

Welfare

rights

Centre Inc.



Annual Report 2008/2009

Social Security &
Employment Services

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About Welfare Rights Centre Inc.



Welfare Rights Centre Inc. is a longstanding not for profit service that offers specialist advocacy and legal services for people in relation to Social Security matters. The most common issues are linked to non payment (mostly due to previous overpayments, waiting/preclusion periods, allegations of Marriage-Like Relationships), eligibility requirements and, increasingly, compliance issues.

Our intention is to provide support to the most vulnerable welfare recipients, in a way that is most useful to the client. This usually means we endeavour to get an early outcome at the initial decision stage rather than have matters escalate to the internal or external review processes.

The Centre operates throughout Queensland, and includes northern New South Wales, as we operate within Centrelink boundaries. To ensure fairness to regional and remote clients, initial contact with the service is usually undertaken over the phone through Telephone Advice Sessions that are supervised by paid staff, but operate with a team of accredited volunteers.

Over the years various governments have been linking welfare entitlements for people of "working age" to employment, job seeking and or training. In 2007 the WRC undertook a project that identified that many of the most vulnerable people have difficulty navigating the maze of obligations and requirements placed upon them by either government departments, Centrelink or the employment services system, and as a result give up on welfare - and the very systems that are designed to support them. Stories we witnessed included complaints about not being offered interpreters, being breached unfairly, not being given access to "job seeker accounts", broken promises, and being locked into bad job placement services. As a result we have set ourselves the challenge to engage with these people and advocate for them in a way that meets their needs.

This year we have received "one off" money from *LPITAF, Department of Employment and Industrial Relations and the Commonwealth Attorney General and we have made significant changes to our service delivery model. We believe we are on track to make a significant difference but our challenge is to retain these funds so we can engage with the most excluded people in the community.

WRC also manages the Disability Discrimination Legal Advisory Service and this year a separate Annual Report has been prepared for this service.

* Legal Practitioners Interest on Trust Account Funds

The WRC has invested time on securing the long term viability of the WRC. This has meant reviewing the Vision and Strategic Purpose to ensure any new money or expansion of the services we offer does not skew us away from our initial purpose.

The WRC Vision

Welfare Rights Centre Inc. is an independent voice for fairness, determined to empower people who are often unheard.

Strategic Purpose

We focus our services towards bringing about change for the greatest number of people with intent to deliver high impact high quality services through our three core service models:

Client advocacy
Community education
Reform and policy development.

Client Advocacy

- * use the *legal system* to address unfairness.
- * *engage* with clients to get the most efficient outcome for them.
- * invest in the *expertise* of our staff to ensure quality services.

Community Education

- * build capacity of *community workers* so they can advocate for their clients using our knowledge, expertise and support.
- * encourage and facilitate participation of *clients* in their own advocacy.
- * present solutions to unfairness to other *service system providers*.

Law Reform and Policy Development

- * pursue client focused, *evidence* based systemic reforms.
- * stimulate *research* agendas to build the evidence base for reforms and development.
- * build *strategic alliances* with key stakeholders to pursue fairer systems for clients.

We ensure the governance of the Centre is fair, transparent and accountable whilst:

- operating in a way that eliminates unnecessary risk, and
- managing the resources to ensure ongoing viability of the services.

President's Report



I am very happy to present the President's report on behalf of the Management Committee of the Welfare Rights Centre (Inc).

A good indication of how an organisation knows its business is an assessment of how well it operates and knows itself. A well developed governance manual provides staff not only with a creed of its operational procedures but also assists them with organisational direction and goals. I am pleased that the tasks of finishing the Governance Manual was completed and applaud all those involved.

Over the years, concerns have been raised about our possible ongoing commitment to administering the DDLAS on less than adequate funding. In an effort to address this, WRC, in full consultation with DDLAS staff, appointed a Viability Sub-Committee charged with looking at the future of the DDLAS. This tireless committee have not only been active but also committed to the task at hand. We will all look forward to their final report.

The role of the Principal Solicitor has been re-examined in light of a different approach to dealing with client enquiries. Previously the Principal Solicitor was checking legal advices and responses to non-legal enquiries. The new approach to client enquiries quickly establishes whether the issues raised by the client is a legal one requiring legal advice from a solicitor or a general one requiring assistance from a non-legal staff member. This approach has allowed the solicitors to concentrate on legal matters and not getting bogged down with non-legal advice matters.

One of the benefits of the approach we have now taken is that the work output of the Centre has increased significantly. With the assistance of non-legal staff, many of the client matters are successfully dealt with, either through advocacy with Centrelink or by the clients themselves. This has allowed the solicitors to concentrate on appropriate matters.

To overview the new methodology in dealing with clients and to ensure that matters are dealt with by appropriate persons, the Principal Solicitor is constantly advised.

The management committee supported the Sector and Union campaign to improve the wages of staff in our employ. For some time, remuneration has been a significant issue in the sector. Of particular note is the recent attempts by the centre to recruit a Principal Solicitor on a twelve month contract; there was not one enquiry from a suitably qualified candidate. Although the wages campaign had some success, for us the true test of whether new salary levels are satisfactory will occur when we advertise the Principal's position on a permanent basis.

Of course the other issue surrounding wages will be ongoing funding to meet the salary outlays we currently face. If the funding isn't made available to meet our obligations to staff, then we will have no other option but to reduce staff hours. This will of course have a significant impact upon service delivery to our vulnerable clients.

The Centre has been fortunate to see a steady growth in volunteers over the year; this definitely compliments our service delivery. There is considerable competition for volunteer membership and the associated training. The Centre's staff has developed a comprehensive training package for legal and non-legally qualified volunteers.

WRC's efforts in training volunteers and community agencies have been recognised by a number of persons. The worthwhile efforts of staff in being seen as not only knowledgeable professionals but also competent trainers and developers of training programs is evidenced by the proposed partnership with the WRC and Bremer TAFE for the development, delivery and updating of a TAFE course of training for TAFE student skills acquisition.

We are also fortunate to have a high profile among the legal sector both through the work our staff do and our Executive Director drawing considerable attention of what we do to those who matter.

During this year we had the state election. The outcome saw the resignation of a Management Committee Member. Mark Ryan was a successful candidate and now sits happily in the State Legislature. Our best wishes go with Mark; he was and still is an avid supporter of our centre.

The aftermath of the State election has seen a government policy shift in focus from growth to financial recovery; caused by unforeseen effects of the Global Financial Crisis. This of course means that the government is going to pre-occupied with savings rather than expenditure. I am concerned that a foreseeable result of the current approach to government cost saving is that the State will not increase the necessary funding to Social Service Providers that many of our clients rely upon. The Global Financial Crisis affected far more than Government coffers; it had a greater impact upon many vulnerable people who without the help of the Welfare Rights Centre Queensland would have fallen through the cracks of strained Social Service provision.

Welfare Rights predominantly relies upon funding from the Federal Government and is always looking to improve its funding allocation so that we can maintain delivery of quality services to our client base. There is a need for a greater allocation of money which properly focuses on Early Intervention strategies for the most excluded. The issues in the Logan City community highlight this.

To my mind, the recent stated intention of the Federal Government to address school truancy in the Logan Community through suspension of Centrelink payments is appalling and does not address the needs of that community. The communities need more than a single punitive solution. These families need a variety of options

available to them to get them engaged. To do this there needs to be adequate consultation and integration of services, whether they be delivered by community State or Commonwealth governments. If the government expands this course of action against families then outcome will be debilitating to the most vulnerable.

Being a part of any community organisation is a challenge. Working in the CLC sector, I am fully aware of current issues we all face. As yet I don't believe that we have seen the worst effects of the Global Financial Crisis. The GFC has and will continue to see an ever increasing need for our services. Many of our new clients will be those who thought that they were able to rely on their hard-earned nest eggs and are now faced with having to apply for pensions and to appeal decisions.

In the past year;

- We have remained focussed upon all of our services and are pleased to note that we are maintaining a high quality legal service in relation to social security and disability discrimination legislation.
- Our early intervention strategy has been able to promote systemic change affecting the areas of policy application and law relating to income security.
- We remain pro-active in promoting the need for legislative change and improvements to the needs of clients affected by policy and law relating to disability discrimination.
- We have maintained our goals to educate and build the capacity of the community to understand rights and to respond to issues in relation to social security and disability discrimination laws.

In attaining the above we have remained a stable, independent and innovative organisation.

There are a number of people that I would like to thank and acknowledge, as without their support many of the tasks completed this year would not have eventuated. First of all I would like to thank Gail, John and the staff of the Centre. Without their dedication to tirelessly supporting disadvantaged people and their knowledge of Disability Discrimination, Social Security law and Centrelink practices, many individuals and their families would be left out in the cold. More generally, I extend the committee's appreciation for the work of the dedicated volunteers and those who offer their valuable pro bono professional services, advice and guidance throughout the year.

I would like to thank my fellow committee members for their generosity in giving their time and support and bringing with them skills and an ideology that is conducive to a strong voice for the most marginalized. In particular, to **Greg Marston, Cameron Thomas, Jenny Medland, Kathie Grigg, Jason Young, Luke Tiley and Mark Ryan**, thank you!

Terry Stedman
President

Treasurer's Report



It gives me a great pleasure to present the Treasurer's report for the financial year 2008/2009 to members of the Welfare Rights Centre Inc. and our valued sponsors and funding bodies. During the year the Welfare Rights Centre continued to deliver a quality service in accordance with our funding obligations whilst also working to ensure the service focused on those clients that are at most risk of falling out of the Australian support systems.

Financial Result

The Centre's activities were financed primarily by core funding received through the state and commonwealth Community Legal Centres Program. This included:

- Money targeted to Social Security - \$521,448
- Money targeted to Disability Discrimination - \$71,300

Additional one off money was received through the following sources:

- Outreach work through the LPITAF - \$90,300
- Employment Advocacy Project through the Skilling Queenslanders for Work PIP \$84,000

Other sources of income, as outlined in the Auditor's Financial Statements were received from; additional one off government grants, donations, sponsorship, interest, membership fees and sundry income. This additional funding equalled \$28,703. As a result the WRC generated a total of \$795,751 to deliver its services.

The operating result to 30 June 2009 for core funding was a surplus of \$66,333. Major outlays continued to be salaries and we anticipate that with the new Award coming into play this surplus will be used within the next two years.

Acknowledgements

I would particularly like to acknowledge Sue McComber - Financial Administrator, for all the skills and diligence she brings to her work at the Centre. Sue has continually delivered sound advice regarding the financial situation of the Centre.

Further, I would like to thank the Management Committee, Gail Middleton - Executive Director and Nicole O'Keane - Office Administrator for their incredible support throughout the year.

The efforts of WRC staff, locums, students and volunteers to maximise the benefit of our funding for our client groups throughout the year is also acknowledged and greatly appreciated.

Conclusion

I draw your attention to the following Financial Statements prepared by the Auditor, George Crokidas. The Financial Statements have been prepared in accordance with applicable accounting standards and reflect the financial position of the Centre for the year ended 30 June 2009.

Kathie Grigg - Treasurer

Executive Director's Report



Irrespective of which funding source we use, the Welfare Rights Centre is committed to using a service delivery model with a three pronged approach including:

- Client Advocacy
- Community Education
- Law Reform and policy development.

Client Advocacy

The majority of our Centres work is focused on our clients and we provide them one of the following services:

- Information
- Advice
- Casework

Throughout the year, we provided 187 clients with information only. This is when we listen to the caller and make a determination that we cannot assist. We often redirect the person to an appropriate service, which is usually another community legal centre or community organisation. Staying networked is essential to ensure we are providing a quality service at this level.

The next level of service is offered through our Telephone Advice Service and we work with these callers to identify their problem and undertake various levels of advocacy to reach a fair outcome. During the year we undertook 1345 of these advices. Our service delivery model is one that tries to prevent problems from escalating to tribunals/courts and so we regularly undertake advocacy whilst the decision making is still with Centrelink. This early intervention approach to our work is essential for our efficiency but also to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the most vulnerable clients who are often living in crisis and need immediate outcomes to prevent complete breakdown such as homelessness.

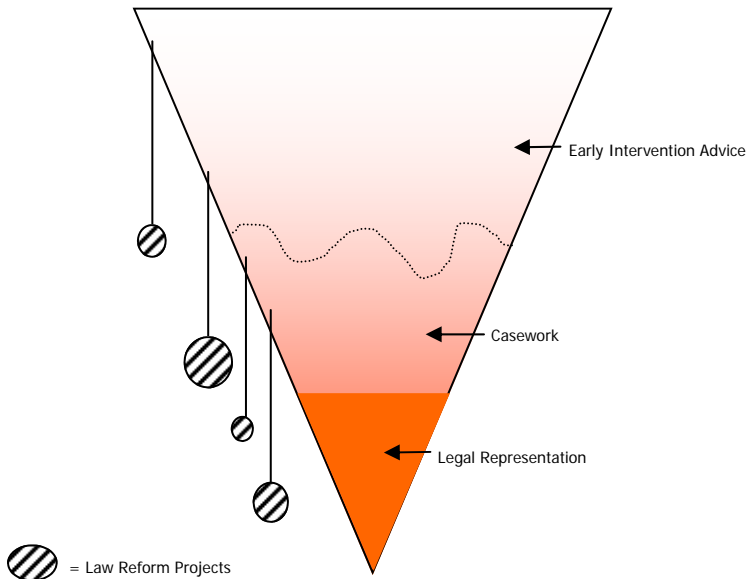
The diagram over the page describes the service delivery model that we have implemented. The commitment to early intervention, balanced with the strength of legal casework and law reform, puts the Welfare Rights Centre in a position to make a difference.

During 2008/2009 the Welfare Rights Centre undertook 41 representations at the SSAT or the AAT.

Due to the increasing complexity of some of the matters we come across, we do need to undertake more in-depth negotiations using either our social work or legal staff. These matters are opened as a casework and in 2008/2009 we opened 636 files, this is an increase of more than 300% on previous years. This increase in casework is

clearly the result of introducing social work skills into our telephone advice which is allowing us to engage with the more vulnerable clients and also exposes the complexities of some of the client problems. However, the key strength of our service delivery model is that if matters are not settled early, we have a team of lawyers that use the tribunals and court system to bring about fairness to the Social Security recipients.

Welfare Rights Centre Service Delivery Model



Casework Trends

We have identified the following trends in our casework.

- We have had an increase in debt matters compared to last year's data, so now 22% of client problems relate to Centrelink debt. Not all debt is related to fraud. In fact, the bulk of Centrelink debt is caused through the Family Tax Benefit system which requires families to estimate their income and reconcile their debts at the end of the financial year. However, there is a growing concern amongst staff and the community that debts where a prosecution may be considered are not receiving the specialist legal support that is required. We hope to be able to build on the work of Tamara Walsh and Greg Marston along with the experience of the pilot project operating in Western Australia to look at

what needs to be done in this area to prevent imprisonment.

Comparison of Presenting Problems

	2007/2008	2008/2009
Compliance	133	120
Debt	456	669
Eligibility	501	696
Marriage Like Relationships	62	245
Service Treatment	87	93
Rate Reduction	52 (half year)	129
Employment Services	Not counted	34
Other Centrelink Problems	302	670

- 23% of our clients are having problems with accessing a benefit. Many of these problems relate to DSP, but we are getting an increasing number of migrants, including people from New Zealand, having difficulties accessing Centrelink. These families and individuals were in full-time jobs and had no intention of claiming welfare, but the recent downturn in employment has affected their ability to support themselves and their families. They are now without money and are not entitled to welfare. As a consequence these people are at risk of losing their homes. Returning to New Zealand is often not a reasonable solution, as their lives are entrenched in Australia.
- 8% of our matters are classified as "Marriage Like Relationship" issues compared to only 3% in this category last year. Our Principal Solicitor undertook significant work in this area, including working on the introduction of the same sex reforms. The Welfare Rights Centre in Sydney is taking a lead on this issue however John Stannard has also played a significant role in this area of work.
- With the introduction of our Employment Advocate project, we have started to measure the number of clients presenting with issues associated with decisions outside of Centrelink but that impact on welfare entitlement.
- We are having a greater number of people coming to us for assistance in getting onto the DSP. We believe this was to be expected given the changes to the compliance regime for sole parents, and the fact that many sole parents suffer from depression and anxiety. Recent changes announced in the 2009 Federal Budget took sole parents out of the "Pension" category and we believe this is encouraging more people to seek out the DSP.

Our Clients

Our efforts to work with the more vulnerable client groups is starting to show results. More than 4% of our clients identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, two 2% of do not use English as their main language at home. The most common of these languages was Arabic.

We had an increasing number of clients that “self identify” as having a disability. 10% of these clients identified as having a psychiatric disability and 14% as having a physical disability.

Our source of referral remains similar to previous years, with most people finding us on their own, but Legal Aid Queensland is the single service that makes most referrals. It is interesting to note that there has been a significant increase in referrals from Centrelink Social Workers, CLC’s, community support services, and the SSAT. However one issue we need to take into consideration is that the number of people finding us through the website has more than doubled, hence our commitment to review the current site.

More than 59% of our clients are female.

Our oldest client was 93 and the youngest client was 16. The following table outlines the spread of client groups. It is clear we are seeing very few “young people” and next year we need to look into why this is the case.

Clients by Age

Age Group	# of people	percentage
Under 16	0	
16 - 17	4	0%
18—25	120	8%
26—40	393	25%
41- 64	753	49%
Over 65	263	17%

Client Satisfaction

Based on the annual client satisfaction survey, our service standards increased significantly over the past year. The table below indicates the aspect of the service that we measure and our clients satisfaction rating.

Client Satisfaction Survey

Aspect of Service	% of clients satisfied
Access to service	94%
Responsiveness of service	89%
Treatment of clients	94%
Explanation to client	95%

We also measure the “Usefulness of Assistance” and although 89% of clients were satisfied, it is a difficult question to answer because often the legislation has been applied correctly, even though it is unfair. Often clients indicate dissatisfaction with our service because we did not achieve an outcome they wanted. Whilst client advocacy cannot fix unfair legislation, we can use these cases to build on our law reform work.

Service Outcomes

Measuring the effectiveness of our service is a challenge given the current data system that the national system requires us to use. We are equally concerned that we are not able to measure the degrees of vulnerability that our clients exhibit, hence we have started to gather the following data about our clients:

- Homelessness
- Risk of homelessness
- Number of dependents
- No income
- Risk of abuse or violence.

We are also collating the amount of money that we are putting into the pockets of our clients due to having debts waived, or entitlements granted.

For a small organisation, it is still too expensive to monitor advice and casework outcomes, although we are looking at introducing methods to calculate some of the most obvious data. But the most powerful tool is telling stories, so we hope to have more stories to tell in future reports.

Networking with Stakeholders

One of the valuable consequences of adopting an early intervention model as part of our services has been the ongoing improvement in our relationship with Centrelink staff. Throughout the year the front-line staff are in regular contact with team leaders from the Centrelink Customer Services Centres. When client issues become more complex, we have access to senior Centrelink staff who work from the Brisbane Regional Offices and provide quality assistance, resources and guidance. Over the year we have also had regular meetings with the Customer Service Manager from the Brisbane Region, who acts as a conduit for information and the development of ideas between the Welfare Rights Centre and her counterparts in the other Centrelink regions.

Due to one off money, we have expanded services to include advocacy for clients having problems with their employment service provider. Whilst this services is focused in the Logan area, having this in house expertise available to staff has assisted us to cope with the impact that increasing unemployment is having on our clients and prepares us for dealing with the constant changes in the employment service system that are currently being experienced.

Employment Services Advocacy Project Pilot

A project within the then Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (DEIR) Queensland, looking at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander's participation in the workforce, identified concerns about the ability of the job network agencies to attract participation from this vulnerable population group. DEIR, working with the Welfare Rights Centre, identified that supporting effective consumer advocates within the system through the "Participating in Prosperity" program could improve engagement and participation opportunities for the most vulnerable. DEIR offered the Welfare Rights Centre \$154,000 of one-off funding for 08/09 to pilot an employment services advocacy project in the Logan area. Whilst we will exceed our prescribed targets, undertaking 60 individual client advocacy cases and offering advice and support to over 300 unemployed individual and their community support workers, this highly successful advocacy project (targeting the most vulnerable) remains at risk.

Community Education

Whilst a significant proportion of our work provides a service to individual clients, we are also funded to provide community education which includes participating in community forums, drafting publications and articles for newsletters, and linking with key stakeholders. During the year the WRC completed 31 Community Legal Education Projects. Examples include:

- ◇ Working with Griffith University on a research project on The Cohabitation Rule: Indeterminacy and Oppression in Australian Social Security Law. This includes an article being published in the Melbourne University Law Review.
- ◇ Delivering community education workshops on the impact of the Same Sex Treatment legislation on couples - particularly where one member of the couple is out of the workforce and had not planned on the drop in income.
- ◇ Updating the Social Security chapter in the Caxton Qld Law Handbook.
- ◇ Writing articles for community sector magazines on changes in Centrelink practices and treatment of sole parents.
- ◇ Working with General Practitioners on assisting vulnerable patients to get the Disability Support Pension.
- ◇ Networking with Federal Members regarding the impacts of Social Security Legislation on Queenslanders.
- ◇ Working with Bremer TAFE to develop training resources for advocates in the community services, whose clients need support in relation to accessing Centrelink payments.
- ◇ Working directly with Employment Service Providers, assisting them in their negotiation of individual Employment Plans for those experiencing significant barriers.
- ◇ Offering training and support to community groups and Registered Training Organisations to assist them understand the complex integration of Centrelink and Employment Services.

The mainstream media plays a significant role in stereotyping welfare recipients. Systemic unfairness based on education, race, age, gender and connectedness with society seems to attract little public interest. As a result, the “undeserving” get limited populist support, which equates to missing out on politically motivated bonuses and increases. At the WRC, we strive to do what we can to make a difference, but we prefer to work with decision makers by offering solutions rather than using the media to air our concerns. We need to question whether we have this balance right, or whether we should use the media to make our voice heard.

During the year we launched Scene and Unseen: Photographic Prize, our attempt to raise awareness of poverty and social exclusion in Queensland. We also believe this will raise awareness amongst the general community, as to the value of our services (see page 16).

Law Reform and Policy Development

This year, the Centre led or participated in 31 Law Reform projects. Our participation included the significant roles staff play in systemic advocacy organisations including the National Welfare Rights Network, ACOSS, QCOSS and the Futures Forum. Some of the major issues addressed by us and these groups during the year include the following:

Same Sex Treatment Legislation

The Federal Government announced changes to the way that couples receiving Centrelink payments would be treated as a result of the introduction of the Same Sex Relationships (Equal Treatment in Commonwealth Laws—General Law Reform) Act 2008. Whilst the WRC supports the recognition of same sex couples, it is concerned about the impact of the legislation on those couples who have not had time to plan their finances for retirement. The National Welfare Rights Network submitted that a savings provision should be introduced to safeguard those people who were not able to gain advantages through the tax system (by being a couple) as their working life was over, but now they were receiving less (or no) welfare due to the introduction of this legislation. John Stannard worked with staff from the Sydney Welfare Rights Centre and others to undertake community training on the impact of this legislation. In Queensland this included working closely with QAHC.

2009 Federal Budget

Clearly the Australian Social Security system does not give people an adequate income. This has been evidenced in various research papers and in the recent Bradley Review and Pension Review. In the lead-up to the Federal budget, it became clear that only older people and those caring for people or children with a disability would receive a much needed increase in payment. Sole Parents and the unemployed would miss out. We have not given up, but the plight of the long term unemployed needs to be given a voice. In the meantime, many sole parents are testing their eligibility for the Disability Support Pension.

Compliance Regimes

It was announced that the compliance system of three strikes and then an eight-week non payment system was to be replaced with a new system that was being sold as having a less punitive affect on the most vulnerable. The new system still requires employment services to report “failures”, although there appears to be a willingness to engage with the clients. However, Australia is still using the payment of welfare as a catalyst to change client behaviour. We are not so convinced that the most socially excluded in our communities are as motivated by money as the decision makers would like to think, as one client said (speaking about welfare) “sometimes it’s just not worth the bother”.

Employment Services

Working collaboratively with various government and non-government stakeholders, we have been able to identify issues and inhibitors within these systems which result in client-experienced barriers. Many of these have been successfully addressed, resulting in more effective service delivery to the most vulnerable. The Welfare Rights Centre has always offered and brokered solutions rather than just highlighting problems.

Gail Middleton
Executive Director

SCENE & UNSEEN

PHOTOGRAPHY PRIZE

In 2008, the Welfare Rights Centre launched the **Scene and Unseen: Photography Prize**, an event that we hope to hold every anti-poverty week, as a mechanism to raise awareness of the impact that the lack of adequate income has on Australia's most vulnerable. Whether the delays in welfare be eight weeks or one day, the impact on those living on the edge is devastating.

The Global Financial Crisis has impacted on many people who thought they were immune to hardship and insecurity, because life has been so buoyant and privileged. However, even during the economic boom, others were doing it tough - they were often silent, powerless and ignored.

When most people picture poverty, they usually think of images of people living in third world conditions, in developing or war-torn countries. However, poverty should be seen as what is relative to that country's norm. That is why, when the OECD measures the level of poverty in a country, they base their definition on 50% of the median disposable income. In 2006/07 Australia's relative poverty had increased to more than 11%. Another common measurement of Poverty is the "Henderson Poverty Line". In March 2009 this line recorded the single poverty line for an unemployed person as \$317.73 a week. At this time, the Centrelink payment (including maximum rent assistance) was \$35 a week below the Henderson Poverty Line.

Poverty is not a lifestyle that people choose, yet many Australians are ill-prepared to save themselves from financial stress should they lose their income source. The recent increase in unemployment figures is raising community awareness as to the complexities involved in navigating the Centrelink and employment services systems.



Scene and Unseen sponsors include:



ANTI-POVERTY
11 - 17 October 2009
WEEK



Staff of 08/09



Gail Middleton - Executive Director

Gail's role in the Welfare Rights Centre is to work with staff and the Management Committee to ensure the community needs are being met through the service being provided. Gail has been involved in a wide range of not for profit groups and is quite passionate about working with those that stand up and speak out for the most vulnerable people in our communities.



John Stannard - Principal Solicitor

John's role as Principal Solicitor carries with it the dual responsibility for Social Security Law and the work the Centre does in the civil area of Disability Discrimination. Working in a practice that does not have the resources to meet demands means there is need to undertake a flexible approach whilst maintaining the integrity and quality of the service. John worked hard on meeting this expectation..



Patrick Cranitch - Solicitor

Patrick has been with the Welfare Rights Centre for more than 7 years and takes on a senior practitioner's role that gives our work significant credibility in terms of its quality. Patrick has more than 25 years legal experience both overseas and in regional Queensland before he joined WRC in 2002. Patrick has a keen interest in human rights law.



Susan O'Shea - Solicitor -

Susan started with the Welfare Rights Centre as a volunteer but demonstrated her commitment to working with vulnerable people, so when a paid position became available she was a logical choice. Susan is a solicitor and works part time for LAQ and part time with us. Susan's focus is in Social Security but she is always willing to take a challenge and expand her learning.



Nicole O'Keane - Office Administrator

Nicole has a history of working as an administrator in the community services sector which has given her the patience to deal with the multiple demands by being the sole administrator in both DDLAS and the broader Welfare Rights Centre. Her competence in this position shines through as she accepts and completes every challenge that we set her.



Staff of 08/09



Georgina Warrington - Social Worker Advocate

Georgina has a wealth of experience in social work and working in Community Legal settings prior to coming to the Welfare Rights Centre. Her professional approach and balanced decision making is appreciated by all those that work with and around her.



Georgina Walton - Social Worker Advocate

After a lengthy career in Centrelink, Georgina came to the Welfare Rights Centre to assist us implementing our Early Intervention approach to client problems. She has a wealth of knowledge and is highly committed to making a difference.



Sue McComber - Financial Administrator

Sue joined the WRC in August 2006 to take on the part time Financial Administrator's role. Sue has a Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in accountancy and has undertaken similar work in a variety of non profit community sector organisations.



Kelly Lewis - Advocate for the Unemployed

Kelly has taken the challenge of advocating for unemployed people who are facing barriers engaging with their employment service provider. She has a teaching background and significant experience working in the employment system. Her greatest strength is her capacity to communicate with disadvantaged people and her tenacity of never letting go until she has a result.



Joern Herrmann - Admin Support and Library

Joern has been a volunteer at the Centre for many years, but during 2008 he started to take on paid relief work. Joern is a constant support to the admin and professional staff at WRC. He manages to meet every challenge we set, and then looks for more.



Carla Wilson - Training and Development Officer

Carla returned to the Centre this year to assist with the implementation of our early intervention service delivery model. Her knowledge of Social Security legislation, Centrelink procedures and commitment to people were skills we could not overlook. Carla has since moved into the role of training and developing our volunteers as well as taking on special projects.



Volunteers, Students and Supporters



The Centre is developing its commitment to training quality volunteers. We see that volunteering at WRC is a clear pathway into paid work, with LAQ being a preferred employer by most of our law students.

We have spent a significant amount of time in the training and ongoing development of our volunteers. We have partnered with TAFE to develop some resources that not only look at the legislative framework and Centrelink procedures, but also at communicating with clients, testing individual prejudice and values, and working as an effective advocate.

We only have 6 full-time staff at the Centre so we rely heavily on volunteers to meet client demand. Our volunteers undertake about 75% of our first contact work, which last year was about 1200 calls (fully supervised for insurance purposes). As competency is increased, these volunteers, who are predominantly law students, are given more in-depth work, including case work, research and systemic advocacy. However, our most significant barrier to continue this program is that we do not have the resources to continually train, accommodate and supervise our volunteers.

Our new training program was developed with LPITAF money and it takes about 6 weeks for participants to complete. It is competency based and includes group work and one-on-one sessions to ensure the services offered to the client are professional and accurate. We take on new volunteers twice a year and we cap training to 10 places each time. Whilst we can measure the outputs of our volunteers we cannot measure the long term effects such a program has on community participation of young professionals. However, we believe our volunteers' experiences will live with them through to their professional careers and will make them more active community-minded people.

The following are the list of volunteers who worked with us through 2008/2009:

- Andrew Davison
- Andrew Tan
- Ruth Westbrook
- Jack Brumpton
- Aaron Beh
- Joern Herrmann
- Lynda Wong
- Stephanie Francis
- Sam Alexander

Lynda Wong, who has volunteered for WRC since 2002, deserves a special mention for giving so many years of service to the Welfare Rights Centre and its clients. Lynda's confidence has grown significantly in this period. Whilst she is coming to the end of her studies, we are working on ways that Lynda's experience is not lost to the centre.

Brooke Caruna also gave greatly to the WRC during the year. She was a Human Services Student from Sunshine Coast University. She worked with us on developing policies around poverty and undertook key duties in relation to Anti-Poverty Week 2008.

We also owe our thanks to many barristers who have so generously contributed their time to the work of WRC over the year.

Membership



At the 2008 AGM, changes were made to the Constitution to allow “organisational membership” of the Welfare Rights Centre. It is vital for the longevity of small specialist services, such as this community legal service, to be linked in with the other stakeholders, whether they be for-profit legal firms or other not-for-profit community organisations.

At the end of the 2008/2009 year, the Welfare Rights Centre had a total of 70 members with 4 of these being Life Members.

Management Committee



The Management Committee is elected by the members of the Welfare Rights Centre at the AGM which is held on the 3rd Tuesday of November. In November 2008, the following people were elected to the 23rd Committee of Management:

Terry Stedman - President
Dr Greg Marston - Deputy President
Cameron Thomas - Secretary
Kathie Grigg - Treasurer
Jenny Medland
Jason Young
Mark Ryan (resigned)
Luke Tiley (appointed May 2009)

At the State Election in March 2009, Mark Ryan was elected to the State seat of Morayfield and consequently resigned his position on the WRC committee. Luke Tiley, who is a practicing solicitor from Hall Payne, was appointed to replace Mark by the Management Committee at the May 2009 Meeting.



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Large print copies and a PDF version of this report are available upon request.

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