielle Prodanovic

We also promoted an article in the Border Mail on the issue of prospective shortages of lawyers in Rural, Remote and Regional communities (copy of the article can be found on page 31, **Annexure 2**). The article was taken up and published accompanied with a photograph of Helen McGowan, former Principal Lawyer of HRCLS with a young local lawyer and lawyer in training.

ALBURY COOPERATIVE LEGAL SERVICE DELIVERY (CLSD) PROGRAM:

The Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) Program is a regionally-based approach to legal service delivery in NSW that aims to improve outcomes for economically and socially disadvantaged people by building cooperative and strategic networks of key legal services and community organizations referred to as 'partners'. Partners comprise of:

- Community Legal Centres

Continued...

- Legal Aid NSW
- Aboriginal Legal Services
- Pro bono partners (Clayton Utz)
- Financial counselling agencies
- Disability advocacy agencies
- Tenancy Advice & Advocacy services
- Local Courts
- Regional Law Societies
- Family Relationship Centres
- Mediation services
- Domestic Violence Court Support Services
- Youth services
- Legal Information Access Centres (LIAC)
- Migrant community groups/resource centres
- LawAccess NSW
- NSW Legal Assistance Forum (NLAF)

In 2006 the program was established and rolled out in the Albury/Wagga Wagga region and in July 2010 the Albury/Wagga Wagga CLSD Region was split into their own distinct regions. Brooke Morris continued in the Coordinator role for the Albury region with Anna Nightingale from Legal Aid NSW Wagga being appointed as Coordinator for the Wagga Wagga region.

There were 4 meetings held throughout the financial year, on 12 August 2010, 9 December 2010, 1 April 2011 & 28 May 2011. Each meeting was well attended with 12 partners attending each meeting. The meeting held on 1 April 2011 saw the development of the 2011-12 Strategic Plan.

One of the major joint projects that the regions have continued to work on has been attendance at the Henty Machinery Field Days which took place on 21, 22 and 23 September 2010. 8 partners from both Albury and Wagga Wagga attended the event and were impressed with the turn out and interest in their services. Partners have indicated that they would like to attend the event next year but agreed that a larger and higher profile site was required.

It has taken a bit of time for partners to adjust to the region split but it seems to be working well. It has allowed both coordinators to focus on their regions and they have been working on promotion of the program and recruitment of new partners. We look forward to 2011-12!



Cath Norris from Women's DV Court Advocacy Service & HRCLS lawyer Beth Simpson manning the stall



HRCLS lawyer Sarah Rodgers, handing out information packs to passers by

Continued...

ALBURY & WODONGA FAMILY LAW PATHWAYS NETWORK (AWFLPN):

HRCLS is a major contributor to the network with other key partners such as the Child Support Agency, Centrelink, local community support agencies, local Family Violence victim support agencies, local legal practitioners and Family Dispute Resolution providers.

Sarah Caplice, our VLA Family Law secondee lawyer, participated in the AWFLPN organising committee for a two day conference, titled 'Working with Clients with Multiple and Complex Needs' in June 2011. Karen Keegan, our Principal Lawyer facilitated a hypothetical panel discussion during the conference.

COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

LIFE PLANNING:

Our Life Planning program continues to be well subscribed. We delivered 13 CLE's on Life Planning across our catchment area, in partnership with local stakeholders such as Aged Care, Northeast Health Wangaratta, Legacy, Intereach and Gateway Community Health. Geographically we took it out across the region to Benalla, Kiewa, Wangaratta and Yarrawonga in North East Victoria to Finley in NSW Riverina, and at various locations in Albury including the Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service.



Karen Bowley delivering the Life Planning CLE

What a participant had to say:

"On behalf of the Committee and members of U3A (the University of the Third Age), many thanks for coming to speak to us last Friday. It was most interesting to hear of the scope of the help you are able to give and the large number of people who need it. It's reassuring to know that there is justice for those without the means to consult privately".

FAMILY LAW:

HRCLS supports the parenting programs conducted by Gateway Community Health, with a lawyer regularly presenting "Family Law and You" to parents on a range of programs.

FAMILY VIOLENCE:

In addition to attending at the Wodonga Magistrates Court each week for IVO's, our Family Violence Duty Lawyer also provides regular community education sessions on the issue of Family Violence. We provided a community education session in Benalla on the *Family Violence Protection Act* and again in Wodonga during Law Week 2011.

Continued...

WHO AND WHAT THE LAW IS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS:

HRCLS was invited to present an introduction to the legal system to Wodonga TAFE students completing studies to enable them to work in the social welfare sector. Various questions were addressed such as 'What are my legal duties to clients? What can I do if my client needs legal assistance? What can a client expect before a Court and how can I help?.

WODONGA LAW TALKS – CIVIL LAW:

In April 2011, the HRCLS was invited to participate in 'Law Talks', an initiative of the Victorian Law Foundation. The program was hosted by Wodonga Senior Secondary College, focussed at Year 11 and Year 12 students currently completing Legal Studies. HRCLS presented on the Civil Procedure Act, recently introduced into Victoria.

SPECIALIST LEGAL SERVICES:

The HRCLS arranged the following Specialist Legal Services and Training Organisations to visit our region:

Immigration Law

In March 2011, a lawyer from the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre [RILC] attended Wodonga and gave an overview of the Immigration legislation in the context of sponsoring family members to Australia, split and non-split family applications, sponsoring partners and fiancés/fiancées, applying for visas in Australia, visa conditions and requirements. There were two sessions conducted at the new Tafe Space Building in Wodonga, the first focused on Humanitarian Visa Holders and the second on Skilled Migration. The following day the lawyer from RILC held individual legal advice sessions for interested local clients.

FOI and Privacy Law

In June 2011, under the banner of the Federation of Community Legal Centres, FOI Solutions, Solicitors and Consultants, attended and delivered a seminar on Freedom of Information law and Victorian Privacy Law. Attendees included staff from HRCLS and volunteer lawyers

LAW REFORM & LEGAL POLICY

HRCLS made a submission to VLA in relation to their proposal to alter the Funding Guidelines for Family Law matters. A key concern to our Service and ultimately to our RRR clients, is the differences between NSW Legal Aid and VLA in relation to the awarding of grants. HRCLS is a cross border Community Legal Service, we have clients who move regularly between NSW and Victoria and it can be difficult to explain to clients the differences in the grants system. Our submission sought to encourage commonality where possible and highlighted a range of other issues. We note that VLA considered all submissions and included them into an amended policy where possible.

Continued...

HRCLS has a funded NSW Outreach lawyer position which was under review, we lobbied for the renewal of the funding and contributed significantly to the consultation process. A report was completed and it was determined that there is a definite need for our service in the Riverina. We are pleased to report that the NSW Outreach Lawyer Position was funded for three years.

STRONGWILL: A HELPING HAND TO DRAFT YOUR WILL USING THE INTERNET:

Do you have a Will? If not, what would it take to encourage you to make one? Would you like to work with us on developing a new tool to help? If so, please contact us for more information.

This year, Upper Murray Family Care received \$50,000 from the Victorian Legal Services Board to develop an internet tool to help rural people to develop their Wills and Powers of Attorney.

Here at the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service we work closely with the private legal profession to help people to protect themselves from the impact of life's adversities. Whilst many people know having a Will is a good idea, it is often not done. (A survey by the NSW State Trustee found that 40% of people did not have a Will).

Strongwill is an online tool, using pictures and questions, to guide willmakers in clarifying their testamentary wishes. Working through a decision making process, information is collected and used to draft a simple Will. This draft document can then be checked with a local solicitor and signed correctly. The Victorian Office of the Public Advocate is simultaneously developing an online tool to help people with their Power of Attorney documents.

We are working with graphic designers and the University of Ballarat Centre for eCommerce and Communication. The project aims to have the website operating by the end of 2011.

Point of Contact:

Helen McGowan, Lawyer and Strongwill Project Worker

Mobile: 0417 245 710

Email: strong.will.2011@gmail.com

ADDITIONAL INCOME

We received additional income in the amount of \$18,903.00 from Legal Aid NSW for the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery program.



Upper Murray Family Care Incorporated

BOARD MEMBERS PROFILE & CONTACT DETAILS

President Trish Devlin LL.B	Trish Devlin Lawyers 11 Faithful St Wangaratta, Vic 3678 3710 Snow Rd, Whorouly East 3735 PO Box 1228, Wangaratta, Vic 3677	03) 5722 4122 0411 255 353 (mobile) trish@trishdevlinlawyers.com.au	Appointed to the Board on 16 January 2009. Trish started with the agency as a foster care worker having worked previously as a psychiatric nurse, left to pursue legal studies and returned in 1999 as a solicitor in the new Community Legal Service, leaving in 2002 to return to private practice, interspersed with a stint with DHS. Trish now runs her own private practice as a solicitor in Wangaratta.
Vice President Jeff Wittig	Boralma-Tarrowingee Rd Londrigan Vic 3678	03) 5721 6099 (work) 03) 5721 9222 (fax) 03) 5726 9346 (home) 0428 573 075 (mobile) wangniss@netc.net.au	Appointed to the board on 30 July 1999 and has been vice-president since 2000/1. Jeff is a small business owner in Wangaratta.
Treasurer Phil Oates Dip Bus. (Acc)	7 Hall Court Wodonga, Vic 3690	02) 6024 2698 (home) philmer27@hotmail.com	Appointed to the Board on 11 October 2002. Phil was appointed treasurer in 2003/4. Phil is a retired accountant who was previously with the ATO. Phil is also on the board of other organisations such as WAW Credit Union.
Member Lester Sawyer B.Arch. ARAIA	PO Box 830 Albury, NSW 2640 559 Paine St Albury NSW 2640	02) 6021 8484 (work) 0414 273 584 (mobile) 02) 6021 8829 (fax) 02) 6021 3394 (home) lestersawyer@bigpond.com.au	Appointed to the Board on incorporation on 14 June 1985 but was also on the Committee of Management prior to incorporation. Lester is a past president of 5 years. Lester is an architect working in his own business.
Member Greg Pearl Dip Ed, B Health Admin	Deputy CEO Wodonga Regional Health Service Cnr Wilson & Vermont St Wodonga, Vic 3690	02) 60 517469 (work) 0408431253 (mobile) greg.pearl@awh.org.au	Appointed to the Board on 8 June 2007. Greg is currently Deputy CEO of Wodonga Regional Health Service based in Wodonga.
Member Clare Grogan B Ed.	Catholic Education Office PO Box 1181 Wangaratta 3676 124 Delloro Rd Wangaratta South, Vic 3678	03) 57257228 0417219203 (mobile) Clare Grogan cgrogan@ceosand.catholic.edu.au	Appointed to the Board on 12 December 2008. Clare has a background in teaching and currently works as an Education Officer at the Catholic Education Office in Wangaratta.
Member Phil Stuckey B Bus	PO Box 1139 Wodonga, Vic 3689 610 Affleck Street Albury, NSW 2640	02 6056 2828 wk 02 6056 1181 fax 0417 242 381 mob 02 6041 1048 home Phil@kookabrothas.com	Appointed to the Board on 19 February 2010. Phil runs a food manufacturing business in Wodonga established in 1987, was previously Manager of Upper North East Youth Services & has served on the boards of several community organisations and schools in the region.
CEO & Public Officer Luke Rumbold BA, BSW, MSW, PhD, FAIM	C/- UMFC 27 Stanley Street Wodonga, Vic 3690	02) 6022 8030 (work) 02) 6022 8099 (fax) 0418 970 182 (mobile) lrumbold@umfc.com.au	Luke is currently the CEO of UMFC and has been with UMFC since 17 September 1984.

Monday, May 23, 2011

Online abuse cited in domestic violence cases

NET'S UGLY TURN

BY AISHA DOW

A BORDER solicitor says about 50 per cent of the domestic violence cases she sees involve new technologies such as Facebook and mobile phones.

Beth Simpson, of the Hume Riverina Community Legal Service, says technology is advancing faster than the laws protecting people from harassment and intimidation.

She sees up to 16 cases every month in the Wodonga Magistrates Court that have an element of Facebook "violence".

"It's mainly just messages on Facebook that are offensive or insulting or are used to harass or intimidate, like calling people names or calling people homosexuals," she says.

"And people set up sites pretending to be other people or hack into other people's accounts."

Another growing issue is the misuse of photographs and videos.



'A girl sends a photo to her boyfriend of a sexually explicit nature then they break up and he sends it to a few mates. Then it gets sent off to another 1000 people'

BETH SIMPSON

Ms Simpson pointed to the case where an army cadet accused a fellow student of secretly filming her having sex and showing it to his friends.

"More commonly a

girl sends a photo to her boyfriend of a sexually explicit nature and then they break up and he sends it to a few mates," Ms Simpson says.

"Then it gets sent off to another 1000 people."

She says the trend is known as "sexting".

While intervention orders can prevent people from publishing information and pictures, including on the internet, she said "the law is taking a while to catch up with the technology".

"There are both state laws and federal laws that you can apply to these issues, but there is often the problem of getting enough evidence."

Ms Simpson says it is difficult to prove messages or pictures had been sent by a particular person from a mobile phone.

"Facebook is like that too, as other people can access their account," she says.

Continued page 4
Editorial — page 15



● Beth Simpson says online abuse is rising. Pictures: MATTHEW SMITHWICK

Ugly online violence

From page 1

The Wodonga lawyer says people's Facebook accounts are often hacked by friends and family, who change their profile information and post fake updates on a their Facebook page.

The phenomenon is known as "Frape", short for "Facebook rape".

Most cases of Facebook hacking are harmless, but it can also be used for more sinister purposes.

While today most people put up emotional abuse via new technology, Ms Simpson has a warning for those perpetrators who think they will get away with it.

"It's amazing how

many people put (their abuse) in black and white," she says.

"They say the rule is don't put anything on Facebook that you wouldn't want your nanna to read."

Changes that would widen the definition of family violence are being considered by Federal Parliament.



● Women in law: Fourth-year law student Jessica Furze, Danielle Prodanovic and Helen McGowan. Picture: MATTHEW SMITHWICK

The Border Mail
17 May 2011

Border towns face solicitor shortage

BY AISHA DOW

TOWNS on the Border could soon be without permanent legal services if nothing is done to end a shortage of rural lawyers, says the Law Council.

Co-ordinator of the Law Council's rural recruitment and retention strategy Helen McGowan said yesterday not enough of the young people who could afford to move away to study law were returning to the regional areas after graduation.

She said Corryong, Mount Beauty and Corowa were at risk of being without lawyers when older solicitors retired.

"The Law Council in 2009 did a survey and found that in the next five years a significant number of bush practitioners are going to retire," Ms McGowan said.

"They are saying there is going to be a critical shortage."

As the nation celebrates Law Week, Ms McGowan is leading a push to get more law-

yers working in country areas.

She is lobbying La Trobe University's Albury Wodonga campus to offer a law degree.

Danielle Prodanovic, a young solicitor at Albury's Hazris Lieberman Solicitors, decided to return to Albury after completing her degree in Melbourne.

She said she and her friends "dispersed to the winds" to attend university but not all returned to the Border.

"They go away and establish themselves in the

city, and have to uproot themselves again to come back."

She said a rural law course would mean more young people could afford to study law.

Ms McGowan said Border lawyers were advocating for a law course tailored towards rural practice.

But while La Trobe is "considering the possibility" of offering the degree, it is yet to flag when it will make a decision.

The Law Council is also targeting practising

lawyers, including established city practitioners, looking for a "tree-change".

If its efforts fail to attract more lawyers, Ms McGowan is hopeful video technology could deliver legal services to rural towns through the broadband network.

However she said face-to-face legal services were always better.

National Law Week began yesterday with a Women in Law Breakfast hosted by Member for Indi Sophie Mirabella.