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Community Law Australia



MEDIA RELEASE

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Mackay Regional CLC urges candidates to reveal their plans to address legal crisis

Mackay Regional Community Legal Centre has written to its local candidates in the seat of Dawson to ask them to outline their plans to address the access to justice crisis.

As the local community legal centre, Mackay Regional CLC provides vital legal help to residents across the Dawson electorate and is concerned that access to justice has not yet been addressed in the local area.

Community Law Australia commended Mackay Regional CLC and said that despite recent increases in funding to individual centres, there was still huge unmet demand for free legal help among Australians who can't afford to pay for a private lawyer.

Community Law Australia spokesperson Carolyn Bond said: "Access to justice is a major issue for people in the local area, which is why each candidate is being contacted to ensure that they make their position known to local residents.

Mackay Regional CLC said that the top legal issues they encountered ranged from family law issues such as property settlement and child contact, employment law particularly unfair dismissal, and consumer complaints such as services and bill disputes.

Jessica Brake, Principal Solicitor at Mackay Regional CLC, said that usually they are booked three to four weeks in advance and that local demand for legal help was high. This is the case even with legal advice evenings being staffed by volunteers, including 22 lawyers, migration agents, social workers and co-ordinators.

"We also have a solicitor who provides face to face advice to residents of the Whitsundays 1 day a month," Miss Brake said.

Community Law Australia Spokesperson Carolyn Bond said: "Without proper access to justice, people may miss out on legal help when they need it most.

"Unresolved legal problems can often escalate, causing financial, social and health problems. CLCs can help people address these problems before it's too late.

"It saves money overall to provide access to legal help for Australians who can't afford a lawyer. It's also vital in ensuring that everyone is equal under the law.

"Legal problems can crop up at any time – but access to quality legal help shouldn't depend on your bank balance or where you live. This is why we are encouraging local candidates to make their commitment to access to justice known so that local residents can make an informed choice on Election Day," Ms Bond said.

Community legal centres provide free legal help to people who can't afford a private lawyer. They assist with problems such as housing, employment, consumer issues, debt and family violence, and are often a source of early advice and assistance to help prevent problems from escalating.

MEDIA: Spokespeople include: Carolyn Bond on 0412 032 987 and Mackay Regional CLC Principal Solicitor Jessica Brake on (07) 4953 1211. For media inquiries, contact Anaya Latter: 0432 121 636