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FUNDING SLASHED Residents relying on essential services lose government support

Legal limbo, nowhere to go

Sherelle Moody

ARM Newsdesk

CUTS to funding mean hundreds of Gladstone region residents will be in legal limbo from July 1, 2017.

This is because the current Federal Government cut community legal centre funding by 30% in the 2014 budget.

Unlike the nation's capital cities, there is just one free legal service for our residents to turn to when they are facing problems relating to domestic violence, divorce and separation, child protection, employment, credit, debt and consumer contract issues, disability discrimination, tenancy and neighbourhood disputes and even minor legal issues including driving offences.

Gladstone residents who do not qualify for legal aid and who do not have enough cash to hire private solicitors will often seek help at Central Queensland Community Legal Centre.

CQCLC helped 1153 clients last year. It provided 610 pieces of information and 1228 pieces of advice and opened 144 cases.

While it is still unclear how much the centre will lose, it was announced in the 2014 Federal Budget that \$12.1 million would be cut nationwide in 2017-18, \$11.6 million would go in 2018-19 and a further \$11.1 million would be cut in 2019-20.

CQCLC committee vice-president Wayne Jones said hundreds of central Queensland residents facing family abuse and employment worries would suffer as the centre prepared to lose its outreach services to Gladstone, Yeppoon and Emerald and its weekly domestic violence support at Rockhampton Magistrates Court.

Mr Jones said the centre's two full-time solicitor positions would be cut to one full-time and one

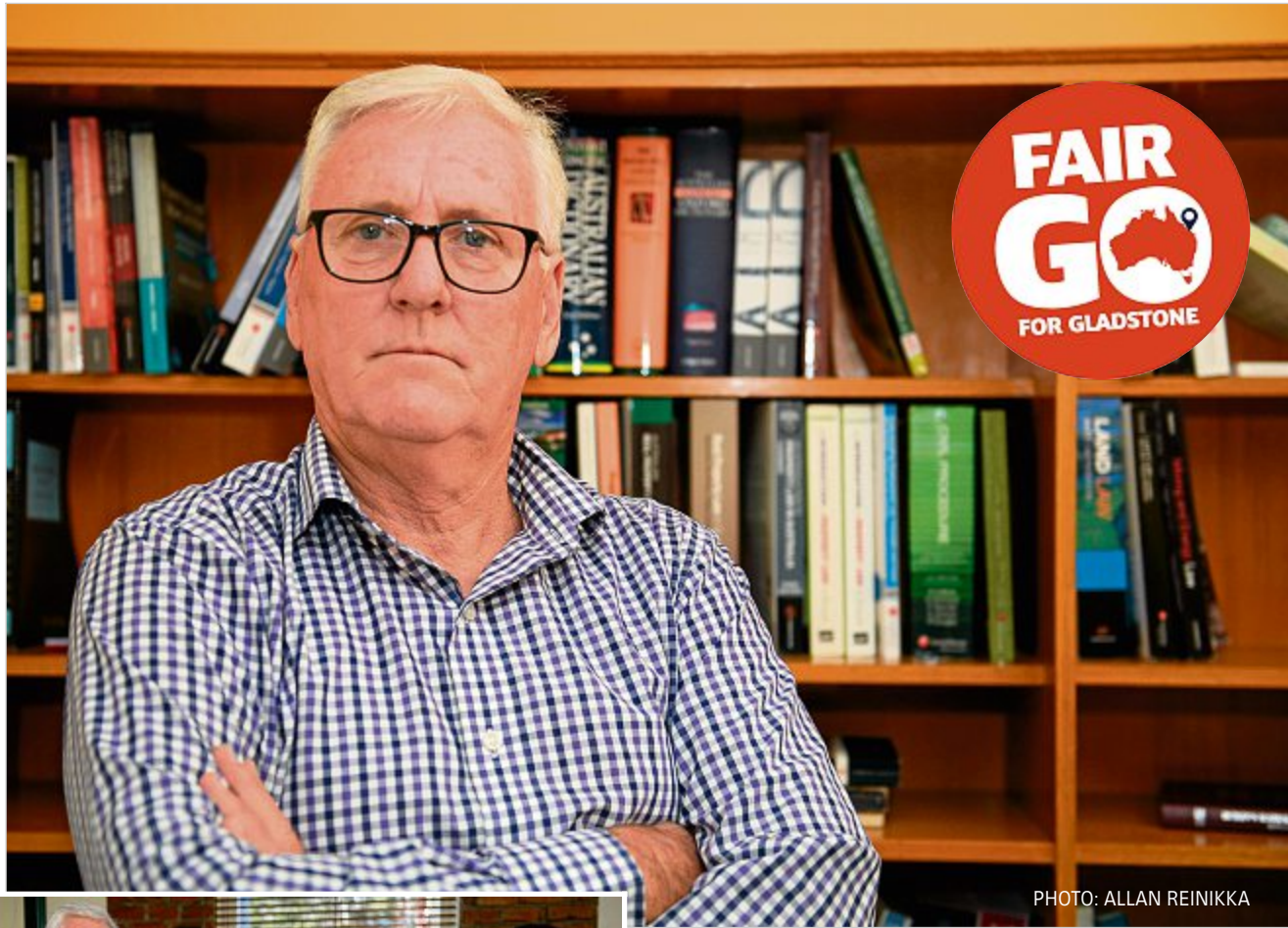


PHOTO: ALLAN REINIKKA



DON'T UNDERESTIMATE US: CQCLC committee vice president Wayne Jones fears the region's only community legal service will have to cut its services for Gladstone residents if federal government funding cuts go ahead and (inset) Mr Jones speaks to student Joshua Morgan about those fears.

BY THE NUMBERS

Central Queensland Community Legal Centre last financial year:

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- # Provided 610 pieces of information.
- # Provided 1228 pieces of advice
- # Opened 144 cases.

Source: Central Queensland Community Legal Centre

underestimate the value they get for a modest amount of money," Mr Jones said.

There are 198 community legal centres in Australia.

About 77% of Queensland's community legal-centre services were provided to regional, rural and remote areas of the state in 2015.

Their support included 100,000 pieces of legal advice to more than 50,000 clients.

National Association of Community Legal Centres' Amanda Alford said CLCs were often the only source of legal support for regional and rural residents so it was vital the funding cuts were reversed.

"The impact of the cuts on centres in regional areas is likely to be greater because often there's no alternative, there is nowhere else for people to go," Ms Alford said.

DV cash will not fix cuts

WHILE the federal coalition has pledged \$30 million in three years for family-violence law services, the opposition and lawyers say community legal centres are still out in the cold as they try to work out how to absorb a \$34.83 million cut in funding.

Shadow attorney-general Mark Dreyfus said if Labor won the July 2 election regional CLCs would be in line for a \$43 million boost.

"Community legal centres will fall off a cliff unless the government reverses its earlier cuts in full," Mr Dreyfus said.

"Many CLCs are struggling to keep their doors open."

Attorney-general George Brandis and Minister for Women Michaelia Cash said a portion of the \$30 million would go to CLC domestic-violence services:

"The ... funding is part of the \$100 million in new funding over three years announced in the 2016 budget..."

But National Association of Community Legal Centres' Daniel Stubbs said this did not cancel out CLC funding cuts.

"It is difficult to understand why the government would provide CLCs with some share of \$10 million per year as part of this funding, but during the same period cut CLCs by 30% nationally," Mr Stubbs said.

part-time. The service also provides important experience for CQUniversity law students who make up a large portion of the centre's voluntary workforce.

"We provide minor assistance for young people, people with English as a second language, people who are not going to have a high level of education," the CQU special adviser and employment law expert said.

"We help them complete forms, we help them with court documentation and we

help them to understand legal contracts.

"That takes more time than just advice over the telephone.

"That's something that would go because we just wouldn't have the time to provide that service."

Mr Jones urged Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, whose government announced the cuts, and opposition leader Bill Shorten to make sure our region got a fair go.

"They need to not

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MEET VICTORIA BRADSHAW

Media Advertising Manager

Victoria joined The Observer in February 2014 and has many years of media experience, having worked during her career for a fashion magazine, The Age Newspaper and News Limited.

As the Media Advertising Manager, Victoria oversees a team of 11 advertising and sales support staff while working with key stakeholders in the region to drive local initiatives and promote local businesses.

Having lived in the region for many years, Victoria is very passionate about Gladstone and Central Queensland and loves living the regional lifestyle and representing our local newspaper.



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