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# Limited funding leaves community legal centres victim to digital gap

By Naomi Neilson | 27 February 2020



If community legal centres received additional funding to implement technological and innovative practices, justice for the most vulnerable could be better achieved.

The legal sector significantly falls behind other industries in adopting the current forms of technology, and the IT systems used presently are generally not fit for purpose. The sector relies heavily on paper-based and manual processes, slowing the system down.

Research undertaken by Community Legal Centres Queensland found major gaps on many legal IT systems and highlighted that greater investment in technology is critical to assist community legal assistance services. Research showed that this investment could close the digital gap and allow legal centres to be more innovative.

Director of Community Legal Centres Queensland Rosslyn Monro said: "Undertaking this research has given a clear indication of where future investment needs to be made and the investment needs to increase digital capability and infrastructure. It needs the target to meet the needs of community legal centres and their communities."

While community legal centres recognise the importance of greater digital literacy and systems usage, the reality is funding is limited and vulnerable people are left just like that.

The report highlighted several recommendations, including developing new websites, implementing digital services for clients, infrastructure improvements and processes for managing technology and data-related risks. The report provided the sector with a "vision and strategy to close the digital gap".

"[The report] showed that the effective use of technology is becoming critical to sector's ability to be sustainable. The research indicated that there was a risk in adopting new technology but doing nothing was also a tangible threat to the sector," Ms Monro said.

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**Anonymous**

I'm not convinced. I volunteered for many years with two CLCs and each one was appallingly run. In each case, their managing director treated them as a personal fiefdom through which to pursue vanity projects. In one, while I was between jobs, I offered to come in during week days and work up to full time hours for free. I was strongly discouraged from doing so despite having more subject-matter experience than most of their staff. Looking at the manager's hires, I suspect the reason was that I was too male and too white, although the manager in question seemed to have equal-opportunity prejudices: in one case she actually said "of course Vietnamese do well: they're all drug dealers". At both, decisions on casework were almost completely arbitrary and seemed to be geared around the prospect of getting into the newspapers rather than merit.

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**Karen Gurney**

Give us a break! I've worked 13 years in CLCs and never met or heard of one with a managing director, let alone one where blatant racism occurs. We work on the smell of an oily rag at times and do the best we can for our clients.

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