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# Community Law Australia



## MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 4 September 2013

### Gippsland CLS urges candidates to reveal their plans to address legal crisis

Gippsland Community Legal Service (a program of Anglicare Victoria) has written to its local candidates in the seat of McMillan to ask them to outline their plans to address the access to justice crisis.

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

Community Law Australia commended Gippsland CLS 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 this area, which is why each candidate is being contacted to ensure that they make their position known to local residents.

Gippsland CLS said that the top legal issues they encountered were family violence, family law, neighbourhood disputes, personal safety intervention orders, discrimination, credit and debt, and infringements.

Last year Gippsland CLS had to decline a request from the Latrobe Valley Magistrates Court to attend an additional family violence intervention order day to provide essential assistance to applicants. The Service is also unable to extend the applicant duty lawyer service to the other courts in Gippsland due to lack of funds.

Jane Anderson, Gippsland Regional Director of Anglicare Victoria, said: "while additional Federal funds were provided to the CLC sector this year, our Service did not receive an increase"

"Gippsland has the highest rates of family violence in the State and yet we are only funded to provide assistance to victims of family violence within the Latrobe Valley. We are concerned that very vulnerable people are missing out on essential legal assistance. The cuts to Legal Aid funding have placed further pressure on the Service who are unable to meet the demand." Ms Anderson 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.

**MEDIA: Spokespeople include: Carolyn Bond on 0412 032 987 and Jane Anderson on 03 5133 9998. For media inquiries, contact Anaya Latter: 0432 121 636**