

Volunteers step up to help everyday Queenslanders with legal problems

Community Legal Centres throughout Queensland continue to ask lawyers, social workers, migration agents students and community members to work for free, as reported in the National Association of Community Legal Centres census which were published on Monday.

The report showed that 88 per cent of the 33 centres in Queensland asked people to work for free. This resulted in 1,565 people working 4,111 hours **every week** during the 2015/16 financial year. The volunteers included lawyers, migration agents, counsellors, bookkeepers and administrators. 96 per cent of the un-paid staff delivered front line legal services and the remainder provided support services.

The census results showed in the last financial year Queensland's community legal centres turned away over 55,000 people and the top three reasons why they couldn't help was because they didn't possess the relevant expertise in-house (67%); the centre had insufficient staff resources at the time (76%) or they were unable to assist in the timeframe the client needed (71%).

James Farrell, Director of Community Legal Centres commented, 'Queensland Community Legal Centres still turn away close to 55,000 people per year because they don't have the paid staff available to help them. People working for free helps us to meet this unmet need. We have made increased efforts to attract volunteers and this year more people donated their time to an extraordinary level.'

'There is a critical need for long-term, sustainable and predictable funding for the legal assistance sector so the centres can pay people to undertake this work. Ideally we would like the government to deliver on the Productivity Commission recommendation of an additional \$200 million. When people are unable to access legal help, they end up costing taxpayers more as they tried to navigate the legal system alone or have problems that escalate, eventually needing more help from other government services," said Mr Farrell.

The census also showed that the total number of hours employed staff spent supervising, supporting and training volunteers came to 3,456 hours per year.

Mr Farrell commented, 'Community Legal Centre staff put enormous amounts of time training volunteers and overseeing their work. One of the benefits of doing this is that volunteers can potential become paid staff in the future. They are already equipped in specialist skills such as social security law and specialist migration law and how a community legal centre operates.'

Ends

NOTES:

1. **Community Legal Centres Queensland Inc** (formerly QAILS) is the state-wide peak body representing community legal centres in Queensland. Queensland community legal centres have 40 years of service delivery experience providing free information, advice and referral, casework and representation to the community. www.communitylegalqld.org.au
2. The full census report is available on NACLC's website [here](#).

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