

Eastern Community Law

Newsletter

Autumn 2010



Too far to go – Yarra Ranges campaign

Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) has called on the State and Federal governments to fund a Community Legal Centre based in the Yarra Ranges. Legal research has highlighted a range of local issues where legal help is needed. The project is supported by a Reference group of community agencies, police, Council and the Member for Seymour, Ben Hardman.

ECLC CEO Michael Smith said the Centre was most concerned at the lack of access to legal and related services for local residents and communities. "ECLC was aware of issues through our outreach services and bushfire response, but the results of the research were very striking. A large number of residents were unaware of any legal services available to them, and even if they do know, access is highly problematic due to the lack of public transport in the area."

"A legal appointment with our lawyers is usually about 45 minutes. For Yarra Ranges residents this can become a day trip which is often impossible, especially for parents or people who are working. Clients have come from East Warburton to our Boronia office for an appointment with a lawyer. In our view, this is not an acceptable service." Last year Yarra Ranges residents were assisted in 551 matters, but the vast majority had to go outside the municipality to access help.

Following the bushfires in February 2009, ECLC initiated a legal needs study, consulting with agencies and residents. The study confirmed a high level of legal need and major access barriers to services for these communities, with tenancy and housing related legal issues along with family law and intervention order issues identified as the major areas of need. It also highlighted barriers such as lack of public transport and distances travelled to get to services.

The establishment of a Yarra Ranges Community Legal Centre is proposed to meet the legal needs of these communities. The Reference Group has selected Healesville as the preferred site for such a centre. There are high levels of need in this area and the police station has a high workload. A base in Healesville would also be able to respond to the Murrindindi region, an area with no free legal services, an issue exposed by the tragic bushfires.

The report and proposal has been presented to the State and Commonwealth governments and other stakeholders. It is available at the Centre's website, www.eclc.org.au. Residents, lawyers and organisations wishing to support the campaign are encouraged to contact the Centre's Boronia office on 9762 6235 or 1300 79 70 88.

Denise Budge and Michael Smith



'Spurred on' by community need: on the right track for a Yarra Ranges Community Legal Centre

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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:

Bulleen
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
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Outreach Locations

Rowville
Lilydale
Yarra Junction
Healesville
Yarra Glen

Ringwood Magistrates' Court

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



Staff Snapshot



Philip Cottier,
Principal Lawyer

What do you do at ECLC?

Firstly, I am a community lawyer seeing clients and giving advice and doing casework in a range of legal areas. I also work in the duty roster at Ringwood with family violence/intervention orders. Secondly I am a manager

in the legal service, supervising and mentoring lawyers in our team. I also work in policy development and implementing programs; endeavour to ensure we meet our obligations to our funders and adhere to "best practice" in all we do at the Centre of a legal nature.

What did you do before working at ECLC?

I was Principal Lawyer at Brimbank Melton CLC for nearly three years. Before that I was a litigation lawyer in the private sector.

What do you like about ECLC?

This is a great environment to work in. The people are committed and highly motivated, and there is a real commitment to social justice.

Highlights of the work so far?

Highlights include getting some good results for clients in some difficult motor vehicle accident claims and negotiating some good outcomes in the intervention order list at Ringwood, where things at times can be a bit fraught! Giving direction to people with their legal problems and reducing their stress levels can be very satisfying.

Any funny or embarrassing moments in the job?

Struggling with the new photocopier at Box Hill. That is more tragic than funny, and I probably shouldn't admit to it for the sake of my own credibility. Not too many outright funny moments, but I am sure there are some ahead!

I did have a family law property matter a few years ago where I had settled (or so I thought!) but the agreement broke down over the ownership of the family cockatoo! (We did settle eventually.)

Any legal issue that frustrates you?

Probably not having enough funding to hire the additional staff to service the burgeoning needs of the community for accessible legal services. Plus people who sign legally binding agreements without getting legal advice beforehand.

Favourite food?

Thai Green Curry.

Favourite holiday destination?

Probably down the south coast somewhere or camping on the Murray in the middle of a hot summer.

Favourite time of the year?

Summer in Melbourne, plus I love Spring too, when everything comes back to life.

Would you like to donate to ECLC?

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

Elder Abuse

Response Expanded

2010 has seen an expansion in the work being undertaken to assist Seniors and respond to elder abuse in the Eastern Region. Leonie Boyle has commenced at ECLC as Advocacy & Partnerships Co-ordinator through a partnership with Seniors Rights Victoria and the Inner East Primary Care Partnership (IEPCP), with funding from the Victorian Government.

The role has three key components. First, the Co-ordinator provides short-term advocacy and assistance to clients experiencing elder abuse, in collaboration with the SRV lawyers. This may involve initial assessment, linking in with local services and exploring options with the older person, while ensuring they are aware of their legal rights. Elder abuse takes many forms, with most of the clients contacting us experiencing some form of financial abuse.

Second, the program works with local community and aged care services to assist them in responding to issues of elder abuse with their clients. Many of the local agencies are well aware of the relevant concerns and have considerable expertise in this area already. The work will involve refining some common approaches and protocols, while sharing best practice experiences. The Eastern Elder Abuse Network will be a key forum for this work.

Third, with the IEPCP, ECLC will be organising a series of Elder Abuse Prevention information sessions and workshops in the eastern region over the next year. These events will cover a range of issues based on input from the Network and other services.

Leonie has been working with Seniors in Melbourne's east for a number of years and is relishing the new role. "It's very rewarding to contribute to a program that values the vulnerable older members of our community. I've witnessed a strong commitment throughout the Eastern Region that supports older people's rights to live in safety and with dignity. I'm excited to be a part of that and I look forward to working with the whole of community to empower older people to live their lives free from abuse."

Leonie Boyle can be contacted at ECLC's Box Hill office.



Leonie Boyle, Advocacy and Partnerships Co-ordinator and Lauren Hills, SRV Administration



Families to benefit from Family Law Pilot

Separating families will have access to additional legal information and advice thanks to a new partnership project. The Eastern Family Law Pilot has a focus on community lawyers and mediators (Family Dispute Resolution Practitioners) working together to assist families as they negotiate the family law system.

The new project will see lawyers from ECLC and Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) providing targeted legal information and advice to clients of the Ringwood FRC on a regular basis. It is a partnership of ECLC, the Ringwood Family Relationship Centre (FRC), VLA and Eastern Domestic Violence Service, funded by the Commonwealth Government.

While the FRC has been running information sessions for families attending their service, these sessions will now include a specific legal component drawing on the expertise of the community lawyers. In addition, lawyers from ECLC and VLA will conduct advice sessions at the FRC, while maintaining independence and confidentiality.

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland has supported the introduction of the project to see greater involvement of lawyers with the FRCs. "A greater understanding of the family law system will assist separating families to resolve their disputes and avoid the need to go to court, wherever possible," he said.

"I am pleased by the positive response from partnering agencies in this pilot to build better partnerships and greater collaboration between Family Relationship Centres and nearby legal assistance services. These proposals provide opportunities for legal services to work more closely with the Centres to support separating families, but with a clear emphasis on resolution," Mr McClelland said.

Ringwood FRC Manager Toni Williams fully supports this pilot in providing further assistance to children and families at a difficult time in their life when dealing with separation. "Research has shown that ongoing family conflict causes significant damage to children's developmental, psychological and emotional functioning. Being able to provide easier access to legal advice during the Family Dispute Resolution process will of great benefit to families," she said.

ECLC CEO Michael Smith said the Centre was looking forward to working more closely with the FRC. "ECLC already has a strong family law focus with a focus on vulnerable families. This partnership will build on that work, particularly by making access for families who have trouble navigating the family law system much easier. The legal advice will be entirely independent from the FRC but we will still be able to work much more closely and learn from each other to assist the clients."

The Ringwood FRC is operated by EACH in partnership with Relationships Australia. ECLC has worked with EACH for many years, especially through its outreach services.

[Interested clients can contact the FRC or ECLC for details.](#)

Bill Shorten thanks ECLC



Bill Shorten has acknowledged the work of the Eastern Community Legal Centre and expressed appreciation for the efforts of volunteers and staff.

As the guest speaker at ECLC's 2009 AGM, the Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Bushfire Reconstruction shared his thoughts on the role of community organisations in the recovery process following the fires.

Mr Shorten said he expects, "a long rebuilding after a fire that takes everything... [and] the long return from such a day can be hard beyond bearing for those who lost their property."

"Such a rebuild can only be done with help... including a massive community effort... and with the help of thousands of volunteers and organisations such as yours providing pro bono legal support."

"The shared kindness which your organisation has displayed is part of that rebuilding process as surely as the dollars"

Access to Justice in Manningham: Legal Services in Bulleen

Manningham residents now have access to free legal advice and an exciting series of legal information sessions in their own backyard, thanks to a Council grant awarded to ECLC. These services are offered to Manningham residents in addition to the existing services currently available in Box Hill.

Bulleen Outreach Service

Based at the Bulleen and Templestowe Community House (BATCH), a new legal outreach service has been established and commenced in March. The service was developed in response to community feedback that many families in the area have difficulty travelling to Box Hill for services. Residents can make an appointment to meet with a lawyer at BATCH for advice on legal issues including family law, crime and traffic matters, neighbourhood disputes and intervention orders.

To make an appointment with the lawyer at the Bulleen Outreach call ECLC's Box Hill office on 9285 4822. For more information, visit www.eclc.org.au

'My Place, Your Space' at Healthy Lifestyle Week

To celebrate the launch of the new service ECLC held a successful free legal information workshop, 'My Place, Your Space', on resolving neighbourhood disputes on 1st March as part of Manningham Healthy Lifestyle Week. Together with the speakers from ECLC and the local Council, residents explored how to resolve neighbourhood disputes on issues such as trees, animals and fences.

Ongoing Community Legal Education Opportunities

As part of this initiative ECLC will be offering free Community Legal Education sessions to organisations and community groups in Manningham. Sessions can be tailored to meet the needs of an audience or host organisation and can cover such topics as Youth and the Law, Wills, or Family Law. If you have questions or wish to discuss this opportunity further, please contact Amy Johnstone, Community Development Worker on (03) 9285 4822 or amyj@eclc.org.au.



'Handball for Human Rights' at Local Festivals

Can you imagine a footy game without an independent, unbiased umpire? Can you imagine going to a sporting final unable to wear your team colours or chant for your sporting heroes?

Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) has invited local families to test their handpassing skills and learn about human rights in an exciting game of 'Handball for Human Rights' featuring at a number of this year's local festivals.

ECLC CEO Michael Smith says the game builds on the successful 'Human Rights are Aussie Rules' education project developed by the Centre. "We believe human rights are more than legal principles – they are rules of fair play for the game of life, too."

"Each year, the eastern suburbs welcome thousands of families from countries all across the world. No matter where you come from, one language common to people from all cultures is sport."

"At school, all kids learn the rules of fair play on the sportsfield. But they should also understand the rules for fair play in life." said Michael. The Human Rights are Aussie Rules project has been featuring Fred's Fair Play (a fun performance for children teaching about these rules) and classroom workshops in schools in Eastern Melbourne.

The 'Handball for Human Rights' game links the principles of Freedom, Respect, Equality and Dignity to fair play and being a good sportsperson. A free and family-friendly activity, participants can have as many shots as they like throughout the day, with prizes awarded to the most accurate hand passers.

For more information visit:

www.eclc.org.au and
www.humanrightsareaussierules.org.au



Local children test their skills with 'Handball for Human Rights' at the Knox Festival

Upcoming Law Week Events

To celebrate Law Week (17-23rd May) ECLC invites local residents to participate in an exciting game of 'Legal Lingo Bingo!' and explore a range of common legal issues. With prizes to be won, these sessions will also provide an overview of local services available to help resolve legal issues. For dates, venues and bookings visit www.victorialawfoundation.org.au or www.eclc.org.au

Staff overview

With some growth and other developments, there's been some changes to the ECLC staff team. For who to call, see the list:

Chief Executive Officer Michael Smith	Administration Naomi Milnes, Armita Hira, Sara Molenaar Jenica Lim-Young
Inner East Manager Leonie Burnham	Administration Trainees Ashlee Lui, Holly Phillips-Kliska
Outer East Manager Denise Budge	Advocacy & Partnerships Coordinator—Seniors Rights Leonie Boyle
Finance Manager Cathy Oliver	Community Development Amy Johnstone
Principal Lawyer Philip Cottier	Human Rights are Aussie Rules Tanja Kovac
Family Law Co-ordinator Catherine Jeffries	Volunteers Project/SRV Admin Lauren Hills
Community Lawyers Donna Askew, Elise Meredith, Tanja Kovac	YRIPP Coordinator (CMY) Susan Hillman Stolz

Support

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

- Victoria Legal Aid
- Commonwealth Government
- Department of Planning and Community Development (Vic)
- City of Boroondara
- City of Whitehorse
- Knox City Council
- Maroondah City Council
- Helen MacPherson Smith Trust
- Victorian Multicultural Commission
- Sports Without Borders
- Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission
- Balwyn Welfare Association
- **Box Hill Citizen's Advice Bureau**
- Carp Productions
- Centre for Multicultural Youth
- Clayton Utz
- Council On The Ageing (Victoria)
- Devenish & Co
- EACH
- EDVOS (Eastern Domestic Violence Service)
- Family Access Network
- GordonCare
- Holding Redlich
- Inner East Community Health Centre
- Inner East PCP
- JH Legal
- Knox Community Health Service
- Knox Infolink
- Loddon Campaspe CLC
- Louise Multicultural Community Centre
- Mercader
- Migrant Information Centre (Eastern)
- Moores Legal
- NACLC
- Public Interest Law Clearing House
- Ringwood Family Relationship Centre
- **Ringwood Magistrates' Court**
- Robinson Gill
- Seniors Rights Victoria
- **Women's Legal Service Victoria**
- Yarra Valley Community Health Service

• Volunteers and members of ECLC