

press clip



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CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

Funding cut adds to load

DENIS DOHERTY

DENIS.DOHERTY@NEWS.COM.AU

THE Gold Coast's already creaking justice system is facing a tsunami of unprepared defendants as a result of funding cuts to community legal centres. The Gold Coast Community Legal Centre (GCCLC), the Coast's primary community legal group, is facing a 30 per cent cut to its funds in June while the Robina Community Legal Centre (RCLC) is still relying on volunteers and funding from sponsors and council.

With the centre's primary focus being on early intervention and the de-escalation of legal matters to avoid court proceeding, organisers behind the centres warn they will be forced to turn away even more clients — a move that could lead to a raft of underprepared defendants forced to appear in

more legal matters before the Coast's courts.

Both GCCLC head solicitor Victoria Shiel and RCLC founder Ross Lee said the centre's had seen increased demand for their services in 2017.

Ms Shiel said her group had started receiving phone calls from Gold Coasters desperate

for legal representation on Boxing Day, while Mr Lee said despite extra volunteers joining the group it still had to turn away a dozen people at its first session of the year.

Ms Shiel said the centre put on extra staff to help work through the number of people who contacted the centre over the Christmas break but that a move to a new venue, 34 Railway Street, Southport, would save the organisation some funds.

"We had a spike in people seeking our services on family law and debt-related matters

and on domestic violence," she said. "We are finding that people are presenting more in crisis than in previous years so their matters are more urgent."

Mr Lee said the impact would also extend further than just the Gold Coast's magistrates and district courts.

"It will be the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal and those areas dealing with debt, employment and tenancy," he said.

The head of Queensland Community Legal Centres James Farrell said any drop in services offered by the centres would lead to people turning up at courts unprepared and in greater numbers.