

Funding cuts threaten future of South-West Brisbane free legal services

Communities in South West Brisbane will have nowhere to access urgent legal support if pending funding cuts go ahead.

South West Brisbane Community Legal Service has been providing free legal advice and information to the local disadvantaged in the community for more than 30 years.

Community Legal Centres across the country are facing a 30 per cent drop in funding as of July this year. The Queensland Government has publicly stated that it needs to 'find savings' of about \$1.9m and that these cuts will be made in funding community legal centres.

South West Brisbane Community Legal Centre Acting Director Jonathan Ward said the loss of the local legal advice outreach service would have a major impact on the most vulnerable in the community.

There is currently funding for one lawyer to service the areas of Beaudesert, Browns Plains, Acacia Ridge and Riverview until June 2017.

He said there was high demand with an average 35 appointments booked weekly to provide advice on family law, domestic violence and child protection problems.

"Our Outreach Lawyer has been successful in helping many mothers obtain domestic violence orders which have provided protection for vulnerable families," said Mr Ward.

"These orders have been vital to the safety of women and children who require protection from domestic and family violence, often while waiting for the Family Law Court to make a decision about their parenting orders."

Local mother, Lizzie Smith*, said the South West Community Legal Centre had given her advice on how to regain access to the family home after her ex-husband locked her out.

"I have three children, one of whom is disabled and I found myself locked out of my house by my ex-husband," she said.

"This means that I couldn't get a change of clothes for the children, access toys or anything else I needed for their care.

"The children and I had to go and live with my mother and I had to use my limited savings to pay for replacement items.

"The South West Community Legal Centre gave me advice about the custody of the children and helped me put an order in place so that I could get back into my house. If I didn't have their help I don't know where I would be today."

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The National Association of Community Legal Centres is still hoping to convince the Federal Government to wind back the planned funding cuts.

According to Community Legal Centres Queensland Director James Farrell only half the people who contact a community legal centre will have access to the help they need.

“The remaining 50 per cent are turned away because we just don’t have the resources we need to provide help for everyone who qualifies,” he said.

‘In July this year the Commonwealth Government will cut almost 30 per cent of funding to community legal centres across Australia.

“Our organisation is calling on Malcolm Turnbull and George Brandis to reverse this decision to ensure people in the Pine Rivers area get the legal help they need and the justice they deserve.”

Ends

NOTES:

1. Community Legal Centres Queensland Inc (formerly QAILS) is the state-wide peak body representing community legal centres in Queensland. Queensland community legal centres have 40 years of service delivery experience providing free information, advice and referral, casework and representation to the community. www.communitylegalqld.org.au
2. *Lizzie Smith (name changed) is available for print and radio interviews only

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