

COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION

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ECLC delivered an incredible 71 community legal education (CLE) activities in 2009-10, reaching approximately 2200 residents of the local community. This has been in large part due to the strong relationships formed with community organisations, with many services now inviting ECLC to participate in regular sessions with audiences including recently

arrived refugees and young people at risk. ECLC has also been working closely with Neighbourhood Houses to offer CLE to existing groups and the general community.

For ECLC's community legal education it most definitely has been the year of 'Legal Lingo Bingo!' After an appearance at last year's ECLC AGM, this innovative legal education tool has popped up at international student orientations, seniors groups, English language classes and even debt workshops. 'Legal Lingo Bingo' is a fun game exploring common legal issues and raising awareness of legal support services available to the community. ECLC used it as the basis for its Law Week activities in May, inviting local residents to participate in the fun by partnering with local neighbourhood houses to offer sessions. The feedback from this program has been overwhelmingly positive, with participants enjoying the game of 'Legal Lingo Bingo' and becoming familiar with a wide range of common legal issues.

DIVERSITY CONSULTANCY PANEL

In 2009 ECLC established the Diversity Consultancy Panel to act as an advisory committee to the Centre.

The Panel aims to provide advice on how to improve the Centre's services and community education projects for diverse communities.

The DCP also provides a chance for community members to discuss and share opinions on legal issues facing diverse communities, while assisting members to develop their leadership skills and learn how to support community groups.

The opportunity was advertised in a range of forums including local media and through culturally-specific groups via a mail out.

The group currently has four members representing diverse cultural backgrounds.

Meeting bi-monthly, so far the group has consulted on a number of topics including ECLC's promotional materials and language services. This feedback helps

inform the development of culturally responsive and appropriate services and resources within the Centre.



HUMAN RIGHTS ARE AUSSIE RULES

ECLC's innovative human rights education project has had an amazing year as it grew from a small festivals project featuring just Fred's Fair Play to a major schools program.



This major schools program incorporates a classroom workshop, curriculum resources and the play with some new components for different audiences.

Human Rights are Aussie Rules Project is a schools-based education program teaching children about human rights through principles of fair play and good sportsmanship. When children compare the rules of fair play in life with the rules on the sports field, concepts such as freedom, respect, equality and dignity become very easy to relate to, rather than just abstract ideas. Because sport and fair play is a language common to young people from different races, religions and social backgrounds, it enables a discussion about human rights that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries.

A major launch of the project was held during the football finals in September 2009, featuring an audience (and choir) from the Blackburn English Language School and the play itself. The program was formally launched by the Attorney-General, Rob Hulls and many other supporters also attended. AFL Multicultural Program staff ensured the event included plenty of physical activity and footballs. The project website, www.humanrightsareaussierules.org.au was also launched.

A number of primary schools hosted the pilot phase of the schools program in early 2010 and it is now being implemented in schools across the Eastern region. By invitation, the play has also been performed in Central Victoria and at the VEORHC Conference in Melbourne. In 2009-10 ECLC invited local families to test handball

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.

The game links the principles of Freedom, Respect, Equality and Dignity to fair play and being a good sport. 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.

Additional funding to develop the project was received from the Helen Macpherson Smith trust, the Victorian Multicultural Commission, the City of Whitehorse and the Australian Centre for Human Rights Education.

With the release of the National Human Rights Committee's report, ECLC was delighted with their first recommendation: That education be the highest priority for improving and promoting human rights in Australia.

Following its release, ECLC briefed Attorney-General Robert McClelland regarding this project and its broader work. While there is understandably some disappointment with the decision not to pursue a Human Rights Act at this stage, the government's Human Rights Framework's emphasis on education is clearly needed and welcomed by the Centre.

In April, the project was recognised as a National Finalist in the Children's Law Awards hosted by the National Children's and Youth Law Centre. This highlighted the potential scope of the project at a national level so partnerships in other states and territories to expand the project are being actively explored. An invitation to participate in the Garma Festival in Arnhem Land in August was accepted thanks to philanthropic and pro bono support.





BULLEEN PROJECT

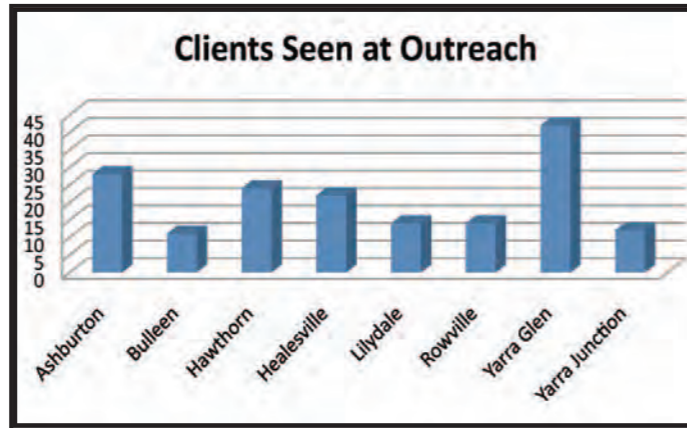
In 2009 ECLC identified a need for a legal service in Bulleen, particularly for residents of Bulleen and Lower Templestowe.

While this area is technically serviced by the Box Hill office, both statistical and anecdotal evidence suggested residents do not find Box Hill to be an accessible service.

ECLC applied for and received pilot funding from the Manningham City Council to establish a legal outreach service in Bulleen. Based at the Bulleen and Templestowe Community House (BATCH). A new legal outreach service was established and commenced in March 2010.

To support the newly established Bulleen Outreach Service the Community Development team pursued a range of opportunities for Community Legal Education in Manningham, with 16 sessions delivered throughout 2009-10 in Manningham. While evaluation is currently underway for this project, it is clear that these sessions

and the relationships made with community services have had a major positive impact on the success of the program.



Case Study

Young people who engage in anti-social behaviour, particularly whilst using alcohol, can be charged with an offence that results in a criminal conviction.

They often do not understand the lasting implications a conviction has for their future, particularly in relation to employment opportunities and travel overseas.

A young man attended ECLC's after being charged with property damage for breaking a shop's glass door whilst intoxicated. As this was his first offence and he was aged between 12 and 17, he presented as a suitable candidate for the Ropes program.

The Ropes program is run by Victoria Police, the Children's Court of Victoria and municipal youth workers and is designed to help build a positive relationship between young offenders, the police and courts. The full-day program pairs up the young person and the police informant as a team to work through the physical challenges of ropes courses at a rockclimbing centre which require trust and co-operation. On successful completion of the program, the Magistrate will discharge the young offender without requiring them to re-attend court, take a formal plea or hear a summary or evidence and without making any finding as to the young person's guilt.

ECLC successfully negotiated with the informant (police officer) and obtained their consent to the young man participating in the Ropes program, rather than the charge being heard by the Children's Court. ECLC appeared on behalf of the young offender in the Children's Court and the application for approval was successful.

The outcome means that upon successful completion of the Ropes program the young person will not have a criminal conviction and will not have a finding of guilt recorded. This gives them the opportunity to remain out of the criminal justice system and to experience positive behaviour change and think about the consequences of their actions and better ways of handling situations in the future, rather than going through a negative punitive experience.

YOUTH REFERRAL & INDEPENDENT PERSON PROGRAM

The youth Referral and independent Person Program trains and supports people working as Independent Persons across Victoria.

The Youth Referral & Independent Person Program (YRIPP) provides up to date training, a state wide Independent Person roster, resources for police and parents and access to a 24hr legal advice line for young people in custody.

The law requires that an adult be present during formal police questioning of a young person under 18 years of age. When a parent or guardian is unavailable, an adult 'Independent Person' is required to be in attendance. (Section 464E Crimes Act 1958)

YRIPP, as a statewide service, has experienced a major change in service delivery over the past 12 months. It has been necessary to amalgamate some regions with four rather than the previous eight servicing the state.

Interviews for young people needing an Independent Person have remained constant overall but the service is no closer to determining why "busy" periods develop with one Saturday night recording one request (for an Independent Person) for the whole state and the following Tuesday night, 17 calls from as many stations.

The program continues to lobby for ongoing funding to ensure that it continues to assist young people in our community who have found themselves involved in the criminal justice system.

For some young people the support of the Independent Person at the police station and the



subsequent referral process can be life changing as the feed-back from Youth and Family Service attests. YRIPP is a partnership between the Centre for Multicultural Youth, ECLC, Victoria Police and other community agencies.



Abdil's* background of criminal involvement and disengagement from his family have created an environment of negative and high risk behaviours. Since Abdil's involvement in the YRIPP referral and his engagement with the worker, Abdil is becoming more aware of the consequences he is currently facing for his past behaviours, his options regarding his own future as a young man within the community and the services and supports available to him to assist him in reaching his goals.

*name changed to protect confidentiality



YARRA RANGES PROJECT

ECLC supported the communities of the Yarra Ranges for 14 months after the devastation of the Black Saturday bushfires in February 2009 through the relief and recovery centres.



Now the ECLC has extended the Centre's outreach program to include a monthly service to Yarra Glen. ECLC was concerned at the lack of access to legal and related services for local residents and communities. As a result, ECLC initiated a legal needs study, consulting with agencies and residents. The study confirmed a high level of legal need with tenancy and housing-related legal issues along with family law and intervention order issues identified as the major areas requiring a response. It also highlighted major barriers to accessing services for these communities such as lack of public transport and large distances being travelled to receive assistance. Stuart Wilson, a social work student spent many months on the legal needs study which resulted in a publication 'A Community Legal Centre for the Yarra Ranges' which identified 8 key recommendations. The results of the research were striking. A large number of residents were unaware of any legal services available to them, and even if they did know, access was highly problematic due to the lack of public transport in the area. Over 12 months, ECLC's Outer East team assisted in 551 matters for residents in the Yarra Ranges with many having to travel to the Boronia office for an appointment. For those living in more remote areas such as East Warburton, a 45 minute appointment with a lawyer could become a day trip which is often impossible, especially for parents or people who are

working. ECLC considers this unacceptable. The project has been further supported by the establishment of a Reference Group of community agencies, police, Council and the Member of Seymour, Ben Hardman. The Reference Group is working hard to campaign State and Commonwealth governments and other stakeholders to establish a Yarra Ranges Community Legal Centre to meet the legal needs of these communities and break down the barriers of distance. 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.

A copy of the report 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. This is just one of the many stories of the ECLC Boronia office. Join us in the fight.

ECLC has been a partner with Knox Community Health Services, Women's Health East, Knox Infolink, Knox Council and others for the past three years in an awareness raising campaign to end violence against women – the Knox Accord. In 2009, the project implemented a successful partnership with the Eastern Football League, providing guest speakers to six of the local clubs and having a football game in July dedicated to the Knox Accord. Football players wore white arm bands in support of the Accord while the partnership members sought additional signatories to the Accord's personal pledge to not commit, support, condone or remain silent about any form of violence against women.

SENIORS RIGHTS VICTORIA

Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) is a free service to help prevent elder abuse and safeguard the rights, dignity and independence of older Victorians.



Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV), a free service to help prevent elder abuse and safeguard the rights, dignity and independence of older Victorians, began operating from the ECLC offices in July 2008. This state-wide service was formed as part of a joint venture between

ECLC, the Council on the Ageing (COTA), the Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH) and Loddon Campaspe Legal Centre (LCCLC). From January this year, SRV now offers an advocacy service from ECLC's Box Hill office to cover the eastern region. SRV's advocacy service works alongside the SRV lawyers to offer individual support and assistance

to enable older people to eliminate abuse and regain safety, security and confidence. SRV has been busy working on developing networks with many local agencies and service providers across the Eastern Region with the aim of sharing information and resources, and to establish and improve referral pathways. Throughout the year, the SRV team has worked closely between the Box Hill and Boronia offices, as well as the occasional home visit when a client was unable to come to us. This collaborative approach has enabled us to provide a holistic response to incidences of abuse. On Tuesday, 15th June 2010, Seniors Rights Victoria held a day-long workshop on elder abuse at Melbourne's Rendevoez Hotel. The workshop was attended by workers from all over Victoria and representing a broad range of expertise, they received positive feedback from the evaluation.

Case Study

ECLC regularly receives referrals from clients who have driven uninsured, had an accident and as a consequence are being sued for damages.

These damages are often to the other parties' vehicle and instigated by a large insurance company – Victoria Legal Aid does not fund representation in these matters. The majority of these clients are severely disadvantaged and often surviving on a government benefit with significant pre-existing debts, mental health concerns, disabilities, drug/alcohol/gambling dependency or other poverty-related problems, which are all contributory factors in being unable to afford third party property insurance. In the absence of a statutory regime as in other Australian states, uninsured drivers are left to fend for themselves, often being pursued for years by insurers with little or no prospect of being able to pay any debt or damages claim. ECLC regularly advocates and negotiates on our clients' behalf to have debts waived or significantly reduced. ECLC lawyers recently assisted a client whose sole source of income is a Disability Support Pension. As a result of a three-car collision the client was being pursued by two separate insurers, with damages sought totaling over \$14,000. ECLC successfully resolved this long standing matter by negotiating with both insurers to have the debts waived on the basis of our client's financial hardship. Generally clients do not realise that income derived through a government benefit is protected by the law so, when pressured by collection agents acting on behalf of insurers, agree to payment plans that they simply cannot afford on their very limited incomes.



VOLUNTEER DINNER



Nikos Tavern in Ringwood was the setting for ECLC's annual Volunteers' Dinner in May, 2010.

As well as great food and plenty of it there was great company, great entertainment and great speakers. "Celebrating diversity" was the theme and this was a chance to showcase ECLC's diversity of volunteers and programs.

The night was a huge success with some familiar faces and some new faces but as always the spirit in the room was high, despite the competing noise in the restaurant. Our volunteers had a chance to mingle with others that they often don't see.

Our distinguished guests, including our patron Chief Magistrate Ian Gray, along with other local magistrates, were able to learn more about the working of a community legal centre and the critical support of the volunteers we have across the east.

Mr George Lekakis, Chairperson of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, was the guest speaker and shared his sentiments on the role of community groups for multicultural societies such as ours. During his speech, he said:

"Multiculturalism is not a new phenomenon. It's part of our history in this country. Part of who we are. Australia's history of migration has taught us that there is more than just one way of doing things. That we can learn and have learned to do things better,

and faster, and more tastefully and more beautifully, and more enjoyably if and when we embrace multiculturalism as an opportunity for improvement rather than as a threat to orthodoxy."

Tanja Kovac spoke with passion about ECLC's commitment to human rights and compared this to the passion many of us share for football and all things sport.

CEO Michael Smith shared insight into ECLC's growth and diversity as we move into the future.

However the most important purpose of the evening was to share our thanks and appreciation for the volunteers that continue to support ECLC and its vision.





EASTERN COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE INC.

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Hours of operation

Monday to Friday 9:00am to 5:00pm

Tuesday to Thursday evenings

Inner East: serving the communities of Boroondara, Manningham & Whitehorse

Outreach to:

Ashburton, Hawthorn, Bulleen, Ringwood FRC & Ringwood Magistrates' Court.

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Hours of operation

Monday to Thursday 9:00am to 5:00pm

Tuesday evenings

Outer East: serving the communities of Knox, Maroondah & Yarra Ranges

Outreach to: Rowville, Lilydale, Healesville, Yarra Glen and Yarra Junction,

Ringwood FRC & Ringwood Magistrates' Court