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# Damage done despite reversal on funding

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THE Federal Government may have reversed its controversial cuts to the nation's community legal centres but many in the field feel the damage has already been done.

While the government has committed to restoring the one-third funding cut that was hanging over the heads of CLCs around the country at the end of June, state and local CLC heads say that staff confidence had copped a hammering over the uncertainty with some lawyers seeking other positions.

Queensland Community Legal Centres head James Farrell said the uncertainty over funding was having a dramatic impact across the sector.

"Staff were leaving because they needed certainty and their roles couldn't be filled at the time because the funding was uncertain," he said.

"Across the state fewer services could be delivered and fewer people could access services. We haven't come back from that yet.

"The federal government has an-

nounced funding would be reinstated but we've seen no details so we don't know what the future holds."

The funding crisis also contributed to a decision to temporarily shut the Robina Community Legal Centre, with founder and centre president Ross Lee also standing down from the principal solicitor's role.

The centre has now reopened and has appointed a new principal solicitor, experienced family and domestic violence lawyer Justine Cirocco

However, Mr Lee said the funding crisis and the inability to gain access to government grants had impacted the centre.

"It's not helpful and I suppose that our entire economy is built on confidence," he said. "We just want to do the job of a professional community service and I hope we've got the chance to keep on doing that."

He said the centre's temporary shutdown had elicited a response from people who expressed an interest in volunteering and would make further attempts to gain funding to pay for a paid principal solicitor and a paid co-ordinator.

Mr Lee said he hoped the centre would be able to acquire government funding to at least pay Ms Cirocco.

"I hope it won't up that she will become burnt-out and will be able to get a fair days pay for a fair days work

Mr Lee said he would remain on as the centre's president

"We're a resilient mob and I suppose this new chapter in the centre's history speaks volumes of the depth of professionals' feelings about giving back to the community. But when you do volunteer work sometimes it's just not valued properly."