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Page 1 of 1

 back

# Students learn in the firing line

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SUNCOAST Community Legal Service is providing a hands-on initiation to the law for students attending the University of the Sunshine Coast's law faculty while also helping to do the grunt work essential to the process.

Two clinic students sat through all appointments with the client and helped assess more than 60 documents including those from doctors, child safety and psychologists, effectively filling the role a law clerk would in a legal office.

"They really got their teeth into it," Lecturer in Law Kirsty Mackie said.

The university student team is based at the community legal service as part of a partnership between the two bodies for three days a week, boosting funding that comes from the State Department of Justice and Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.

One case the students worked on last year involved grandparents seeking custody of their



**EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS:**  
**Kirsty Mackie.**

PHOTO: SOPHIE MEIXNER

grandchildren, whom the Department of Child Safety had removed from their parents.

The children who were all young had suffered serious and significant domestic violence at the hands of the parents, including physical abuse and neglect.

Underscoring the value of the legal centre's community engagement, the children's grandmother had attended a community talk on elder abuse and grandparent matters in 2015, conducted by Ms Mackie, and had retained the contact details.

The case provided a comprehensive introduction to the law for the USC students who played an integral role in preparing

their client's case, including taking the instructions of the children's grandmother, and assisting in collating the extremely large volume of medical evidence and correspondence from Child Safety to start proceedings in the Federal Circuit Court.

"It took three months to prepare the relevant documents for filing and the affidavit was over 60 pages long, with a volume of annexures comprising 40 documents," the spokesperson said. "Ultimately the children's grandmother was successful in obtaining custody for all children."

The community service provides legal advice clinics and some casework and also conducts free community legal-education sessions, on a variety of topical legal issues, at local government libraries and for community groups.

"Without formal parenting orders, the grandparents are sometimes raising two or three children on the age pension, as they can't access government family assistance or subsidised health care," Ms Mackie said.