

2000-01 report on HRCLS. One perspective.

History

Our cross border regional community was targeted for a Community Legal Service in the federal government's Justice Statement of 1995. That year, the federal Attorney General's department invited tenders for the provision of the service. A community steering committee was established to ensure that the program was able to offer services in both states and would be truly responsive to the community's needs. Steering committee members were drawn from the universities, legal profession, women's centre, adult education and community organisations such as Upper Murray Family Care. The Albury Wodonga Council of Social Services (AWCOSS) was the auspice body for the committee.

Initial funds were provided by the federal government to enable research on an appropriate model for service delivery for a cross border regional community. The outcome was the *"Report on models for a cross border community legal centre for Albury Wodonga"* presented in December 1996. However it was a further two years until the federal government was able to provide budget money for the service.

The community steering committee requested Upper Murray Family Care (UMFC) to be the original auspice organisation to deliver the service. As Luke Rumbold has been involved since the beginning, he was an enthusiastic supporter and a keen participant in the successful tender. Finally funding was provided and two project workers (Trish Devlin and Helen McGowan) were employed by UMFC in April 1999. Their role was to establish the service after consultation with community groups and the legal profession. The service was launched by the federal Attorney General Daryl Williams AM QC MP on Wednesday 28th July 1999.

Community Legal Services have been a part of the Australian legal system for over 25 years. They were originally established as voluntary services in inner urban areas of Melbourne and Sydney to assist people in their dealings with the legal system. Traditionally the role of a service is to provide free legal information, advice and assistance with a specific interest in addressing law reform and improving access to justice. Now both state and federal governments fund services to provide this assistance to the community.

Today

Our Community legal service has been operational since 28th July 1999 and we are constantly evolving and refining our mode of service delivery to the community. We have four staff including two solicitors (Trish Devlin and Helen McGowan) one administrative para legal information officer (Allison Mayers) and a part time financial manager (Jane Mulloy). We have also had solicitor locum assistance from Glenice Fox and Jacqueline Sutherland.

We have an annual Budget of \$200,000 from the federal Attorney General and our program is administered by Upper Murray Family Care.

Our service provides advice and information to the regional communities of North East Victoria and the southern riverina of New South Wales. We do this through advice clinics and also conduct an Intervention Order Scheme in Wangaratta and Wodonga Magistrates Courts.

We provide Community Legal Education when invited and have assisted during Rural Health Week, Women on Line Week, the Albury Wodonga Festival of Learning and Law Week.

Our service organised the first National Conference on the legal needs of women in rural, regional and remote Australia. This was attended by state and federal politicians, national peak women's groups, community services and women as consumers.

Through the internet Bulletin Board we are connected with all Australian Community Legal Services. Within this group there are networks based around specific issues such as rural communities, women's issues, disability and Community Legal Education.

Our workers are involved with partnerships with other community groups including Aged Psychiatry, AWCOS, Legal Aid, Albury Community Housing, the Womens Centre and FarmSmart.