



Courier Mail
Friday 18/03/2016

Page: 12
Section: General News
Region: Brisbane, AU
Circulation: 155282
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 88.00 sq.cms.



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Tough times for legal helpline

A KEY free legal helpline for women is in danger of closing unless it raises \$200,000 by June.

A one-off state government grant last year helped Women's Legal Service Queensland update its phone system and doubled the number of staff to answer calls.

But the improvements have resulted in a 700 per cent increase in the number of calls, mainly from women fleeing domestic violence situations,

in 2½ months compared to all of 2015.

Fundraising manager Natalie Davidson said analysis last year had shown only 5 per cent of calls to the service were answered before the upgrade.

More than 1600 women had been helped this year alone, she said.

"This might be the first time that a woman reaches out, it might be the only time she reaches out," Ms Davidson said. "We try to take the posi-

tive view that women are reaching out for help."

Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services chief executive James Farrell said community legal centres nationwide were facing the same issues, with federal funding dropping by 30 per cent.

"In Queensland, community legal centres helped 50,000 people last year, but 80,000 were turned away," he writes in an opinion piece today.

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