



## NEWS

# Violence victims, kids to lose as lawyers' funding slashed



Nicky Moffat | 5th Apr 2017 5:00 AM



UNFAIR: Suncoast Community Legal Service says reduced funding will mean the Coast's most disadvantaged miss out.

Contributed

VOLUNTEER lawyers representing the Sunshine Coast's most needy are reeling from news their funds have been cut by nearly 40%, meaning they'll have to return to answering phone calls rather than appearing in court.

Last week details of community legal service funding by state and federal governments were announced, and include a \$2 million cut from Queensland services by the Turnbull Government.

Suncoast Community Legal Service's core funding will continue, but an additional budget it had received over the past 18 months to help domestic violence, family violence and child safety will not continue.

The service had understood the funding had been a one-off, said principal Julian Porter, but it was still a bitter pill for its 100-plus volunteers to swallow.

"When we were receiving that extra money, it was the first time in our 33-years history that we felt we were getting the job done in more than a fill-the-gaps kind of way," he said.

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"We're dropping from around \$600,000 to around \$400,000 and honestly...I don't think (it's) enough to fund a community legal service for the whole of the Sunshine Coast.

"If you work it out, it's about \$1.20 a person."

Victims of domestic and family violence, others involved in family court cases and the Coast's children will be worst hit as the service winds back its case work.

Since expanding its services to help more vulnerable Coast people, word had spread that free legal representation was available in some cases.

"We've existed for 33 years and we've never been busier than we are now," the service's Carolyn Beaton said.

This includes more than 17 sets of grandparents seeking custody of their grandkids because their own children's drug addiction, she said.



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RISE Queensland spokeswoman Jodie Woodrow represented herself in family law courts over 10 years and failed to gain access to two of her children.

She can't afford a lawyer and said lack of free legal representation left families and children vulnerable.

"It's a daunting process for anyone who is educated, let alone uneducated," she said.

"It leaves mothers, fathers, children wide open to being vulnerable to matters being represented inadequately. It has devastating results for children."



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