

\$2m cuts endanger Gympie's community legal aid



scott kovacevic | 2nd Mar 2017 7:00 AM



LEGAL HELP: Taylor St Community Legal Service has been providing legal help from the Gympie Community Place.

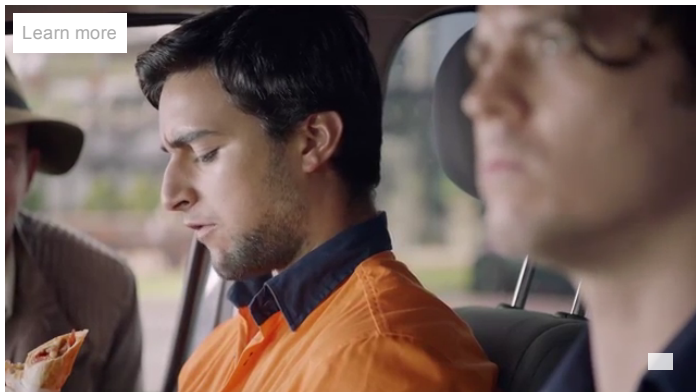
Renee Albrecht

LEGAL aid for Gympie's most vulnerable could be axed as a result of \$2 million of cuts by the Federal government.

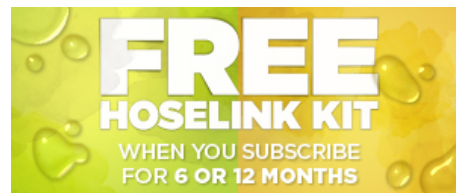
The decision has left community service members and the State government calling for reversal of the cuts, which they said would be devastating to regional services like Taylor St Community Legal Service.

"Community legal centres will have to close outreach offices and Taylor St provides services across four Local Government areas, and a number of those services will be at risk," Community Legal Centres director James Farrell said.

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Fifty-three solicitors and 22 receptionists regularly volunteer their time to help deliver legal aid across Gympie, the Fraser Coast, North Burnett and Bundaberg, which provided more than 1400 pieces of legal advice and opened 43 new cases from 2015-2016.

Taylor St principal solicitor Melissa Seymour Dearness said the cuts would be a huge blow.

"If the Federal Government proceeds with the funding cuts, our centre will have to reduce staffing levels and services which will likely result in closure of some of our outreach venues," Ms Dearness said.

"We would have to end the free legal advice we provide to about 1500 people per year and those needing urgent legal advice will be heavily impacted.

"The most distressing part is that our centre often prevents people's legal problems from escalating.

"The Federal Government will save money but if my clients don't resolve their legal problems, there will be flow-on effects, including stress and health problems for the person and significant costs to the broader community."

The GympieTimes

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