

Fears council to fill funding gap

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IT could be like trying to plug holes in a leaky dam.

With the Gold Coast's only government-funded community legal centre facing a funding cut that could see the centre lose 30 per cent of its current funding, fears have been raised Gold Coast City Council may be forced to plug the funding gap.

The funding cut comes as the Gold Coast Community Legal Centre revealed domestic violence cases coming through the centre had gone through a 14-fold increase in the past four years, and from 60 to 890 in the past year.

It also follows the move of the centre from a Southport commercial premises to a council-owned former childcare centre at the rear of Club Southport in Railway St, Southport. It's understood council gave the centre a peppercorn rate for the building.

Southport councillor Dawn Crichlow said she feared council would be forced to accept more and more funding responsibility for the centres.

"Victoria Shiel (centre di-



Dawn Crichlow.



Hermann Vorster.

rector and principal solicitor) does a fantastic job in the domestic violence sphere and they've got up and coming graduates from Bond and Griffith universities who come in and get valuable experience by volunteering at the centre. But we end up picking up the slack when the funding stops. I've seen this time and time again."

She said the move to allow the centre to cheaply rent the unused childcare centre would benefit the community.

"But why does it always come to the shoulders of ratepayers to help fund these services when they should be funded by the federal and state governments?" she said.

"I fear we could see more and more funding responsi-

bilities dropped on council."

Robina councillor Hermann Vorster, who donates \$10,000 a year to the Robina Community Legal Centre from his divisional funds, said the federal government was not shifting funding responsibilities.

"We haven't been asked to provide funding, we've simply stepped up and plugged a gap," he said. "I'd prefer there wasn't a cost to the ratepayer but there is a clear need for these services."

Ms Shiel confirmed the centre, which was looking to fill a \$200,000 hole in its funding, may be forced to cease providing some of its outreach programs. The group runs 13 outreach programs across the Gold Coast.