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## LawRight News - Issue 1 - April 2017

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### Funding Cuts

The anticipated cuts to commonwealth funding for CLCs have now been published and the impact for LawRight is catastrophic.

LawRight will be reduced to funding levels from 2012-13. This means a staff loss of 45%, each of our unique services reduced, and our capacity to innovate, research and collaborate significantly depleted.

The impact for people facing disadvantage in Queensland is far greater. We estimate that 1,000 clients per year will no longer receive assistance through LawRight. This is not 1,000 advices – this is 1,000 people experiencing complex, multiple, long-term disadvantage who need intensive and comprehensive civil casework services, which are only available in Queensland by accessing pro bono solicitors and barristers.

The main impact will be felt by those with the least resources and for whom there is no other legal service – homeless and disadvantaged indigenous clients in Cairns, young people exiting the child safety system who face an 88% risk of homelessness, people representing

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[Register now for the Qld Legal Walk 2017](#)



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### Support LawRight

LawRight relies on charitable

themselves in debt enforcement hearings and in workers compensation appeals, people in Townsville who are homeless or representing themselves, and people throughout Queensland experiencing mental illness.

Here are five stories we won't be able to tell after June 2017:

support to conduct its activities. If you would like to make a **tax-deductible donation** you can do so by selecting 'donate' on our homepage.

[Donate](#)

## Hope for aboriginal family violence survivor

Anna, a 17 year old aboriginal girl, has already endured a lifetime of violence. In 2015, her ex-partner viciously stabbed her and convinced the community to ostracise her. Anna had been sleeping rough ever since and received no income - her birth was never registered, so she didn't have enough ID to claim Centrelink. When Anna was 15, her daughter was taken from her care. Her ex-partner told Anna that Child Safety removed the child, but that was a lie – he and his family had taken the girl.

When Anna attended an Aboriginal Health Centre in Cairns, she met with our LawRight indigenous lawyer. LawRight arranged for Anna to get a birth certificate, a back payment from Centrelink, and sign a long term tenancy. Anna learnt the truth from LawRight about her daughter's removal and was connected to the local indigenous family violence service to arrange a reunification.

With the basics of housing, income and family no longer ignored, Anna can begin her healing.

*Anna was helped by our indigenous lawyer in Cairns, who operates legal clinics at Wucopperen Aboriginal Health Centre and Douglas House crisis accommodation service with pro bono lawyers. Last year, LawRight helped 182 indigenous clients with 274 complex legal issues, to resolve housing, income and family violence problems. This service will end this month.*

## Three years to end a doomed cycle

According to her community worker, teenager Bobby was on the road to prison – a fate that meets many young people exiting the Child Protection system. Bobby was already homeless, had accumulated 32 criminal charges and owed over \$4000 of fines and debt. When she reluctantly met LawRight volunteer lawyers in the company of her community worker, she couldn't

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look them in the eye or sit still long enough to ask for help. But the lawyers persisted.

After one year of meeting with Bobby at a beach park, the lawyers had sorted out the debts, sorted out all the criminal charges, made an application for housing and helped Bobby access her Child Safety records. Bobby learnt that her intellectual disabilities had never been properly diagnosed.

After 2 years, the lawyers had connected Bobby to disability services and supported her to challenge a complex family violence dispute.

After 3 years, Bobby contacts her lawyers herself, when she needs them. She became pregnant and worked with the lawyers to persuade Child Safety not to remove the child at birth. She is currently in stable housing, commits no crimes and is a loving mum who welcomes the wrap-around support of disability, child safety and legal services.

*Bobby is helped by LegalPod, which currently provides 48 young people exiting state care with their own "pod" of volunteer lawyers. LegalPod aims to reduce the 88% homelessness risk of this cohort by giving young people a persistent lawyer who will address the housing, income, health and criminal problems which prevent a stable transition to independence. 11 law firms and 11 community agencies collaborate with LegalPod. This service will end this month.*

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## Michael gets it together

Michael had been unemployed for some time, his mental health had declined and he fell behind in everything, including his rent. He owed so much and could not cope with the court formalities, so the landlord obtained a default judgement at the Magistrates Court for the money owed. By the time of the enforcement hearing Michael had found work, but his credit history and health were still at risk.

LawRight arranged a volunteer barrister to attend the enforcement hearing and advised Michael to negotiate a repayment plan and apply to set aside the default judgement.

Without the stress of being constantly pursued by debt collectors, Michael can now focus on maintaining his employment and health.

*Michael was helped by LawRight's Duty Barrister schemes which targeted disadvantaged litigants in 3 locations - the Brisbane Magistrates Court debt enforcement hearings, appeals in workers compensation matters to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission and child protection reviews to QCAT. These 3 services assisted 130 self-represented litigants and will end this month.*

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## Townsville LawRight prevents injustice

Beth is a survivor of 20 years of family violence, with a deep need for safe accommodation. She moved to Townsville for a fresh start and rented a house, but a break and enter damaged the front security screen door.

Beth sought help from a women's support service, where she was connected to visiting volunteer lawyers. The lawyers helped Beth through the formal process of asking the landlord to repair the screen, and giving notice to vacate the house, when her request was ignored. The landlord resisted all attempts at negotiation and instead filed an application to claim the rental bond.

By now, Beth was living in her car, unable to rent anywhere until the bond dispute was sorted.

Volunteer lawyers with the Townsville Self Representation Service helped a very frightened Beth to argue her case at QCAT. The QCAT member ordered the landlord to pay back the bond and a further 2 days rent. The QCAT member also criticised the landlord's management of the tenancy and handling of Beth's dispute.

Beth was so relieved and proud of her success. Who will assist other "Beths" when LawRight Townsville is defunded in June 2017?

*Beth was helped by our Townsville office, which coordinates pro bono outreach legal clinics at the Womens' Centre and the Housing Connections Hub; coordinates volunteer lawyers at the Self Representation Service at local courts and tribunals and refers disadvantaged people to local lawyers for free legal services in complex matters. LawRight Townsville helped 336 clients last year with the support of 8 local law firms and 11 local barristers. This service will end this month.*

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## Better response to mental illness

Clare is 39 years old and has a part-time job. She lives with her parents and hopes to attend university one day. Clare has significant and long-term mental illness which she is active in managing. When her illness worsened, Clare followed her GP's encouragement to voluntarily seek specialist help at a hospital, but the hospital placed her under a Treatment Authority (TA). Clare wanted LawRight's help with the review of the TA.

With pro bono legal support, Clare was able to prepare for the review – explaining that she was not at risk of harming herself or others and that she had extensive support. The Tribunal revoked the Treatment Authority. Clare's mother cried and Clare was stunned and overjoyed. She said: 'I felt I was heard. I was just glad to be able to have [your help], especially because it was short notice. I

am very grateful.'

*Clare was helped by our Mental Health Law Practice. LawRight self-funds this statewide service to people under Treatment Authorities who will not be represented at their review. The MHLP also visits locked wards and community mental health services to provide legal help for other problems such as evictions, debts and criminal charges which prevent people with mental illness getting better. The MHLP assisted 277 clients last year. This service must drastically reduce by the end of June.*

**People like Anna, Bobby, Michael, Beth and Clare need access to justice. What can you do?**

The NSW government this week provided an extra \$6M of funding so that no community legal services or staff are lost in that state. Please contact your local State and Federal politicians to reverse the cuts to LawRight (and other Queensland CLCs) which take effect from July 2017.

Your donation to LawRight can provide emergency funding to keep some services running.

[Donate](#)

## Queensland Legal Walk



We are celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Walk.

In view of the loss of pro bono legal services for disadvantaged people throughout Queensland, please join us to make this the biggest Queensland Law Walk ever.

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You can register at [www.qldlegalwalk.org.au](http://www.qldlegalwalk.org.au)

If you can't attend, you can still [donate](#).

On **Tuesday May 16, 2017 at 7am**, walks will commence in:

**Brisbane:** Forecourt, QE II Courts Complex

**Toowoomba:** Toowoomba Court House, 159 Hume Street

**Sunshine Coast:** War Memorial, Cotton Tree Park

**Townsville:** Townsville Bulletin Square, Flinder's Street

**Cairns:** Funship Playground, north Cairns Esplanade

**Mackay:** a fundraising breakfast will be held at 8.00 am (venue tbc)

Last year, Amanda, a lawyer at Ashurst took out the individual fundraising award and her hint is: ***Hold a weekly raffle at your work place. Make the prize 50% of the proceeds raised that week – the more buyers, the greater the prize!***\*

\*Note that under the raffling legislation, you must set the total prize value at least 20% of the estimated ticket sales and you will need to obtain a Letter of Authority from LawRight to conduct the fundraising raffle on behalf of LawRight.

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## LawRight Launch

Keen readers will have realised this is a first edition newsletter - after 40 newsletters and 15 years, QPILCH has become LawRight.

LawRight was officially launched at the Banco Court on 15 February 2017 by The Honourable Catherine Holmes, Chief Justice of Queensland. The Chief Justice expressed her affection for our old name and detailed QPILCH's history and the involvement of so many people.

Our President, barrister Matthew Jones, explained that pro bono organisations such as Justice Connect, JusticeNet SA, Law Access in WA, and now LawRight have developed well beyond being mere pro bono clearing houses. He said the name LawRight had been chosen to better communicate to the public the organisation's role and function.

We appreciated the support of speakers Damien O'Brien QC for the Bar Association of Queensland and Christine Smyth, President of the Queensland Law Society, and our keynote speakers for the night - journalist Peter Greste, and Gilbert + Tobin law firm partner, Christopher Flynn, who led the international team of lawyers who secured Peter's freedom from prison in Egypt.

As John Corker expressed in his article on the launch for the Australian Pro Bono Centre newsletter:

*"Peter took the advantage of an audience of a room packed full of lawyers to [talk of] a changing world with changing values to emphasise the importance of the work that LawRight and the pro bono community does in seeking to provide better access to justice for the disadvantaged and marginalised; to uphold the*

*best of the values in Australian society.*

*Christopher Flynn...talked of the importance of the pro bono culture at his firm and across the legal profession. Chris spoke of disruptions facing the profession and focused on global re-distributions of power, their impact on western democracy and the profession's role in maintaining the rule of law and access to justice.*

*The event marked another important milestone in the growing maturity of the pro bono culture in Queensland, and in Australia."*

We look forward to another 15 years of supporting and growing pro bono culture in Queensland.



Peter Greste

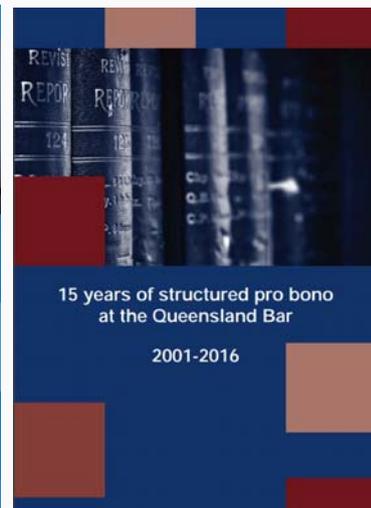
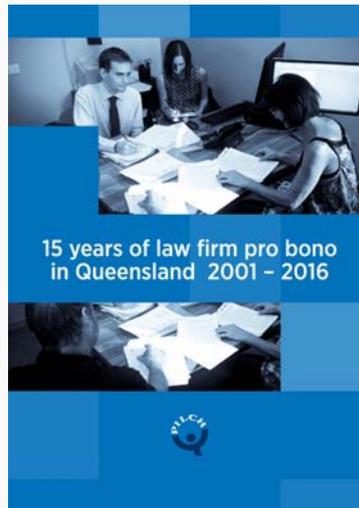
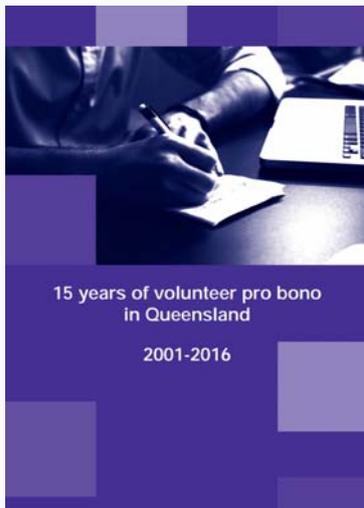


Left to right: Jeff Giddings, Francesca Bartlett, Steve Herd, Gabriella Ritchie and Lucy Bretherton



## New 15 years publication - the full-set

To commemorate the fine tradition of pro bono work in Queensland, and as we transitioned into LawRight, we produced three publications to record the pro bono contributions over the last fifteen years.



## New Mental Health Website

We have developed a new health law resources site where the resources that are available to help people

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who are experiencing or planning for health law issues, principally mental health, can navigate the health law system, see [www.healthlawqld.org.au](http://www.healthlawqld.org.au).

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LawRight  
PO Box 3631  
South Brisbane, QLD 4101  
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