

Centres face crisis

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THE Gold Coast's two community legal centres are at risk of being hamstrung by financial Catch-22s.

Both the Robina Community Legal Centre and Gold Coast Community Legal Centre are battling funding crisis, with the Robina centre forced to reach out for corporate sponsorships to help keep the wolf from the centre's pro bono door.

At the same time the Gold Coast Community Legal Centre is battling to find funding for its services before a planned federal government funding cut bites in mid-2017.

Robina's head solicitor Ross Lee said the group has been forced to turn to corporate support to keep the operation going. The group has attracted sponsorship packages from the likes of the Gold Coast City Council through area councillor Hermann Vorster, both Bond and Griffith universities, and private companies including Grace Removals.

Mr Lee said it felt "very weird" to go hunting for sponsorships. However, he said the higher level of compliance hoisted on community legal centres compared to private practices meant the centre was forced to trawl for funds.

"Desperate times call for desperate measures but it's not completely comfortable," he said. "The problem for us is that if we don't have a certain level of administration than mistakes get made and things slip between cracks and then it's our clients who get caught out. Really, professionals get sued more often than not because things

slip between the cracks."

He said despite this pressure the centre had just passed its fifth audit.

However, he said while it was rare for a CLC to be sued, a successful action would be devastating.

"It would be the end of us."

Victoria Shiel, of the Gold Coast Community Legal Centre, said her centre was struggling to walk the fine line between uncovering alternate funding sources and providing

the services that funding should allow.

"We're at capacity at the moment particularly our solicitors working on family law, domestic and family violence and child protection matters," she said.

"Because we're at capacity it's impacting on our workers."

She said the centre's solicitors felt obliged to see as many clients as possible.

"It's a huge thing for someone to come and see us only to be told you can't see them because you're so busy."

"We had three clients last week in one morning who were living in their cars so you feel you have to help them."

"We're forced to spend more and more time searching for funding to deliver our services which takes away from the time we can spend on delivering those services."



Ross Lee.



Victoria Shiel.