

Community Fact Sheet

Darebin Community Legal Centre (**DCLC**) urgently needs to relocate to suitable premises which are safer and more accessible. We are asking for assistance from Darebin City Council. We need you to let Council know that you support DCLC and think that it should too.

Council can help by providing Council-owned premises or by financially assisting us to move into private rental property, so that we can continue providing free legal services to the Darebin community.

Why we need to move

Our current office is far from adequate for the needs of our clients, volunteers and staff. There is no disabled access to interview rooms or other facilities (including outside toilets). The steep, narrow internal staircase presents serious safety concerns. The centre only has two interview rooms, neither of which is sufficiently private or soundproof.

The current office space is far too small. We are dependant on a volunteer base of around 90 volunteers, and on most days the centre struggles to accommodate staff, volunteers and clients. This makes it difficult to provide the privacy and confidentiality our clients need and expect. The centre's heating is very poor and there are no cooling units: inside temperatures can easily reach 36°C in the hotter months. File storage space is not adequate for the large volume of legal matters we deal with each week.

Background

DCLC has 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 Darebin Council.

This never eventuated, and since that time DCLC has invested considerable time and effort in looking for office space in our local area (Preston). 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. Preston is an ideal location for DCLC, because it is easily accessible by public transport for clients and volunteers, and close to other services. However, commercial rental costs in Preston have risen dramatically over the last few years.

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



Who we are

DCLC is a community-based organisation that provides free legal advice for people who live, work or study in Darebin. We have been providing free advice, assistance, advocacy and community legal education to the Darebin community for over 20 years.

In 2008 – 2009, DCLC provided advice to over 1,870 clients who sought our assistance with matters including family violence, victims of crime compensation, credit and debt, family law, fines, neighbourhood disputes, tenancy and consumer matters, wills and powers of attorney. DCLC also provides outreach services at the Family Violence Division of the Heidelberg Magistrates' Court, to local Indigenous communities, and to men and women who are in prison or have previously spent time in prison.

DCLC has always been proud of its vibrant volunteer program. Our volunteers come from a diverse range backgrounds and include solicitors, students, local community members and professional workers.

Why we are asking Council for assistance

Currently, Darebin Council provides assistance towards premises and facilities to a number of local organisations, including Neighbourhood Houses, the Darebin Information and Volunteer Resource Service, and Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre.

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 that 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. But we believe that Council can and should play a role in supporting our ability to continue to provide much needed services to the Darebin community.

What you can do to help

We are asking for community members who understand the importance of free, accessible, community-based legal services to let Council and local MPs know that you support us:

- Sign a campaign postcard and send it to Council (available from DCLC)
- Contact your local Councillor and State and Federal MPs
 - Darebin City Council - (03) 8470 8888 or mailbox@darebin.vic.gov.au
 - Martin Ferguson - (03) 9416 8690 or Martin.Ferguson.MP@aph.gov.au
 - Fiona Richardson - (03) 9481 5777 or Fiona.Richardson@parliament.vic.gov.au
 - Robin Scott - (03) 9478 5611 or Robin.Scott@parliament.vic.gov.au
- Leave a comment in the feedback section of Darebin Council's website www.darebin.vic.gov.au - go to 'Contact Us', then 'Council Enquiries and Feedback'
- Come into the centre and offer to help out with the campaign!

DCLC needs a new home