

NUNDAH

Wait-and-see on funding



Co-ordinator Sharon Gingell and principal solicitor Eugene White at Nundah Community Legal Service.

Picture: PETER CRONIN

Lara Lauth

CASH CUTS FOR COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES

A COMMUNITY service in Nundah which provides free legal advice for some of the northside's most vulnerable people is in jeopardy after the Federal Government cut funding to community legal centres by 30 per cent.

Nundah Neighbourhood Centre and Community Legal Service co-ordinator Sharon Gingell said she was not sure what would happen to the centre once funding via a national partnership agreement between state and federal governments came to an end on June 30.

"A cut at federal level has an impact on state funding

obviously, because they don't have the capacity to make up the shortfall," Ms Gingell said.

"We've just submitted our tender for three years of recurrent funding starting from the 1st of July, 2017."

Decisions are expected by March, 2017.

She said she was concerned for clients, whose problems could often be de-escalated with an hour's free advice or referral to a specialist.

Nearly 40 per cent of the Nundah service's clients seek advice on family legal

matters, and many seek help with employment issues.

One former client said an hour's advice on her parental rights enabled her to forge a private custody agreement with her child's father, avoiding costly and traumatic legal proceedings.

Another man came to the office in tears after his wife gave birth prematurely, and his employer refused to let him start planned leave earlier than expected. Advice helped him resolve the matter rapidly.

Federal Labor MP for Lilley Wayne Swan said the

"disgraceful" federal funding cuts should be reversed.

A spokesman for the Attorney-General said the Federal Government was providing funding to front-line legal assistance services, including more than \$1.6 billion for legal aid, community legal centres and indigenous legal assistance from 2015 to 2020.

Queensland would contribute a total of \$32.3 million from 2017-20 to legal assistance services a Department of Justice and Attorney-General spokesman said.

THE FACTS

- Nundah Community Legal Service already turns away 50-60 people seeking help each week, unable to meet demand
- Principal solicitor Eugene White says every federal dollar spent saves the community about \$18 in everything from prison to court costs
- 88 per cent of funding goes to direct service delivery
- 40 per cent of the Nundah Community Legal Service's clients seek help with family legal matters