

Eastern Community Law

Newsletter

Autumn 2008

Fred's Fair Play @ Festivals!



ECLC launched its festivals project in style, with Fred's Fair Play being performed by Carp Productions at the Maroondah and Knox Festivals to large & enthusiastic crowds of children and parents.

The aim of "Fred's Fair Play" is to capture children's attention and imagination and educate them at the same time. Based on sports and fairies, this play entertains boys and girls alike and teaches in a fun way about the Charter principles of 'Freedom, Respect, Equality and Dignity'- FRED!

The Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission funded project promotes awareness of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The Charter promotes the four key principles and requires that all government and public authority laws, policies and procedures be assessed through a 'human rights filter' to ensure their compatibility with the Charter

ECLC contracted CARP Productions to write the script and present the play to primary aged children at festivals and their work has been entertaining and energetic, as well as educational. The debut performance was held at the Maroondah Festival in Croydon on Sunday 17th February to a consistent and energetic crowd of over 80 children and adults. ECLC staff and volunteers were very impressed with this crowd as although the show was held in the morning, it was incredibly hot!

The show travelled to Knox Festival in Ferntree Gully on Sunday 2nd March. Carp Productions performed 2 shows to a library full of children, who were very inquisitive and enjoyed the interactive parts of the show, including audience participation, dancing and answering questions – and asking some of their own! Overall more than 100 children and families who were enjoying learning about the principles of the Charter – most people were hearing about it for the first time. After each show staff and volunteers distributed legal information packs to parents and balloons and colouring sheets to children.

By portraying Human Rights in a fun way and through audience participation, there is a greater potential for the key themes to be learnt. This innovative approach targets children and families in a friendly, fun, non-confrontational way. The play also supports schools with encouraging life skills and the Centre is exploring how the festivals program may be utilised with schools and other contexts.

"Fred's Fair Play" challenges the way we view Human Rights – instead of being something that happens in other countries, it makes the audience think locally. The key themes in the Charter (FRED) are all being 'played out' in the playground each day. If Fred's Fair Play impacts any child and makes them think about the way that they are treating others, then it is a success.

There will be at least five more shows of Fred's Fair Play at Festivals later this year. Keep an eye on the ECLC website, or contact us for details. Big thanks to the staff and volunteers who worked incredibly hard in the lead up to each festival and on the day of the shows to ensure that this project ran smoothly.

Kate Johnson, Community Development



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ECLC Services

Box Hill Office

Suite 3, Town Hall Hub
27 Bank Street, Box Hill 3128
Mon – Fri 9:00am – 5:00pm
Ph: (03) 9285 4822 Fax: 9285 4833
eclc@eclc.org.au

Outreach locations:

Hawthorn
Ashburton
Ringwood Magistrates' Court

Serving the Cities of Whitehorse, Boroondara & Manningham

For an appointment for these services, call (03) 9285 4822

Boronia Office

Suite B, 6 Floriston Road, Boronia 3155
(PO Box 747)
Mon – Thurs 9:00am – 5:00pm
Ph: (03) 9762 6235 Fax: (03) 9762 9751
Freecall: 1300 79 70 88
outereast@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

www.eclc.org.au

New service for Seniors!

See page 3 for details



Staff Snapshot

ECLC profiles Ann Lightowler,
Outer East Community Lawyer.

Ann joined the team in June 2007.



What work do you do at ECLC?

I am a lawyer and do (mostly) all the usual things that lawyers do plus some community education.

Why do you want to work in this area?

I chose community law because I am able to assist people in a practical way. If I could wave the magic wand and be anything, I'd be a history/politics professor.

What do you like about ECLC?

My work colleagues, the diverse client base and I love the fact that there are no billable hours.

Highlights of my work so far?

Meeting really nice people, being part of an organization committed to social justice.

Favourite holiday destination?

Paris (I've never been but hope to go in the near future). Anywhere my children are.

Favourite food?

Fresh fruit and vegetables. Simple food. The staff of ECLC and I share a fondness for lemon tart.

Any legal issue that frustrates you?

There were many in my youth but I've forgotten them. I've made a decision to chill.

Favourite time of year and why?

Autumn. Because the sun has lost its bite but still has plenty of warmth, the mornings are misty and the nights, cool. I love the autumn colours and the change in the intensity of the light.

Social Security Outreach

Having a legal dispute with Centrelink or facing an appeal process, criminal matters such as fraud allegations or a hearing at the Social Security Appeals Tribunal can be very daunting. ECLC provides assistance in many areas of the law but our guidelines and expertise do not extend to Social Security matters.

Life is never so simple that problems come one at a time and it is quite common for clients to present with a raft of issues that all need to be addressed. Often this will include Centrelink and Social Security matters. Part of ECLC's role is to identify issues that fall outside our guidelines expertise and refer clients on to appropriate services.

We are pleased to announce that Victoria Legal Aid Ringwood has commenced an outreach service to both ECLC's offices to assist clients with Social Security matters. This service will be of great benefit to clients across the Eastern region.

If you have a client that would benefit from speaking to a specialist Social Security lawyer at either the Boronia or Box Hill office then ring VLA's Ringwood Office on (03) 9259 5444 and ask for an appointment at either the **Box Hill or Boronia Social Security Outreach**. It is important to make it clear that they want an appointment at one of these locations if that is most convenient. If you would like more information about this new service contact ECLC.

New Website

ECLC has a new look, easy to use & understand website! www.eclc.org.au now has up to date information on all of our legal services and projects.

Now it is even easier to find out about what ECLC offers to clients, professionals, students, volunteers and the community.

For example, when you click on "Legal Services" you will get information on all of the legal advice services ECLC offers including day and night service details, outreach locations and the Intervention Order Support Service.

ECLC's website also includes resources to assist clients and the community, as well as professionals who are referring to ECLC. These resources include our 'Can ECLC Assist You?' poster (also available in Chinese) so that professionals can accurately refer to ECLC. It also has all our Fact Sheets, which will be updated and added to regularly.

ECLC is constantly adding information to its new look website, so please keep visiting our site for more information on our services and upcoming projects. Feedback is welcome.

Changes to Legal Aid Guidelines

Jenni Smith, Principal Lawyer

In February Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) introduced significant changes in funding of Family Law matters as a result of budgetary constraints. This has resulted in funding no longer being available for: advice, negotiation and preparation of consent orders; any property applications including those that are also associated with children; any contravention applications; child support applications and significant cuts in grants being available for the appointment of an Independent Children's lawyer.

VLA argues that although the Commonwealth increased legal aid funding nationally by 45% over the last seven years, VLA's Commonwealth funding was only increased by 10%. While this was based on some reserves held by VLA, these are now largely exhausted.

Stakeholders including the Law Institute of Victoria have begun lobbying the Commonwealth government with concerns for how the cuts will impact on anyone involved in the family law system. The LIV has stated,

"The funding crisis will have significant immediate and long-term implications for the community, the Family and Federal Magistrates Courts, all those involved in the family law system and children who are already marginalised and disadvantaged. The LIV calls on the federal government to boost legal aid funding in its upcoming budget."

ECLC is already seeing the effect of the changes. In recent weeks several clients have attended to obtain advice on the preparation of documents for contravention applications having been initially assisted by private lawyers. The private lawyers are now unable to provide them with further assistance due to the funding changes. Also notable is the rise in the general numbers of clients seeking family law advice. Whilst we are not exactly battenning down the hatches, we are aware that we may have to start prioritising clients.

It is hoped that the pressure on the Commonwealth government will produce some effect at budget time when VLA say the funding changes will be reviewed. However importantly we would hope that any Commonwealth funding will not be made at the disadvantage of Community Legal Centres funding who are already struggling to keep up with the volume of clients under our own current funding arrangements.

Would you like to donate to ECLC?

For more details on how to donate and how your donation will be used, please visit ECLC's website. Donations over \$2 are tax deductible and can now be made on-line.

Eastern Community Legal Centre is delighted to announce that a new State-wide legal service focused on seniors will soon be operating, with a strong presence in the eastern region.

Seniors Rights Victoria aims to become the recognised leader in Victoria for providing knowledge, policy and advocacy on issues of abuse and older people.

ECLC, in partnership with Council On The Aging Victoria (COTA), Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH) and Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre will be managing this service. This new service seeks to eradicate the abuse of older people in all its forms, and to promote the rights of all seniors in Victoria to achieve, or maintain, their independence in a world free of ageism and abuse.

The new service will provide:

- information, telephone assistance and referral support to older people experiencing abuse;
- community and professional education;
- advocacy and support to older people and their families;
- community and professional education regarding older persons' legal issues; and
- support to expand the capacity of existing CLC's and community agencies to address older people's legal needs.

The definition of elder abuse is "any act occurring within a relationship where there is an implication of trust which results in harm to an older person. Abuse may be physical, sexual, financial, psychological, social and/or neglect" (ANPEA, 1999).

Michael Smith, Manager of ECLC said "This new Centre will provide a vital link for older people if they are facing challenging issues, often involving family members which makes them more difficult to manage. These clients have rights and the ability to make their own choices and the Centre will play a crucial role in both responding to individual needs and educating the broader community.

"ECLC is delighted to be at the leading edge of this new work to assist very highly valued members of our community and to ensure good access for seniors across the Eastern region." From ECLC's perspective, it is pleasing to be both a key partner and that lawyers and education staff will be outreaching to our eastern region regularly and assisting residents with both elder abuse and age-related issues.

At ECLC's AGM in October, Janet Wood, COTA Chairperson explained that, "across Victoria there's an estimate that about 3% of senior Victorians are subjected to some form of abuse", which amounts to approximately 20,000 people."

Minister for Senior Victorians, Lisa Neville, announced, "With our ageing population, the Government recognises the need to ensure older people are treated with respect and empowered to care for themselves and plan for their own futures," she said.

Attorney-General, Rob Hulls, said the Brumby Government was committed to respecting the dignity and independence of older people. "The Government is providing \$2.64 million over three years to support this service. This new service will play a vital role in providing for the legal information needs of older Victorians, and helping to overcome barriers to access to justice for victims of elder abuse."

COTA Victoria Executive Director Sue Hendy said the peak body would bring its networking and advocacy skills to coordinating the new education and legal service. "Each of the partners in the joint venture brings particular strengths, resources and expertise that are needed to make this service effective".

This service will be opened in late April. For more information about Seniors Rights Victoria, please visit www.cotavic.org.au or ECLC's website www.eclc.org.au

YRIPP Is Off The Ground!

The Youth Referral and Independent Person Program (YRIPP) has now been launched in police stations across the Outer East, including Lilydale, Croydon, Mooroolbark, Belgrave, Knox, Boronia and Ringwood Police Stations. Police at these stations are now able to request trained Independent Persons ("IPs") from YRIPP to attend police interviews with young people 10-18 years of age where a parent/guardian is unavailable, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. IPs also have the opportunity to assist these young people to link in with local support services to reduce their chance of future re-offending. The first referrals have now been assisted by YRIPP.

The launch of YRIPP has been made possible through the enthusiasm and commitment of 25 new YRIPP volunteers across the eastern region. These volunteers were trained in police processes, legal perspectives, understanding young people and working with Indigenous and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) young people.

YRIPP is still looking for volunteers who are willing to be a part of this important service. Please contact Vivianne Gloz, Eastern Metro Coordinator at the Box Hill office on 9285 4822.

For information on ECLC's services
please see the new improved website or
call the office directly.

www.eclc.org.au

Youth in a Legal Context

Denise Budge & Armita Yaresh

Last year, the Outer East staff identified that young people were not accessing the legal service very often. To understand and investigate this gap, a survey project was developed by the Centre titled *Youth in a Legal Context*. Armita Yaresh and volunteer Kirsty Vella carried out this project from September 2007 to February 2008.

The aim was to identify the gaps in legal service delivery to young people and involved survey questions targeting youth service providers and school welfare co-ordinators in the three local government areas of Maroondah, Yarra Ranges and Knox. The questions were to identify the depth of knowledge workers had of ECLC's service, what the common legal issues faced by young people were and how we could improve the accessibility of our service to young people in need of legal assistance.

The survey results from youth services revealed that mobile phone contracts/debt, assaults (at parties), Intervention Orders and family law matters were the key areas of concern for young people. Whereas school welfare co-ordinators reported that theft, Intervention Orders, fines, minor drug or alcohol charges, driving offences, transit police matters and assaults were the common legal issues faced by young people.

The youth project gave ECLC the opportunity to raise awareness of the legal services with workers and get valuable feedback on how best to communicate and provide access to young people in our community. The overwhelming response was that the internet was a great way to access young people and provide legal information. There were some suggestions that "My Space" was a good tool for young people to access information. Recently ECLC have totally updated its Website and will be looking into the "My Space" suggestion.

By building partnerships with the local youth services and school welfare co-ordinators, ECLC has developed much stronger lines of communication and is now receiving more referrals from these workers for the young people that they are working with. We will be looking forward to developing these links further during the coming year.

After almost 34 years, ECLC continues to grow, develop and plan its future development. The Board has recently completed a Strategic Planning process, looking at the next three-five years for the Centre and the key opportunities and risks ahead.

In short, the future is very bright, with an impressive and stable Board, management and staff team in place with the support of many capable and professional volunteers. Our funding base is generally sound, while there remain a range of opportunities for developing projects

The key Strategic Directions over the coming years will not be a surprise to supporters and observers of the Centre. Each of these directions builds on an existing base yet seeks to either improve the quality or grow the work in this area:

- Quality targeted and integrated advice and casework
- Community development
- Volunteer engagement
- Partnership development (including the new Centre responding to elder abuse)
- Innovative approach to service planning and delivery
- Succession planning

Even a brief reading of this and other newsletters highlights the newer developments taking place within ECLC and with our various partners. With a little imagination there are a range of possibilities for further action. Yet be assured that the first three areas listed above have been the core work of ECLC for over 30 years and yet continue to be refined and developed. Each also needs the assistance and input of the breadth of staff, volunteers and supporters to be as effective as possible.

We continue to welcome your co-operation and collaboration in many ways in our work for the communities of the East.

Law Week Libraries Promotion

ECLC is excited about being part of Law Week again this year. Law Week, which runs from May 12-18, is a wonderful opportunity for ECLC to take its promotion to the community and raise awareness of the free service it provides.

ECLC, in conjunction with the Victorian Law Foundation and the Law Institute of Victoria, will be having displays in libraries throughout the Eastern Region and those visiting the library can pick up brochures, bookmarks and booklets on legal issues.

The 2008 Law Week theme of 'Reaching Out' will focus on those who may find it difficult to access legal information and services such as rural Victorians, seniors, young people, multicultural communities and people with special needs.

For more information about Law Week activities, please visit the Law Week website www.victorialaw.org.au



Brought to you by the Victoria Law Foundation and Law Institute of Victoria

For information on ECLC's services and projects
or to view a map of our office locations,
please see the website or call the office directly.

www.eclc.org.au

National Apology

Eastern Community Legal Centre welcomed the national apology to the stolen generations on February 13 and along with forty other community organisations publicly expressed our support (published in *The Age*) as follows:

The Apology to be given by the Federal Parliament today is a momentous step forward for Australia. It has been a long and tortuous journey to this point, but now we are stepping forward as a mature nation.

Saying Sorry provides a powerful and symbolic first step towards healing and achieving improved outcomes for Indigenous peoples. We endorse Mick Dodson's comments that the Apology establishes a platform to build on – a beginning to help address the issues that exist across indigenous Australia.

We believe that the next steps must include meaningful engagement of Indigenous communities. As community sector organisations, we are committed to walking alongside Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and indigenous peoples, families and communities so as to achieve greater equity. We are committed to giving true meaning to saying Sorry.

Pictures from "Fred's Fair Play"



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
- Rotary Club of Balwyn
- Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission
- Box Hill Citizen's Advice Bureau
- Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues
- Council On The Ageing (Victoria)
- EACH (Eastern Access Community Health)
- EDVOS (Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service)
- Family Access Network
- GordonCare
- Inner East Community Health Centre
- Knox Community Health Service
- Knox Infolink
- Loddon Campaspe CLC
- Louise Multicultural Community Centre
- Migrant Information Centre (Eastern)
- PolMin
- Public Interest Law Clearing House
- Ringwood Magistrates' Court
- Women's Legal Service Victoria
- Volunteers and Members of ECLC
- Jones Hepworth Johns
- Mercader
- Moores Legal
- Robinson Gill
- Volunteers and Members of ECLC