



QUEENSLAND  
COMMUNITY LEGAL  
CENTRES

*Impact report*

2017/2018



**Community  
Legal Centres  
Queensland**

# Queensland Community Legal Centres (CLCs) have a significant impact on communities across the State. CLCs provide:

- appropriate and effective client services;
- increased knowledge and access to services that meet the community's legal needs;
- support to the justice system to effectively operate and make policy and practice decisions; and
- meaningful professional experiences to volunteers.

This impact report tells the important stories of **change in our communities...**



“

**“Evaluating outcomes is really important for clients, and for government in understanding the value of its investment”**

Queensland Attorney-General and Minister for Justice Hon Yvette D’Ath

“

**“We really appreciate being able to link families to this service...[the] families are well-informed and able to make better decisions and choices for their future...”**

Community Partner survey respondent

# Our Impact

The work of CLCs in Queensland achieves intermediate outcomes in four stakeholder groups

## 1 Clients

### Our impact on Clients

The client survey results and case studies demonstrate the Queensland community legal sector is providing appropriate services to Queenslanders. The impact of those services ranges from being able to obtain free advice and information relevant to a client's legal problem, through to decreasing stress and financial strain.

Queensland CLCs are adept at developing and delivering services in a range of ways to meet their community's needs using outreach, telephone services, drop-in clinics, and multi-disciplinary responses among a range of service delivery approaches. The overall high degree of satisfaction from clients indicates Queensland CLCs are a vital part of the service system infrastructure.

Future work is required to ensure CLCs are more accessible for people who have disabilities. With the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) across Queensland, CLCs will be challenged to better support and advocate for those accessing the scheme and supporting their other legal issues.

## 2 Community Partners

### Our impact on Community Partners

Queensland CLCs provide a wide variety of community legal education (CLE) activities across a broad range of legal topics and audiences. The types of resources and strategies delivered ensure community partners largely agree their communities have access to legal information and education.

Queensland CLCs rely on key community partners to provide the community with access to services to meet their legal needs. Community partnerships ensure services can be delivered in a cost effective and efficient manner, are targeted to people who most need them, and ensure as much access to services across a geographically diverse State. Without the support and relationships with community partners the CLCs' community impact would be significantly reduced.

While the communities have indicated confidence in getting their clients to the CLC services, there is some future work required to improve the way CLCs refer to community partners to ensure clients get the extra support they need.

## 3 Justice System

### Our impact on the Justice System

Justice system respondents clearly indicated Queensland CLCs are instrumental in supporting the system by providing high quality services to help clients navigate, increasing the efficacy and efficiency of the justice system for all parties involved.

Testimonials and case studies demonstrate CLCs inform decision-makers about how law and policy effect the community and can contribute to making those law and practices fairer. Queensland CLCs have contributed to legal policy and practice through direct submission to government and decision-makers, raising public awareness and strong advocacy.

## 4 Volunteers

### Our impact on Volunteers

Queensland CLCs can leverage substantial community resources by harnessing the commitment, energy and enthusiasm of hundreds of volunteers. The deployment of volunteers in direct service delivery and supporting roles has meant students and early career volunteers are able to develop professional skills and insights into community issues.

While professional development may not be the main driver for more experienced and senior volunteers, the volunteering experience is viewed as important professional obligation of service to the community. The involvement of volunteers in CLCs is a service multiplier that has a positive impact on both clients and volunteers.



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**“The lawyers have been amazing in helping me! They have comforted me and help me understand everything and helped me in so many ways that has taken a lot of stress away!”**

Client survey respondent.

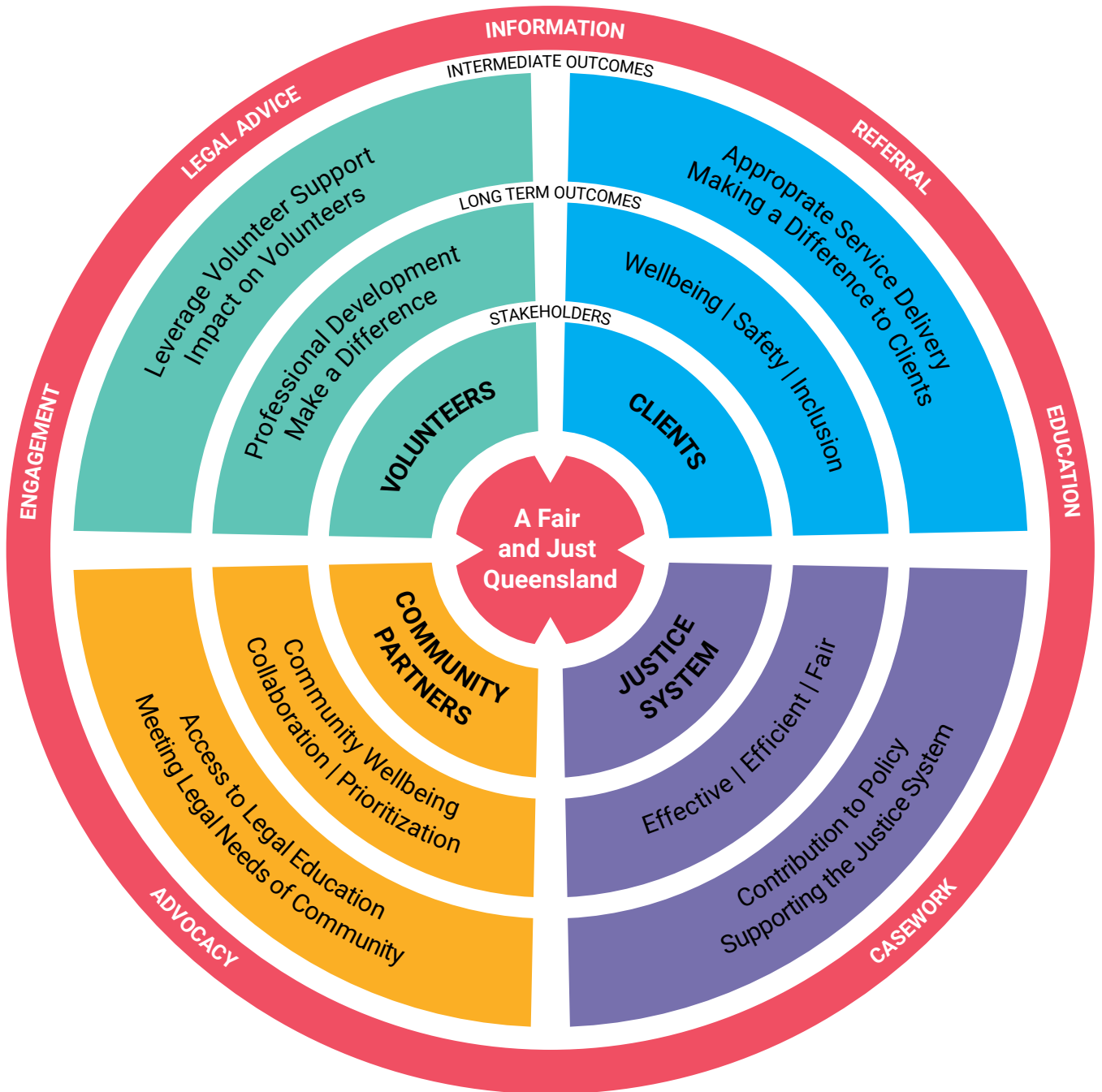
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**“Without [CLC] assistance, this court may not hear an important perspective and those parties may not be in a position to effectively exercise their valuable procedural rights.”**

Judge Fleur Kingham,  
Land Court of Queensland

# Theory of Change

Our theory of change helps us to better understand and measure the long-term change CLCs activities have on four key stakeholder groups.



## Clients have:

- decreased stress and anxiety
- improved financial wellbeing
- improved personal relationships
- increased personal safety
- decreased social exclusion

## Community organisations:

- collaborate better
- contribute to the broader community experiences increased individual and community wellbeing

## Justice system services:

- courts and tribunals expend less resources, provide fairer legal outcomes, and can improve policy and processes with better information
- governments are better informed when they develop laws, legal policy and practice
- other legal assistance services function more effectively

## Volunteers:

- make a difference in their community
- develop their own professional skills.

This impact report tracks the progress on **intermediate outcomes** as they are:

- more immediately identifiable
- measurable
- based on a program logic that if we achieve intermediate outcomes they will contribute to the longer-term outcomes which are harder to measure

The **intermediate outcomes** for the four stakeholder groups include:

## Clients have:

- appropriateness of service delivery
- effectiveness in making an impact for clients

## Community organisations have increased:

- legal knowledge and education for the community and partners
- community access to services that meet their legal needs

## Justice system services benefit from CLCs:

- support of the justice system
- contribution to legal policy and practice

## Volunteers:

- can be leveraged to provide more services to the community
- volunteers professionally benefit from volunteering in CLCs



### WHAT THEY SAID

#### OUR CLIENTS

“Very friendly and welcoming front staff. Legal staff saw me same day when anxious and friendly and efficient. Felt secure in their skills.”

#### OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

“...[the CLC] is an important welfare service in the fabric of our community, accessible and responsive.”

#### THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

“CLCs provide a great service and I am impressed with the commitment, work ethic, professionalism and outcomes they achieve....”

#### OUR VOLUNTEERS

“I’m enormously grateful that the [CLC] has given me an opportunity to experience real legal issues in a practical environment.”

“...I feel the benefits to me from the experience still outweigh my contribution...”



Our CLCs' civil law work includes domestic violence protection orders, housing, credit and debt, wills and estates and employment.



# About our clients

**46%** of Queensland CLC clients have no or low income

**68%** of Queensland CLC clients indicated that they were experiencing financial disadvantage

**7%** of Queensland CLC clients are First Australians

“  
OUR CLIENTS TOLD US...  
“Excellent support and advice. Very helpful and I felt very reassured. It made the matter less stressful. Excellent service in place, definitely made a difference in my life - there is a way forward and hope.”



**60% of clients** are women



**1 in 5 clients** has a disability or mental illness



**4 in 5 women** seeking assistance experience family violence



**Over 1 in 10 clients** are from outer regional and remote areas in Queensland



**50% of clients** in rural regional and remote areas experience family violence



**3 in 5 clients** are people with a disability on no or low income



**2 in 5 people** with a disability experience family violence



**1 in 5 people** seeking help from rural regional and remote areas are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people



**More than 6% of clients** are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing homelessness



**Most people** experiencing homelessness that sought help from a Queensland CLC are women

# About our Services

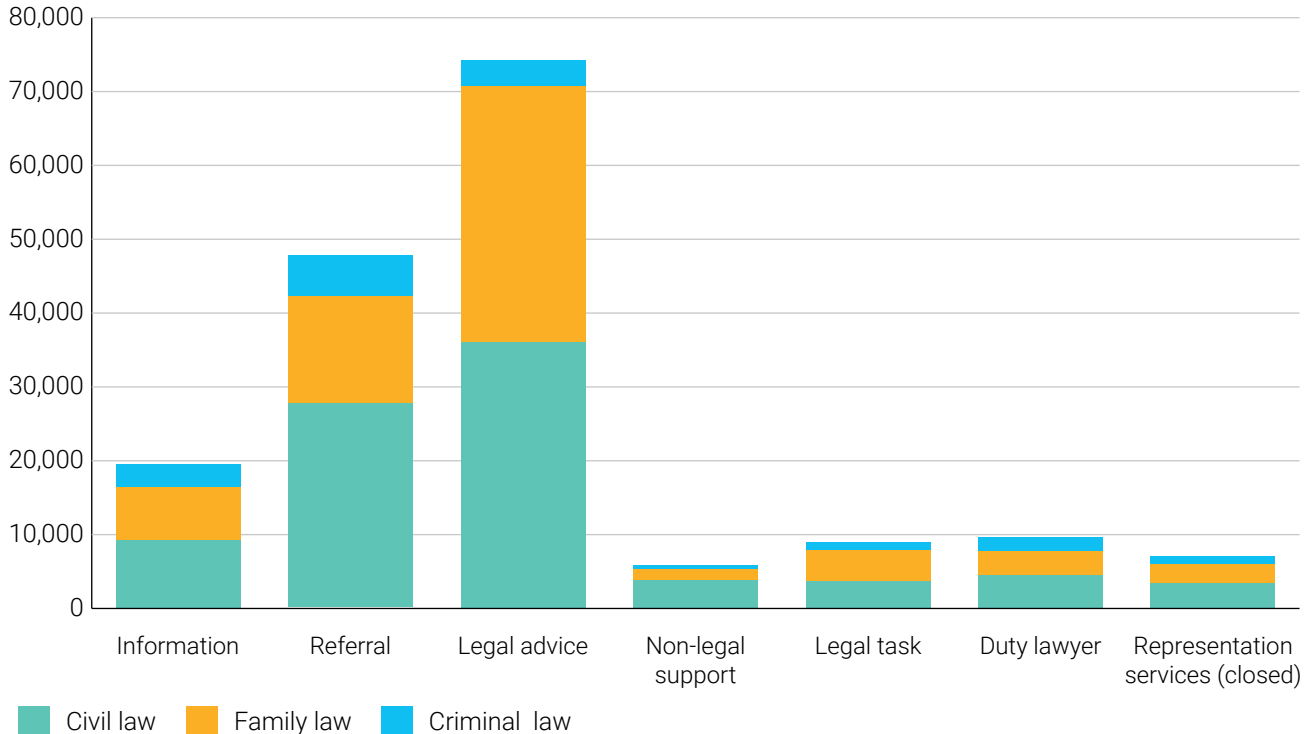
The majority of services provided by CLCs were advices in the area of family law, closely followed by the civil law areas.

The high rates of discrete services reflect the many volunteers across Queensland CLCs providing one-off legal advice and task assistance.

Because of the narrow eligibility of Legal Aid services for family law assistance, and the unaffordability of private lawyers' services for people on low incomes, CLCs play an important role in filling this need across the Queensland community.

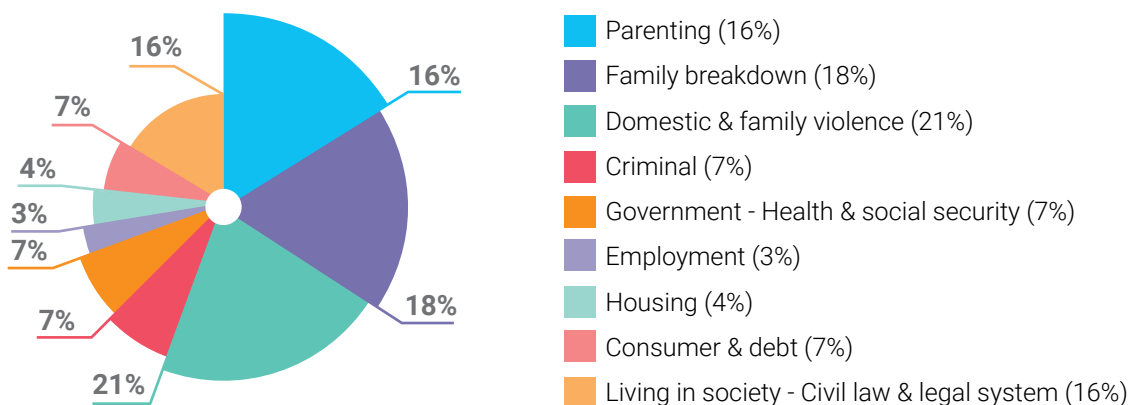
The stories of Tom, Ano, Leanne and Janet profile our CLCs' representation work and provide a powerful insight into the impact of the legal assistance on people's lives. There are hundreds of stories just like these.

## What services did we deliver this year?

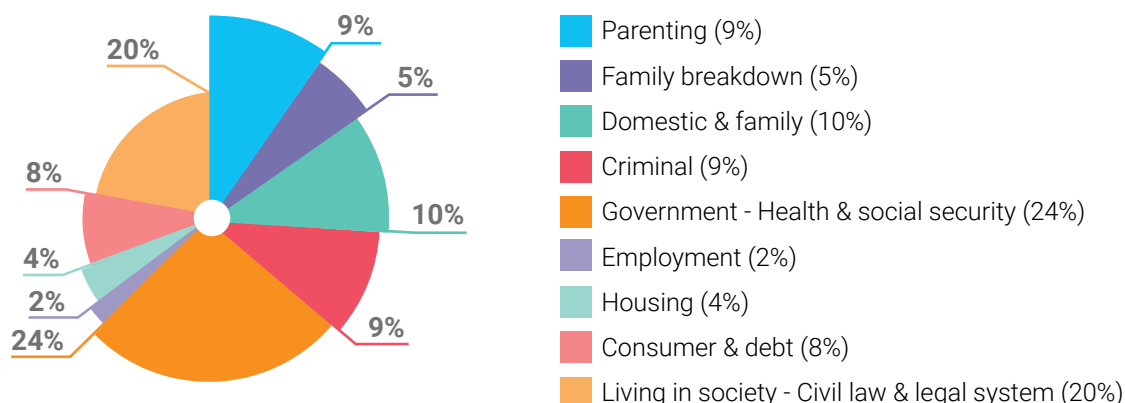


## What legal problems did we help with this year?

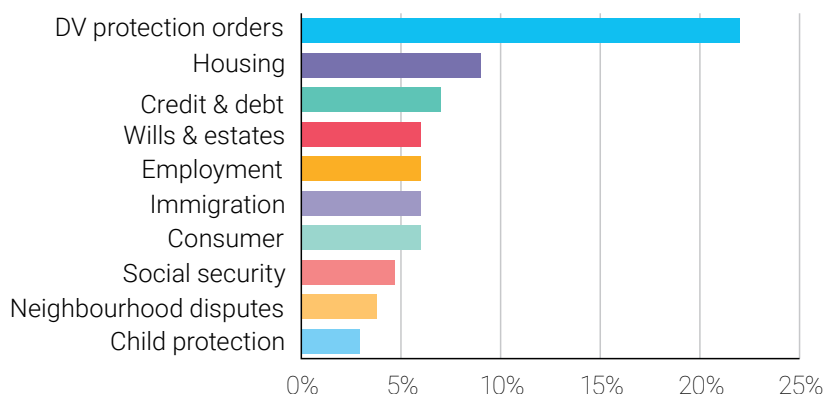
### Discrete services



### Representation services



### QLD CLCS 2017/18: Top 10 Civil Law Issues





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OUR CLIENTS TOLD US...

“I have asked for help for several matters. I have severe psychiatric disorder and have great difficulty coping with life’s complex issues. I have nobody in life to turn to for help. Therefore I have found this service a life saver. It is invaluable to me. I know I will again need further help in the future.”

“

OUR CLIENTS TOLD US...

“Nice to know that I can take steps to address a distressing situation with neighbours.”

# How we are able to address our client's needs

## Reaching out to the people who need us most

Palm Island has one of the highest need for legal assistance services in the State. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Legal Service NQ** recognised the legal need of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women on Palm Island by providing fortnightly legal outreach to Palm Island and in 2016, extended that service to include a community development worker for 20 hours per week. As a result Palm Island women are seeking legal advice and representation in increasing numbers as the community development worker provides a vital access point between court days and when other forms of communication with lawyers are not possible. This service is also complementary to the recent establishment of a specialist domestic violence court on Palm Island.

## Multi-discipline expertise a phone call away

The Social Security Telephone Advice Service (TAS) at **Basic Rights Queensland** enables vulnerable people across the State to access advice about social security issues. TAS consists of a multi-discipline team helping callers address a range of socio-legal issues as well as their social security concerns. TAS helps callers with advice on a wide range of social security issues including eligibility for payment, refusal or cancellation of Disability Support Pension, suspension of payments, assets and incomes tests, youth allowance, Austudy and Family Tax Benefit.

## Innovating to fill service gaps

When couples acquire property during their relationship, resolving who gets what when they separate can cause conflict. When there is no money to spare and there are low-value assets and sometimes significant debt, access to legal services is limited. But couples need help to sort out a financial settlement. For example, superannuation needs to be dealt with, or the family home may need to be sold or transferred and they may need to work out who gets the car or in some cases, they may only be working out how to share paying debt. Separated couples may also need help to work out the arrangements their children's care. **Pine Rivers Community Legal Service** recognised the challenges disadvantaged people face when separating and developed the Community Family Mediation Service (CFMS) to provide no-cost mediation for financial/property settlements and children's matters. The CFMS helps separating couples resolve separation issues quickly and effectively when no other legal service is available or affordable.

## Meeting the challenge of distance

Queensland is a geographically diverse state and this creates challenges for people in regional and rural communities accessing services. **Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service** provides culturally appropriate support, assistance and referrals to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families that experience family and domestic violence and sexual assault. The service spans a large geographical region, with offices in Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Mt Isa and Brisbane and regular outreaches in regional centres. Its 1800 number also allows people in rural, region and remote Queensland have access to legal services via a free call.



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“Women being able to access specialist legal advice and support in the safe environment of a DV agency ensure two things: firstly, they are able to access two supports at the same time and not have to spend time and money travelling between agencies coordinating appointments; secondly, the safe environment of a DV agency means they can engage openly with the lawyer and gained joined-up support from their advocate, the lawyer, and DV support staff at Court.”

Rosemary O'Malley, CEO of Domestic Violence Prevention Centre

# How we are able to address our client's needs

## Bringing complementary services to the regions

**The Advocacy and Support Service (TASC)** Psychology and Counselling initiative was developed to improve rural and regional communities' access to psychology and counselling services. Psychology and counselling are complementary to the legal and advocacy work TASC already does and benefits the broader work in the community. TASC Psychology Services are either bulkbilled via Medicare or are based on the ability of the individual to meet costs. This new social enterprise venture aligns with TASC's strategic objective to diversify its funding base. The service is available in Toowoomba, Roma and South West Queensland and focusses on clients who would not otherwise have access to a service.

## Mobile service in safe locations

**Gold Coast Community Legal Centre and Advice Bureau**, in consultation with the Integrated Response Network developed a mobile legal service which is provided in places where survivors of domestic and family violence feel safe. Legal services are provided at local domestic violence services, the specialist domestic violence court, and temporary and crisis accommodation settings. Feedback from members of the Integrated Response Network has been overwhelmingly positive.

## No appointment necessary

There are few legal services where people in the community know they can show up for a free legal service the same day each week. **Moreton Bay Regional Community Legal Service**, with the assistance of a dedicated pool of volunteers, operates a "walk-in" clinic every Monday in Caboolture. The option of a walk-in clinic means community members with urgent legal problems may not have to wait weeks for an appointment.



OUR CLIENTS TOLD US...

"My English is poor, but thanks to the friendly staff, I did not feel uncomfortable and they did everything to get a good understanding."



OUR CLIENTS TOLD US...

"Above and beyond my expectations. I now have the confidence to leave my house and enjoy my life without fear! That is not something I have been able to do for a very long time. The lawyer has helped me get the confidence I need to finally live my life again."



“

OUR CLIENTS TOLD US...

“Being supported by kind and friendly staff was an amazing support. Their advice was impeccable and I cannot thank them enough for the support I needed at the exact time I needed it. I massively appreciated this service, I had no understanding of the law related to my matter or how to go about it. Their assistance in the process and the outcome was invaluable and they were a game changer for me.”

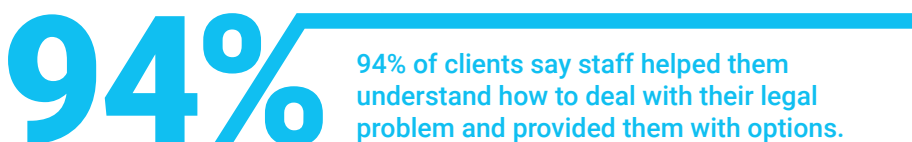


## What our clients say

In May 2018 CLCs Queensland coordinated a survey of 1,757 CLC clients.

Our aim was to survey 25% of the State's CLC clients over a period of a month. In the survey month (1-31 May 2018), we received 1,757 responses, and according to Community Legal Assistance Service System (CLASS) data 5,436 clients received services in the same period, so we reached **32.3%** of clients.

### What did clients think of CLC services they accessed?



Clients with disabilities were less satisfied with the access to services and their overall satisfaction with services provided.



### OUR CLIENTS TOLD US...

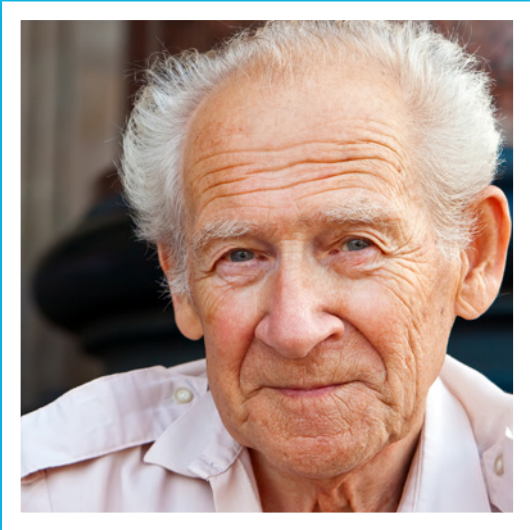
"Excellent explanation helped by showing particular clause in the Act. Good directions on moving forward. A great job overall and a great team. [CLC] made a difference as it empowers me to not give up but take the next step."

"Legal staff are great and are most helpful in providing direction in sometimes complex issues. What's best is that there is a service for us pensioners who struggle with costs and would otherwise avoid legal problems."

"Excellent support and advice. Very helpful and I felt very reassured. It made the matter less stressful. Excellent service in place, definitely made a difference in my life - there is a way forward and hope."

"Very knowledgeable, patient and ensures that you fully understand everything. Always concise and clear and accurate and no question was too silly. Without the team I would never be where I am today. I got my requested settlement against many odds and legally. Always ensured my safety and wellbeing with support at all court hearings and was extremely supportive at mediation during settlement. Very aware of all and never dropped the ball once. Overall excellent service and I would not consider anywhere else. I feel the staff are truly vested in the mission and thus their whole belief system is entirely for the client. I am in a very healthy confident place right now as well as physically safe and totally mentally at peace."

# Our client's stories



## Helping Tom\* and his son avoid homelessness

Tenancy can be an insecure type of housing when tenants are subjected to unfair treatment and eviction. Being able to navigate the residential tenancy system can be critical to tenants staying in their home.

Tom and his son, Liam were renting a property. After a routine inspection was carried out by the real estate agent, Tom was issued with a Notice to Remedy Breach. The Notice said that they had been smoking in the house. Neither Tom, Liam or any of their guests smoke. When the property manager came back to check the breach was remedied they noticed there was still dust on the fans and a window sill, so Tom and his son were given a Notice to Leave.

Tom has a disability and required assistance with negotiating with the real estate agent. Tom and Liam faced potential homelessness. **Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre** sent a letter to the real estate agent requesting the Notice to Leave for Unremedied Breach be withdrawn.

As a result, the real estate agent withdrew the notice and agreed to let Tom and Liam stay until the end of the fixed term so they could stay in their home.

## Getting beyond language barriers

Raising a healthy child in Australia is expensive and a child has a right to be financially supported by their parents.

Ano\* came to Australia after meeting Johnny. She is learning English, but still has some difficulties in communicating. After being married for a number of years, Ano and Johnny separated. Ano is the primary carer of their children, relying solely on Centrelink benefits and child support.

Ano did not understand the separation processes, including child support and needed help. After looking over the documents, **North Queensland Women's Legal Service (NQWLS)** found Johnny had been underpaying her child support by thousands of dollars. NQWLS appealed to the Child Support Agency on Ano's behalf.

Because of NQWLS solicitors' advocacy work, Johnny has begun to pay back the child support that Ano and the children should rightfully have received. Ano said that she is now relieved that the financial stress on her family has been reduced.

\*Not their real names



### Janet's\* independence

Adults making decisions about their personal financial affairs when they have the capacity to do so is fundamental to maintaining autonomy. This includes adults who have a disability.

Janet is a young women with autism and mental health issues. Her mother was seeking the appointment of the Public Trustee to make financial decisions for Janet, against her wishes. **Taylor Street Community Legal Service** helped Janet gather evidence from her medical specialists and from organisations with whom Janet volunteered who confirmed her planning and management capacity. Taylor Street Community Legal Service also represented her at her Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) hearing.

QCAT found Janet had capacity to manage her day-to-day financial affairs and put safe-guards in place to assess how she was going after a six month period. This finding enabled Janet to maintain her right to financial independence over day-to-day matters, the loss of which would have impacted on her mental health, dignity and self-esteem.



### Keeping Families Together

It is important Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children preserve and enhance their identity by maintaining strong connections with their family and culture and wherever possible be in the care of their family and community.

The Department of Child Safety removed Leanne's\* four children from her care, placing them in different location across the State. Leanne had to travel more than 200 km to seek help from the **Aboriginal Family Legal Service Southern Queensland (AFLSSQ)** to have her children returned to her care. AFLSSQ helped Leanne with documents in response to the Department's concerns and attended case conferences with her. AFLSSQ was able to assist Leanne with referrals to services in her local community that could support her with parenting.

Because of AFLSSQ's work, Leanne's children were returned to her care and are feeling settled at home. Leanne is feeling very relieved to have her children back at home.

\*Not their real names



“

OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS SAY...

**“This is a very important service for those members in the community who are unable to pay...”**

# Working with our communities

## Our activities

# 917

community legal education (CLE) activities

# 128

(CLE) resources developed

The top 3 areas of civil law for community legal education are:

- 1 Environment
- 2 Immigration
- 3 Wills and Estates

The top 3 areas of family law for CLE are:

- 1 Domestic & Family Violence
- 2 Parenting
- 3 Divorce

### CLE resources include:

- Self-help kits
- Phone apps
- Manuals
- Fact sheets
- Brochures
- Podcasts
- Theatre
- Film
- Presentations

### The audiences for CLE activities and resources include:

- Clients
- Community organisations
- Community groups
- Government agencies

Community Legal Centres Queensland plays an important role in providing training and support to CLCs and the community to support their work. Community Legal Centres Queensland does this by:

- Providing free webinars to CLC staff and volunteers
    - 38 webinars in the last year with 3326 registrants
    - Webinar registrants came from CLCs (51.75%) and from the private legal profession, government agencies, community organisations and students (46.82%)
    - 26.82% registrants were outside Queensland
  - Holding an annual 2-day conference
  - Holding an annual Leadership Forum
  - Special training events – This year we held a **CLE Masterclass** for community legal centres and Legal Aid commission workers across Australia. More than 80 participants attended. When participants were surveyed about how the CLE Masterclass would change their CLE, the top 3 responses were:
    - Aligning CLE with the organisation's strategic plan
    - Use more community development techniques
    - Use more technology to deliver CLE
- Six weeks after their masterclass, participants reported that they had changed or still had an intention to change in the top 3 areas of:
- Adopting principles of adult learning
  - Aligning CLE with the organisation's strategic plan
  - Setting SMART objectives to help plan and evaluate their CLE



# How we work with Community Partners

## Co-location with a neighbourhood centre

Establishing and maintaining strong community partnerships not only ensures clients get the services they need, it can also mean cost efficiencies. Back-office costs for the **Brisbane North Community Legal Service** are low due to the co-location of the service with the Nundah Neighbourhood Centre. The co-location allows for sharing of operational, administrative, finance and other back office costs. The provision of other social programs at the Neighbourhood Centre ensures legal service clients can be easily linked into other community-based services.

## Health Justice Partnership: Mental Health Service

Many people in the community may not know how to access legal help. Health community partners are important “noticers” of people who may be experiencing legal problems. The **Cairns Community Legal Centre** works with the Cairns Hospital to provide weekly advice clinics at the hospital’s Mental Health Unit. The Cairns Mental Health Legal Service operated by the Cairns CLC, assists patients with Treatment Authorities, Electroconvulsive Therapy applications and other mental health legal work, including hearings before the Mental Health Review Tribunal. Cairns CLC also provides patients with other legal services including credit, debt, family law, domestic violence and other legal matters they may be experiencing.

## Building connections at NAIDOC Week

**Goondiwindi Community Legal Service** is part of Care Goondiwindi. As part of its work in the community, each year it contributes to the community’s NAIDOC week events and activities. These include town marches, ceremonies and performances. NAIDOC week is an important time for the Service to forge ties with the community and raise awareness of the legal services available to the community.

## Partnerships to provide regional services

Strong community partnerships are critical to **Tenants Queensland’s** management of the Queensland Statewide Tenant and Referral Service (QSTARS) program that provides high quality, free, independent tenancy advice to help tenants understand their rights and responsibilities and sustain safe and secure tenancies. QSTARS partners are: Community Plus, Enhance Care, The Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre, Ipswich Regional Advocacy Service, Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre, Suncoast Community Legal Service and TASC. These partnerships ensure regional communities have access to tenancy advice.

## Community legal education for refugees

**Refugee and Immigration Legal Service (RAILS)** partners with organisations to facilitate engaging and informative community legal education. Partners include Multi-cultural Development Association, Department of Justice and Attorney-General’s Dispute Resolution Centre, ACCESS Services and Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT). Community legal education activities include life skills programs for newly arrived refugees, conflict resolution for community leaders and “Rap and Role Play”.

## Community legal education for young people

An important part of YFS Legal’s work is to provide CLE to young people to help prevent them into getting into trouble with the law. **YFS Legal** is only too familiar with the consequences for young people becoming involved in the criminal justice system through their work as duty lawyers and representing young people in court. CLE informs young people about where they stand on parties, drugs, alcohol and social media.



“

OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS SAY...

“I would look forward to any liaison around opportunities to work together to support client outcomes and develop communication pathways.”

“

OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS SAY...

“The enthusiasm to engage with our school is appreciated and the changes in the sexting presentation are great!”

## What our community partners say

We asked our community partners about the impact of the work of Queensland CLCs in:

**1** increasing the community's knowledge and self-confidence around legal issues.

**2** increasing the community's access to legal services.

A broad range of community organisations representing the types of community partnership responded to our survey including:

- community based social support services
- domestic violence support services
- advocacy groups
- Government departments
- Law firms
- Peak industry bodies
- Educational institutions

# 82%

of our community partner survey respondents agree or strongly agree that CLCs have contributed to the community having improved knowledge and self-confidence around legal issues

# 85%

of survey respondents had confidence in making a referral to a CLC for appropriate support or advice

# 65%

of survey respondents indicated that they had increased competence and knowledge in making appropriate referrals, with more than 34% of respondents indicating they felt neutral about this or making appropriate referrals was not applicable to them.

# 40%

of community partners felt CLCs made appropriate referrals to them. This is qualified by 30% of respondents indicating a referral to them from a CLC was not applicable and 27% of respondents were "neutral" about this question.



# Stories from our communities

## **Collaborative service planning**

The community benefits in many ways from services working together.

Legal assistance services struggle to meet the legal demand in their communities. Community Legal Centres Queensland provided regional planning support to the Regional Legal Assistance Forums (RLAF) in Caboolture and Ipswich. This involved local services including Community Legal Centres, Legal Aid and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services identifying the community's legal needs, planning to enhance collaboration between services and identifying where new services are needed. The plans were provided to the Queensland Legal Assistance Forum (QLAF) to inform State-wide planning by government and legal assistance services.

The regional service plans will provide a framework for local services and government to better meet the community's legal needs in the future.

## **Helping communities to be better noticers of legal problems**

It is important that people in our communities are able to share their problems with others they trust who can connect them with the help they need.

**Law Right** recognises that health and legal problems are often interconnected. Law Yarn is a legal health check that can help health practitioners yarn with members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Cairns about their legal problems and connect them with legal help. Using images of cyclones, mangroves, stars and journeys, the Law Yarn resource helps vulnerable communities recognise their legal problems in context. Law Right specifically trained Wuchopperen health staff to use this highly effective resource with implementation of the program to continue throughout 2018.

## **Real world experience in clinical legal education**

Being treated fairly at work is a basic right protected by law and is a right many people take for granted. It can be challenging to get affordable and timely legal help when unfair treatment happens at work.

In recent years, **Central Queensland Community Legal Centre** (CQCLC) experienced an increased need in the community for legal assistance for employment issues. CQCLC's limited resources could not cover the community's need. By forming a partnership with Central Queensland University, CQCLC was able to involve law students who have completed their employment law course to assist with research and basic drafting tasks. Through the student clinic CQCLC has been able to provide a better level of advice and minor assistance to clients who might not otherwise be in a position to obtain legal help.

## **Community having a say**

It is important the local community's voices are heard in decisions that affect them. Access to information about any decision-making processes is critical to ensure local community views are heard.

**Environmental Defenders Office North Queensland** (EDO NQ) provided residents and community groups in Kuranda with advice and information about an environmental impact assessment process for a proposed tourist development. This advice helped the community to navigate the complex statutory processes of environmental assessments and planning, allowing them to have their say about a project that was likely to have a significant impact on their community.

# CLCs' contribution to legal policy and practice

## Our activities

# 172

Law Reform projects

# 2566

Stakeholder engagements

### Queensland CLCs made formal submissions to:

- Queensland Government about Bills before Parliament
- Australian Law Reform Commission
- Queensland Parliamentary Committee Inquiries
- Productivity Commission
- Queensland Law Reform Commission;

### on a list of topics including:

- Child protection
- Family law
- Housing
- Criminal justice system
- Elder abuse
- Citizenship
- Aged care
- Social security
- Domestic violence
- The environment
- Gender and identity

### Timely services at the door of the court

In recognition of the challenges clients who experience family violence face in the Family Court, **Caxton Legal Centre** established the Family and Advocacy Support Service (FASS) with Legal Aid Queensland. FASS involves a full-time solicitor and social worker based at the Family Law Courts, providing advice and support. This is a unique service which involves social workers in a duty lawyer model at the Family Court, which provides a wrap-around service for families who are vulnerable due to the effects of domestic and family violence.

Facing court can be daunting for women experiencing violence. Women are often fearful of their abusive partner or ex-partner, and of the court system itself. **Women's Legal Service's** duty lawyer service operates from the Holland Park, Ipswich and Caboolture Magistrates Courts. Women's Legal Service duty lawyers support women by providing information about court procedures, explaining options and appearing in court with them. As a result women are better supported and equipped to participate in the court process.

### Making public transport more accessible

**Queensland Advocacy Incorporated** (QAI) has been instrumental in the community campaign for accessible Queensland trains. In 2013, Queensland's Department of Transport and Main Roads commissioned \$4.3 billion for 75 new six-car trains. Those that have arrived in Queensland so far (built overseas) are not fully accessible for people who use wheelchairs, or who have vision impairments. Some access paths and the bathroom access are narrower than the minimum widths set out in the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (DSAPT) established in 2002. Queensland applied to the Australian Human Rights Commission for exemptions from the DSAPT, but they did not grant them for the new conveyances. Queensland has undertaken to fix the conveyances over the next few years and the Premier has appointed retired District Court judge Michael Forde to lead a commission of inquiry into the faulty commissioning process.

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SURVEY  
RESPONDENTS SAID...

“The whole justice system  
would crumble to smoking  
ruins without CLCs!”



“

As a result of advocacy on the issues, the explanatory note for their Bill before Queensland Parliament states:

“There have been many instances where individuals have been denied access to work due to the inflexibility of the current system. In a number of cases, the local community, through community leaders, law enforcement and judicial representatives, has determined that the person poses no risk to children and their employment would have broader positive community impacts. It is imperative that the legislative framework in Queensland recognises the different circumstances of remote indigenous communities and supports the process for job seekers in Indigenous communities whilst protecting the interests of children.”

### **Making systems fairer for indigenous people**

Working with local Members of Parliament, **Junkuri Laka Community Legal Centre** has been involved in drafting amendments to the *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000*. The amendment introduced a separate category of Blue Card for Indigenous workers in Indigenous communities, people who now often miss out on work when they can't obtain a Blue Card due to the typically extensive criminal records people in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have.

## What the justice system says about CLCs

We surveyed people working in the justice system that interact with Queensland CLCs. The range of respondents provide us with an insight into how CLCs effectively support the justice system and the value of our CLCs' contribution to legal policy and practice.

**47%**

of respondents worked at Legal Aid

**34%**

of respondents worked in government in the area of justice administration

**17%**

of respondents worked in a court or tribunal including judicial officers and registry staff.

**100%**

of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Queensland CLCs provided an effective service for vulnerable individuals and the broader community

**100%**

of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Queensland CLCS lawyers provided high quality services to their clients

**84%**

of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Queensland CLCs contributed to reduced incidence of non-appearances in court

**96%**

of respondents agreed that Queensland CLCs' work lead to increased efficiency in processing cases

**92%**

of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Queensland CLCs work enabled them to be better informed on community views on legal and public policy issues

“

“QLAF, its working groups and regional forums provide important spaces to undertake collaborative service planning, and Queensland's approach is recognised as national best practice,” said the current Chair of QLAF, barrister Matthew Jones. “Community legal centres' contribution at these forums are clearly contributing to a more effective and efficient system of services, and better outcomes for the justice system and those Queenslanders that are affected by the justice system.”

# Stories of change

## Working together to improve the service system

People often experience multiple legal problems at the same time, and they often coexist with, or are triggered by, other (non-legal) problems. Individuals should have improved access to opportunities for resolving legal problems, no matter how they make contact with the system. To improve access to front-line services, Queensland's legal assistance services coordinate with each other and collaborate with governments, non-legal services and the private legal profession.

The Queensland Legal Assistance Forum (QLAF) is the State-wide forum for building partnerships across the sector to ensure a holistic approach to addressing people's legal and social problems. The Forum meets several times a year, to consider opportunities for improved coordination and targeting of services between legal assistance service providers and other service providers. Practical impacts of the Forum in 2017-18 include supporting a pilot regional service planning process in Caboolture and Ipswich; providing input into government policies around research and innovation, evaluation, and new services; supporting training forums focussed on frontline services and community education, and taking advice from Regional Legal Assistance Forums about emerging issues across the state, that can inform service development and collaborative services.

## Justice a long time coming

Having a criminal record can mean a life-time sentence even though a person has served their actual sentence. It is particularly unjust if the criminal record is for activities that are no longer against the law.

Consensual sexual activity between adult men was decriminalised in Queensland in 1990.

Although decriminalisation removed the threat of further prosecution for these activities, it did not address the impacts of criminal records relating to historical offences. This meant that a number of Queenslanders continue to live with ongoing stigma, shame, and practical difficulties presented by a criminal record for conduct that is now legal.

The **LGBTI Legal Service** actively advocated for the expungement of wrongful convictions prior to 1991 by publishing a discussion paper, engaging with the Queensland Law Reform Commission Review process and working with community to raise awareness of the issue.

In October 2017, the Queensland government passed a law to establish an administrative scheme for the expungement of convictions for consensual homosexual interactions prior to decriminalisation.



## Helping the community be heard

*Judge Fleur Kingham, President Land Court, Queensland*

"My first real life exposure to legal practice was through the Students' Legal Service at the University of Queensland, the Women's' Legal Service and the Caxton Legal Service. As a student and, later, a volunteer lawyer, I saw the impact of law on the lives of individuals and communities and their great need for guidance in navigating the labyrinth that is our justice system.

As President of the Land Court of Queensland, I am aware the need for assistance has only grown as the law has become increasingly far-reaching and complex. In the last financial year, more than 70% of cases before the Land Court involved at least one party appearing without legal representation. While I regret there is no funding for a pro bono advice service that focuses on this court, I know many of our parties do obtain some assistance through legal advice services offered by community legal centres.

The most fortunate are the parties who secure legal representation by a community legal centre. In this jurisdiction, I most frequently encounter the **Environmental Defenders' Office**, which supports individuals and community groups to exercise their right to be heard about decisions that affect them, their communities and the environment. Without that assistance, this court may not hear an important perspective and those parties may not be in a position to effectively exercise their valuable procedural rights."

# Stories of change

## Older people's rights are human rights

Every week **Townsville Community Legal Service** (TCLS) helps older people experiencing human rights abuses. Many of their stories highlight gaps in our law and legal system, and how it fails to protect older people. Their stories include issues of violence, abuse and neglect, autonomy and independence and access to health and care services.

TCLS Principal Solicitor Bill Mitchell has been able to take these everyday stories of Townsville's older people and use them to inform debate in the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing, which is working towards a new United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. These stories contribute to and inform the debate about the human rights of older persons around the world.

## Fairer treatment for young people

It is internationally recognised that people under the age of 18 are children. For many years in Queensland this was not the case for treatment of 17 years olds in the criminal justice system.

Over 25 years of persistent advocacy from the **Youth Advocacy Centre** (YAC) and other youth organisations in Queensland, the State Government changed the law to ensure that 18 years of age is the threshold for a person to be treated as an adult in the criminal justice system. Since these changes in 2016 YAC continues to be involved in the practical implementation of the law to ensure fair and just treatment of young people in Queensland. YAC continues to provide advice to Government about further reform of the youth justice system (such as raising the age of criminal responsibility, again a matter of comment by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child).

## Reduced costs to the taxpayer

It costs the Queensland justice system more than \$300 per day to keep a person in prison, so ensuring prisoners have access to supervised release in the community reduces taxpayer costs and prisoner numbers.

**Prisoner's Legal Service's** Parole Advice Service helps disadvantaged prisoners gain increased access to supervised release to the community. The Service helps incarcerated people prepare parole applications which includes plans that consider accommodation and employment upon release as well as assisting prisoners with making submissions to the parole board.



“

THE 2016 SOFRONOFF REVIEW OF THE QUEENSLAND PAROLE SYSTEM NOTED THAT:

“...The role of Prisoner’s Legal Service in assisting prisoners to identify and raise errors in decision making by the Parole Board should not be underestimated....in holding the Parole Board accountable and assisting a marginalised and disadvantaged cohort..... It is also a significant agent in reducing overall cost”.

“

SURVEY RESPONDENTS SAID...

“Require further funding to expand legal services to vulnerable persons within the community.”



“

CLC VOLUNTEERS SAY...

“I think volunteering at a CLC is both a privilege and an obligation of the legal profession. Lawyers, through their education and practice, understand our complex legal system. Others in the community do not have that opportunity, or the capacity. I think it is an important part of a lawyer’s role in the community to share their knowledge and assist others in navigating the legal system.”

“

VOLUNTEER SURVEY  
RESPONDENTS SAID...

“I really enjoy the thought of ‘giving back’ to the community... I feel like my time volunteering has given me more satisfaction than I have experienced in my 7 years of practising...”



# Volunteers

Queensland CLCs have a long history of harnessing volunteer support to make a significant contribution by providing services to the community. In turn, it is the community legal centres' hope that the volunteering experience is a professionally and personally enriching one for our volunteers.

## Our volunteers

Volunteers bring broad a wide range of skills and expertise to CLCs with volunteers undertaking roles including:

- Lawyers
- Migration agents
- Community development and engagement workers
- Community legal educators
- Social workers
- Law and social work students
- Professional legal training students
- Financial counsellors
- Administrative assistants
- Finance officers and bookkeepers
- Fundraisers
- Human Resource management
- Special projects
- Board and management committee members
- Communications
- Technology assistance
- Town planning
- Singers!

**In the last year, volunteers were involved in all aspects of Queensland CLC operations.**

**89.3%**

of Queensland CLCs involved volunteers in their organisation

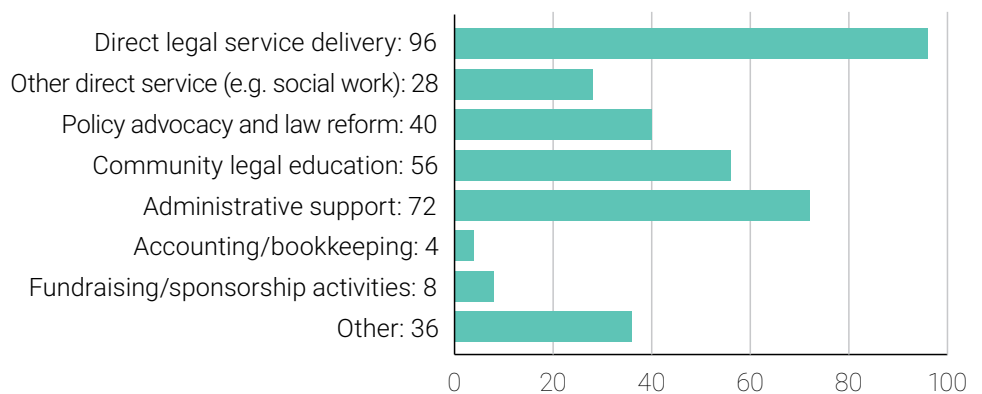
**4,111**

the number of volunteer hours in Queensland CLCs over the course of 1 year

**1,565**

the total number of individual volunteers in Queensland CLCs (over the course of 1 year)

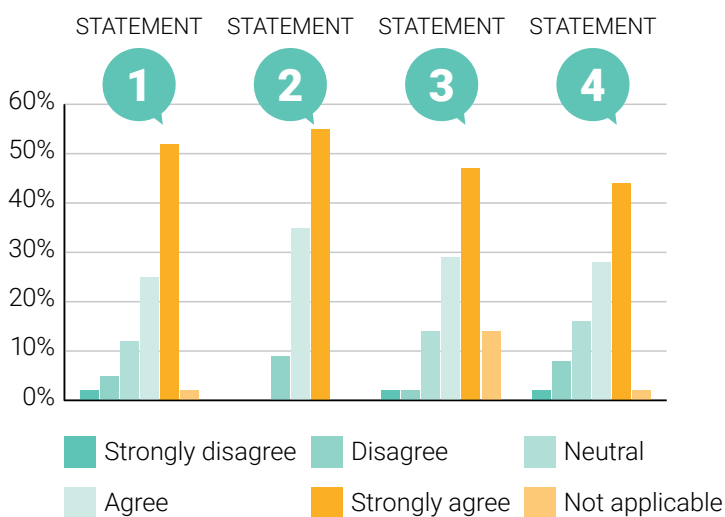
### Types of work undertaken by CLC volunteers



## What our volunteers say

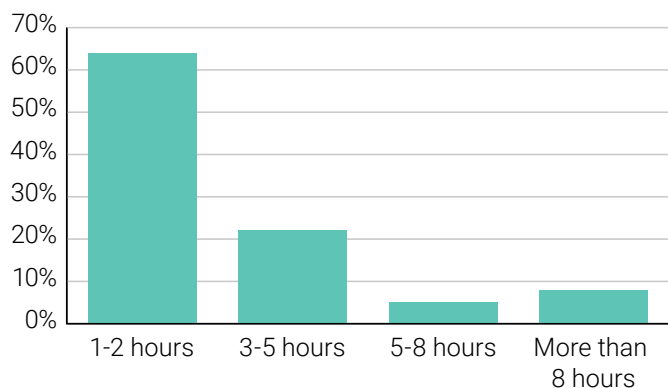
We surveyed 55 people who volunteer in Queensland CLCs. The sample size is still relatively low considering the involvement of over 1565 volunteer across Queensland CLCs.

The volunteers in CLCs are exposed to broader community issues. For more experienced volunteers the experience does not directly provide them with career or professional development. However respondent comments indicated that there is inherent personal and professional value in making a contribution to the community through volunteering at a CLC. Early career volunteers were more likely to benefit from the professional development aspects of volunteering at a CLC.



- 1 Working with the CLC offers me a unique opportunity to gain experience in new and different areas of law
- 2 I have been able to improve my understanding of broader community issues through my work at the CLC
- 3 I feel like I have been able to improve my practice as a result of my experience at the CLC
- 4 I feel the experience of working at the CLC has enhanced my career prospects

### How many hours per week do you contribute to the CLC?



## Volunteers keep services in communities

Small community organisations would not be able to run without the dedication and commitment of volunteers to provide support across all the functions of the organisation, including governance. **Bayside Community Legal Service** has limited staff resources, so the efforts of the committed voluntary management committee has ensured the service continues to remain available to the Bayside community, and has done so for over 25 years.

## Volunteering build careers

Volunteering in a CLC not only helps people who need legal help, but can also play an important part in building the careers and networks of legal practitioners.

Alice first came to volunteer at **Robina Community Legal Centre** through her studies of law at Bond University and then as an ongoing volunteer, after she happened to fill in for a friend. Through volunteering with the CLC, Alice developed connections with lawyers in the private profession. These connections led to Alice undertaking work experience at a local law firm. The work experience was invaluable to Robina CLC as she brought paralegal skills she learnt from work experience to her volunteering duties. Recently Alice was successful in obtaining a paid position at another private law firm, who also had volunteering connections with Robina Community Legal Centre.

For Alice, and many other student volunteers across CLCs, their volunteering experience enables them to gain valuable work experience and develop professional networks which contributes to their developing legal careers.

## Volunteers are a service multiplier

Providing services in a geographically dispersed State like Queensland has its logistical challenges, particularly when resources are scarce.

In tackling the legal need across the Sunshine Coast region, **Suncoast Community Legal Service** recruits volunteer lawyers and receptionists to provide regular evening services across the region, from Maroochydore, Noosa, Nambour, Caloundra, Maleny, and Landsborough to Pomona.

The commitment of volunteers has meant that regional towns and communities have increased access to free legal services on a regular basis.

Most volunteers contributed between 1 and 2 hours per week to a CLC

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CLC VOLUNTEERS SAY...

“Working as a volunteer at the CLC has given me the opportunity to work in areas of the law that are not available to me at my place of work.”



**Acknowledgment of traditional owners**

*Community Legal Centres Queensland affirms that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the indigenous inhabitants of Australia and acknowledges their unique relationship with their ancestral country. In particular we acknowledge the Turrbal and Jagera peoples, the traditional custodians of the land in and around Brisbane and pay respect to their elders, past and present.*



**Community  
Legal Centres  
Queensland**

[www.communitylegalqld.org.au](http://www.communitylegalqld.org.au)