



MEDIA RELEASE

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One hour's investment by Community Legal Centres returns a day's pro bono work

Analysis of recent survey data from the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) and the National Pro Bono Resource Centre (NPBRC) reveal a ratio of 7.2 between the total number of hours spent by the staff of Community Legal Centres (CLCs) in supervising and training volunteers, and the total number of hours contributed by volunteers and pro bono partnerships with law firms.

The analysis also shows that individual volunteering by lawyers provides at least two thirds of the pro bono legal support provided to CLCs. The other third is contributed through law firm/CLC pro bono partnerships. Fifteen of the law firms with more than 50 lawyers (29%) surveyed by the NPBRC indicated that they have provided lawyers on secondment to a CLC partner in the past year. The most common length of a secondment was six months.

Mr John Corker, Director of the NPBRC said, "Individual volunteering by lawyers, law students and others remains the lifeblood of CLCs but the contribution being made by the large firms through pro bono partnerships is significant. However, in order for CLCs to leverage fully from the pro bono support that is available from lawyers and law firms, it is vital that CLCs have adequate skilled staff to undertake the necessary tasks. This is important to make it work cost-effectively for all involved."

"There is some evidence that this is a problem, with the NACLC survey indicating that the main reasons for some CLCs not using volunteers were a lack of time and resources to provide adequate supervision, and a lack of office space", said Corker.

The NACLC survey indicated that the necessary tasks include providing general induction training, liaison and coordination with law firm pro bono coordinators and individual volunteers, providing training in relevant areas of law and practice, supervision of volunteers and secondees and the checking of legal advices and providing feedback or supplementary advice where necessary.

"It is also important to appreciate that many of the necessary tasks require a high level of skill", Corker said. The NACLC survey showed that the Principal Solicitor and Centre Manager primarily undertook the supervision and training tasks.

Law students

Another important finding of the NACLC survey is the significant contribution being made by law students volunteering at CLCs. Fifty five per cent of all individual volunteering hours came from law students contrasted with 26% from lawyers, with the rest being provided by administrative volunteers, social work students and financial counsellors.

“CLCs are making a significant contribution to educating law students and helping them to understand the importance of a life-long commitment to pro bono legal work”, Corker said. “This investment in the future should be celebrated, recognised and supported”.

The results are based on a survey conducted by NACLC in June 2012 of CLCs nationally based on 106 responses (out of a total possible 200 CLCs) and a survey conducted by the NPBRC in September 2012 of all Australian law firms with more than 50 lawyers based on responses from 36 law firms (out of a total possible 51 law firms).

The NACLC survey data showed a total of 3637 volunteers (1885 lawyers, 1260 law students and 492 other volunteers) providing 435,188 hours of volunteer time to CLCs in 2011/2012 and in the same year, contributions of 56,939 hours made to the 106 CLCs through law firm/CLC pro bono partnerships. This figure was very close to the total number of hours of pro bono legal work reported to the NPBRC by the large law firms as having being sourced from CLCs in the 2011/2012 year (54,932 hours) thus corroborating the results.

NACLC have published two summary documents from their survey titled “Working Collaboratively: Community Legal Centres and Volunteers and “Working Collaboratively: Community Legal Centres and Pro Bono Partnerships that provide further analysis. Both are available online at http://www.naclc.org.au/resources/NACLC_VOLUNTEERS_web.pdf and http://www.naclc.org.au/resources/NACLC_PROBONO_web.pdf

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