

Domestic violence services provided by Queensland community legal centres

In the past five years, Queensland's community legal centres have seen an increase in the number of people asking for our help. From 2011 to 2015 Queensland community legal centres' family violence services included:

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Information	1,593	1,823	1,897	2,448	3,482
Advice	4,771	4,961	5,722	5,670	7,863
Casework	626	808	1,099	1,181	2,222

219%

more pieces of legal information

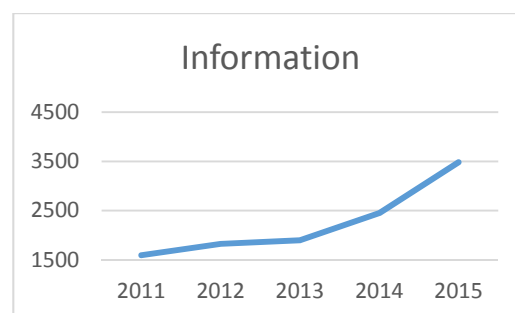
165%

more legal advice

355%

more ongoing support, representation and casework

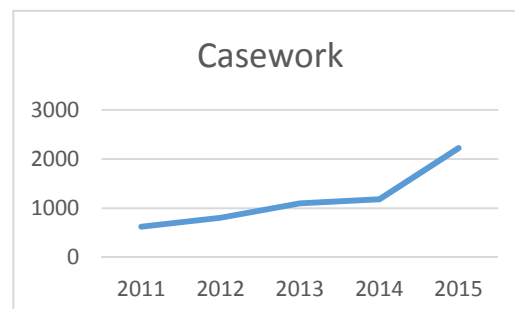
Information – Typically over the phone, lasting approximately fifteen minutes with a trained telephone advice person telling a person what they can do. Generally the person calling does not give specific details of their own particular problem, or the specific details of the problem are irrelevant to the information given.



Advice – This is where a lawyer speaks to a client for up to one hour. The lawyer helps the client select between options after hearing the details of her problem. The lawyer may even draft letters which the client then sends, or make phone calls on the client's behalf. The client may get counselling, advocacy and support as well as legal advice. Generally after the appointment, there is no further contact with the lawyer.



Casework – This is when a lawyer provides ongoing assistance to the woman which might include going to court to represent her or providing ongoing support. In domestic violence matters, this can include providing assistance to apply for a domestic violence prevention order at a Magistrates Court, or to respond to an application by a current or previous partner.



Enough is enough

Family violence services in Queensland community legal centres

More and more Queensland women experiencing domestic violence are finding their voice and saying 'enough is enough'. One of the first steps they take to address this problem is to call their closest community legal centre to find out about their legal rights.

But Queensland's community legal centres are unable to meet the demand for our services.

In 2013-14, community legal centres **helped 50,000 vulnerable Queenslanders**, but had to turn away over 80,000. That means we can only help **two out of every five people** who ask for our assistance, because we just don't have the resources we need to provide help for everyone who qualifies.

In 2017, the Commonwealth Government will cut almost 30% of funding to community legal centres across Australia. While it spends over \$700m on its own lawyers, it can't find \$12m to continue providing legal help to Australians facing legal crisis. We're asking the Federal Government to:



- Reinstate funding that will be lost in the 2017 'funding cliff'
- Increase funding for legal services, as recommended by the Productivity Commission
- Work with legal services to identify people's legal problems, and develop a strategy to solve them.

QAILS is actively working with its members and partners for sustainable, adequate policy and funding decisions to ensure that Queenslanders are able to get the legal help they need and ensure that access to justice is realised.



Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services Inc



The women behind the statistics

I had been married for 20 years when I was finally able to break free from the abuse I had been living with for so long.

I have 3 children who all live with me and I was desperate to be free from my husband and start a new life with my children. I contacted Women's Legal Service. They have been absolutely amazing. I initially contacted them for help with my application for a divorce. After my first few appointments, my ex began making more violent threats against my children and me. We were all terrified. He told my children that he was going to come to a school event and kidnap them. The school was supportive, but without a court order stopping him they could only let me know if he came to collect them. He then told one of my children that he was going to kidnap and kill him. My child was petrified; he said that he wanted to take his own life to escape the fear. I could barely sleep or concentrate. I was consumed with worry for my family.

We reported this threat to the police, who recommended that we take out a protection order against my ex. The thought of doing this was overwhelming. I didn't know where to begin.

I tried unsuccessfully to get Legal Aid. When I went for an appointment at Women's Legal Service, I told them what had happened. They were just so amazing; they offered to help me prepare the application for a protection order.

To admit to yourself that you have been living in such a horrid environment is really difficult but it's even harder to admit to another person the reality of your life. Women's Legal Service handled what was an incredibly emotional and difficult time with such amazing support, care, empathy and absolutely no judgement.

I now have a protection order in place. My children and I have a sense of security we haven't known in a long time. It was so important for my children to see that their father's violence will not be tolerated.

Source: Women's Legal Service 2012 Annual Report

Gold Coast Legal Service acted for a woman recently arrived from India in an application to have her divorce set aside on the grounds of fraud. She was subject to domestic violence, including threats to kill her and scared and unsure of what to do. She came to us after the State and Federal Police and two private lawyers were unable to help.

We provided casework assistance and prepared her case to have the divorce set aside on the basis of fraud and assisted her with an application for a protection order. She was highly appreciative and happy with the work done on her behalf and said: "When I saw the solicitor at the Centre, Victoria, I was struggling badly in my heart, I was scared and cried all that first appointment. Victoria helped me and listened and was kind and she has given me back my hopes when no one else would."

Source: Gold Coast Legal Service 2015 Annual Report



Our 'average' client

- Female, aged 35-49
- Receives less than \$500 per week (many have dependent children)
- Doesn't live in traditional stable housing/home
- One in six tell us they have a disability

What is a Community Legal Centre?

Community legal centres are not for profit, community-based organisations that provide free legal advice, casework and information and a range of community development services to their local or special interest communities. Some community legal centres also advocate for law reform or conduct test cases where laws are operating unfairly or are unclear. There are 34 independent community legal centres in Queensland and over 200 throughout Australia.

Community legal centres' work is targeted at people experiencing or vulnerable to disadvantage and those with special needs, and in undertaking matters in the public interest. Community legal centres have been advocating for a rights-based approach and equitable access to the justice system in Australia for over 40 years.

Who is QAILS?

The Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services (**QAILS**) is the state based peak body representing funded and unfunded community legal centres operating throughout Queensland. QAILS supports and develops community legal centres to provide effective, high quality services to their communities, and leads to unite its members and be a voice for social justice. For more information, visit www.qails.org.au.

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