



# Eastern Community Law

## Newsletter

Spring 2006

### Introducing ECLC's Patron

It is with great delight that the ECLC Board announces the appointment of Mr Ian Gray, Chief Magistrate, Magistrates' Court of Victoria as the Patron for the Centre.

Mr Gray has held many positions of influence throughout his career. Early in his career, Mr Gray was ECLC's Community Solicitor. He also was a solicitor with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service.

During the 1980's and 1990's, Mr Gray specialised in criminal defence work, was the Principal Legal Advisor for the Northern Land Council in Darwin, was appointed as a Northern Territory Magistrate, and then two years later, was appointed Chief Magistrate for the Northern Territory. In the late 1990's, Mr Gray returned to Victoria where he practiced criminal law, administrative law and employment law and was also a mediator in Native Title.



In the year 2000, Mr Gray was the head of the Land & Property Unit of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor. Over the past few years, Mr Gray has also been the Vice President of the Victorian branch of the International Commission of Jurists.

Mr Gray was appointed the Chief Magistrate of Victoria in March 2001. In the past few years, there has been significant change within the Magistrates' Court of Victoria including the creation of a Drug Court, Koori Court and Family Violence Court.

The Centre is delighted to welcome Mr Gray as our Patron. He has had a long association with ECLC, including as an early volunteer, Community Solicitor and Committee member. More recently, he has supported ECLC's campaign for services in the Outer East.

Mr Gray brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the position of Patron and ECLC is excited and grateful for the opportunity to work together. In 2007, there will be opportunities for volunteers members and supporters of ECLC to share with the Chief Magistrate at key events.

*Acknowledgment: Source: www.monash.edu.au*

### **ECLC's Patron, Mr Ian Gray, sent the following message at the Launch of the Outer East Office.**

First, can I say it gives me great pleasure to accept the invitation to be Patron of the Eastern Community Legal Centre.

I would very much have liked to be at the launch today but can't be there. I am a strong believer in CLC's and have great faith in their future. They are a vital and vibrant part of the spectrum of legal service provision to all Victorians

Although we are opening a new office today, I have very fond memories of my time at the centre, both as a volunteer and community lawyer. I should acknowledge the wonderful pioneering work done by Erskine Rodan, Geoff Eames and many other hard workers in the first foundational years. Any celebration has to reflect that past history.

For the future, I look forward to active participation and meeting as many of you as possible at ECLC events. I wish everybody well and congratulate you on the opening of the new Centre. Best wishes,

**Ian Gray, Chief Magistrate**

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### ECLC Services

#### Blackburn Office

1st Floor, 20C Blackburn Rd Blackburn  
(PO Box 466)  
Mon – Fri 9:00am – 5:00pm  
Ph: (03) 9877 5777 Fax: 9894 2133  
eclc@eclc.org.au www.eclc.org.au

#### Outreach locations:

Hawthorn  
Mitcham  
Ringwood Magistrates Court

Serving the Cities of Whitehorse, Boroondara & Manningham

**For an appointment for these services, call (03) 9877 5777**

#### Boronia Office

Suite B, 6 Floriston Road, Boronia  
(PO Box 747)  
Mon – Thurs 9:00am – 5:00pm  
Ph: (03) 9762 6235 Fax: (03) 9762 9751  
outreast@eclc.org.au www.eclc.org.au

#### Outreach Locations

Rowville  
Lilydale  
Yarra Junction  
Ringwood Magistrates Court

Serving the Cities of Knox, Maroondah & the Shire of Yarra Ranges

**For an appointment for these services, call (03) 9762 6235**



## Staff Snapshot

This edition, ECLC is introducing an important member of the team. She is one of ECLC's community lawyers and has assisted many people in the six months that she has been at the Centre.

**Your name:** Danni Baylis

**What work you do at ECLC?** Community Lawyer

**What do you like about ECLC/ Favourite part of the job?**

Without a doubt the clients. The vast majority are a joy to work with, all have an interesting story to tell, and the feel good factor when we can help them is always good and, I suppose, a bit selfish on my part.

**Any funny/embarrassing moments on the job so far?**

Singing happy birthday to Michael and not being aware that there were clients in the waiting room.

**Favourite holiday destination?**

I haven't really got one. Our holidays are always by the water because my partner is into boating and fishing. It's just great to relax so I'm not fussy where we go.

**Favourite time of the year and why?**

I haven't really got one. Christmas is too stressful, perhaps early New Year when it has calmed down and every one seems to be relaxed.



## ECLC Staff

**Manager**  
Michael Smith

**Outer East Co-ordinator**  
Deborah Handley

**Co-ordinator of Volunteers**  
Leonie Burnham

**Lawyers**  
Jenni Smith (Principal)  
Eve Bodsworth  
Danni Baylis

**Administration/Projects**  
Denise Budge

Kate Johnson

Kate Bennett

Stephanie Ng

Craig Rossi

Noel Stubbs

## Community Development

Over the past few months, ECLC has undertaken new Community Development projects.

One of these projects centres on the creation of a specific family law training module for community workers. This training module, "Operating in a Family Law Environment", has been developed in partnership with Women's Legal Service Victoria (WLSV).

In September, 15 indigenous workers from around Australia completed the last stage of a 15-day community mediation training program offered by Regional Extended Family Services (REFS) funded by FACSIA. ECLC and WLSV presented the Family Law module as part of this program and the participants now have skills and knowledge to help people in their local communities.

Other Legal Education sessions held across the community including:

- Talking to young people about their legal rights;
- Preparing a Will;
- Family Law;
- Powers of Attorney; and
- Introduction to contacting a lawyer/ using a Community Legal Centre

## Diversifying ECLC's Volunteer Base

ECLC has an incredibly skilled, loyal base of over 100 volunteers and without these important people, ECLC could not offer the excellent service it does.

An important current project endeavours to increase the diversity of the Centre's volunteer base. Given the significant amount of CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) clients the Centre assists, the Centre is keen to reflect this in our volunteers. Also, while ECLC enjoys the services of many lawyers and law students, other community members also have much to offer.

Initially, ECLC staff have been meeting volunteer agencies and building partnerships with CALD service providers. This project has only recently commenced, but there are great things happening already! Updates on this project will be in the next edition of ECLC's newsletter.

ECLC has volunteer position descriptions on the website. If you are interested in volunteering or would like more information about volunteering, please visit the website.

To find out more about the services ECLC offer or if you would like more information on Volunteering Positions or Membership, you can visit the website [www.eclc.org.au](http://www.eclc.org.au)

## We Are Moving!

In mid November, the Blackburn office will be relocating to our new home at the Box Hill Town Hall. The Blackburn office will be closed for a short time for packing and relocation.

Appointments at Blackburn will be limited during relocation. ECLC will advise closer to the moving date of phone and address details. If in doubt, visit our website or phone to check the latest.



## Outer East Launch

In 2005, after a major community campaign, ECLC received funding from the Victorian Government and Victoria Legal Aid for the Outer East Community Legal Centre. The Outer East office serves the Cities of Knox and Maroondah and the Shire of Yarra Ranges.

On Tuesday, August 29 2006, ECLC welcomed the Attorney General, Rob Hulls MP and over 100 friends to Boronia. Mr Hulls formally launched the new Centre.

### Attorney-General Rob Hulls, MP

"The service that we formally launch today is, I think, testament to a belief shared by all those represented here – a belief in the value of access to justice being delivered at a grass roots level, in the value of organisations that understand the people they work so hard to assist.

In their own ways, everyone here has demonstrated the extent of this conviction, whether it be through advocacy, providing accommodation, information or collaboration in developing an outreach service. For its own part, the Bracks Government has been a staunch ally of CLCs, defending them from Coalition schemes to nobble the most troublesome, as well as, of course, increasing funding to VLA.

In fact, we have committed almost \$12.5 million in extra support to CLCs, last year's Budget allocating \$8.9 million to establish, amongst other things, four new CLCs. I'm pleased to say that this is another of those additional CLCs, the first being Loddon Campaspe CLC late last year, Cranbourne and Melton earlier this year, as well as the Whittlesea CLC in late 2004.

I get a huge kick out of opening new CLCs – access to justice is, after all, what this job should be about. There are, of course, many ways we can bring access to justice to Victorians but, in my view, CLCs are unique because they evolve from and are part of the neighbourhood they're working to serve.

CLCs remind us that access to justice is central to Victoria's communities, that building a confident community is about recognising rights and providing services tailored to suit each unique and diverse population.

The need for a community legal service in the outer east is not only readily apparent but overdue. Boronia is an ideal location because it can service three of Victoria's largest municipalities, with a combined population of almost 400,000. Not only will the Boronia branch of Eastern CLC benefit the people of the Knox and Maroondah municipalities, but it is also well located to serve those living in some parts of the neighbouring Yarra Ranges Shire.

This area, then, represents an extraordinarily large sector of the population, one that deserves the myriad forms of advice and assistance that only a CLC can offer. I understand that, since first commencing operation in November, the office has already vindicated the community's call for its services.

Congratulations to all those involved in establishing this service and guiding it to the operational stage it has reached today. Thanks go, of course, to the staff of Eastern CLC, as well as to the various individuals and groups who played an enormous role in getting this service up and running, including:

- James Merlino MP, Member for Monbulk,
- Knox Infolink, who previously ran the night service and who now run it in partnership with Outer East CLC;
- Knox and Maroondah Councils and Yarra Ranges Shire.

I would also like to thank the members of the Outer East CLC Reference Group, without which the establishment of this office would not have been possible.

Your collective efforts demonstrate that belief in the value of community is alive and well in Melbourne's Outer East, and I wish you all every success as this service goes from strength to strength and brings assistance to more and more Victorians. It is now my very great pleasure to declare this Outer East CLC office officially open.

### Manager, Michael Smith

Just over two years ago we asked the question: How can one Community Legal Centre claim to serve a community of 800,000 people? The answer was obvious - you're kidding yourselves! And the Outer East did not have real access to a community legal service. So we decided that we had to either have a serious push for a Centre out here, or we had to be more honest and say that it wasn't realistic for us to claim to cover this area.

After a commitment of time and some money from our Centre's Committee the Outer East CLC Reference Group was formed. James Merlino, Member for Monbulk and Kate Hamond, "local resident" were enthusiastic participants, along with representatives from all three local Councils, and community agencies like UnitingCare Harrison, Knox Community Health, Knox Infolink and the Eastern Family Violence Network. This group worked hard with a clear strategy to highlight the local needs, gather support and advocate.

In April 2005, funding was announced for the Outer East CLC and this was eventually granted to ECLC and its partners in July. After a huge amount of work the doors were first opened in November 2005 – just the formalities have taken a little longer!

Since then we have seen over 400 clients from this office and as we expected family law has been the dominant theme, with two-thirds of clients coming with those issues. Of those, at least a quarter have involved family violence - a key concern of our Centre. We are also conducting outreach services to Rowville, Lilydale and Yarra Junction and are undertaking a range of community development and education projects.

As we all know, CLCs have always been and proudly been largely volunteer-based organisations. Eastern CLC has over 100 volunteers and they are fantastic. CLCs have also often been idealistic and talked about things like community development.

Unfortunately sometimes people think that because CLCs involve volunteers, that it is a hobby, a spare time activity and that view can permeate how the services are perceived – that near enough is good enough.

Let me say that is not our view here. We are not interested in being amateurs. The people of the east and especially the Outer East have been missing out for far too long and deserve the best legal advice and casework services we can deliver, from the best staff and volunteers in a timely, professional and highly ethical manner. It should not matter whether you live on the Yarra in the inner city or at Yarra Junction or what your background is when you need to access a legal service.

Our commitment is to honour the trust you have placed in us with these resources and to work hard, professionally yet passionately to improve access to and understanding of the law for all of the communities we serve.





## ECLC Clients

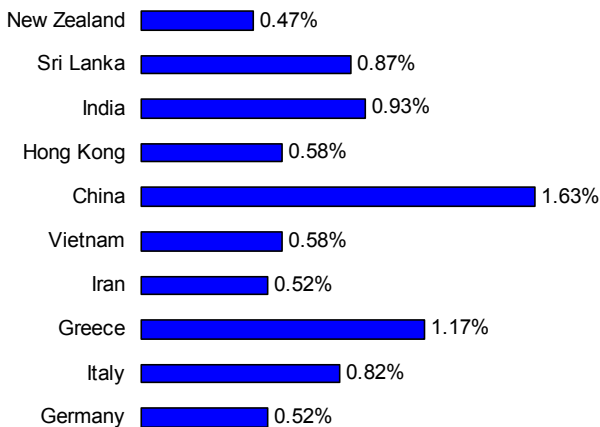
ECLC sees a variety of clients and assists them in many different ways. Some clients are at breaking point and need urgent assistance, while others simply need initial advice and to know their legal rights.

Over the 2005/06 year, ECLC has provided information and casework assistance to nearly 2000 clients. A staggering 84.6% of clients seen by the Centre are new clients.

The top issues that clients seek assistance with include family and domestic violence (15.3% of our clients), separation, child residency/custody, divorce, property in marriage and other family law issues, wills, motor vehicle accidents and neighbourhood disputes.

ECLC experiences a huge demand for wills and this could account for the rise in clients over 66 years of age. The wills service is often booked weeks in advance and sometimes the Centre has to close the books.

ECLC assists a large number of CALD clients. Approximately 18.9% of clients were born in other countries. The top ten countries where the clients originated from are China, Greece, India, Sri Lanka, Italy, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Germany, Iran and New Zealand. ECLC is grateful for the referral and support offered by the Migrant Information Centre.



In the last 12 months, there has been an increase in clients aged from 18-30 years. There has also been a small increase in clients over the age of 66 years. In relation to the first client group, it could be said that the cause of the rise could be associated with the large percentage of family law issues that the Centre assists people with.

## Membership

Do you live, work or study in the East?

Are you interested in becoming a Member of ECLC?

If so, feel free to check our website for further details.

If you would like any more information about anything you have read in this newsletter, please contact us.

## Law Reform

Recently, the Commonwealth Government introduced The Migration Amendment (Designated Unauthorised Arrivals) Bill to amend the process for asylum seekers arriving in Australia.

ECLC was most concerned with this legislation and wrote to a number of Federal MP's directly. Indeed Mr Petro Georgiou MP stated that, "It is the most profoundly disturbing piece of legislation I have encountered since becoming a member of parliament."

ECLC was encouraged to see that five members of parliament, including Petro Georgiou and Russell Broadbent rejected the Bill and it was withdrawn.

ECLC continues to campaign for fairness and justice in the community it serves. Russell Broadbent MP, Member for McMillan, wrote to ECLC as follows:

*Thank you for taking the time to and effort to write to me at a time that has been most difficult.*

*I understand people have different points of view which I respected and took into account as I considered my position on the Migration Amendment (Designated Unauthorized Arrivals) Bill 2006.*

*As well as the overwhelming support from within my own electorate it has been a comfort to me that emails and letters received from people like you confirm that my position represents a large number of Australians.*

*Your thoughts and words of support are very much appreciated.*

*Yours sincerely*

**Russell Broadbent MP**

## Support

The ongoing support of these financial and other partners is gratefully acknowledged:

- Victoria Legal Aid
- Commonwealth Government
- City of Boroondara
- City of Whitehorse
- Knox City Council
- Knox Infolink
- Volunteers and Members of ECLC

## Newsletter

If you would like to receive a copy of ECLC's Newsletter via email, please email [eclc@eclc.org.au](mailto:eclc@eclc.org.au)

Would you like to donate to ECLC? Donations over \$2 are tax deductible.