



Basic Rights Queensland

Annual Report 2018

States Parties shall prohibit all discrimination on the basis of disability and guarantee to persons with disabilities equal and effective legal protection against discrimination on all grounds.

*UN Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities Article 5*

Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 23*

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights...

*UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Article 11*

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## ABOUT US

# What we do

Basic Rights Queensland (BRQ) is a specialist community legal centre, providing free advice, advocacy and legal services state-wide by telephone. Our committed staff, volunteers and students assist vulnerable people in matters relating to social security, disability discrimination and women's employment issues.

Where an issue has an impact on the broader community we may develop and conduct community education activities, and/or undertake research informing law reform projects where we advocate on behalf of the community.

- BRQ's specialist services are accessible via freecall numbers from anywhere in Queensland.
- BRQ's client work focuses on vulnerable and disadvantaged people:
  - 55% of our clients are people with disability, including mental illness
  - 89% of our clients are in very straitened financial circumstances
  - 13% of our clients have no income at the time of contact
- BRQ's social work services are offered to clients in need of brief counselling or linking in with local supports
- BRQ's plain English factsheets support understanding of the law, how to access rights and any related responsibilities
- BRQ's capacity-building training assists community, private sector and government workers to understand the law and how to assist their clients
- BRQ's law reform activities arise from the client work; they focus on informing government of the impacts of laws and policies on vulnerable people and on offering positive alternatives
- BRQ has been operating for over 33 years with the support of volunteers, sponsors, donors and pro-bono assistance

# Our Vision

Basic rights for a just society

# Our Purpose

- Providing high quality, independent advice, legal services and community education
- Upholding rights to social security entitlements and freedom from discrimination
- Advocating fair and just outcomes for vulnerable people

# Our Values

## Fairness

We act with integrity, ensuring our resources are targeted equitably while prioritising the most vulnerable.

## Access

We are committed to enabling access to justice through innovative service provision and making the complex comprehensible.

## Inclusion

We are non-judgemental and we embrace diversity.

## Transparency

We are clearly accountable for our actions so as to maintain trust with our clients, the wider community, and funders.

## Respect

We respond to all who need our assistance with compassion and understanding, maintaining a non-judgemental perspective.

## Responsiveness

We provide our clients with an objective assessment of their situation while also being empathic to the difficulties of their situation and the challenges of dealing with it.

## Knowledge / Expertise

Through continually developing our in-depth knowledge of complex areas of law, we provide expert, evidence-based advice to our clients.



# Thank you

I wish to write you a personal letter to restate my thanks to you (and BRQ) for genuine and generous professional assistance to me in an appeal with a DSP (rejected) claim. Due to information, guidance and support, I was able to accumulate my evidence and present it in a way that Centrelink could assess to verify and approve my claim.

I am very grateful that such assistance is available to disadvantaged and struggling Australian citizens.

I am not proud about being on DSP and keep that fact as private as possible! I would much better prefer being healthy and earning an 'honest wage' in the building trade (plumber) like I did for most of my tax paying life. But I am 54 and advice now is, "look after what health I have left"...

The online information that I researched from BRQ on this subject was highly informative and influential regarding decision made and actions taken. I wish to return the sentiment of helping others, even in a small way by offering my actual account with the goal of giving confused and unaware persons an option to consider if faced with similar beaurocratic obstacles. Even if it helps just one!

I never expect anything for nothing and can only offer my information and gratitude as a form of inferior payment. Please know you have made a positive impact, and reduced a lot of angst in, at least on older man's life!

Thank you



## A MESSAGE FROM

# Our President and Director

### Lurline Comerford and Georgina Warrington

This has been a noteworthy year for BRQ, characterised by development and change, the most significant of which has been the incorporation of the Working Women Queensland Program into BRQ. With funding reduced to an unsustainable level, the Queensland Working Women's Service (QWWS) made the difficult decision to cease operations after 22 years and to hand over their vital program to BRQ.

Since January, our new team of Industrial Officers has been providing advice, advocacy and representation for vulnerable women across the state who are experiencing workplace problems, such as bullying, unfair dismissal, sexual harassment or non payment of wages.

BRQ was fortunate to be able to engage the experienced staff formerly employed by QWWS. Their prodigious output and successful outcomes belie the limited hours covered by the funding. Sadly however, the limited funding in no way meets the need. The addition of the WWQ Program has been beneficial for other BRQ clients who are now able to be referred in-house as appropriate. BRQ has also adopted QWWS's Domestic Violence Work Aware program, which provides specialist training to organisations on how to best support their staff who are experiencing domestic violence.

Inevitably, the period of transition was one of major upheaval, particularly during the required office re-fit. Incredibly, amidst the chaos, our dedicated staff and volunteers managed to continue advising and assisting our clients. We would like to gratefully acknowledge the massive contribution of staff

and volunteers during this process, it simply could not have come together without their hard work, determination and patience.

Against the backdrop of increasingly restrictive government policies and practices exacerbating the hardship experienced by vulnerable people, there was high demand for our services. This year BRQ's Social Security, Disability Discrimination and Working Women Queensland programs assisted a total of 1,919 people. In addition, we continued to provide well-received community education, partner in research and undertake law reform work. Details of our activities and client stories illustrating our work can be found in this report.

BRQ's many achievements this year were carried out through the hard work of our dedicated staff team, supported by our wonderful volunteers. Everyone, from volunteer First Contact Officers to the Executive of the Management Committee, has a vital part to play in ensuring BRQ continues to provide high-quality, expert services, upholding the basic rights of vulnerable Queenslanders to social security entitlements, freedom from discrimination and social justice in the workplace. This is enabled through the funding received from Government, boosted by sponsorship, donations, and in-kind contributions.

Finally, we honour the memory of Patrick Cranitch, who was with BRQ for 16 years, during eight of which he was our Senior Solicitor. The respect in which Patrick was held was evidenced by the many tributes we received, including this:

"A compassionate and deeply understanding guy, much of which came from his own personal experiences of the world. A great lawyer with encyclopaedic knowledge but never one to boast or blow his own trumpet. A great loss to our community."





## CLIENT STORY

# Appeal Success at Tribunal

Catherine\*, who was in her early 60s had been employed and had cared for her family as a single parent for most of her adult life. However, a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and the associated impact on her health exceeded her capacity to cope any and she became unable to continue in employment.

In the lead up to her claim for the Disability Support Pension, she experienced a range of symptoms including vision impairment, **difficulty with memory and cognition, exhaustion and fatigue, difficulty with fine motor skills, restless legs and impaired bladder control.** Furthermore, she suffered severe depression which **was not expected to improve significantly as her physical health continued to deteriorate.**

**Catherine's claim was rejected by Centrelink and she appealed the decision, attaining a rating of only 5 points for her mental health condition and no points for the symptoms of her MS.**

BRQ assisted Catherine at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal - Level One by helping her to obtain further relevant information about her conditions and lodging a written submission. Ultimately Cather was assigned a rating of 55 points compared to only 5 points **that were assigned to her by Centrelink. She was granted the Disability Support Pension backdated to the date of claim.**

(\*not her real name)

The communal area is unveiled

So many boxes, so little time



## Our Renovations

Incorporating the WWQ program required an office re-fit and temporary relocation... while continuing to provide client services.



"Universal headset adaptor"



Temporary location



# Community Legal Education

## Steve Irvine - CLE Coordinator

The demand for BRQ's Community Legal Education Program continues to grow. This year we expanded our capacity to provide information by utilising web-based technology. We continued to provide workshops in Social Security law and Disability Discrimination to community workers, stakeholders, Tertiary institutions and the general public. BRQ also collaborated with Government Organisations and maintained regular networking activity with the community legal sector.

This year BRQ conducted or was involved in seventeen workshops and events providing social security expertise to community legal organisations, community groups and professionals involved in the social security sector. BRQ conducted information sessions with organisations such as Benevolent Society, Stepping Stones and QSTARS. BRQ also collaborated with the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) on providing information to the QWIN network on debt issues and young people. Similar to recent years, BRQ also collaborated with Brisbane City Council and Logan City Council and provided information and attended public community events such as Homeless Connect and the Logan Finance Fair.

BRQ joined with Legal Aid Qld and The Administrative Appeals Tribunal in presenting a Webinar on Appealing a Disability Support Pension decision. This was the first Webinar that BRQ have been involved in and we were able to extend our information reach as well as increase our audience. One hundred and eleven people "tuned in" and we received very positive feedback. We look forward to utilising this media in the future. Despite operating in the technological age there is still a preference amongst community organisation and service providers for "face to face" engagement when it comes to the delivery of Social Security Information.

Collaboration within the sector and with stakeholders is equally important in the dissemination of legal information. To that end BRQ maintained involvement with the CLE Legal Assistance Forum network (CLAF). BRQ also communicates and contributes regularly to the National Social Security

Network in producing, editing and publishing new and updated fact sheets.

BRQ maintained its focus on educating Tertiary students about the important role that Community Legal Centres provide to those less advantaged in society and the important role CLCs play in the provision and dissemination of legal advice throughout the community and within the legal profession. BRQ have been supported in this by Bond University and The University of Queensland clinical legal placement program. BRQ provides students from both universities, opportunities to gain practical experience within the sector and experience how administrative law "works" in a practical setting. The students from both universities have thoroughly enjoyed their experience at BRQ.

## Student Feedback

- Clinical placement has been a valuable and positive experience
- I really valued the experience to learn an area of law that is not really covered in law school
- During my placement I have been honestly inspired by the good work and amazing attitudes of the staff at BRQ. As a result I have become committed to finding ways to continue my pro bono experience in the future.





# Client Services

**Principal Solicitor,  
Andrew Davison**

## Social Security

The last year has challenged BRQ's social security service in many ways but perhaps the predominant trend has been the increasingly high levels of frustration and distress that our clients are presenting with when they contact us. This frustration and distress is the consequence of government policies designed to restrict access to social security support. Given Disability Support Pension (DSP) continues to dominate the majority of our advice and case work, the lengthening delays in average DSP processing times are a significant contributor to these impacts upon clients. In particular, the introduction of yet another step in the DSP process, the Assessment Services Recommendation for DSP medical eligibility, now means that even a DSP applicant who is immediately found to meet the criteria for DSP will have to have at least three different sections of Centrelink and one government contracted Doctor check that they meet the medical criteria before they can be granted. We have also noticed a significant number of those whose DSP is rejected having their reviews left in limbo for months at a time until we or they follow up Centrelink and insist that they progress the matter.

At a national level BRQ has worked closely with the National Social Security Rights Network (NSSRN) to advocate on policy on a number of issues this year. In particular, the roll out in Queensland initially (though we understand it is intended to be expanded nationally) of Early Case Assessment at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal first tier has concerned us as clients are being talked into withdrawing by a lawyer employed by the Tribunal. We have raised our concerns directly with the Tribunal at a national level to make sure that clients are clearly informed that they are not receiving independent legal advice during Early Case Assessment and that they are entitled to do so by contacting our services through the Duty Lawyer or Advice clinics.

## Advices

BRQ continued to provide a high volume of telephone advices in social security and disability discrimination in 2017-18 with a total of 2,151 advices this year through both the weekly Duty Lawyer and daily Telephone Advice services. At the beginning of 2018 BRQ decided to fully digitise our advice records and move to paperless. Although this has presented challenges in refining our new systems, the advice staff should be commended for keeping up our advice numbers throughout this significant change to our processes which will provide quicker access to client records moving forwards. Thank you to our administration staff and volunteers for tirelessly working to solve problems as they arose and to develop ways to improve the system.

The persistently high levels of frustrated, distressed and/or angry clients takes its toll on staff, particularly in telephone advice sessions. BRQ staff undertook training in dealing with challenging behaviours this year to optimise our communication skills and minimise the impacts on ourselves of such calls.

## Case work

In 2017-18 we closed over 140 cases, with complex medico-legal issues in DSP cases continuing to dominate our casework. The casework staff have continued to expand their knowledge and familiarity with a broad range of medical conditions and continued to develop relationships with health practitioners and support workers to expand the reach of the assistance we can provide to the community.



One of the skills our caseworkers have definitely honed this year is the ability to think outside the box and not simply consider the immediate issue that the client is presenting with. The most common example of this is discussing with clients the advantages of making a new claim for DSP or pursuing further treatment when they present with an appeal of a DSP claim that they often lodged more than 12 months ago. As the appeals Tribunal can only consider if they met the criteria within 13 weeks of their claim, clients who have had ongoing treatment will often have a much stronger argument on a new claim now or after pursuing further treatment. Another area in which we have assisted a number of clients this year is to prioritise changing their current situation over pursuing appeals; for example, recommending they consider ceasing to live under the same roof as their ex-partner in circumstances where Centrelink is unlikely to accept the separation due to credibility or other issues. Many of our clients become so focussed on their current appeal that they lose sight of their other options to improve their situation. It is a particular strength of our staff that we are able to talk to clients holistically about their situation and advise them about both the prospects of their appeal and the potentially much higher prospects of a better outcome if clients change their situation.

Clients  
Total  1,919

1717 1071  
Financial Disadvantage People with disability

71 73 35  
CALD ATSI Homeless

### Working Women Queensland

♀ 249

59% 23%  
Financial Disadvantage People with disability

4% 4%  
CALD ATSI

### Disability Discrimination & Social Security

120   1,613

93% 60%  
Financial Disadvantage People with disability

2% 4%  
CALD ATSI





## Disability Discrimination

### Terri Bradley, Disability Discrimination Advocate

BRQ's Disability Discrimination Advocacy Service provides advice, and in limited cases representation to people who believe they have been subjected to unlawful discrimination on the basis of their disability. The main areas relate to discrimination in employment, education and access issues.

There has been an increase in both the number of advices provided and cases opened for the 2017/2018 period, with 202 advices provided and 13 cases opened. A large number of those were direct referrals from the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland.

BRQ encourages clients to resolve issues informally where possible and this year we have seen a number of matters resolved with early intervention and achieved positive outcomes for clients without the need of participating in a formal adversarial process.

This year BRQ was invited meet with Department of Education as part of a stakeholder consultation process relating to behaviour procedural review within Queensland schools. Given the large number of advices provided within the education area this was a valuable opportunity to discuss concerns relating to behavioural management of students with a disability.

BRQ has also been invited to meet with Senior Management from a Local Council to discuss future accessibility issues for upcoming infrastructure projects. We hope this opportunity will assist in providing accessible infrastructure for persons with a disability in Queensland.

#### CLIENT SERVICE STATS

Legal advice .....	1947
Legal task .....	167
Duty Lawyer .....	119
Representation Services (Closed) .....	141
Information provision .....	279
Referrals .....	897
Non Legal Support (WWQ assistance) ...	405





## CLIENT STORY

# Assistance Animal Access

Stan\*, who relies on an assistance dog for a mobility impairment, had booked a holiday at a popular holiday destination but was told that his assistance dog couldn't come too.

BRQ's disability discrimination advocacy service assisted, negotiating on the Stan's behalf with management & legal advisors from the holiday destination. In the negotiation process, the holiday destination learned about their legal obligations and made changes to their practices as well as training staff to better assist disabled clients. An agreement was reached without the need to lodge a formal complaint.

For Stan, that meant that he was able to enjoy a long-anticipated holiday with his assistance dog and was able to fully participate in holiday activities without unreasonable conditions applied to him and his animal.

(\*not his real name)

# Social Work

## Teresa Grahame and Caitlin Collins

The social work service continues to focus on assisting BRQ's most vulnerable clients. We were happy to have two final year social work students join us in the second half of 2017, Jack Margaritis (UQ) and Julia Baird (QUT) for their field placements. We were fortunate to have Jack stay on as a volunteer and subsequently as an employee in administration and telephone advice.

Across the year the social work service has noted an increase in the proportion of BRQ clients presenting with mental health issues as a primary or secondary issue. In particular, amongst clients contacting in relation to Disability Support Pension (DSP) cancellations and rejections (which represent about half of our work) there has been a greater level of confusion, frustration and distress associated with the length and complexity of the DSP assessment process. The recent addition of the Medical Assessment Team recommendation to determine whether a Job Capacity Assessment is warranted is an additional step in the process which creates some efficiencies for Centrelink decision making but also adds further complication and delay in the already complicated assessment process for DSP.

In addition, the removal in 2015 of Centrelink's "Treating Doctors Report" Format, which previously provided a structure for doctors to provide medical information to Centrelink, has left many of our clients confused as to what information will be relevant for their claim. Basic Rights Queensland responded to this gap in the past with proformas that our clients can take to their treating health professionals and this year our social work service initiated a review of ways to improve the proforma to more effectively assist clients and their doctors.

In this context, the social work service has maintained a focus on early intervention in order to alleviate the distress experienced by many of our vulnerable clients. For example, taking the opportunity to advocate for clients in the earlier stages of the claims and appeals process and support them to navigate each stage.



"Thank you  
for your help to explain  
my current situation with Centrelink.  
Now I can see the light at the end  
of the tunnel. Tomorrow I am picking  
up the questionnaire you  
addressed to my doctor and  
will forward it to you asap.  
Thank you!"



## CLIENT STORY

# Social Work Early Intervention

Tami\*, her husband and son had been granted a temporary Protection Visa. Tami's young son has a disability which requires constant care and medical equipment and they could not afford the associated expenses. Tami's husband is employed, however due to the high care needs of her son, Tami was unable to work outside home. Tami had been receiving SRSS (Status Resolution Support Services) payments which had been stopped. Tami had been trying to communicate with Centrelink for some time but was unable to effectively advocate for herself, due to language and other difficulties. BRQ advocated for Tami with Centrelink to expedite processing her claim for Family Tax Benefit. Approximately two weeks later Tami's claim was accepted, plus she was awarded arrears payments. This additional entitlement has brought welcome relief to a family in very difficult circumstances.

(\*not her real name)



# Working Women Queensland Program (WWQ)

## Kerriann Dear Working Women Queensland Program Director

Since commencing at BRQ in January this year, the Working Women Queensland Program has continued to provide a state-wide service for vulnerable working women. This is enabled with funding from the State Office of Industrial Relations. Services are accessed primarily through the WWQ website and the DV Work Aware website and are delivered via our free-call number.

During six months, the WWQ program has provided three to four advisory clinics per week and has experienced strong demand for assistance. Over 410 individual telephone sessions were delivered, 352 of which provided specialist advice. Around 5 percent of women receive ongoing assistance including representation and over \$150,000 in settlements was negotiated for clients. Other outcomes included reinstatement, more positive resolution of matters and employers undertaking to implement improved processes and policies to prevent future injustices occurring.

The most common issues reported by clients were termination of employment, followed by workplace harassment and then discrimination. Workers Compensation and workplace health and safety are also common issues, along with women seeking assistance about disciplinary processes.

Approximately 8% of services users indicated they were from a diverse background (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) and an estimated 50% of services were delivered to women

outside of the Brisbane metropolitan area.

Migrant and overseas visa workers have been increasingly prominent on our client landscape and typically present with complex and multiple issues indicating systematic exploitation. This group continues to report underpayment; bullying and discrimination issues and sexual harassment matters are also common. We report significant breaches or public interest matters directly to a contact at the Community Engagement Unit at the Fair Work Ombudsman.



The Working Women Queensland Website [www.wwq.org.au](http://www.wwq.org.au), recorded

over 3,100 site visits with over 5100 page views during the six month period. 88.5% of these users were new visits.

DV Work Aware is a new national program that provides women and their workplaces with support in handling issues of domestic and family violence. The DV Work Aware website [www.dvworkaware.org](http://www.dvworkaware.org) provides a national portal to specialist services, including WWQ, which can assist with issues of domestic and family violence and also connection to industrial assistance.

Since January, with sponsorship from Q Super and in conjunction with The Services Union, Qld Nurses and Midwives Union, The Teachers Union and United Voice, we delivered 12 community-based seminars. These seminars focussing on how workplaces can support workers who are experiencing domestic violence were delivered in Rockhampton, Mackay, Toowoomba, Ipswich and the Redlands.

DV Work Aware now has national reach through collaboration with the National Working Women's

## CLIENT STORY

# Parental Leave Return to Work Guarantee

Nancy\* had been working in a permanent Part-time IT position for three years prior to taking 12-months parental leave. Nancy intended to return to work following the parental leave. At a meeting prior to her return Nancy disclosed that she was pregnant again.

The organisation refused to allow her to return to work due to her being unable to work for a full school semester before she would have to take parental leave again. Nancy was told her pregnancy would cause a disruption to the IT department and on her work colleagues.

Under the Fair Work Act an employee has a guarantee to return to the job they left prior to taking parental leave. After our assistance, Nancy achieved a financial settlement as general damages for hurt and humiliation caused by the actions.

(\*not her real name)

### WWQ volunteer

Upon my retirement from full time employment in April 2018, I commenced voluntary employment with WWQ two days a week. As WWQ is a small unit within BRQ, I value the opportunity to increase my knowledge by working with individuals on a wide range of industrial relations issues and the provision of information and advice to vulnerable women who may have no other means of support. The people at WWQ are wonderfully supportive and I find my work to be very gratifying. I would highly recommend it to anyone who has the time and capacity to volunteer.

Jen

Services with strong demand for fee for service training in the private and government sectors.

The WWQ program remains affiliated with a number of women's advocacy groups, including the National Women's Alliance, Economic Security 4 Women, funded by the Federal Office for Women and the National Foundation of Australian Women. WWQ is frequently consulted by these groups on emerging issues for working women and through its associations has participated in training, networking and roundtable discussions as well as contributed to parliamentary, senate and departmental inquiries.

We continue to seek resources, pro-bono referral relationships and partnerships that assist us to determine and best respond to the needs of vulnerable women in Queensland.

# BRQ Team

## Management Committee



**Lurline Comerford.**  
**President**

A Social Worker of over 40 years' experience, Lurline has been BRQ President since 2011. With a strong interest in economic independence for women, Lurline is keen to promote social justice and equity for all. Lurline aims to maintain a strong community-based organisation that can address the issues, anomalies and problems confronting BRQ clients and participate in improving the system for those who are disadvantaged. Equity is a guiding principle where people face poverty, discrimination or unfair treatment at work and where basic rights are neglected.



**Cale Fryer, Secretary**

Cale holds a Bachelor of Business Management (Int. Business) degree as well as graduating with Honours with a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Queensland. Cale is a solicitor of the Supreme Court and the High Court of Australia. He has extensive experience in all aspects of general practice with particular focus on personal injury litigation. Cale is committed to helping ordinary Queenslanders achieve improvement and justice and has been on the Committee since 2013.

### Stuart McDowall, Treasurer

Stuart is a Chartered Accountant, with professional qualifications in Business and Information Technology. For nearly 20 years, he has been working with government, business and not-for-profits to help them succeed. He has a keen interest in social justice and joined the Management Committee in 2015.



**Georgina Warrington.**  
**Committee Member**

Director of BRQ for 7 years, Georgina Basic Rights Queensland has a keen interest in assisting vulnerable people to access their rights and a better life through individual and/or systemic advocacy and through the provision of high-quality community services. With a background in social work and education, Georgina has over 20 years' experience in community sector client service, worker training, resource and policy development, management, leadership and governance roles.



**Jessie Westaway.**  
**Committee Member**

Jessie works at Tenants Queensland as a Data Analyst and Tenancy Advice Worker. Prior to her work with TQ, Jessie worked as an Industrial Officer at The Services Union and Senior Industrial Officer at Queensland Working Women's Service. Jessie is passionate about issues involving human rights, women's rights and the promotion of strong social justice values. Jessie has been a member of the Committee since 2017.



**Leah Mertens.**  
**Committee Member**

Leah Mertens joined the BRQ management committee in 2017, following the merger with the Queensland Working Women's Service, which operated in Queensland for more than 20 years. She was previously the Chair of the QWWS Management Committee, works for the Queensland Teachers' Union as a Research Officer and was formerly the QTU's Women's Officer. She has an interest in the basic rights of workers, particularly women workers, and a strong interest in education, equity and social justice for all.



**Mike Dee.**  
**Committee Member**

Mike joined the Committee in 2015, having lectured in social work at



Queensland University of Technology for a number of years and most recently in social policy at the University of Queensland. His interests include social policy issues around welfare 'reform', covering citizenship, participation, social inclusion/exclusion and the surveillance of welfare subjects. Mike



**Neisha Traill,  
Committee Member**

Neisha, who joined the Committee in November 2016 and is an Industrial Officer with the Electrical Trades Union. Neisha has worked in Unions for 12 years and has a keen interest in social justice and equity. She is particularly focused on workplace relations and protecting individual's rights at work.



**Paul Henman, Vice  
President (until  
March 2017)**

Paul served on the BRQ Committee from 2013 to 2017. He is Associate Professor of Digital Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Queensland. Paul has a strong professional interest in social security policy and administration, and of wider issues of inequality. His research focuses on the nexus between social policy, public administration and digital technologies.

### **Paul Freeburn, Committee Member**



Paul obtained an honours degree in law from the University of Queensland and then was admitted as a solicitor in 1983. After working as a solicitor, Paul was admitted as a barrister in

1990. In 2003 Paul was made a Senior Counsel which was converted to Queens Counsel in 2012. Paul has experience in a large range of commercial litigation and legal advice. He also has a strong belief in community and social justice issues. He has been part of the Basic Rights Qld committee since 2015.

## **Staff**

### **BRQ permanent staff to 30th June 2018**

BRQ positions were nearly all part-time, ranging from one day/week to full time.

Andrew Davison, Principal Solicitor  
 Andrew Kennedy, Disability Discrimination Advocate, Solicitor  
 Caitlin Collins, Social Worker  
 Deidre Ross, Admin & Intake Manager (from October 2017)  
 Ellen Jones, Solicitor (to May 2018)  
 Georgina Warrington, Director  
 Isabella Morosan, Industrial Officer (from January 2018)  
 Jayne Carter, Industrial Officer (from January 2018)  
 Kerriann Dear, Assistant Director (from January 2018)  
 Lee Matahaere, Senior Industrial Officer (from January 2018)  
 Mark McKeon, Financial Administrator  
 Patrick Cranitch, Solicitor (until October 2017)  
 'Sam' Simon Tracy, Solicitor (from May 2018)  
 Steve Irvine, CLE Coordinator, Solicitor  
 Teresa Grahame, Senior Social Worker  
 Terri Bradley, Law Graduate (from November 2018)

*"We can never thank you enough for what you have done for us. A big relief.... thank you for your belief in us and following everything through."*

### **Casual Staff**

Avryl Gratton, Acting Director  
 Dahye Jung  
 Jack Margaritas  
 Jen Carman  
 Maddison Dantu-Hann  
 Tamara Chin

# Volunteers

## Volunteers

Aaron Smith  
Amelia Lodge  
Ashley Anand  
Bonnie Kubler-Shaw  
Carlos (Chin Fung) Cheng  
Crispin Scott  
Dahye Jung  
Elena Paik  
Elizabeth Valassakis  
Georgia Lee Kelly  
Hana Sarac  
Jack Margaritis  
Jake Sheehan  
Jennifer Carman  
Jonathan Syme  
Kia Davis  
Kelvin Lee  
Laura Dawson  
Michael Seymour  
Ondrej Migac  
Ossanna Faataape  
Tara Seiffert-Smith  
Terri Bradley

So much has happened in the last twelve months and there have been many changes to our systems, processes and premises. Our great team of volunteers has taken it all in stride and done a fantastic job in their respective roles. Throughout our refit the volunteers pitched in and, in addition to their regular duties, helped out with all manner of tasks.

Volunteering at BRQ provides great opportunities to develop skills that just can't be gained through the coursework structures of university and students report that the experience has enabled them to gain an advantage over their peers in work experience and professional development.

We have a lot of fun working together as well as doing the serious business of client intake and care and assisting advice workers.

"Working at BRQ is unlike any volunteering experience I have ever taken part in. The uniqueness of the work and nature of the FCO role means that you'll never have dull moment working at the intake desk.

It is so rare and valuable for volunteer students to get the opportunity to speak directly to clients and help refine those vital interpersonal skills that are invaluable in any occupation. The staff at BRQ are also extremely welcoming and supportive, always ensuring that you are emotionally and professionally supported throughout your time at the organisation.

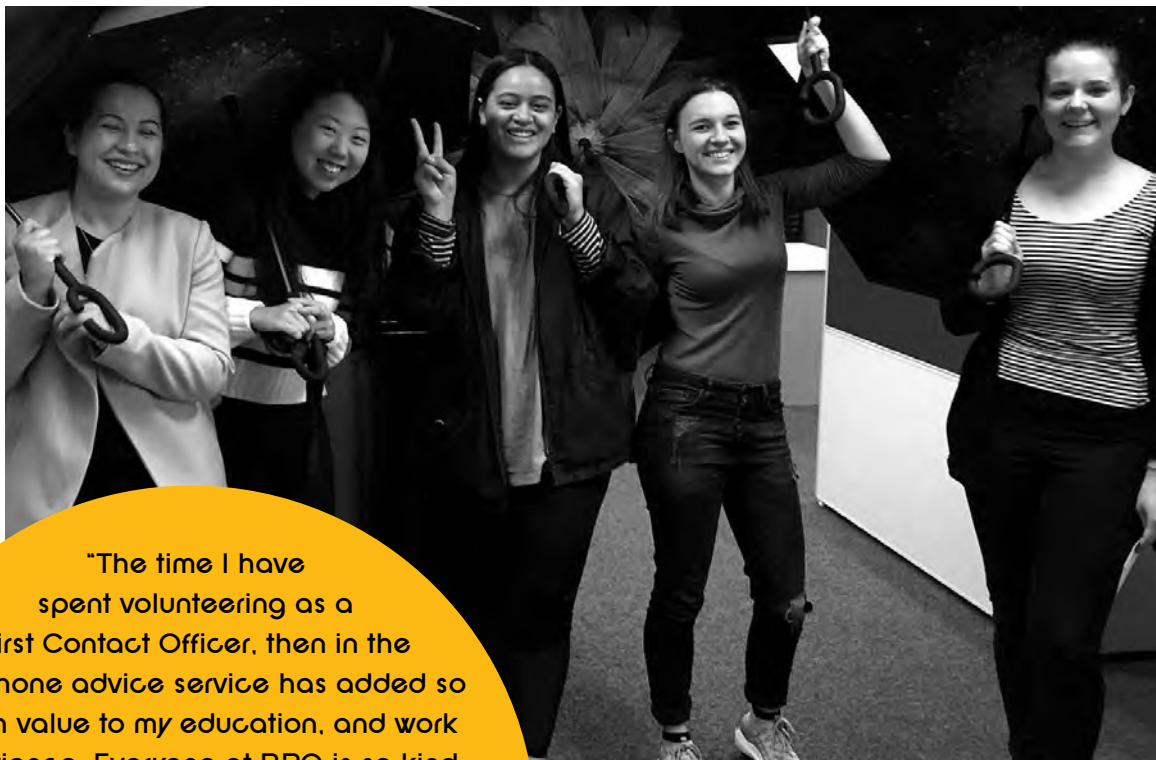
Volunteering at BRQ has not only inspired me to pursue a career in service of the vulnerable and disenfranchised in our society, it has also equipped me with the skills to be successful in that pursuit. I would recommend volunteering at BRQ to any law student as it not only gives you essential skills, but also an insight into the types of people whom are often overlooked by the legal system.

You will meet some incredibly warm-hearted, passionate and professional people, who will positively impact your life in so many ways."

*Crispin*

## Student Placements

Alan Moore  
Brenton Kanowski  
Christina Budur  
Jack Margaritis  
Jerry Zhan  
Julia Baird  
Lucia Belchamber  
Roberto Chata



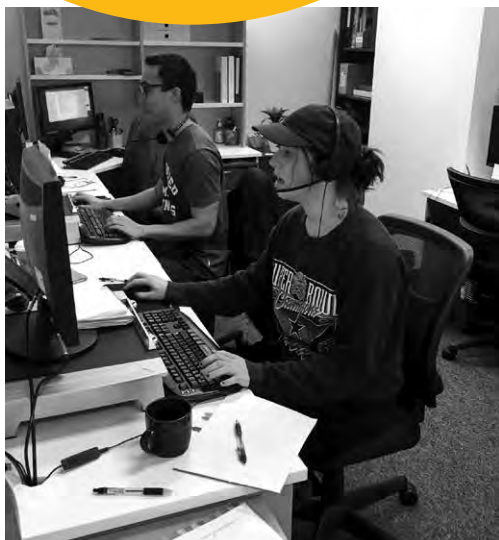
"The time I have spent volunteering as a First Contact Officer, then in the telephone advice service has added so much value to my education, and work experience. Everyone at BRQ is so kind, respectful, and fun to work with! I have matured so much in my interpersonal and communication skills and have really felt the positive effect of BRQ's service from the feedback I have received from clients.

It has truly been such a joy to be a part of the BRQ team."

*Tamara*

"Volunteering at Basic Rights has afforded me the opportunity to gain invaluable legal experience in a fast paced work environment. Working as a first contact officer whilst challenging, is a means by which I have been able to work on my communication skills, ability to delegate and prioritise tasks, operate under high stress situations and manage client expectations accordingly. Volunteering at Basic Rights Queensland has exposed me to a variety of legal situations and has allowed me to exercise a high level of autonomy when taking clients through an intake process. The work culture of BRQ is both friendly and welcoming and fosters a culture that both encourages development and collaboration between colleagues. It has been a pleasure to extend my services thus far at BRQ. I have learnt a number of important legal and professional skills in which I will without a doubt carry with me into future practice!"

*Georgia*







## CLIENT STORY

# Debt Waiver & Restoration of Benefit

Lena\* had been on a Disability Support Pension (DSP) for some years because she had suffered an injury that affected her physical and mental health and she was unable to work. She contacted BRQ as Centrelink had reviewed her eligibility for DSP and cancelled her payment. Lena had appealed the cancellation approximately 2 years previously and had been left on “Payment Pending Review” for the whole period. Centrelink then raised a debt for approximately \$40 000 for the overpayment. Lena was distressed and confused as she had been stuck in a loop with Centrelink for several years and was making no progress.

BRQ assisted Lena to gather further medical evidence to support her case and to then appeal the cancellation of the DSP to the AAT. The AAT overturned Centrelink’s decision and found that Lena continued to qualify for DSP. BRQ also advocated on behalf of Lena with Centrelink to have the debt waived in full on the basis of administrative error. This appeal was successful and the debt was waived in full. Lena continues to receive DSP and no longer has a debt to Centrelink.

(\*not her real name)

# Financial Report

## Stuart McDowall, Treasurer

I am pleased to present the Basic Rights Queensland (BRQ) Treasurer's Report, for the 2017/18 financial year.

The BRQ Management Committee would like to thank our funders for their financial support.

BRQ's ongoing social security and disability discrimination services are funded through the Community Legal Services Program. This program is funded by the State Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG), and the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.

The Working Women Queensland program, funded through the Queensland Office of Industrial Relations, transitioned into BRQ during 2017/18. Accordingly, our financial statements reflect a significant increase in income and expenses when compared with the previous year. As part of this transition, BRQ gratefully accepted a significant donation from the Queensland Working Women's Service, which has now been wound down.

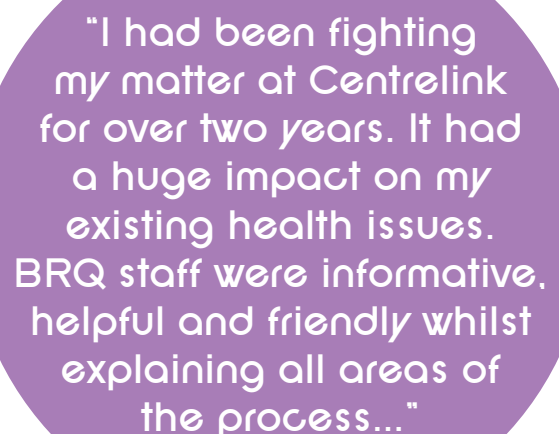
Other funding received includes donations, which are of great assistance in our work to provide specialist legal advice, information and advocacy to the community. We particularly thank the Electrical Trades Union for their regular sponsorship since 2006!

Salaries and staffing costs are BRQ's major expenditure item, owing to the nature of our services. The cost of BRQ's premises is relatively modest, courtesy of affordable arrangements with Brisbane City Council for our office space in the Maida Lilley Centre in Fortitude Valley. Being co-located with other community services also provides some operational benefits.

In order to accommodate additional staff, in connection with the transition of the Working Women Queensland program, BRQ undertook a significant office refurbishment and an IT systems refresh during the year.

BRQ has finished the year in a strong financial position and we are confident in our ability to meet our financial commitments in the coming year. The ongoing financial sustainability of BRQ remains a focus for the Management Committee. BRQ will continue to seek additional funding streams to ensure ongoing sustainability and to continue to provide the most relevant and exemplary service possible to clients.

BRQ's performance and position is a reflection of the contributions made by our talented and invaluable staff and volunteers, who exhibit great passion, energy and innovation in delivering their important work. We express our special thanks to Georgina Warrington and Kerriann Dear, who have remained agile, positive and calm in responding to the challenges and opportunities that BRQ is presented with.



"I had been fighting my matter at Centrelink for over two years. It had a huge impact on my existing health issues. BRQ staff were informative, helpful and friendly whilst explaining all areas of the process..."

Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income for  
the Year Ended 30 June

REVENUE	2018	2017
Community Legal Services Program grants	867,918	845,259
Employment Advisory Services for Women grant	113,636	–
Building Stronger Communities grant	7,500	–
Donations	271,459	914
Services revenue	10,455	2,454
Finance income	4,911	5,078
Other revenue	8,646	8,881
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>1,284,525</b>	<b>862,586</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Staff expenses	(905,151)	(801,738)
Premises costs	(22,973)	(22,345)
IT & communication expenses	(34,063)	(25,864)
Print, postage & document management expenses	(21,942)	(8,005)
Membership, subscriptions & conference expenses	(17,381)	(11,227)
Depreciation and amortisation	(6,858)	(3,813)
Assets written off	(7,303)	–
Office renewal costs	(10,063)	–
Marketing & sustainability expenses	(8,360)	–
Audit fees	(6,200)	(5,670)
Insurance costs	(691)	(2,571)
Travel expenses	(3,603)	(2,328)
Programming & planning costs	(2,312)	(1,359)
Other expenses	(9,637)	(1,040)
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>(1,056,537)</b>	<b>(885,959)</b>
<b>SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) BEFORE INCOME TAX</b>	<b>227,988</b>	<b>(23,373)</b>
Income tax expense	–	–
<b>SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR</b>	<b>227,988</b>	<b>(23,373)</b>
<b>OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME</b>		
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss	–	–
Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss	–	–
<b>TOTAL OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME, NET OF TAX</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>
<b>TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR</b>	<b>\$227,988</b>	<b>\$(23,373)</b>



"I am extremely thankful for Terri's advice. I succeeded in reversing an \$8500 debt. I couldn't be happier."

#### Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June

CURRENT ASSETS	2018 \$	2017 \$
Cash and cash equivalents	538,574	417,738
Trade and other receivables	2,808	2,878
Other current assets	7,476	8,650
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>548,858</b>	<b>429,266</b>

NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant and equipment	92,012	13,426
<b>TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>92,012</b>	<b>13,426</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>640,870</b>	<b>442,692</b>

CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and other payables	44,264	46,234
Employee benefits	100,820	111,940
Revenue received in advance	–	15,730
<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>145,084</b>	<b>173,904</b>

NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Employee benefits	31,680	32,670
<b>TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>31,680</b>	<b>32,670</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>176,764</b>	<b>206,574</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$464,106</b>	<b>\$236,118</b>

EQUITY		
Accumulated surplus	464,106	236,118
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>	<b>\$464,106</b>	<b>\$236,118</b>

\* Copies of our full audited Financial Report are available via email: [brq@brq.org.au](mailto:brq@brq.org.au)

# Supporters and Donors

We are grateful for the support we receive, both financial and in-kind, from former clients, private individuals, business and organisations.

## Sponsor

The Electrical Trades Union, Qld and NT branch, sponsor since 2006

## Pro bono

Clayton Utz  
Minter Ellison

## Individual Donors

BRQ receives donations from the general public and from former clients. We would like to express our sincere thanks for their support.

## Funding

Basic Rights Queensland is funded by the Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney-General, the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and the Queensland Office of Industrial Relations. We are grateful for their support.



"Just a quick message to let you know that my disability pension has been accepted. We've also received back pay from the date we applied. Thank you Caitlin and everyone involved for helping to make this possible. I'm not sure how I can put into words how grateful we are for all your effort and attentiveness to our situation."



## CLIENT STORY

# Access to Education

Brad\* who has Autism, had faced a number of challenges in his education. When it came time to change schools, his enrolment was accepted, but due to his disability, the school placed conditions on his entry. Brad's mother contacted BRQ as she was concerned about what this could mean for him; that he would be singled out and miss educational opportunities.

Placing conditions on entry to school based on a disability is discriminatory. BRQ liaised with the school directly in order to remove the terms and conditions placed upon Brad's enrolment and the School removed these without the need to lodge a formal complaint.

Brad was able to commence his new school with an equal opportunity to his peers and to remain happily unaware of the potential barrier to his education.

(\*not his real name)



# Contact Us

To book a telephone advice session for  
Social Security or Disability Discrimination

Between 9.30am and 4.00pm weekdays  
07 3847 5532 | 1800 358 511 (free call)

For telephone advice on Women's employment issue

Between 9am and 4.00pm Monday, Wednesday, Friday  
1800 621 458 (freecall)

## Administration Line

Between 9.30am and 4.30pm weekdays  
07 3421 2510

## Postal Address

PO Box 293  
Fortitude Valley Qld 4006

**Email** [brq@brq.org.au](mailto:brq@brq.org.au) | **Fax** 07 3421 2500

**Website** [www.brq.org.au](http://www.brq.org.au)



"We can never thank you enough for what you have done for us. A big relief.... thank you for your belief in us and following everything through."

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