



Police at the Helensvale McDonalds after a double shooting. Picture Mike Batterham

Crime and Court

Gold Coast volunteer legal service forced to turn away hundreds due to lack of funds

Paul Weston, Gold Coast Bulletin
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A VOLUNTEER Gold Coast legal service says it is turning away almost 300 domestic violence victims each year because it cannot handle the demand.

The Robina Community Legal Service won the Pro Bono Program of the Year at the 16th annual Australian Law Awards in recognition of its outstanding work during the city's DV crisis.

Despite a raft of government reforms being introduced to help reporting to police, on the eve of 12-month anniversaries of the tragic deaths of Tara Brown and Karina Lock, the Coast continues to fall short in support services.

RCLS president Ross Lee in his award speech at a black-tie gala dinner in Sydney outlined the dire funding for volunteer legal services on the Glitter Strip.

“Reporting of domestic violence has doubled in our city and despite the recent Productivity Commission findings on how under-resourced CLC’s are, Robina CLC is not yet funded by the State or Federal governments,” Mr Lee said.

Remembering Tara Brown



Remembering Tara Brown as the young, beautiful Gold Coast woman who doted on her gorgeous daughter. #RIPTara Photo: Instagram

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“Our volunteer practitioners and law students are awesome. They’re just regular lawyers wanting to give a bit back to help battlers.

“We run nine advice desks on Thursday evenings and will change over 1200 lives this year.

“We’d like to do more.”

Police data obtained by the *Gold Coast Bulletin* shows that in some Coast police districts the number of breaches of domestic violence orders had increased five times in the past 15 years.

The worst for DV breaches in 2015 were Southport (350), followed by Coomera (310), Nerang (170), Surfers Paradise (15)) and Broadbeach (130).

Surfers Paradise has had a fivefold increase since 2000, followed by Coomera where there were four times as many breaches.

All districts have experienced a substantial growth in reporting of offences.

In the Robina group’s submission for the award, Mr Lee said a city the size of the Coast would expect to maintain two CLCs which, through government and corporate funding, could each budget \$700,000 a year.

This would allow each CLC to cater for 5000 clients at \$140 per advice.

The CLC at Southport receives government funding but Robina operated off a budget of \$15,887 last year, with its volunteer lawyers providing 857 advices.

“This equates to \$18 per advice, and we are projected to provide 1400 advices this year in 2016,” Mr Lee said.

The work by the volunteers was estimated to cost \$69,900 a week, or \$3.2 million a year, he said.

The Robina CLC obtained \$2362 from a “humble sausage sizzle” at Bunnings in Burleigh Waters where area MP Michael Hart outlayed \$453 for sausages and onions.





📷 A lone bunch of flowers lay in tribute to Tara Brown. More still needs to be done to help the Gold Coast's domestic violence victims. Picture Mike Batterham

Mr Lee told the Bulletin the volunteer service which began in 2014 recently dealt with a record 42 clients on a Thursday night at offices set up at the Robina library.

“We have to turn away about 20 per cent of clients. What we are going to try to do is get little outreach centres in the southern Gold Coast,” Mr Lee said.

“We would like to do that at Burleigh and Coolangatta. We’ve got about 60 to 70 volunteer lawyers on the books,” Mr Lee said.

High profile lawyers helping include former councillor Lex Bell and Queensland Law Society president Bill Potts but experienced solicitors need back-up from students studying at Bond and Griffith universities.

With the 12 month anniversary of Tara’s Brown death today, family and friends are organising a touch football tournament this weekend to raise funds for DV help. Go to the Facebook page A Touch of Love for Tara Brown and Domestic Violence for details.

