

FOR QUALITY LEGAL HELP IN YOUR COMMUNITY

# Community Law Australia



## MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 7 August 2013

### **Funding provides vital community lawyer support for family violence and first new community legal centre in Melbourne's fringe since 2005**

Community Law Australia today welcomed increased funding to ensure that the Eastern community legal centre (ECLC) could service more people in need of legal help.

New funding announced by the Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus today of \$350,000 over 4 years to establish a Healesville-based CLC to service the Yarra Ranges will mean that access to justice is closer to a reality for those that community legal centres are struggling to service because of limited resources.

Further funding of \$400,000 over four years towards the Eastern CLC will also help them sustain and increase support around family violence – a top issue for the area and the State.

Community Law Australia campaign spokesperson Carolyn Bond said that access to justice is a major issue for people in regional areas, women struggling with family violence issues, people being ripped off by financial institutions, and people with credit and debt problems.

“Community Law Australia has long been calling for better resources to meet the needs of a diverse range of client needs in the community, and it is welcome to see that the Federal Government recognises the issue of access to justice in Australia, and is working to address it,” Ms Bond said.

“Community lawyers are a vital resource for women and children experiencing family violence, giving them quality free legal advice and assistance with intervention orders, and support with the Court process.

“This new funding will make a big difference to families experiencing violence in the area, and ensure that outreach services that were seriously under-resourced can now be strengthened, and a new centre established in an area with high demand for legal help.

“Investing in existing CLCs gives exponential return on funding. Research shows that doubling funding can more than triple service delivery.

“We know that conservative estimates suggest that half a million Australians are missing out on legal help each year, but given the 63 per cent of community legal services reporting unmet demand, we believe this is only the tip of the iceberg.

“The Australian Council Of Social Services (ACOSS) Community sector survey released recently showed that a shocking 63 per cent of services couldn't meet demand, and 85 per cent of CLCs were forced to tighten or restrict service levels due to a lack of resources.

“Unlike the Australian health and education systems, there is no universal safety net for legal help, and yet unresolved legal problems can have a long lasting negative impact on individuals' lives, and the community as a whole.

“The Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus has also called a Productivity Commission inquiry that will provide crucial insight into the extent of the access to justice crisis and how best to break down the barriers to accessing legal help.

“This new funding will ensure that more in need of legal help will be able to access it in the Yarra Ranges and Melbourne’s Eastern fringe, but there is still more to be done if we are going to improve access to quality free legal help across the board,” Ms Bond said.

**MEDIA**

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