



REPORT OF THE GOULBURN VALLEY COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE PILOT
OCTOBER 2010

Working for Justice in the Goulburn Valley

A stylized map of Victoria, Australia, with a black circular spot in the center. The map is filled with diagonal yellow and grey stripes. The black spot contains the text 'CLC BLACK SPOT'.

CLC
BLACK
SPOT

Centre closing 30 June 2011!

ACT NOW

Background

Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre Pilot and Campaign – CLC4GV

The Goulburn Valley needs a Community Legal Centre.

The region, encompassing the city of Shepparton and the towns of Seymour, Violet Town, Euroa, Numurkah and Cobram, represents one of the last significant black spots for community legal services in Victoria.

The Bendigo based Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre (LCCLC) and the Shepparton based UnitingCare – Cutting Edge (UCCE) have partnered to demonstrate the unmet legal need and support the community to campaign for a community legal centre (CLC).

In August 2009 a needs assessment was published providing a demographic analysis of the region that demonstrated significant disadvantage. It also captured the perspectives of local service providers on the need for a CLC to compliment the work of Victoria Legal Aid and the private legal profession.

In October 2009 LCCLC was funded by the Clayton Utz Foundation to initiate a pilot service to demonstrate the demand for services and to showcase the type of work that could be undertaken by a CLC.

A solicitor, Joanne Ellis, was employed and has been dedicated to establishing and coordinating the pilot. Funding for the pilot ends on 30 June 2011.

This pilot, albeit limited in scope, has clearly demonstrated the significant need for a CLC.

The pilot service has:

- Provided direct legal assistance
 - including legal information, referral, advice and casework
 - by telephone on Mondays and Thursdays (from Bendigo) and face to face on Tuesdays and Wednesdays (in Shepparton and Cobram)



Joanne Ellis (pilot lawyer) and Luke Slater (volunteer lawyer)
PHOTO COURTESY SHEPPARTON ADVISER

- Coordinated pro-bono legal assistance from volunteer private lawyers – through a Tuesday evening advice service (in Shepparton)
- Undertaken legal education in response to community requests
- Coordinated five legal issues forums, concerning the legal needs of migrant communities, people experiencing family violence, older people, aboriginal people and young people.
- Coordinated a migration law assistance clinic in partnership with Victoria Legal Aid and the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre.

The campaign for CLC services in the Goulburn Valley gathered significant momentum in 2010, developing the brand CLC4GV and engaging with the community and politicians about the need. While the need and the campaign have been compelling, there is more work to be done in securing a commitment for ongoing services.

To find out more about the campaign contact the Loddon Campaspe CLC, UnitingCare – Cutting Edge, go to the LCCLC website, or follow it on Facebook and Twitter.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was written by Peter Noble, Principal Solicitor and Coordinator, and Joanne Ellis, Solicitor and Clayton Utz Foundation Fellow at the Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre.

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About Community Legal Centres

Community Legal Centres (CLCs) have been a vital component of the provision of legal services in Australia for almost 40 years. There are more than 200 CLCs throughout the country and 51 in Victoria – in metropolitan, suburban, regional, rural and remote areas.

Community Legal Centres provide access to justice. They compliment the private legal profession and Legal Aid Commissions by undertaking a range of cases that fall between the cracks. They also provide legal education to the community about responsibilities and rights and identify areas where the law can improve. They get people to first base on their legal issues and in many cases go into bat for the duration. They seek to prevent legal problems arising in the first place or to stop them escalating unnecessarily.

CLCs operate within a number of key frameworks:

The Rule of Law – every person and organization, including the government, is subject to the law

Promoting Responsibilities and Rights – like fairness, respect, equality and dignity

Access to Justice – removing barriers that prevent people from understanding their responsibilities and exercising their rights

Community Development – supporting local solutions to local needs

About the Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre

LCCLC (a program of the Advocacy & Rights Centre) was established in 2005 following a community based campaign for community legal services in the Loddon Campaspe Region. The campaign was led by EASE (the local family violence support service), Centre Against Sexual Assault (Loddon Campaspe) and the housing advocacy group Advocacy & Rights Ltd.

LCCLC now comprises a team of seven lawyers, a communications and community development worker, social worker and administrative support.

It receives in excess of \$500,000 on a recurrent basis from the State and Federal Governments. It also receives financial support from philanthropic organizations and local municipalities.

LCCLC has earned a reputation as one of Victoria's most effective CLCs, delivering quality services, targeting need, and undertaking innovative projects.

LCCLCs Vision: To work towards a humane, fair, equitable and accessible legal system.

LCCLCs Mission: To promote, protect and enhance the rights and interests of those who are disadvantaged in their access to justice and contribute to the reform of laws and structural inequities, which limit access to justice.

 loddon campaspe
community legal centre

About UnitingCare – Cutting Edge

UCCE was established in 1996 and has grown to become a frontline rural support agency, working with marginalized communities of disadvantage in Victoria's North East. UCCE has established an approach of identifying emerging needs and dislocations, particularly among non-mainstream groups within communities, and using processes of engagement to secure effective solutions.

UCCEs Vision: An inclusive community where all are valued and supported to participate fully in life.

UCCEs Mission: Serving People, Building Communities, Unlocking Full Potential

 UnitingCare
Cutting Edge

History of the Pilot

The Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre (GVCLC) Pilot is the culmination of a number of years of work in the region to profile unmet legal need. This began with a publication of a discussion paper in 2008 by LCCLC and UCCE (with research assistance from Clayton Utz lawyers) focusing attention on legal need in the Goulburn Valley. This was built upon in 2009 with a report by the partners (funded by the Legal Services Board Grants Program) which catalogued this need. During this time LCCLC received funding from the Clayton Utz Foundation to employ a lawyer to initiate pilot community legal services, and the Victoria Law Foundation to fund the production and distribution of promotional postcards. UCCE also secured funding (from the Reichstein Foundation and United Way – Goulburn Valley Community Fund) to defray operational expenses and coordinated in-kind support from the City of Greater Shepparton and a number of private law firms to equip the pilot premises.

The project partners agreed to conduct a pilot from October 2009 to June 2011 known as the ‘Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre Pilot’. The objectives of the pilot are to:

- demonstrate demand for a CLC in the Goulburn Valley region
- showcase the CLC model and its associated benefits
- explore innovative models for legal service delivery
- develop strong, sustainable partnerships with the legal and community service sectors

Shepparton Outreach

The GVCLC Pilot is based at 139 Maude St, Shepparton (opposite UnitingCare – Cutting Edge). The pilot provides free legal assistance to people living in the Greater Shepparton, Mitchell, Strathbogie and Moira Shires.

The service can assist in a range of areas including family law, consumer law, credit and debt matters, discrimination, family/domestic violence, crime, motor vehicle accidents, welfare rights, employment, guardianship, complaints and victims of crime matters.

SERVICE TIMES:

Telephone Advice: Mondays 2-4pm, Thursdays 10.30am-12.30pm, call 1800 639 121

Evening Advice: Tuesdays 6-8pm, call 1800 639 121 to make an appointment

Face-to-face appointments: available in Shepparton and Cobram where required.

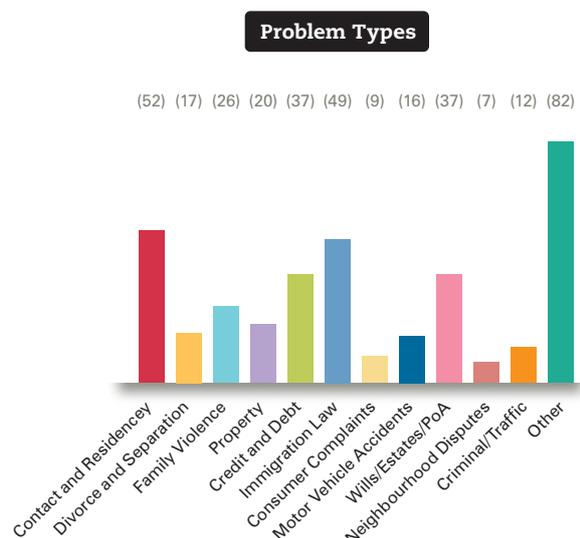
Outcomes

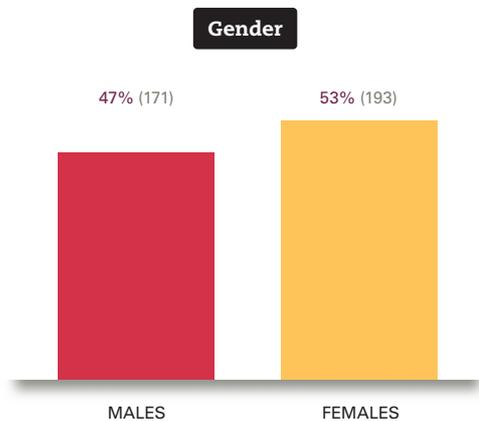
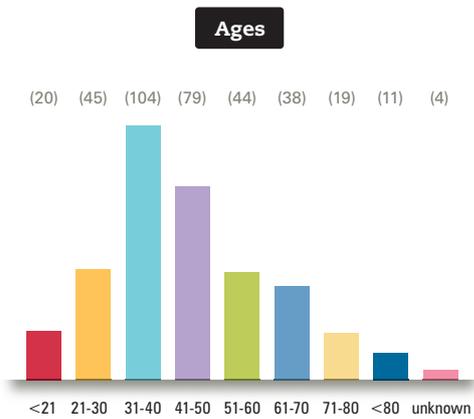
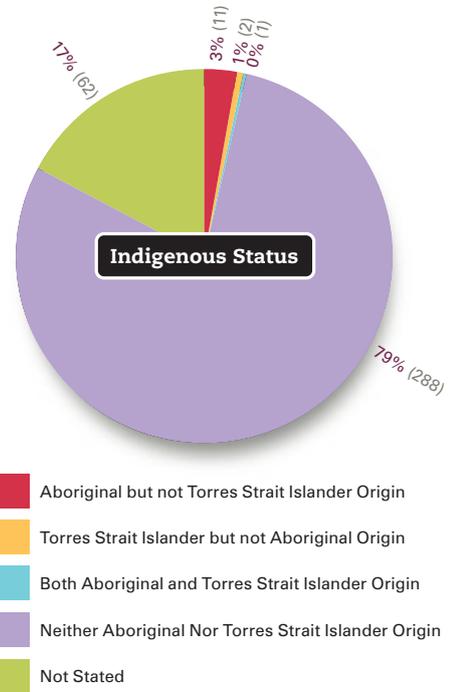
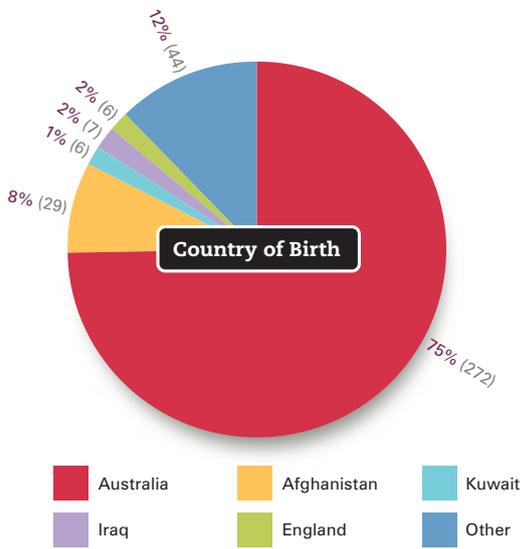
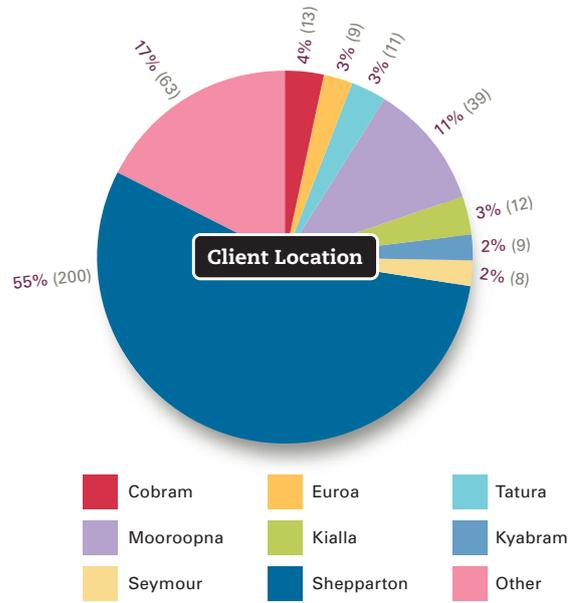
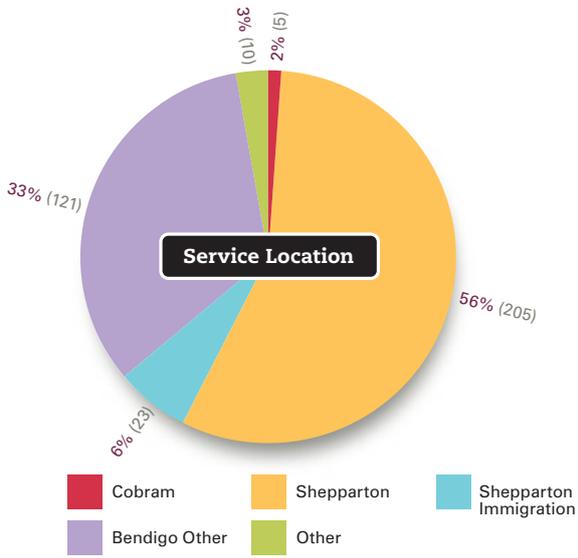
GVCLC Pilot Statistics

From 1 October 2009 to 31 October 2010 the pilot assisted with 364 matters.

Of these approximately 26% have been taken on as cases by the pilot. 13% required assistance but were refused due to a lack of capacity within the pilot. 28% were referred on the basis that the client could self-represent and 18% because they could afford private representation. 8% of cases were deemed eligible for legal aid and 7% of matters were referred to specialist services for further assistance.

A breakdown of all matters indicates the following:





Community Consultation

The GVCLC Pilot has held five community consultations to better gauge the nature and extent of unmet legal need in the region. Consultations primarily targeted service providers and focused on the experiences of migrant communities, people experiencing family violence, older people, the aboriginal community and young people.

Migrant communities

IDENTIFIED LEGAL ISSUES

Assistance is urgently required in a range of migration law matters, particularly: family reunions, partner visas, identifying the appropriate visa, skilled migration, specific issues for New Zealand born residents, identifying who can help with visa applications, carer visas, and visiting visas.

Other legal issues include issues with door to door contracts and the non-payment of fines / infringements

CASELOAD MANAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS IN MIGRATION LAW MATTERS

a) Seminars/workshops

Seminars or workshops should be held for potential visa applicants and those who may assist in filling in visa applications. The seminars should include information on visa criteria as well as consequences such as support on arrival. Priorities areas include: family reunions, parent visas, partner visas and unaccompanied minor applications.

b) Streamlining the instructions

To reduce the amount of time spent on cases with a low chance of success, administrative support could be used to assist with screening during the interview process.

c) Provide information on form completion

People in the community have been known to provide assistance in making applications. A seminar should be held outlining the obligations, responsibilities and the boundaries for providing assistance when an applicant requires assistance to complete their paperwork.

TRANSLATION OF LEGAL SERVICE MATERIALS

The GVCLC pilot brochures should be translated into appropriate languages including: Dahri, Arabic, Dinka, Fur, Swahili and French.

Family Violence

IDENTIFIED LEGAL ISSUES

- Fragmented family violence initiatives.
- Better support is required for indigenous parties.
- Information to migrant communities that is preventative.
- Culturally appropriate supports for court staff.
- Settlement support around legal rights and navigating the legal system.
- Legal support in Cobram (primarily stalking related intervention orders), Seymour (primarily family violence related intervention orders) which have particularly high unmet legal needs, Mansfield and Myrtleford (requiring additional assistance for all parties in intervention order matters).
- Better linking people with disabilities (eg. cognitive impairment / mental health issues) when they first present at court to file applications.
- Better fax back systems, notifying support services when assistance is required.
- Addressing cultural barriers to pursuing rights and client intimidation (shame factor, fear of contact with the perpetrator, fear of the police).
- Meeting at courts between professionals on family violence list days to coordinate supports.
- Forging better links between legal and non-legal services eg. Rumbalara, Marian House and Community Health.
- Addressing problems with issuing safety notices and time delays, ie where no Court is sitting within 72 hours.
- Need to develop a pro forma report back to police (where breaches of orders are alleged).
- Police need to pursue breaches more effectively.
- All courts need to be able to mandate engagement with services including men's behaviour change and anger management.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING NEEDS

- Training on safety planning.
- How to provide effective support (actual physical support) to women and children returning to relationships where violence has been experienced (especially for migrant community members).
- Training on mandatory reporting of abuse / suspected abuse.
- Training on duty of care obligations by social services.
- A presentation by Police at Rumbalara regarding police responses to family violence.
- Cross cultural training to better engage with migrant and indigenous communities.

Case Study 1

Criminal Matter

Adam, a refugee from Eastern Africa and permanent resident, contacted the GVCLC Pilot after being involved in a multi car motor vehicle accident. When the service saw Adam for the first time he came to us with a number of letters from insurance companies demanding payment for damages. The next time we saw him, the police had charged Adam with driving offences as a result of the same accident.

Adam was in severe financial trouble, at risk of losing his licence and of getting a criminal conviction. Adam's wife was about to have their seventh child and his family relied on his income. Adam worked casually and his employment was conditional on him holding a drivers licence.

This was Adam's first offence. He was not eligible for a grant of legal aid because the offences were not serious enough and he could not afford to pay a private lawyer.

Outcome:

With assistance from a GVCLC Pilot volunteer lawyer, we represented Adam at court and made representations to the prosecutor to downgrade Adam's charges. Adam's charges were reduced to one that was less serious. We then presented a plea in mitigation on Adam's behalf and he was placed on a good behaviour bond. He was required to pay a fine but no conviction was recorded against him. Importantly for Adam, he was able to keep his licence.

Civil Matter

Adam's accident involved 4 cars in a car park. The insurers of the three other vehicles involved in the accident had taken action to recover money from him, which amounted to approximately \$20,000. Additionally, Adam had incurred a debt with Bigpond for internet services amounting to \$385.00 and was behind in his phone and utility bills.

Adam simply could not afford to pay these debts.

Outcome:

The GVCLC Pilot assisted Adam by negotiating on his behalf, waiving a large part of the debt. The GVCLC Pilot is continuing to advocate for waiver of the remainder of Adam's debts on the basis of financial hardship.

Case Study 4

A 47 year old woman was referred to GVCLC Pilot by a local family violence support service.

She had been charged with 10 offences, including burglary, breaches of an intervention order and stalking following complaints made to police by her former partner. The woman had no prior criminal history.

It was alleged that the woman had entered the home of her former partner and stolen his personal property (a ring and a letter). Following the alleged burglary and theft, the woman and her former partner applied for and were each granted Intervention Orders against the other. It was then alleged that the woman breached the IVO by sending text messages to her former partner following the making of the IVO.

The client had suffered years of physical and emotional abuse by her former partner who was the complainant in these proceedings. Although she was prepared to admit the breaches of intervention order, she strongly denied all other charges. She believed her former partner was using these allegations to further intimidate her.

The woman was suffering from post traumatic stress disorder due to the family violence she had experienced. This meant she had to leave her full time job and rely on the disability support pension for income. She is a qualified child care worker and a criminal conviction would be detrimental to her future employment prospects.

She did not qualify for legal aid either on merit or means. Although she was on a disability support pension she owned her home and had too much equity. She also did not have any criminal history.

Outcome:

The GVCLC Pilot undertook extensive negotiations with the police prosecutor and informants to have some of the charges withdrawn. The GVCLC Pilot represented the woman at court on several occasions. Finally, at the contest mention stage, the police withdrew 8 of 10 charges.

The Service then presented a plea in mitigation, in relation to the remaining charges. The solicitor provided evidence to the Court, by way of medical records and photographs of the woman having suffered years of abuse at the hands of her former partner. The Magistrate ordered that the woman undertake community service and be of good behaviour for 12 months. No conviction was recorded.

Case Study 18

Emily is a 42 year old woman. She has lived in Shepparton since migrating to Australia in 2004. One day a man knocked on Emily's door and spoke to her about her gas company. Emily didn't really understand what the person was talking about because her English is limited.

Emily accessed the GVCLC Pilot's evening advice service when she received a letter of demand from a lawyer acting for a gas company. Emily had no idea why this lawyer was writing to her or to whom she owed money.

Outcome:

The GVCLC Pilot contacted the lawyer and Emily's gas company. Unbeknown to Emily, she had switched gas companies and now had an outstanding debt with her new provider. The GVCLC Pilot negotiated with the debt recovery agency for Emily to pay the outstanding debt by installments. The service also assisted Emily to switch back to her original energy provider whom she was more comfortable dealing with and gave her information on how to deal with door-to-door sales people in the future.

Case Study 2

Jane from Shepparton contacted the GVCLC Pilot telephone advice line earlier this year. Jane was a 19 year old university student. Jane moved from Shepparton to Melbourne to begin university studies in 2009. She lived in a residential college at her university.

During her first year of University, Jane was diagnosed with a depression related illness. She sought help from medical professionals and was able to manage her illness and successfully complete her end of year exams.

Although she did not disclose her illness to the College, Jane heard rumours that the College were to refuse her application to live at College again in her second year because of her illness. This rumour was confirmed when Jane received a letter from the College denying her a place for 2010.

The Service advised Jane that she may have a discrimination claim against the College and initiated discussions with the College regarding their conduct. As a result of these representations the College reconsidered its position (again offering Jane accommodation) and its processes for providing support to students experiencing such health issues.

Case Study 7

The Salvation Army referred an eighteen-year-old woman to the GVCLC Pilot for assistance regarding a significant Centrelink debt.

The debt accrued due to an alleged failure by the woman to report her correct income from her casual work at a fast food outlet. While this allegation was disputed, the young woman had recently experienced significant personal upheaval - her relationship with her mother had broken down, she disengaged with school and had become homeless, "couch surfing" for months with friends and associates. During this period the Youth Allowance had continued to be paid into her Mother's personal account and the client received no benefits.

Outcome:

The GVCLC Pilot worked collaboratively with the young woman and her Youth Support Worker to explain the circumstances of the matter to Centrelink. A large proportion of the debt was waived, in recognition that the woman had endeavored to notify Centrelink of her casual income and that she had not received the benefits of the Allowance while not living with her mother. The service also negotiated a manageable repayment plan for the remainder of the debt.

Case Study 11

A 60 year old homeless man attended the service for assistance regarding a \$10,000 credit card debt. He had neither significant assets nor capacity to repay the loan. He received a Newstart benefit.

Outcome:

He was advised that he was essentially judgment proof, but also about the bankruptcy process. He was referred to a financial counselor but declined a referral to a homelessness assistance service.

Older Persons

IDENTIFIED LEGAL ISSUES

A range of common legal problems were identified including:

- Managing bills, disputes with gas/electricity companies
- Will and Powers of Attorney
- Voting obligations
- Debts – entering into contracts and scams
- Untrustworthy trades people
- Fines – speeding tickets, parking fines
- Dealing with Centrelink
- Family law – grandparents caring for grandchildren
- Family violence
- Financial abuse
- Neglect
- Tenancy issues
- General assistance with documents
- Property and accommodation issues

BARRIERS TO OLDER PEOPLE ACCESSING LEGAL SERVICES IN THE GOULBURN VALLEY

- Access issues – literacy, language, cost, reluctance / inability to make contact with services via phone or internet, preference for face-to-face contact
- Isolation – breakdown of social circles & communication links
- Inability to identify legal problems at an early stage
- Not knowing where to go for help
- Reluctance to disclose problems

EDUCATION AND TRAINING NEEDS

- Awareness raising- what is a legal problem? Who to contact when a legal problem arises
- Information on how to plan ahead for old age
- Wills / Powers of Attorney
- Transitioning into residential care

Aboriginal community

IDENTIFIED LEGAL ISSUES

- Bail – defendants require culturally appropriate and safe residences to be bailed to.
- Key other areas of concern: crime / family violence / credit / debt / fines / consumer trading disputes / wills / dealing with the Office of Housing / dealing with Centrelink / contracts / going guarantor

SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES

- Accessing financial support for emergency accommodation.
- Immediate access to legal representatives.
- Police failing to notify the Victorian Aboriginal

Legal Service or Community Justice Panel liaison when an indigenous person is arrested.

- People prefer face-to-face contact, articulating problems over the phone is hard, clients don't want to tell their problems to strangers.
- Conflicts of interest with legal firms / services – e.g. where there are co-accused in criminal matters or multi-party disputes.
- More effective advocacy services are required in residential tenancy disputes.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING NEEDS

- To youth – a preventative approach needs to target primary school aged kids. Targeted assistance could be provided with assistance in transition from grades six to seven. Male and female indigenous workers should be assigned to each school.
- The Hip hop and Real Tone youth music programs were effective
- Education is required concerning police search powers, move on laws, banning kids from Shepparton's CBD, court processes, the privacy act / client confidentiality.

Young People

IDENTIFIED LEGAL ISSUES

- Accessing legal information
- Knowing rights
- Cyberbullying
- Sexting
- The law on leaving school and leaving home
- Understanding loans and other contracts
- Young people tend to be reluctant to learn about services and access unless it is needed immediately

STRATEGIES IMPROVING YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- Make information available through the information networks that young people are already engaged in
- Community legal education topics:
 - Knowing your rights
 - Dealing with authority
 - Consumer affairs
 - Gambling
- Up-skilling of volunteer networks that meet with young people in critical moments. e.g. Court Network, Neighbourhood Houses.

Case Study 10

A 61 year old man attended the GVCLC Pilot seeking assistance with a divorce application. However, during the interview he revealed a number of matrimonial debt matters that caused him significant hardship.

The man had neither significant assets nor money in the bank and received a disability support pension. A year earlier he was seriously injured in a workplace accident and will not be able to work again. He also cares for his youngest son (18) who is suffering from depression. They live in adjoining caravans.

The client's 33 year marriage had recently ended and there had been no property settlement. Throughout the relationship, the client's wife controlled the family finances because he was illiterate. He trusted his wife to take care of his financial interests and would sign documents that she presented to him from time to time.

Since the separation, the client gained a better understanding of the structure of his financial arrangements, discovering that his wife had taken out a number of credit cards in his name and that she had used these to incur significant debts. He was barely managing to pay these debts by installments. The client also discovered that the title for the matrimonial home (valued at \$135,000) and the associated mortgage and related loans (totaling \$175,000) were in his name alone, and not held jointly as he had been led to believe.

Outcome:

The GVCLC Pilot confirmed that the client was solely liable to the creditors for the debts of the relationship. He was also advised that he could bring matrimonial property proceedings to apportion the debt between him and his wife on the basis that the debts were accumulated during the course of the marriage and that the wife's role in accruing many of the debts amounted to a negative financial contribution.

The man was not eligible for legal aid and could not afford private legal assistance. The GVCLC Pilot was unable to represent the man due to its limited capacity. He was referred to the Family Law Assistance Program at the Monash-Oakleigh Legal Service, in Melbourne, for further assistance.

Case Study 19

Sam was seriously injured in a workplace accident. Unable to return to work, he became depressed and addicted to drugs. Sam's marriage broke down, his father died and his addiction spiraled further out of control. Over several years, Sam used his workers compensation to support himself and his drug habit. Pretty soon he had nothing left.

Homeless and without a dollar to his name, Sam moved to the country and withdrew from drugs completely. He lived out of his car and relied on local charities for food.

When Sam applied for a Newstart allowance, Centrelink refused his application because his compensation payment meant he was subject to a preclusion period which they would not waive.

Because he had no income, Sam couldn't access any type of public housing and so he lived in his car all winter. The conditions were poor and degrading and he often didn't have enough to eat. Sam's GP would prescribe him medication to manage his health conditions but Sam didn't have any money to get the prescriptions filled. His health worsened.

Although Sam was engaged with local drug and alcohol counsellors and other support services in an attempt to make real changes to his life, his living conditions and lack of income meant that his prognosis was poor.

The GVCLC Pilot received a call from Sam's homelessness worker and went to visit him in a town outside Shepparton. The CLC appealed Centrelink's decision on the basis of the special circumstances of Sam's case and asked that the preclusion period be abridged.

The appeal was successful and Sam is now in receipt of a Newstart Allowance. He was back paid to the date of his original application. Sam has now secured housing and is looking forward to finding work.

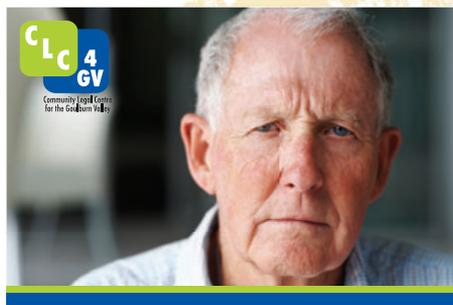


Cobram Outreach Pilot

At the Family Violence forum in May 2010 participants identified that family violence legal assistance services in Cobram were inadequate.

In response to this the pilot initiated a family violence legal assistance service at the Cobram Court in September 2010. This service will run for an initial pilot period of 12 weeks.

The service aims to assist those currently unrepresented in family violence matters and complements the duty lawyer service already being provided by Victoria Legal Aid. The pilot lawyer is at court each time it sits (fortnightly on a Wednesday) to provide advice and representation to unrepresented litigants. General appointments are also available on all legal matters.



Migration Clinic

In November 2010, the GVCLC Pilot hosted an immigration clinic in Shepparton. The clinic was run in partnership with Victoria Legal Aid, the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre and the Loddon Campaspe CLC.

Staffed by lawyers from each of the services and run over a day and a half, the clinic assisted 14 local people to complete visa applications. The clinic followed on from a Victoria Legal Aid community legal education seminar held in Shepparton earlier in the year.

Clients came from diverse backgrounds – Swahili, French, Dinka, Arabic and Tamil interpreters were used. Each client was a refugee and each was hoping to be reunited with spouses, children or siblings living in life threatening situations overseas.

The clients were not only experiencing financial hardship and the usual difficulties associated with being a refugee in a new country; they were facing additional hardship because they are regularly unable to access free, timely legal assistance where they live.

The clinic was able to respond, in part, to the overwhelming demand for free immigration services in the region and is an example of CLCs working collaboratively to increase access to justice in their community.

Fred's Fair Play

In October 2010, the Goulburn Valley CLC Pilot in conjunction with Melbourne's Eastern Community Legal Centre and Carp Productions delivered Fred's Fair Play to almost 100 primary school children at Shepparton's Bouchier Street Primary School.

Fred's Fair Play, which is part of the Human Rights are Aussie Rules Project, is a unique educational play teaching children about human rights through the principles of fair play and good sportsmanship. Fred's Fair Play has been delivered to thousands of children across Victoria.

Bouchier Street Principal Mrs. Judith Park said "the play seemed to go really well and the kids certainly received Fred's message of equality for all". The play was covered by Win News Television and the Shepparton News.

The production and the collaboration between the pilot and Eastern CLC exemplify the kind of work that community legal centres undertake – often sharing good ideas and resources to extend the range of services they offer to their community.

Goulburn Valley Hospice Outreach

LCCLC has extended its successful outreach service to palliative care patients at Bendigo Health to Goulburn Valley Hospice Care Services and Goulburn Valley Health via the pilot.

The service provides free legal help to people over 60 years of age, by referral from a social worker. The program is for those who do not have a local lawyer or whose lawyer cannot help them.

The program can provide advice in relation to:

- Enduring Powers of Attorney (financial, medical, guardianship)
- Wills
- Guardianship/Administration
- Elder abuse (financial, psychological, physical, sexual, neglect)
- Consumer issues (banking, credit and debt, superannuation, insurance, trader disputes)
- Family care arrangements

Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria

On 15 October 2010 the final report of the Victorian Parliament's Rural and Regional Committee's *Inquiry into the extent and nature of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria* was launched in Seymour by Damian Drum, Upper House representative for Northern Victoria.

The report highlights the multitude of issues raised with the committee during a series of hearings conducted across Victoria. It made 50 recommendations, including the recommendation (Recommendation 7) that a Community Legal Centre be funded in the Goulburn Valley.

Peter Noble, principal solicitor at LCCLC, told the Inquiry during its Bendigo sitting that the absence of dedicated community legal centre in the Goulburn Valley was an impediment to justice in regional Victoria.

Peter told the Inquiry:

'There are massive issues in the Goulburn Valley. If there was a blank slate and you had to say where you were going to put a legal service, Shepparton would have got one a long time before Bendigo, because of its cultural and linguistic diversity and its large Indigenous community. The Goulburn Valley is a fantastic community, a vibrant, rich community. But it has significant issues as well. Our statistics bear that out. Family violence is a big issue, and the migration needs and legal issues of that community are big as well. Anything that can be done to improve legal services in that region would be welcome.'



Left to right: Bill Sykes (current Member for Benalla), Alex Mactier (EO Advocacy & Rights Centre Ltd), Damian Drum (Member for Northern Victoria) and Ivan Lister (drought relief coordinator) at launch of report

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SEYMOUR TELEGRAPH

GVCLC Pilot Volunteers

SOLICITORS

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City of Greater Shepparton
Clayton Utz Foundation
Victoria Law Foundation
United Way – Goulburn Valley Community Fund

Support from local politicians

The Honourable Jeanette Powell MP

MEMBER FOR SHEPPARTON (14 APRIL 2010)

“I ... was involved in the initial consultation on the need for a local free service in the Shepparton District as research has clearly demonstrated that there is significant, widespread disadvantage in our region.

This research has shown that some disadvantaged people do not have access to legal services and natural justice. The Goulburn Valley is also home to the aboriginal population outside of Melbourne and people from a non-english speaking background, including a growing number of refugees, in comparison to other regional areas,

The establishment of a Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre will assist these people who would otherwise be unable to access the justice system or meet the criteria for Legal Aid – people on low incomes or social security benefits; people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and people with complex and disadvantaged needs.

The benefits to the wider community of having a permanent Community Legal Centre established in Shepparton to provide free assistance and advice to our community are enormous, both socially and economically, but most importantly, funding is needed to make this necessity a reality...”

The Honourable Dr.Sharman Stone MP

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR MURRAY (1 MARCH 2010)

“The region has been severely disadvantaged by seven years of drought, contractions in agriculture and industry, rising unemployment and the withdrawal of government services.

The region has also suffered an increasing crime rate and there is a need to properly resource the legal system to ensure that justice is not the prerogative of those who can afford qualified legal counsel.

Many of the region’s residents have limited resources and have not had access to the education facilities made available to those in larger centres. A properly constituted and resourced legal service would greatly enhance these resident’s ability to access legal assistance.”

Tim McCurdy

THE NATIONALS CANDIDATE FOR MURRAY VALLEY (24 NOVEMBER 2010)

“I have been briefed on the funding needs and if elected I will fight to secure the funds to ensure that this service can be continued in Cobram...”

“It is of paramount importance that people, particularly those who are disadvantaged, be given access to advice whether it be face to face or at the very least, telephone service.”



Further Reading

Access to Justice in the Goulburn Valley – Demonstrating the need for a Goulburn Valley Region Community Legal Centre (August 2009)

UnitingCare – Cutting Edge and Advocacy & Rights Centre

www.communitylaw.org.au/loddoncampaspe/cb_pages/images/G%20V%20Access%20to%20Justice%20Final%20Report.pdf

Access to Justice in the Goulburn Valley – Responding to Unmet Legal Need through Community Legal Services Discussion Paper (October 2008)

Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre

www.communitylaw.org.au/loddoncampaspe/cb_pages/images/Discussion%20Paper%20Final.pdf

Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria (October 2010)

Parliament of Victoria, Rural and Regional Committee
www.parliament.vic.gov.au/rrc/article/897

Postcode Justice - Rural and Regional Disadvantage in the Administration of the Law

Richard Coverdale, Deakin University November 2010
www.deakin.edu.au/buslaw/law/rrjc/abstracts/coverdale.php

Why community legal centres are good value

National Association of Community Legal Centres
www.naclc.org.au/multiattachments/2287/Document-Name/NACLCL_value_web.pdf

Economic Value of CLCs

National Association of Community Legal Centres
www.naclc.org.au/multiattachments/2305/Document-Name/EconValueISFRpt0306.pdf

Useful Websites

Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre
www.communitylaw.org.au/clc_loddoncampaspe

UnitingCare – Cutting Edge
www.ucce.org.au

National Association of Community Legal Centres
www.naclc.org.au

Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria)
www.communitylaw.org.au

Victoria Legal Aid
www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Australian Government Attorney General's Department
www.ag.gov.au

Public Interest Law Clearing House
www.pilch.org.au

Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre
www.rilc.org.au

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
www.vals.org.au

Aboriginal and Family Violence & Prevention Legal Service (Victoria)
www.fvpls.org

Working for Justice in the Goulburn Valley

REPORT OF THE GOULBURN VALLEY
COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE PILOT
OCTOBER 2010



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