



Lifting the Lid off the Law

Darebin Community Legal Centre Newsletter

ISSN 1837 - 5855

Winter 2010

DCLC still needs a new home...

As anyone who has had anything to do with Darebin Community Legal Centre (DCLC) in recent times will be well aware, we are still operating in premises that are unsafe, inadequate and overcrowded. Our current premises, although well situated in Preston, fall a long way short of the needs of our clients, volunteers and staff.

This has been the case for many years, but it has now reached crisis point, and it is clear that the centre will not be able to maintain the level of services it provides to the community in these conditions for much longer.

We urgently need to relocate to suitable premises in the Preston area which are safe and accessible. We have asked Darebin Council for in-kind or financial assistance, and are currently holding discussions around whether - and when - Council might be able to provide Council-owned premises or other assistance.

We are asking that our members, volunteers and supporters to show their support by contacting their local Councillors and MPs to draw their attention to the difficulties we are facing (see page 2 for further

details of how you can help). We have already collected a large number of signed cards which we will deliver to Council, but it is crucial for us that our supporters help us to maintain a spotlight on this issue at this time.

Why do we need to move?

For anyone who has recently visited the centre, this should speak for itself! For others, we will confine ourselves to mentioning a few of the problems with our current premises...

A key issue which causes unacceptable inconvenience for our clients is the that there is no disabled access to interview rooms or other facilities (including our outdoor toilets). The centre is broadly speaking an OHS minefield, with the steep, narrow internal staircase presenting particular safety concerns (and frequent near-misses!) for staff and clients.

DCLC is still operating in premises that are unsafe, inadequate and overcrowded. We are asking our supporters to contact their local Councillors and MPs to draw their attention to the difficulties we are facing.

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In terms of our ability to provide professional legal services, a major defect of the building is the fact that we only have two interview rooms, neither of which is sufficiently private or soundproof for client conferences.

The current office space is also far too small for an organisation of our size and this also substantially limits our capacity to grow or take on new projects in the future. We are dependant on a volunteer base of about 90 volunteers, and on most days the centre struggles to accommodate staff, volunteers and clients. One consequence of this is that it makes it even harder to provide the privacy and confidentiality our clients need and expect. File storage space is also inadequate for the large volume of matters we deal with each week.

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The centre's heating is very poor and there are no cooling units at all: inside temperatures routinely reach 36°C in the hotter months.

How did it get to this point?

We have been looking for new office space since 2003. As a temporary measure in 2005, we moved from Northcote to our current location in Preston, anticipating that we would shortly thereafter be able to secure accommodation in the old Preston Courthouse or the proposed Preston Community and Intercultural Centre planned by the Darebin Council.

This was not ultimately possible, and DCLC has been looking for appropriate and affordable office space in our local area (Preston) since that time. We have approached Council on a number of occasions requesting assistance.

Our core ongoing funding – which is provided by the state and federal governments – is insufficient for us to be able to afford suitable office space in Preston, which is an ideal location for us, since it is easily accessible by public transport for clients and volunteers, and close to other services. Commercial rental costs in Preston have risen dramatically in recent years and are now out of our reach.

We have reached a crossroads where we will soon need to consider substantially reducing the services we offer so that we can pay more for appropriate premises. And this is at a time when demand for

those services is increasing steadily.

Why we are asking Council for assistance

DCLC has been providing free legal advice, assistance, advocacy and community legal education to the Darebin community for over 20 years.

Currently, Darebin Council provides assistance towards premises and facilities to a number of local organisations. Many other councils provide substantial support to their local Community Legal Centres (CLCs), recognising the valuable work that CLCs do in local communities in a variety of ways. For example, a number of councils assist their local CLC by providing premises. Other councils assist by directly funding service provision. We recognise the assistance the Darebin Council has provided to DCLC for short-term projects, but what we urgently need now is ongoing assistance so that we can move to safe and accessible premises.

We also recognise that state and federal government funding levels to CLCs are not adequate to meet the legal needs of the communities they serve, and we would certainly encourage our supporters to raise this with their local MPs and candidates as elections grow closer. But we believe that Council can and should play some role in supporting our ability to provide much needed services to the Darebin community.

Thanks from all at DCLC to everyone who has taken the time to show their support so far. Readers wanting to know how they can help out should see below. ■

What you can do to help...

- Sign a campaign postcard and send it to Council (available from DCLC).
- Write to, email or contact your local Councillor or MP (see [contacts](#) on page 3) to raise the issues discussed above. It's always better to put things in your own words, but as a starting point, you can copy the text below into an email or letter:

Dear _____,

I am writing to let you know that I support my local CLC, the Darebin Community Legal Centre (DCLC), and to draw your attention to some difficulties it is currently facing.

DCLC has been providing free legal advice, assistance and community legal education to the Darebin community for over 20 years. Through its strong volunteer program, it also offers opportunities for community members from a wide range of backgrounds to participate in a local not-for profit organisation.

But DCLC is struggling to provide these services in premises which fall far short of the needs of its clients and volunteers. Current funding levels are inadequate to allow DCLC to relocate to suitable premises as well as continuing to meet increasing demands on its services.

I believe that you should assist DCLC so that it can provide services in a safe and accessible environment to people who need help with their legal problems.

Yours sincerely

- Join our facebook group ([Darebin Community Legal Centre needs a new home!](#)) and leave a comment showing your support, or drop into the centre and offer to help out.

Dust off your boots, grab a pencil and mark in

Saturday, 2 October 2010

it's the
inaugural

DCLC

BUSHDANCE FUNDRAISER

Stay tuned for more details on the social event of the season!

There will be bushdancing...

Continued from page 2

Contacts

Below are some people you might consider contacting to ask for help with DCLC's situation:

Darebin City Council:

8470 8888 or mailbox@darebin.vic.gov.au (address your message to the Mayor or to your local Councillors)

You can also send a message to Council by leaving a comment in the feedback section of its website:

www.darebin.vic.gov.au - go to 'Contact Us', then 'Council Enquiries and Feedback'

Martin Ferguson:

9416 8690 or Martin.Ferguson.MP@aph.gov.au

Fiona Richardson:

9481 5777 or Fiona.Richardson@parliament.vic.gov.au

Robin Scott:

9478 5611 or Robin.Scott@parliament.vic.gov.au

Welcome!

...to our newest staff member, **Kate Shanahan**, who has joined our family violence duty solicitor team at the Heidelberg Magistrates' Court from a background in criminal law. **Cordell Scaife** will also be helping out at Heidelberg on a locum basis.

We would also like to welcome a new Committee of Management member, **David Stanford**, who brings his substantial experience in consumer advocacy.

... and farewell

Owen Bradfield has resigned from Committee of Management. Owen has been a wonderful source of support for the Centre both as a Committee member and in his role as a legal volunteer. We wish him all the best for the future and hope he will be able to continue his association with the Centre in some form.

From our Volunteers...

International students *Abdul Paracha*

Students from nearly 190 different countries studied in Victoria in 2007. Students from India were the largest group, representing 25% of all international students, followed by China with 23%. The number of students from Vietnam increased by 43% and those from Sri Lanka increased by 38% in 2007.

The number of students is increasing dramatically every year in Victorian universities. These students encounter many problems related to accommodation, employment, safety and stress. Some students face waiting periods of several months before finding housing, often at a substantial distance from their place of study.

Employment is one of big issues for international students. Many small business employers are misusing them and pay inadequate wages. Some employers seem to act on the basis that overseas students are not familiar with the Australian system, so it is crucial that students have access to information about the rights of employees.

Safety is very important for students. Recent reports of attacks on Indian students on public transport are a source of much anxiety for newcomers. Students don't feel safe while travelling at night. Many are scared to go shopping at night-time, even if the shops are walking distance from their homes. Some Indian students believe, rightly or wrongly, that they won't receive a good response from police - students need more confidence in police so that they can go to them if there is a problem.

Students who are studying in private colleges are often particularly vulnerable. Many private colleges have gone bankrupt, leaving students in a difficult situation. The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (**ACPET**), an industry body for private colleges, manages the scheme which deals with these collapses - but if a college goes bust students have very little choice about alternative placements. During the process of being allocated an alternative provider, students lose valuable study time, and this can lead to difficulties with visas!

Many local councils and community centres are starting to acknowledge the need for better engagement with international students. Darebin City Council organised a committee for overseas students known as the Darebin Overseas Student Advisory (**DOSA**) Committee. This committee assists international students and has monthly meetings. However, many overseas students want a change in the private education system as they are paying large amounts of money to education providers for often substandard services. DOSA has heard from students that some colleges don't provide essential resources to students like computers, libraries, or counselling services. Some "colleges" consist of little more than two or three classrooms with a single trainer.

DCLC has seen a noticeable increase in recent times in international students seeking legal advice and assistance, particularly in

the areas of employment law, OHS, tenancy and consumer disputes.

International students are the third largest export for Australia. It is a government responsibility to provide adequate services and ensure that operators who have a stake in the international education sector (educational institutions, housing etc) are made accountable and excluded from the sector if they don't meet adequate standards. ■

Useful contacts for international students:

Tenants Union of Victoria

W: www.tuv.org.au

T: (03) 9411 1444

Jobwatch

W: www.jobwatch.org.au

T: (03) 9662 1933

International Student Care Service

W: www.studymelbourne.vic.gov.au

T: 1800 056 449

Consumer Affairs Victoria

W: www.consumer.vic.gov.au

T: 1300 55 81 81

If you are interested in joining **DOSA**, please contact Odra Santos at odra.noelsantos@darebin.vic.gov.au

Abdul Paracha is an international student on placement at DCLC.

Darebin Community Legal Centre wishes to express our sadness at the news that **Helen Brown** passed away recently. Helen was a member of our Committee of Management from May 2007 to September 2009. She was passionate about ensuring that our services reached those who most needed them and supporting the Centre's staff. Our sympathies are with her family at this difficult time.

From our Volunteers...

Human Rights work experience in Cambodia *Jim Li*

My name is Jim Li. I have been a DCLC volunteer for several years. In January this year, I worked with a local Cambodian NGO called the Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (**CHRAC**) for six weeks. It was a great experience.

CHRAC is a coalition of 21 NGO members. It was created in Phnom Penh in 1994 by a group of local human rights NGOs. I applied for the internship following a Lawyers Without Borders information session at my University, where I met a representative of CHRAC. I found out that CHRAC needed a Chinese-speaking law student to undertake a research project for them. The project involved investigating whether the Pol Pot regime persecuted the Chinese Khmers for racial reasons during the Khmer Rouge period.

Besides working on the research project, I also made some field trips. For example, I visited a different province to observe how the Victims Unit of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (**KRT**) works. The Victims Unit was established to assist victims who want to participate in the proceedings. It informs them about trials of Khmer Rouge leaders, records the victims' evidence and submits it to court. By doing so, the victims are recognised as civil parties and are allowed to claim collective and moral reparations. The field trip allowed me to realise how important this support service is to the KRT. The Victims Unit gathers people from the villages together, facilitating

grassroots involvement in human rights processes. It empowers the victims to participate. However, it does require substantial funding resources.

The Victims Unit meeting I went to was actually the first meeting a particular group of participants had had with the Unit. The majority of the participants seemed to me to be passive in their response to the trial. It was a bit perplexing and even discouraging to me at first. I couldn't understand why they weren't showing much emotion about the great wrongs they had suffered. But my supervisor later suggested that this might be because life is still very harsh for the participants now, and they need to get on with living and internalise the pain caused by crimes which happened 30 years ago. Moreover cultural factors might play a part. Often, participants need a few more meetings before they can feel comfortable to open up and become more engaged with the trial.

My time in Cambodia also brought me into contact with many interesting people – there are a lot of talented Cambodians and foreigners working in various NGOs and international organisations in Cambodia at the moment, because the Khmer Rouge Tribunal is underway. I also had a great time immersing myself in Cambodian culture with a local Cambodian homestay family. ■

Jim Li is a volunteer caseworker at DCLC.

Interested in joining our Committee of Management?

We are currently recruiting members to be part of CoM.

We invite interested members to attend the AGM and nominate.

Please contact our Administrator, Maria Georgiou on 9484 7783 or Administrator_Darebin@clc.net.au for further information and a nomination form.

Darebin Community Legal Centre is pleased to invite you to our

Annual General Meeting

Thursday, 16 September 2010

6.30 pm

Rooftop meeting room, Northcote Town Hall

189 High St, Northcote

NIBBLES AND DRINKS PROVIDED

RSVP 9484 7783 by 13 September 2010

Pay up! No more lip service to equal pay

On 10 June 2010, workers from DCLC attended the Australian Services Union's (ASU) Pay Equity Rally at Federation Square. Why did we feel this was important? Currently the wages paid to workers at the Centre are around \$15,000 per year less than their counterparts at Victoria Legal Aid or in the state and federal public services. If you include years of experience or level of responsibility, the difference is still greater.

Current levels of funding do not allow for increased salaries to workers. As highlighted in this newsletter, the Centre is currently focussed on finding suitable premises. This means that a greater part of the available funding will be allocated for this purpose.

On average, Australian women are paid 17% less than men. In the community services sector, where more than 80 percent of the workforce are women, workers are paid on average \$15,000 per year less than the average wage in Australia.

In April, a Full Bench of Fair Work Australia (FWA) sat to begin considerations of the ASU's landmark case seeking equal pay for social and community workers across Australia.

The ASU test case is trying to increase the wages of about 2,000,000 mostly female community sector workers across the country. It is the largest federal pay equity case.

The Victorian government responded to the campaign rally on 10 June by announcing that it will support the ASU Pay Equity case and that it will provide funding to back FWA's decision.

The Commonwealth has not made any funding commitments, meaning that we need to continue to campaign to ensure that government funding is brought to adequate - and fair - levels. ■



Women account for more than three in every four community sector workers.



Have we got your contact details wrong?

Please tear off and mail this slip to **Darebin Community Legal Centre Inc, 265 High Street Preston VIC 3072.** Alternatively, you can email your corrected details to Darebin_VIC@clc.net.au.

Name:
Address:
Suburb: Postcode:

- I wish to continue receiving the DCLC newsletter:
 - I prefer email. My email address is:
 - I prefer to receive a hard-copy – please mail to the above address.
- Please remove my name from your mailing list.*

* You can also contact us by email or telephone (9484 7783) if you no longer wish to receive this newsletter.