



LOCAL

Freemasons join fight against domestic violence

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DOMESTIC violence victims will soon be able to access more than 2000 free legal appointments each year, after Women's Legal Service Queensland (WLSQ) received \$340,000 from the state's Masonic charity.

Most of the funds were allocated to extend WLSQ's Annerley premises.

The extensions, being funded by Hand Heart Pocket the Charity of Freemasons Queensland, will incorporate six confidential, airconditioned, fully fitted out offices to ensure they can meet the increased demand for legal assistance across Queensland.

WLSQ CEO Angela Lynch said this was the biggest gift the service had received in its 34-year history and would ensure those most vulnerable would have access to essential support.

"We are so excited by what this will help us achieve. The building extension was long overdue and the project could only be funded by generous donations such as this," Ms Lynch said.

"Having more offices will give us the additional infrastructure to deliver 2,000 free appointments per year, which means we can assist vulnerable women when they need it most, for many more years to come."

The 100-year-old premises are home to the statewide Domestic Violence Legal Helpline, the Rural, Regional and Remote Helpline, and the Sexual Assault Legal Service. They also include offices for legal and emergency relief appointments and twice weekly drop-in clinics.

"This grant will also allow us to stay in a central location and remain accessible to our clients and volunteers, so we are immensely grateful for Hand Heart Pocket's generosity," Ms Lynch said.

The limitations of the existing building often make it difficult for staff to find private space where clients could confidentially speak about their situation.

"Being able to talk face-to-face and get expert legal advice when I was going through a difficult matter was crucial, in helping me overcome a difficult time," Virginia Henery a WLSQ client said.

"This grant is wonderful as it will mean more vulnerable women can receive the face-to-face support they need — when they need it," she said.

The grant follows Hand Heart Pocket's vital interim funding of \$130,000 in July last year which ensured calls to its statewide legal helpline could continue to be answered until long-term funding was secured. It also allowed 40 regional community workers to be trained and a revamp of the website to make information more readily accessible.

Hand Heart Pocket CEO Gary Mark said supporting women's financial and physical security was part of the organisation's long-term strategy.

"We are focused on providing sustainable support to organisations that have limited access to other funding, to ensure they can continue to deliver essential services," Mr Mark said.

"This grant will empower Women's Legal Service Queensland to continue building safer futures for vulnerable women and their children who are seeking a better life — having already helped over 120,000 women and with them 250,000 children in the last three decades," he said.



Malcolm Turnbull to discuss cyber bullying in COAG meeting

Councillor Nicole Johnston (Tennyson) said the announcement was wonderful news.

"The grant from the Freemason's Hearts, Hands and Pocket Foundation the Women's Legal Service will be able to give vital advice to an additional 2000 women in need," Cr Johnston said.



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