Basic Rights Queensland

Annual Report 2016-2017

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 a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including…the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25

Contact Us

To book a telephone advice session

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

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Basic Rights Queensland Inc.
SOCIAL SECURITY & DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION SERVICES

ABOUT US

What we do

Basic Rights Queensland (BRQ) is a state-wide specialist community legal centre, providing free advice, advocacy and legal services to people having problems with social security or disability discrimination.

- BRQ's specialist services are accessible via a freecall number from anywhere in Queensland
- BRQ's client work focuses on vulnerable and disadvantaged people:
  - Over two-thirds of our clients are people with disability
  - One-quarter of our clients are experiencing mental illness
  - 9 out of 10 clients are living on less than $500 a week
  - 10% 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 relevant 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 32 years with the support of volunteers, sponsors, donors and pro-bono assistance

BRQ Strategic Plan 2015-2018

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.

Expertise

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

Our Vision

Basic rights for a just society

Our Strategic Priorities

- Organisational sustainability and responsiveness
- Leaders in social security and disability discrimination rights
- Effective stakeholder relationships
- Recognised service excellence

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

CLIENT STORY

"Robo-debt" waived

Since being made redundant two years earlier, Kim* had only managed to secure periods of short-term contract work, supplemented by Newstart Allowance during the months in-between. With occasional help from friends, Kim was just managing to continue to meet her mortgage repayments.

Having taken great pains to report her intermittent income correctly, Kim was horrified find out a "robo-debt" of over $6,000 had been raised via Centrelink's new Online Compliance Intervention system. Tertiary-educated Kim spent several months attempting to challenge the calculations. The stress was so great, Kim decided to forgo claiming Newstart; running the risk of her losing her home, rather than risk incurring further debt.

After eventually getting Centrelink to reduce the debt by two-thirds, Kim contacted BRQ and we represented her at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. The Tribunal noted that the social security payments which Kim could have claimed would have exceeded the remaining amount of debt. This remainder was waived in full.

(*Kim is not the client's real name)

President and Director's Report

Lurline Comerford and Georgina Warrington

A voice for fairness

Basic Rights Queensland has continued to be a voice for fairness, using our in-depth knowledge of social security and disability discrimination law and processes to promote people's access to fundamental rights to social security and freedom from discrimination.

In the face of a highly challenging external environment, for our clients and for BRQ as an organisation, we have continued to provide high-quality legal and social work services to vulnerable people right across Queensland.

Basic rights for a just society

The focus of BRQ's social security work is largely driven by government policy changes. This year, these impacts have been most strongly felt in the numbers of disability support pension rejections and cancellations we have assisted with, along with the impacts of "robo-debt".

The technical, practical, legal and ethical problems with Centrelink's "Online Compliance Intervention" presented an opportunity for BRQ and our peak, the National Social Security Rights Network (NSSRN), to demonstrate the value of our expertise in presenting considered critiques of unfair systems and processes and in offering constructive solutions.

BRQ contributed to the NSSRN's written submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Online Compliance Intervention and we gave oral evidence at the Inquiry hearings in Brisbane. We were pleased to see that some of our recommendations on how to address the numerous problems experienced by people attempting to deal with the online system have been adopted, however we note that fundamental questions as to the fairness of this system remain.

Access to justice for vulnerable Queenslanders

The threat of the Commonwealth Government funding cut hung over BRQ – and all other Community Legal Centres – for most of the year. The 11th-hour reprieve when the Attorney-General, the Hon George Brandis, announced restoration of the funding came about as a result of a nation-wide campaign to demonstrate the vital significance of community legal centre (CLC) services for vulnerable people. Along with other Queensland CLCs, BRQ visited state members of parliament and our Director was part of a Community Legal Centres Queensland delegation to Canberra for two days of meetings with Members, demonstrating the vital significance of our services for vulnerable people.

The uncertainty regarding the amount by which our funding would be reduced made budgeting and planning for future service provision and staffing impossible. We would like to acknowledge the BRQ staff team who, in the face of this ongoing stress, continued to provide high-quality work on behalf of our clients. We would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the state Attorney-General the Hon Yvette D'Ath to secure funding for Queensland CLCs and for her decision to guarantee continued funding until September 2017, thereby enabling us to continue providing services until the final outcome of the Commonwealth funding reinstatement was determined.

Meeting administration challenges

A CLC with a high work volume, like BRQ's, relies upon a smooth-functioning and efficient administration and this has been a big year in that regard. BRQ successfully completed Phase 2 of the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) Accreditation, with our organisational policies and procedures being commended. The introduction of the new NACLC data management system "CLASS" to all CLCs nation-wide has presented huge challenges as CLASS, while having exciting possibilities, is far from complete and data entry now takes considerably longer than previously. It has been a challenging time and we would like to acknowledge the work of our Intake and Administration Manager, Leisa Higgins, in managing the transition to CLASS.

Extending our influence

Through active membership of networks, BRQ has continued to contribute to systemic reform in our areas of expertise and to the development and promotion of the community legal sector more broadly. Our Director has been a member of the Board of the National Social Security Rights Network for five years. This year our Director joined the Management Committee of Community Legal Centres Queensland and the Queensland Legal Assistance Forum Best Practice and Evidence Based Working Group. Our Community Legal Education Coordinator, Steve Irvine, continued to represent BRQ on the Community Legal Education Legal Assistance Forum.

BRQ participates in projects conducted by our networks, the main ones this year being the Community Legal Centres Queensland Outcomes Evaluation Project and the National Social Security Rights Network (NSSRN) Disability Support Pension (DSP) Casework Research Project. BRQ has experimented with outcomes evaluation over several years, so we were keen to be a trial site for the outcomes evaluation kit and to share insights gained from our evaluation experience via our Director's participation on the project steering Committee. A key function of the NSSRN is to conduct research into the effect on disadvantaged people of social security legislation and policy changes. The DSP Casework Research Project involved in-depth analysis of BRQ's DSP casework, focussing on recent changes to the DSP claim process and clients experiencing chronic pain. This analysis will be used to inform systemic advocacy, including advice provided to the Department of Social Services and to the Department of Human Services.

Exploring new ideas - Universal Basic Income Politics in the Pub

We were pleased to partner with New Farm Neighbourhood Centre in hosting a Politics in the Pub at the Brisbane Powerhouse, exploring the topic "Universal Basic Income – Utopia for Realists?" Radio National's Paul Barclay hosted the event which was later broadcast as a *Big Ideas* program. Our expert panel of Dominique Lamb, CEO National Retail Association, Professor Greg Marston, University of Queensland, Professor John Quiggin, University of Queensland, Rachel Watson, Wesley Mission and Graham Young, Director of Australian Institute for Progress presented a range of views in a lively discussion. This well-attended event presented an opportunity to step back from our everyday focus on advocating for people's rights within the social security system and to imagine completely different alternatives. It also afforded the opportunity to promote BRQ's services to a wider audience.

A strong staff team

Without our dedicated, highly experienced staff, BRQ would not exist. Our Senior Solicitor of eight years, Patrick Cranitch, moved into the role of Casework Solicitor this year. During almost fifteen years at BRQ, Patrick has given expert assistance to more than 3,000 clients, providing over 3,200 advices and conducting over 970 cases, in addition to fulfilling the role of Responsible Person. The oversight of our legal practice bears considerable responsibility and we would like to acknowledge Patrick's steadfast service in this role.

Andrew Davison, who has been with us for nine years, has been competently acting in the Senior Solicitor role since January. It has been reassuring for staff and the Committee to know that BRQ's legal practice is in such capable hands.

After twelve years' of expertly administrating BRQ's finances, Sue McComber, left us in January. Sue's diligence and good humour will be sorely missed. We have been fortunate to engage Mark McKeon, who brings accounting and corporate governance experience.

This year we expanded the team, welcoming Social Worker Caitlin Collins. The addition of another Social Worker has been invaluable for our most vulnerable and at-risk clients, while Caitlin's advocacy skills have produced positive outcomes within the Centrelink review process and at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

This year we were delighted to celebrate Ellen Jones' admittance. Ellen commenced with BRQ as a volunteer in 2013, later undertaking casual work as Administration Assistant. She was subsequently engaged as full-time Law Clerk and now as Solicitor. Congratulations Ellen!

Supportive volunteers

As always, BRQ's work has been supported by our student volunteers and our students on placements. Put simply: without their help, we would not be able to assist so many clients; we owe them all a debt of gratitude.

Finally, we would like to thank the members of BRQ's Management Committee for their diligent governance of BRQ and for their generous giving of their time and expertise. We are fortunate to have a Committee with such a breadth and depth of experience and knowledge.

Universal Basic Income Politics in the Pub, Brisbane Powerhouse, May 2017

Advocating for restoration of CLC funding, with MPs Wayne Swan and Trevor Evans

CLIENT STORY

Health-justice collaboration

Sandy* suffers from symptoms of schizophrenia and has a history of past hospital admissions in relation to this, however she was unable to effectively present her case to Centrelink who deemed her condition not "fully treated and stabilised" and therefore rejected her Disability Support Pension (DSP) claim.

Through collaboration with Partners in Recovery, who attended medical and psychiatric appointments with our mutual client, we were able to obtain strong evidence indicating that Sandy was eligible for DSP, based on past treatment and the longevity and severity of her symptoms which fluctuated with external stressors.

Furthermore, we pointed out further evidence that Sandy's apparent period of stable employment of several years was in fact extremely unstable. Moreover, the demands of the working environment had exacerbated her mental health conditions.

Ultimately Sandy was successful at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and has received over 12 month's back-pay, going back to the date of claim.

(*Sandy is not the client's real name)

I would like to say a big thank you to your organisation... for help and support provided in preparing for and attending an AAT hearing. Due to the work of BRQ it was determined that Centrelink's decision to reject my application for DSP be overturned. BRQ contacted me on several occasions and was very detailed in their analysis of my situation. I am certain that in the absence of this work, the outcome would have been different for me.
Again thank you.

Best news I have heard all week!!!!!!
Thank you for all your efforts & patience with not-so-legal-savvy health professional/clinician folk like me.
You have probably not had enough background involvement with our client to know and fully appreciate just how much difference this can and will make to his day-to-day life going forward.
Keep up the great work for those who could otherwise not manage the process & achieve this on their own.
Many thanks on his behalf.

thank *you*

CLIENT STORY

Supporting a young Indigenous client back into education

BRQ's disability discrimination advocacy service assisted a community worker to support a young Indigenous client with Autism Spectrum Disorder who had become disengaged from school to make a successful transition back into the education system.

We advised the young student's guardian and his community support worker about the right to ask for the reasonable adjustments which were necessary to enable him to participate in school. These included adjustments to his attendance requirements, to help ease him back into school; provision for him to be supported with a teacher aide to assist with his attention; and relaxation – initially – of the requirement to wear a school uniform.

The outcome of BRQ's support was that the student's guardian and support worker were able to negotiate successfully with the school and the regional Departmental office for appropriate adjustments to be made.

For the first term, our young client had reduced hours with one-on-one teacher and teacher aide time. Subsequently, he was integrated into the regular classroom with his peers and proudly wore the school uniform.

Client Services

Social Security

There have been many changes and challenges for BRQ's social security legal services in the last year with ongoing legislative change and a continually hostile environment for many of our vulnerable client groups.

In particular, the commencement of the "Online Compliance Intervention" and the Centrelink/ATO data matching system, otherwise known as "robo-debts", has led to increasing numbers of highly distressed clients calling about debts that are up to five years old based on averaging of income over employment periods for which they often no longer have payslips or bank statements with which to challenge such debts.

In conjunction with the National Social Security Rights Network we have had some success in getting Centrelink to make improvements to their processes around such debts to minimise distress to clients and to put debt recovery on hold whilst they appeal. We have also begun to have some success in assisting clients in appeals of robo-debts, however, we suspect that the volume of appeals at the Tribunal level will continue to grow, particularly when they expand to asset data matching on pensions as planned in the next financial year.

Meanwhile Disability Support Pension (DSP) advice and casework has continued to dominate our workload with increasingly lengthy DSP claim and appeal processing times at Centrelink. These are partly as a result of the roll-out of an additional checking level before DSP can be granted (Disability Medical Assessment) causing increasing levels of frustration and distress to the clients who contact us.

There is increasing awareness of the value of health-justice partnerships in bringing about positive outcomes for vulnerable people. BRQ has long worked alongside community and health workers and this year we have been pleased to work with Partners in Recovery to support our mutual clients with mental illness.

Advices

BRQ has continued to provide a high volume of telephone advices in social security and disability discrimination with a total of 2,368 advices provided in 2016-17. As this was the first full year of conducting Duty Lawyer clinics at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, Social Services and Child Support Division, almost 100 of those advices were given in these fortnightly Duty Lawyer clinics which mean those clients were given much more targeted, in-depth advice based on the evidence on their Tribunal files which were reviewed before calling them. In response to positive feedback from the Tribunal and clients and the efficiencies and better targeting that can be had through these Duty Lawyer sessions, BRQ will be increasing to weekly sessions in August 2017.

We have also changed our administrative practices to endeavour to obtain Centrelink internal review and Tribunal decisions prior to booked advice sessions to minimise the need for multiple calls and to give more in-depth and targeted advice. Due to the increasingly high levels of frustrated, distressed and/or angry clients and their impacts on staff, particularly in telephone advice sessions, BRQ staff undertook training in vicarious trauma and mental health first aid, the latter focused on responding to clients who are at risk of harm to themselves or of harming others.

Case work

In 2016-17 we opened and closed cases for more than 150 clients with a significant number of increasingly complex medico-legal issues in many of the DSP cases which dominated our casework. Lengthy delays at all levels of the claims and appeals process have caused increased client frustrations and led to greater demands on staff time in both empathising with clients' experiences and practically assisting them with administrative matters that arise due to such delays (for example, assisting them with Doctor letters about the precise wording needed in medical certificates to obtain exemptions from attending employment services whilst they appeal DSP).

This year has seen new staff quickly learn "the ropes" of social security casework, both navigating Centrelink internal processes and Tribunal representation with increasing caseloads and numbers of successes at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. One particular area in which we have had improved outcomes for clients this year is for those clients who had previously attended an employment service but were on a medical exemption at the time of their claim. Previously the Tribunals had taken a very literal approach to the legislation and failed to grant DSP to clients who had attended less than 18 months with an employment service and were not attending a service around the time of their claim (noting these rules only apply to applicants who were unable to meet the criteria for 20 points on a single impairment table). As a result of a broader approach taken in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal General Division decision in O'Cass in November 2016, we have now had success in securing grants of DSP in numerous cases of clients whose requirement to attend an employment service was suspended due to medical reasons at the time of their claim.

Acting Senior Solicitor,
Andrew Davison

Disability Discrimination

BRQ's disability discrimination advocacy service provides advice, and in limited cases representation, to people who believe they have been subjected to, unlawful discrimination due to a disability. We also work with the people who support these clients and/or their families, especially when the client is vulnerable. Most of our work this year related to disability discrimination in employment and in education.

This year we have been active with stakeholders to increase awareness of the availability of the service and to facilitate referral pathways. We receive direct referrals from community organisations, the Anti-discrimination Commission of Queensland and the Australian Human Rights Commission, where complaints of unlawful discrimination are commenced BRQ encourages clients to resolve their issues informally, if possible, with the alleged discriminator, thereby avoiding legal processes which can delay a resolution and cause further stress. This avoids a formal adversarial process and enables the client and their families to gain the knowledge and ability to resolve the issue, and any future issues themselves.

DDAS has provided casework services for vulnerable clients whose matters have merit. These have included representation at conciliation conferences at the Anti-discrimination Commission of Queensland and the Australian Human Rights Commission who would have difficulty advocating for themselves as a result of their impairment/s.

Due to confidentiatlity requirements we are seldom able to share our success stories; however, we are able to publish one case study of a positive outcome for a young indigenous student, (see page 13).

Disability Discrimination Advocate,
Andrew Kennedy

Social Work

Early in 2016/2017 our social work service expanded with the appointment of Senior social worker Caitlin Collins as a full time social worker, while Teresa Grahame reduced to 3 days per week. Caitlin has previous experience working in a variety of settings including with refugees and with women suffering from violence, sexual assault and she has been a valuable addition to our team.

Across the year our core work has continued to be providing telephone advice and casework services with an emphasis on BRQ's most vulnerable clients: those presenting with poor mental health, suicidality, homelessness, relationship breakdown and social isolation. These most vulnerable clients received intense assistance, referrals and follow up from the social work service with an emphasis on early intervention, including direct advocacy within Centrelink and through the appeals process if required. We are grateful for the assistance of our Centrelink liaison contacts who have been invaluable in assisting us to resolve the Centrelink problems of our most vulnerable clients, people who are often unable to articulate and respond to their Centrelink problem effectively.

As in previous years, the majority of advice and case work provided, related to claim rejections or cancellations of the Disability Support Pension. Whilst the Disability Support Pension medical criteria have not changed for more than 5 years, the processes associated with lodging and assessing claims have changed considerably with a greater responsibility on our clients to understand and provide the necessary information required. An increasing part of our work is involved in attempting to make meaning of the often confusing Centrelink processes involved and reducing the associated stress on our clients.

We continued to assist clients to address Centrelink issues covering all payment types with a focus on those that emerge out of or are made worse by difficult personal circumstances. Since the transition to booked telephone advice appointments, the social work service has also been more active in providing a priority response to clients who contact in a distressed state or who have a matter that needs to be urgently addressed.

Senior Social Worker, Teresa Graham

Telephone Advice Service

The Social Security Telephone Advice Service (TAS) team performed remarkably well over the last year. The streamlined intake and booking service enabled the team to more effectively deliver our expert advices to our clients all over Queensland. The "engine room" of BRQ last year provided 2,168 legal advices.

The Telephone Advice Service consists of a multi-disciplinary team who are trained to provide advice to many of the most vulnerable people in the community. Quite often the clients present with other socio-legal problems and team members address these while maintaining focus on the client's social security issues.

Eligibility for payments dominated the advices for the year with the main presenting problem being the refusal or cancellation of the Disability Support Pension.

Centrelink over-payment was the next main issue and TAS recorded an increase in "debt" advices for the year. Service complaints against Centrelink are also high on the list of advices. The breadth and complexity of Social Security law means that the issues that clients present with are diverse and advices are given on areas such as compensation preclusion periods, suspensions of payments, assets and income tests, youth allowance, austudy and family tax benefit.

The TAS team is made up of staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to provide expert advice and follow-up services where required.

TAS Team Staff

Teresa Grahame, Andrew Kennedy, Ellen Jones, Caitlin Collins, Steve Irvine, Leisa Higgins

TAS Team Volunteers

Brigid Kelly, Elena Paik, Hannah Taylor, Liz Katona, Maddison Dantu, Sadia Aziz, Stephen Moran, Tamara Lenz, Terri Bradley, Vanessa George

Steve Irvine -
TAS Coordinator

CLIENT STORY

Elderly client's full Age Pension restored

Elderly Bert* was living with a female friend in a share-house situation; both parties were on Age Pension. They were sharing accommodation to reduce living costs; it was not a de-facto relationship.

Centrelink made the decision that the parties were a "couple" and reduced Bert's Age Pension to the partnered rate, placing him under financial stress.

BRQ assisted Bert to provide third party evidence, and we made submissions to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal regarding the nature of the relationship. The Tribunal found that Bert and his alleged partner were not a couple.

Bert received back pay and was placed back on the single rate of Age Pension, thereby relieving his financial stress.

(*Bert is not the client's real name)

Community Legal Education

It has been another successful year for BRQ's Community Legal Education Program. Our community engagement activities have ensured that we have continued to share our expertise in all Social Security and Disability Discrimination matters with community workers, stakeholders, Tertiary institutions and the general public.

The Community Workers forum conducted at Logan during the year enabled us to increase our geographical reach to community workers from metropolitan and regional Queensland. Community organisations, Employment Service Providers and community workers from Gympie, Kingaroy and the Sunshine Coast were amongst those able to attend and engage with senior representatives from the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) and members from the Administrative Appeals Tribunal Social Services and Child Support Division and Administrative Appeals Tribunal General Division.

In addition to the Community Workers Forum, BRQ conducted 15 workshops for community legal organisations, community groups and professionals involved in the social security sector, including providing information on our services to Centrelink Job Capacity Assessors. BRQ also participated in public community events such as Homeless Connect and the Logan Finance Fair.

Collaboration within the sector and with stake holders is equally important in the dissemination of social security information. To that end BRQ maintained involvement with the CLE Legal Assistance Forum Network (CLAF). BRQ collaborated with the National Social Security Network in producing and

Steve Irvine and Caitlin Collins with other CLC representatives at NAIDOC

publishing new and updated fact sheets including Debts, Domestic Violence and the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

BRQ also expanded our CLE to Universities, providing much needed exposure to social security issues to students involved in the Clinical Legal Placement course. It was a pleasure to welcome students from the University of Queensland into our student placement clinics. They now join Bond University in our expanded student program.

The introduction of social media to our service has been a great success. Both our Facebook and Twitter sites have been very well received and supported by the community. Our social media has expanded our ability to provide information to a wider audience quickly and concisely, as well as promote our service and support the community sector in general.

Steve Irvine, Community Legal Education Coordinator

"A huge thank you for visiting us in Ipswich to share your legal practice knowledge. Very useful, practical information to support better outcomes for the people we work alongside! Looking forward to keeping in touch with you and BRQ."

"Many thanks for being so generous with your time and for travelling from Brisbane. I have had great feedback about your presentation and our understanding and appreciation of the great work you do has expanded tremendously. It was refreshing to listen to someone who understands our business (mental health assessment) - and the limitations of this so well!"

Law Reform from Client Experience

BRQ's law reform and systemic advocacy is informed by the experiences of our clients and we focus on issues which matter to them.

Much of BRQ's law reform work in relation to social security is through contributions to submissions made by our national peak of legal centres providing specialist assistance in relation to social security law, the National Social Security Rights Network, (NSSRN). BRQ has also contributed to the work of the NSSRN through our Director being a member of the NSSRN Board since 2012.

Centrelink's Online Compliance Intervention, commonly referred to as "robo-debt" hit the headlines early in 2017 as 1000s of people, many of whom are no longer on Centrelink payments, were faced with the challenge of demonstrating they did not owe a debt. These alleged debts were often in relation to income earned from paid work as far back as six years previous and for which they may not have been able to find documentation.

We focus on issues which matter to our clients.

The frustration and – as one of our clients expressed it – the shame and humiliation of being considered to have 'cheated' the system – took a severe toll, even to the point of clients declining to claim payments to which they were entitled in order to avoid the risk of future problems.

BRQ contributed to the NSSRN submission to the Senate Community Affairs Inquiry into the Online Compliance Intervention. We also gave oral evidence at the Committee hearing in Brisbane, using the example of just one client's experience to illustrate many of the problems with the system. We were pleased to see some of the NSSRN's suggestions for improvement taken on board, however we note that the fundamental question as to the fairness of the system, which uses a process of calculation of debt known to not always be correct and then demands the individual prove this is wrong, remains.

We are aware from our clients of the often deleterious flow-on effects from changes to the rules and process around claims of Disability Support Pension in recent years, so we were keen to host NSSRN research into our disability support pension casework this year. We are hopeful that this in-depth examination of our casework will result in sound analysis of the impacts and lead to proposals for improvements to government.

The focus on disability continued with BRQ's NDIS Access Project which researched gaps in advocacy and support provision for people seeking to access the NDIS. Our consultation with disability advocacy organisations a nd the Anti-Discrimination Commission of Queensland indicated that a major gap in service provision is the lack of legal support for people in drawing up their Service Agreements – i.e. contracts – with service providers. With the support of disability services, BRQ drew up a proposal for a funded service; unfortunately, this was unsuccessful. However, the project afforded valuable opportunities to strengthen BRQ's links with disability advocacy organisations and for service promotion via the fact sheets we produced, which have been distributed widely.

In another by-product from the relationships formed and strengthened during the NDIS Project, BRQ collaborated with Queenslanders With Disability Network (QDN) on their submission to the National Disability Employment Services Review. We look forward to partnering with QDN and other disability advocacy groups on future submissions.

BRQ Team

Management Committee

Lurline Comerford, President

President since 2011, Lurline has an interest in social justice and equity for all. A Social Worker since 1974, Lurline is keen to maintain a strong community based organisation that can address social security issues, anomalies and problems and participate in improving the system for those who are disadvantaged. Equity is a guiding principle where people face poverty or discrimination and where basic rights are neglected

Paul Henman, Vice President

Paul had served on the BRQ Committee since 2013. 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.

Cale Fryer, Secretary

Cale holds a Bachelor of Business Management as well as 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 management consultant with over 15 years of professional experience in retail, professional services and public sector organisations. He has professional qualifications in Business and Information Technology, and is also a Chartered Accountant. Stuart is currently working as an Associate Director in Grant Thornton's Public Sector Advisory practice. Stuart joined the Management Committee in 2015.

Dr 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 has published on these topics and is currently writing a social history of surveillance.

Paul Freeburn, Committee Member

Paul was admitted as a solicitor in 1983. After working as a solicitor at Feez Ruthning (now Allens) and as a Senior Associate at Morris Fletcher & Cross (now Minter Ellison) Paul was admitted as a barrister in 1990. He 'took silk' in 2003. Paul has a strong belief in social justice and has been part of the Basic Rights Qld committee since 2015.

Neisha Traill, Committee Member

Neisha, who joined the Committee in November 2016, 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.

BRQ Management Committee members

Georgina Warrington, Committee Member

Georgina has been Director of BRQ for six years. Georgina has taught school, university and ESL students. Since qualifying as a social worker Georgina has worked in youth justice and eating disorders. She has a strong interest in social justice and is on the management committees of Windana Support Centre and the NSSRN

Committee Members - Outgoing at the 2016 Annual General Meeting

Pat Rogers, Committee Member

Pat served as a Member for two years. Pat has been active in the Union movement since the mid 1980's. Pat holds a degree in Business and is an Industrial Officer with the Electrical Trades Union. Pat has a strong interest in social justice and community development.

Christopher Saines, Committee Member

Christopher served as a Member for two years. He is the founder of Galleon Law Group which specialises in corporate and commercial law. He has a particular interest in corporate governance and has assisted

Staff

Role	Name	Years at BRQ	Days/Week
Director	Georgina Warrington	9	4
Senior Solicitor	Patrick Cranitch	15	5
Acting Senior Solicitor (from January 2017)	Andrew Davison	9	4
CLE Coordinator, Social Security Solicitor	Steve Irvine	2	4
Social Security Solicitor	Ellen Jones	3	5
Disability Discrimination Advocate Solicitor	Andrew Kennedy	6	4
Senior Social Worker	Teresa Grahame	12	3
Social Worker	Caitlin Collins	1	5
Intake and Administration Officer	Leisa Higgins	2	5
Finance Administrator (to January 2017)	Sue McComber	12	1
Finance Administrator (from February 2017)	Mark McKeon	0.5	1
Casual Administration Support	Hannah Taylor	1	-
Casual Administration Support	Terri Bradley	1	-

Volunteers

Aaron Smith
Ashleigh Pain-Geddes
Bree-Anna Bowtell
Brigid Kelly
Dahye Jung
Dorothy Fauls
Elena Paik
Fergus Harte
Hannah Taylor
Jean Collings
Lizzy Katona
Maddison Dantu
Osanna Fa'ata'ape
Sadia Azizi
Sam Perkins
Stephen Moran
Tamara Chin
Tamara Lenz
Tara Seiffert-Smith
Tejal Naras
Terri Bradley
Vanessa George

Clinical Legal Placement Students

Artcules Wong Pal Long
Christina Budur
Roberto Chata
Taylor Ritenberg

Volunteers and Students

Volunteers make a valuable contribution to the work of Basic Rights Queensland, assisting with intake, administration, advices and casework. Volunteering at BRQ offers opportunities develop essential professional skills such as client interviewing, record keeping and to gain a practical understanding of legal processes.

While our volunteers are generally law and social work students, we welcome volunteers from all backgrounds. What matters most is a willingness and ability to learn and undertake the work and a desire to engage with and support our clients.

I have been volunteering with BRQ since the end of 2014 and I really enjoy the experience and value the learning opportunity. Working my way from being a first contact officer to a telephone advice volunteer has enabled me to contribute to this amazing organisation and be a part of a team of wonderful people. I have also gained practical knowledge. I look forward to volunteering each week, and encourage others to be involved.
Lizzy

Being a volunteer at BRQ has definitely been the best part of my law degree. Everyone at BRQ is committed to your development and they support you to expand your skills and knowledge. Knowing that the work you are doing is helping people is amazing. It has been a truly invaluable experience.
Maddy

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 2009.

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 and the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department through the Community Legal Services Program. We are grateful for their support.

Funded by
Queensland Government
Australian Government
Attorney-General's Department

Treasurer's Report

I am pleased to present the Basic Rights Queensland (BRQ) Treasurer's Report, for the 2016-17 financial year. The BRQ Management Committee would like to thank our funders for their financial support.

BRQ's primary funding over the period was provided by the State Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG), and the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, through the Community Legal Services Program. During this financial year BRQ entered into a new three-year funding agreement, providing a level of certainty over the medium term. We are grateful for this support and particularly would like to acknowledge the ongoing assistance from DJAG staff.

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.

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. We are pleased to report that we have been successful in our application for a grant through Brisbane City Council's 'Building Stronger Communities' Grants Program. This one-off funding of $7,500 will contribute towards the cost of developing BRQ's Marketing and Sustainability Plan, during 2017-18.

BRQ's overall performance is a reflection of its talented and invaluable staff and volunteers, who exhibit great passion, energy and innovation in delivering their important work. Our Finance Administrator Sue McComber left us in January, after twelve years of outstanding service. BRQ has benefitted greatly from Sue's dedication and expertise and we thank her for this. We have been fortunate to recruit Mark McKeon, who brings experience in accounting and corporate governance. Finally, we express our special thanks to Georgina Warrington, who remains agile, positive and calm in responding to the challenges and opportunities that BRQ is presented with.

Treasurer, Stuart McDowall

Financial Report

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the Year Ended 30 June 2017

REVENUE	2017	2016
Community Legal Services Program grants	845,259	826,747
Services revenue	2,454	–
Finance income	5,078	7,279
Other revenue	9,795	9,533
TOTAL REVENUE	**862,586**	**843,559**
EXPENSES		
Staff expenses	(801,738)	(693,569)
Premises costs	(22,345)	(16,853)
Communication expenses	(21,535)	(20,808)
Printing, postage & stationery	(9,263)	(9,478)
Membership, subscriptions & conference expenses	(11,227)	(19,181)
Depreciation	(3,813)	(5,314)
Audit fees	(5,670)	(5,500)
Insurance costs	(2,571)	(2,584)
Travel expenses	(2,328)	(3,325)
Programming & planning costs	(1,359)	(6,307)
Other expenses	(4,110)	(8,585)
TOTAL EXPENSES	**(885,959)**	**(791,504)**
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) BEFORE INCOME TAX	**(23,373)**	**52,055**
Income tax expense –	–	
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR	**(23,373)**	**52,055**
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME		
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss	–	–
Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss	–	–
TOTAL OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME, NET OF TAX	–	–
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	**($23,373)**	**$52,055**

Statement of financial position as at 30 June 2017

CURRENT ASSETS	2017 $	2016 $
Cash and cash equivalents	417,738	446,997
Trade and other receivables	2,878	9,707
Other current assets	8,650	532
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	**429,266**	**457,236**
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Plant and equipment	13,426	17,239
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	**13,426**	**17,239**
TOTAL ASSETS	**442,692**	**474,475**
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and other payables	46,234	66,851
Employee benefits	111,940	99,040
Revenue received in advance	15,730	8,303
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	**173,904**	**174,194**
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Employee benefits	32,670	40,790
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	**32,670**	**40,790**
TOTAL LIABILITIES	**206,574**	**214,984**
NET ASSETS	**$236,118**	**$259,491**
EQUITY		
Accumulated surplus	236,118	259,491
TOTAL EQUITY	**$236,118**	**$259,491**

* Copies of our full audited Financial Report are available via email: brq@brq.org.au

Basic Rights Queensland Inc.
SOCIAL SECURITY & DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION SERVICES

www.brq.org.au