

Welfare- rights Centre Inc.



Annual Report 2012-2013

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*** identifying details have been changed in all case studies**

Welfare Rights Centre is a charity and classified as a "Deductible Gift Recipient as a Public Benevolent Institution".
Gifts of \$2 and over to the Centre are tax-deductible.

About Us

For nearly 30 years Welfare Rights Centre Qld has been providing advice, advocacy and free legal services to people having problems with the social security system or disability discrimination. We do this through telephone advice services and the provision of representation within the Centrelink appeals processes and disability discrimination at tribunals and conciliation conferences.

We believe people have a right to participate socially and economically in the community as they are able. In order to achieve this, Australia should have a welfare system based upon fairness, which recognises and accommodates diversity, is transparent, and facilitates the contribution of those with barriers to participation.

Our work has an early intervention focus assisting people to maintain engagement with their communities and preventing other problems from escalating. This means our advices are often lengthy, however the pay off is reduced need for ongoing casework, plus a saving of the expense of tribunal hearings or conciliation conferences avoided.

What we do

Client services

Our client services are largely telephone-based, as we provide social security services for the whole of Queensland up to Townsville and disability discrimination services for Queensland up to Mackay.

We provide information and advice to all clients and we make considered referrals for those whose issue is outside our areas of expertise.

Our legal and social work casework is targeted towards the most vulnerable, those facing many, compounding difficulties and those who are unable to advocate for themselves.

Community legal education

We focus on facilitating understanding of the law and promoting access to rights through our easy-to-read publications and website. We also train community workers and lawyers to enable them to best help their clients.

Systemic advocacy

We use our client work to inform our law reform and policy work, grounding our submissions and proposals in the lived experiences of those whom the law affects.

President's Report

Social Security and its role in supporting Australians has continued to be debated in 2012 - 13. Welfare Rights Centre in Qld, together with our equivalent centres in the other states and territories (which form the National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN)), are dealing with inequitable policies in our social security system. Social security, freedom from discrimination and access to justice are part of the platform of human rights upon which peaceful and fair societies are based. As a small specialist community legal centre, we stand together with many concerned voices who speak up for people who are vulnerable to being unable to participate in their communities either due to insufficient income or due to discrimination.

Some examples of the current issues the centre is responding to are the tightening of eligibility requirements for the Disability Support Pension (DSP), the controversial transfer to Newstart Allowance from Parenting Payment for a large number of sole (mainly female) parents and their children, the expansion of income management to Logan and Rockhampton in July 2012 and the inclusion of some young people in income management, including all who are in receipt of Youth Allowance: unreasonable to live at home, in those areas in July 2013.

For people with disabilities, the momentous and national bipartisan implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme will require monitoring to ensure that it is as fair and as equitable as possible. It must be remembered that it has been introduced in the context of tightening of eligibility requirements for DSP and Australia's high levels of exclusion of people with disability from employment and training.

We are finding more and more people require our telephone advice and also legal representation to support access to their social security entitlements and to anti-discrimination protections.

Not surprisingly, the allocation of resources from our funders is uncertain, due to changing governments at state and federal levels. At the state level, a new tendering model is to be applied to allocate community legal centre resources in 2014/15 onwards. This carries the risk of pitting one legal centre against another, so we are pleased to note the determination of CLCs state wide to work cooperatively in regards to this tendering process.

Together with other community legal centres which have been operating successfully since the early 1980s, we are taking steps to adapt to changing environments so that we can focus on continuing to provide our very efficient and valuable expertise to both individuals and other agencies providing services to disadvantaged people. We appreciate the support of the private legal sector and other stakeholders. It is that support together with our funding which allows our dedicated workers at the Welfare Rights Centre to continue to do what they do so well.

In closing, I would like to recognise all of the Welfare Rights Centre employees, volunteers and committee members and the good work that they have done this year.

Lurline Comerford
President
Welfare Rights Centre



Jack's Story...

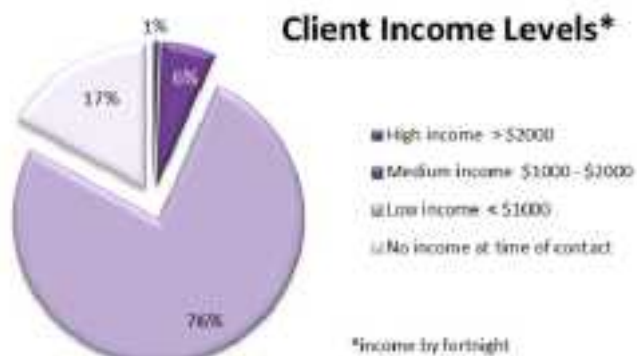
Jack came to Welfare Rights Centre as he was subject to an income maintenance period after being made redundant from his job. He had been told by his Union that he needed to make his redundancy payout last three months, but when he came to apply for Newstart Allowance, Centrelink informed him he had an income maintenance period of a further seven months.

His local MP and a number of charities were so concerned by his risk of suicide that they assisted Jack to pay his rent and buy food for the next few months after he was refused access to his Super. He approached Welfare Rights Centre after a referral from a Centrelink Social Worker.

Jack's WRC solicitor advised him to apply for Special Benefit to which income maintenance periods do not apply. When this was rejected, the Centre represented Jack in the Social Security Appeals Tribunal and argued that Special Benefit is a broad general discretion and the Tribunal had to consider all factors. WRC argued that the incorrect advice from the Union and his real risk of self-harm or suicide due to the stress of having no money for several months made the payment appropriate despite the expenditure of the redundancy funds on relocating to a cheaper area.

Special Benefit was granted and backdated to the date Jack had applied for Newstart Allowance. He was then able to afford to travel to Hervey Bay to see a psychologist and start looking for accommodation closer to work opportunities.

Social Security Facts & Figures

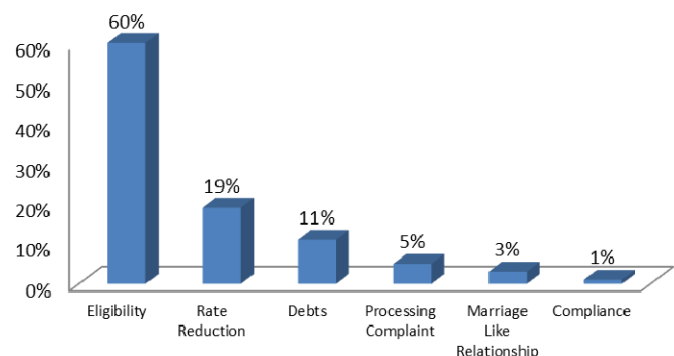


56% of our clients identify as having a **disability**, up from 50% in 2011—2012

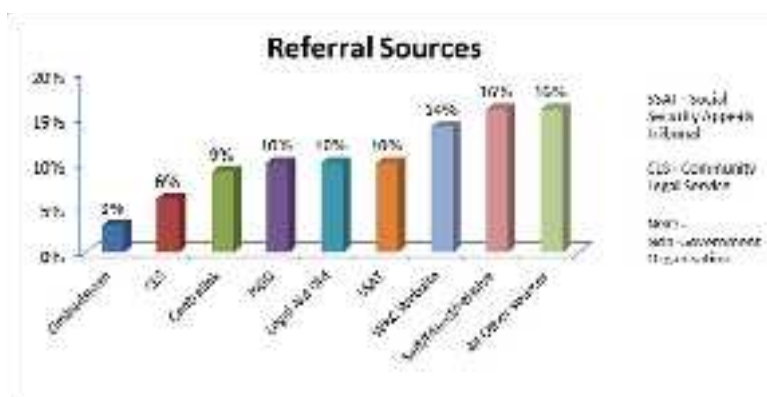
28 clients WRC represented stated that they would be able to **avoid homelessness** and 21 clients disclosed they would be able to **afford to seek medical treatment** now that they had some certainty over Centrelink payments

205 cases were opened and
198 cases were closed

Casework Problem Type



43% of our clients live alone or in share or boarding houses and 21% are single

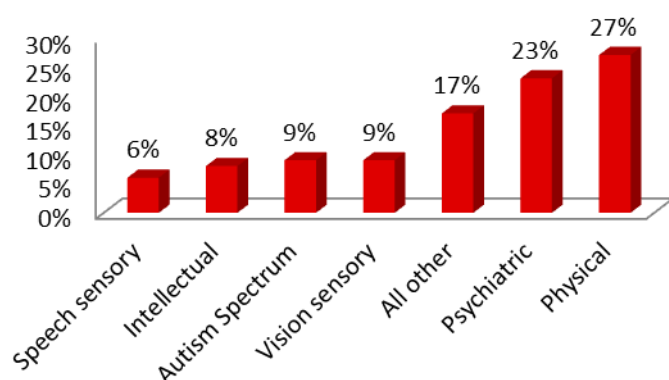


1603 advices were given

45% of all casework related to **Disability Support Pension Eligibility**, up from 35% in 2011-2012

Disability Discrimination Facts & Figures

Disability Type

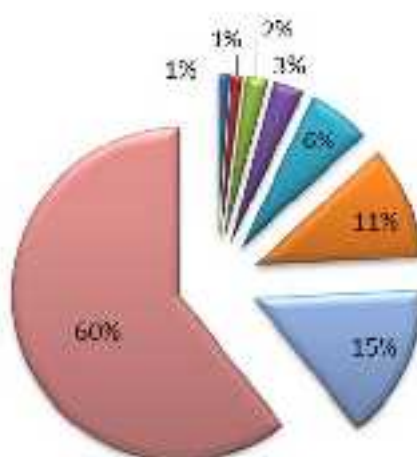


All other includes : ABI, Hearing sensory, HIV, Learning and developmental disorders, blood born diseases

103 advices were given, 14 cases were closed and 15 cases were opened

22% of clients identified as having more than one disability

50% of cases took more than 20 hours



Advice Area

- Access to premises
- Provision of goods
- Government
- Common Health Administration
- Accommodation
- Education
- Provision of services and facilities
- Employment

52% of clients were on government benefits and 14% had no income

Law Reform

Welfare Rights Centre contributes to law reform activities in order to argue for fairer legislation that will not disadvantage vulnerable people. Some examples of our work from 2012 – 2013:

- Completed a submission to, and gave evidence before the following Senate Committee Inquiries:
 - National Disability Insurance Scheme Bill 2012
 - Social Security Legislation Amendment (Parenting Payment) 2012
 - The adequacy of the allowance payment system for jobseekers and others, the appropriateness of the allowance payment system as a support into work and the impact of the changing nature of the labour market 2012
- Provided comments to the Senate Inquiry into the Social Security Amendment (Supporting More Australians into Work) Bill 2013
- Joined the ACOSS “\$35 a day is not enough” campaign
- Presented at an event arguing for an increase in the rate of Newstart Allowance
- Contributed to the National Welfare Rights Network Submission into the exposure draft of the Public Housing Tenants’ Support Bill 2013 - Housing Payment Deduction Scheme and Department of Human Services Independent Review of the Centrepay System.
- Served as a Management Committee member on the National Welfare Rights Network Management Committee

Community Legal Education

Community legal education is an essential part of Welfare Rights Centre's work, as it assists stakeholders and individuals to advocate for their clients and themselves on social security matters. In 2012 – 2013, the Centre:

- Developed the Disability Discrimination Advocacy Service Website, as a part of www.wrcqld.org.au, and produced Fact Sheets to support the work of the service
- Participated in multiple community events including: Anti-Poverty Week at QUT, Mental Health Community Resources Expo, Homeless Connect and Law Week
- Presented to the Brisbane City Council Homelessness Bus Tour for community organisations
- Developed and published a number of new Fact Sheets in response to emerging trends from our advice and casework service, including: Indefinite Portability of Pensions & Former Residents, Redundancies and Payouts – Income Maintenance Periods, and Reporting Your Income to Centrelink
- Presented and took part in policy discussions on Income Management with the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane Social Responsibilities Committee
- Delivered training to Centrelink workers including the Serious Non-Compliance Investigators team and trainee Authorised Review Officers
- Distributed over 800 copies of our publications state-wide
- Provided training to Welfare Officers from University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University and to Social Work students from UQ
- Produced and disseminated a quarterly E-Bulletin to over 200 stakeholders
- Trained Legal Aid Queensland call centre workers to facilitate appropriate referrals
- Participated in the Community Legal Education Legal Assistance Forum, coordinated by Legal Aid Queensland
- Presented tailored social security information to QPILCH's "Mental Health and the Law Training"

Director's Report

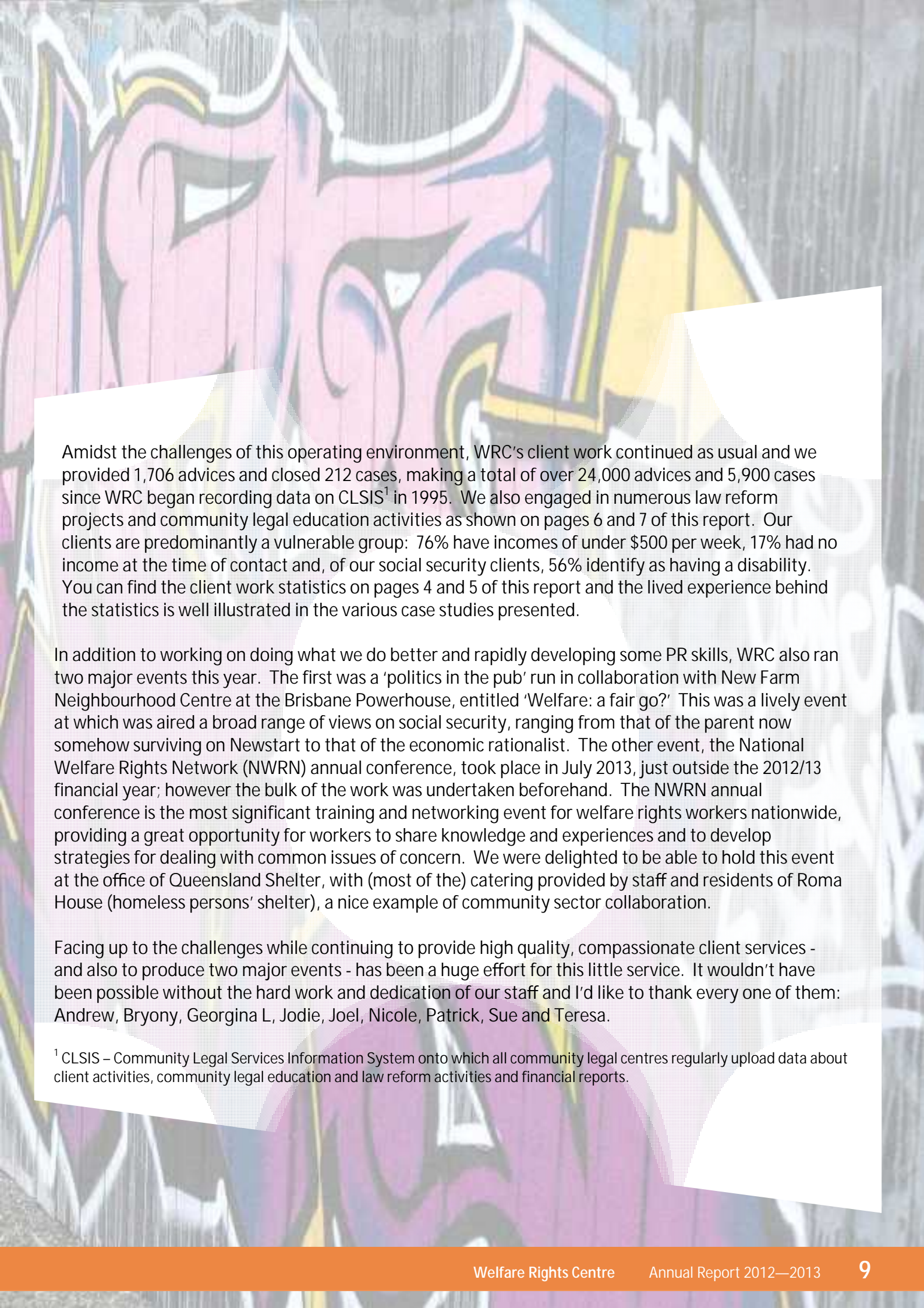
As discussed in the President's report, the environment in which the Welfare Rights Centre - and community services in general - operates is becoming increasingly challenging. In a time of concern about government debt, it is understandable that we are expected to demonstrate we are good value for money in terms of number of clients assisted for amount of taxpayer dollars. However, the challenge goes further than that, as the environment is becoming one in which we are expected to justify our existence; a bit of a shock for a community legal service which has been around for thirty years.

Accepting that things have changed, deciding what to do and taking action is always hugely difficult, possibly more so for small organisations, such as WRC, which have very limited resources with which to take action. However, we're proud of our work at WRC and convinced of the value of this service for vulnerable people, as evidenced by our success stories and the grateful feedback we receive from clients, so we have resolved to give it our best shot. In adapting to the challenges of the external environment, WRC has had an internal and an external focus.

Internally, we have focussed on ensuring our processes and procedures are as required for a community legal centre to operate effectively and efficiently. We also developed and improved our measurement of outcomes. The culmination of reviewing and re-writing our policies and procedures was WRC being awarded NACLC Accreditation in May. As a community legal centre, WRC is a member of NACLC (National Association of Community Legal Centres), the peak organisation through which CLCs are insured. Continued membership of NACLC will depend upon Centres being accredited and accreditation will be a pre-requisite for funding in future. Completing the accreditation process required a great deal of time and effort, and there will be a considerable amount of ongoing work to maintain it, however the payoff for WRC is the reassurance that our policies and procedures meet the national standard.

Another aspect of our internal focus has been to improve how we measure what we do. To date, CLCs are only required to measure outputs, however we decided that we needed to develop a system to measure casework outcomes as a means of better demonstrating the value of our work, besides this is the direction in which funders are moving. With limited resources, this was undertaken in-house, supported only by determination and a council library copy of *Access for Dummies*. Now that this has been in operation for a year, our next project is to develop a process for measuring outcomes from advices.

Our external focus has been on better telling our story to funders and to stakeholders, informing them of the effectiveness of our activities and also of the benefit to the state of WRC. For example, the savings generated by WRC ensuring a person is on payment and therefore able to afford their medications include avoiding hospital admissions and/or the need for crisis accommodation and emergency relief – all costs borne by the state. We have also sought to strengthen our position by promoting the value of our service more broadly, seeking to expand sponsorship and develop partnerships. Of course, the internal-focussed work we have done has served to support the external.



Amidst the challenges of this operating environment, WRC's client work continued as usual and we provided 1,706 advices and closed 212 cases, making a total of over 24,000 advices and 5,900 cases since WRC began recording data on CLSIS¹ in 1995. We also engaged in numerous law reform projects and community legal education activities as shown on pages 6 and 7 of this report. Our clients are predominantly a vulnerable group: 76% have incomes of under \$500 per week, 17% had no income at the time of contact and, of our social security clients, 56% identify as having a disability. You can find the client work statistics on pages 4 and 5 of this report and the lived experience behind the statistics is well illustrated in the various case studies presented.

In addition to working on doing what we do better and rapidly developing some PR skills, WRC also ran two major events this year. The first was a 'politics in the pub' run in collaboration with New Farm Neighbourhood Centre at the Brisbane Powerhouse, entitled 'Welfare: a fair go?' This was a lively event at which was aired a broad range of views on social security, ranging from that of the parent now somehow surviving on Newstart to that of the economic rationalist. The other event, the National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN) annual conference, took place in July 2013, just outside the 2012/13 financial year; however the bulk of the work was undertaken beforehand. The NWRN annual conference is the most significant training and networking event for welfare rights workers nationwide, providing a great opportunity for workers to share knowledge and experiences and to develop strategies for dealing with common issues of concern. We were delighted to be able to hold this event at the office of Queensland Shelter, with (most of the) catering provided by staff and residents of Roma House (homeless persons' shelter), a nice example of community sector collaboration.

Facing up to the challenges while continuing to provide high quality, compassionate client services - and also to produce two major events - has been a huge effort for this little service. It wouldn't have been possible without the hard work and dedication of our staff and I'd like to thank every one of them: Andrew, Bryony, Georgina L, Jodie, Joel, Nicole, Patrick, Sue and Teresa.

¹ CLSIS – Community Legal Services Information System onto which all community legal centres regularly upload data about client activities, community legal education and law reform activities and financial reports.

Client Feedback

The service is invaluable. It is so necessary for people who are in a 'hard' place (especially health-wise). EVERYONE is exceptional in conduct, attitude and support. "Life savers" in a way. I am so grateful for all the help I've received. Thank you with all my heart, don't know what would have become of me otherwise. Please keep this service going. It is very needed.

Dear Andrew,

Thank you so much for your support & for speaking on my behalf at the SSAT hearing...you were absolutely fantastic and a simple 'thank you' seems inadequate...in helping the underdog you are paying it forward big time, but for now you've made one lady very happy and relieved

To Jodie,

A short note to thank you and all the team at Welfare Rights Centre for your support and help with my matter of discrimination. A job well done. Keep up the good work, it's much appreciated.

Bryony,

A Sincere thank you for all your help with my appeal. Your service personally and your organisation provide valuable support.

A grateful client

Dear Teresa,

I would just like to let you know how much I appreciate everything you have done for me. Thank you so much for believing in me, and taking the time, to listen to what I was saying. ...



Catherine's Story...

Catherine was referred to our social work service due to her high levels of emotional distress and suicidal ideation. Catherine owed \$1000 rent and it was evident that she was in poor mental and physical health. She had been in a contact two months earlier but had not responded to follow up calls or a letter encouraging her to claim Newstart Allowance. She finally called for assistance as she was concerned about eviction. Having no income, Catherine had been living off her savings.

Catherine disclosed to our social worker that she had not lodged a claim because she was ashamed about having been "dobbied in" for something some months previously and thought this was why her payment had been cut off. With her permission, we liaised with Centrelink and discovered that her payment had been stopped because she failed to lodge a fortnightly form; Welfare Rights assured her that she was still entitled to a payment and encouraged her to lodge a fresh claim for Newstart Allowance as well as for the Disability Support Pension (DSP). The social worker also counselled her about the grief and loss that she was experiencing as a result of her loss of identity; Catherine had previously been a confident, extroverted and sought-after employee but this status had been lost with an abrupt change to her physical and mental health following an operation.

Catherine was linked in with a housing service that assisted her with her rental arrears. Our social worker monitored the progress of her Newstart Allowance and Disability Support Pension claims to ensure that there were no unnecessary delays and provided regular supportive counselling to Catherine who gradually started to show signs of gaining more control over her circumstances. Catherine was ultimately granted DSP and has started making plans for the future. This story is an example of Welfare Rights Centre's holistic services: Catherine's presentation at WRC with a Centrelink issue proved to be a platform for her to receive crisis counselling and ongoing emotional support as well as referral for assistance with her housing.

Supporters

We would like to thank the organisations that have supported our work in cash and in kind during 2012—2013:

Electrical Trades Union—Old and NT Branch

The ETU supports the WRC because we believe in a society that supports those members of the community who need assistance to get back on their feet. Like the WRC, the ETU believes that for some, fairness and equality isn't always afforded in equal measure. The WRC fights for these principles.

Clayton Utz

Pro bono practice is about making people's rights mean something. In addition to work for individuals, it is about helping community organisations and charities to get on with their vital work assisting disadvantaged and marginalised people. It is about fixing injustice. It is for these reasons that Clayton Utz has given this support to the Welfare Rights Centre.

Government funding

Welfare Rights Centre is funded through the Community Legal Services Program. Funding for the program is provided by the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, the Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney-General and the (Queensland) Legal Practitioners' Interest on Trust Account Fund (LPITAF).

We would like to thank the following individuals for their donations during 2012—2013:

Lorraine Blaney
Christopher Buckley
Simon Dilly
Aisling Fleury
Michael Francis
David Giles

Liz Jeffrey
Stephen Keim
John Kindt
Nancy Logie
Ian Logie
Tony Machin

Claire Moore
Mared Moya
Noel Muller
Graydon Murdock
Luke Tiley
Wendy Turner



Maria's Story...

As a consequence of being beaten mercilessly as a child by both her parents, Maria lost 80% of her eyesight. Maria also missed a lot of school in order to hide the bruises, so she could barely read or write. Never-the-less she triumphed over adversity and got her dream job, working as a kitchen hand in a busy river side restaurant.

Maria was well liked and very popular and worked happily at the restaurant for 6 years without incident, until the 2011 floods sent the restaurant bankrupt. For Maria, losing her job was the worst thing that could happen to her. Her former boss helped her find another job at a large industrial kitchen. Maria was bullied and harassed by the kitchen manager, who considered her an easy target because she was partially blind. When Maria threatened to complain, the kitchen manager told her not to cross him as he would have her fired. She stood up for her rights and was fired.

Maria lost her job, her home and her self-esteem and began self-harming to try to cope with the stress. Welfare Rights Centre's Disability Discrimination Advocate represented Maria at a conciliation conference at the Anti-Discrimination Commission Qld, and assisted her to reach an acceptable agreement. While Maria was unable to be reinstated the respondent company paid her a significant settlement sum by way of compensation. With self-confidence returning after being supported to stand up for her rights, Maria is now able to start seeking alternative employment.

Management Committee

Lurline Comerford — President

Member of WRC committee for 4 years. Lurline has an interest in social justice and equity for all. A social worker since 1974, she 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.

Scott Wilson – Vice President

Member of WRC committee since 2009. Scott also serves as a Director on the Energy Super Board and sits on Energy Super's Member Services, Marketing & Claims Committee. Scott is Training Officer for the Queensland Nurses Union and the Electrical Trades Union, drawing on years of experience as training officer with Future Skills Limited. Scott has worked extensively in the electrical construction and service industry in Australia and overseas and has extensive trade union experience, including membership of the State Executive and State Council, Electrical Trades Union and the Electrical Divisional Council of the CEPU.

Rachel Watson — Treasurer

Rachel is a social worker who has been involved in the community sector for over 20 years holding various positions over this time ranging from Women's Health Worker, Education Officer, Senior Social Worker, Services Manager and Operations Manager. Rachel is currently working with the Red Cross. She values diversity, social justice and a vibrant community sector.

Melody Edwardson – Member

Melody has served on the WRC management committee for 1 year. Melody has a strong interest in human rights and social justice issues. She has worked in disability and mental health services for 25 years and is completing a Masters in Mental

Health practice. Melody is currently employed by the Queensland Alliance for Mental Health and is on secondment to the Queensland Mental Health Commission.

Cale Fryer — Member

Cale holds a Bachelor of Business Management (Int. Business) degree as well as graduating with Honours from his Bachelor of Laws from UQ. Cale is a solicitor of the Supreme Court of Queensland 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.

Raylene D'Cruz – Member

Raylene is a lawyer, admitted to the legal profession in 2009. She holds Bachelor of Laws(Hons)/Bachelor of Business (Management) degrees from Bond University.

Katherine Hammond – Member (to June 2013)

Katherine holds a Bachelor of Laws (Hons) and Bachelor of Arts with majors in Economics and French from UQ along with a Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice from the College of Law. Katherine has been admitted to the legal profession as a lawyer by the Supreme Court of Queensland and is currently employed as a solicitor at a commercial law firm, specialising in the areas of corporate advisory & governance and capital markets. Katherine has previously worked at the Queensland Public Interest Clearing House (QPILCH), on both an employed and volunteer basis, with their Homeless Persons Legal Clinic and other pro-bono legal services.

Previous Members

Luke Tiley—Member (to Oct 2012)

David Powell—Secretary (to Oct 2012)

Submissions

The following are excerpts from submissions made to government inquiries in 2012—2013:

"We support those aspects of the "Fair Incentives to Work Bill" which relate to a doubling of the maximum reserve threshold of the Liquid Assets Waiting Period and the clarification of the definition of termination payment for the purposes of the income maintenance period. We wish however to express our strong opposition to the proposed revoking of the "grandfathering" provisions relating to single parents who claimed their current payment type before the introduction of the "welfare to work" changes in July 2006. ... This proposed change will impact adversely not only on the well-being of the most vulnerable single parent families that are headed by single parents who are unemployed, but also on the significant number of single parent families which are headed by parents who are already employed. These parents will lose substantial income due to the effect of transferring off PPS and onto NSA, and may lose their entitlement to income support and associated concessions due to the lower payment rate and harsher income test that applies. These single parents may not have the opportunity or capacity to make up the shortfall by increasing the number of hours that they work. "

Submission to the Senate Committee on the "Fair Incentives to Work Bill" 2012

"Many people coming to us seeking the Disability Support Pension have an interest in working, but cannot survive on Newstart. Once on the DSP, individuals can be reluctant to try working long-term in case of losing the Pension and having to reapply under tighter eligibility requirements, should they find their condition won't allow them to work the hours they had hoped. Fear of being forced onto Newstart Allowance is real amongst people in receipt of DSP because the difference between the two payments is so marked. "

Submission to the Senate Committee on the Adequacy and Appropriateness of the Allowance payment System 2012

"It is worth exploring the role that underpinning principles play in policy and legal contexts. Whilst articulating principles within legislation does not strictly make them enforceable, it demonstrates a commitment to process and to the people directly affected by it. Principles and objectives can however assist to interpret any ambiguously worded legislative section as in this situation the interpretation most in accordance with the objectives of the act should be taken. It is essential that the NDIS appeals process reflects Australia's commitment to adhere to the principles of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. "

Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into the National Disability Insurance Scheme Legislation 2012.



Why I Volunteer at WRC.....

The WRC provides a service that is vital for those in the community in need of assistance to gain knowledge and understanding of the law and their position. I feel very lucky to be able to be a part of such a wonderful service that helps those in need and provide options they didn't even know they had. The clients are always very grateful for any assistance and are always surprised that such a small organisation can reach and help so many people.. — Antonette

I first approached the Welfare Rights Centre about undertaking some volunteer work as extracurricular experience relevant to my tertiary education in Law. I really enjoy assisting and getting involved with the community, specifically, being able to assist society's most vulnerable members. Volunteering for the Welfare Rights Centre has given me an insight into struggles faced by many at the hands of dated, harsh policy and driven me to develop a strong sense of justice, as well as a willingness to go forward in my legal career with a determination to advocate for those who are unable to advocate so for themselves.
— Nicole

The opportunity to volunteer at the WRC has provided me with a real insight as to what many members of our community struggle with, in and out the system. Before volunteering at the WRC, I had very little knowledge of the social security system and how many people often slip through the cracks. As a vullie, I have not only become more informed about social justice issues but I have also acquired new skills. The best part is a feeling of accomplishment and that I have helped in some way, no matter how little. — Keertan

Volunteering at the Welfare Rights Centre has been an eye-opening experience that I have found educational, challenging, and genuinely enjoyable. People approaching our service are often confused and upset, and I find it rewarding when we are able to advise them in a way that provides clarity, understanding, and often, hope. — Jess

Volunteering at the WRC has given me the chance to assist people going through very difficult experiences. Even at First Contact Officer level, it is an invaluable experience to be part of a legal service which provides people with support they wouldn't otherwise have access to. — Amy

Working at the WRC has been an awesome experience that has a unique way of allowing me to contribute while at the same time equipping me with skills that are vital for my future in the legal industry. It is not often where, as a student, I am given the opportunity to advise clients under very close supervision. The feedback given has been very helpful and the service that is done by the centre has been a phenomenal blessing to those affected by Social Security Law in QLD and NSW.- Tinashe

Volunteers

Without volunteers, Welfare Rights Centre would not be able to assist nearly as many people each year. We rely on volunteers in all aspects of our service provision.

Volunteer First Contact Officers (FCO) handle reception and intake, answering our phones for the majority of our business hours. They ascertain if we can help the caller with their issue and take their personal and social security or disability discrimination problem details or provide a referral to an appropriate service.

Volunteers within our Social Security Telephone Advice Service (TAS) are supervised by the TAS Coordinator, who is a qualified solicitor. These TAS volunteers provide advice and/or advocacy in order to resolve the client's issue through early intervention, if possible while the matter is still within the Centrelink decision-making process. Our Disability Discrimination volunteers are supervised by the Disability Discrimination Advocate who is also a qualified solicitor.

Some of our volunteers undertake casework under the supervision of the Senior Solicitor. This may include drafting letters or submissions to tribunals, researching legal issues and negotiating with Centrelink on behalf of clients. The majority of our volunteers are students. We also have a number of qualified practicing solicitors who provide pro-bono casework and representation.

This year, our TAS Supervisor and Office Administrator developed comprehensive TAS and FCO handbooks to provide more robust training and reference materials to support our volunteers.

The following people provided invaluable assistance to our organisation in 2012 – 2013:

Volunteers

Amanda Sinclair
Amy Williams
Anna Huang
Anne Nguyen
Antonette Reyes
Arleena Dellaway
Ashnita Kisun
Brittoni Chin
Cecilia Chau
Charmaine Webster
Chia-Yi Kuo
Claire Davies
Constance Lee
Damien Craven
David Northcott
Dimitry Thoms
Dominique Gillespie
Ellen Palmer
Flora Lee
Frederick Vahdat

Georgia Haydon
James Hodge
James Stedman
Janice Hwang
Jenny Wang
Jessica Watter
Karen Thorpe
Keertan Samra
Laura Manley
Laura Pound
Lauren Thompson
Lucinda Robertson
Marika Pathe
Maja Cvjetanovic
Melinda Lim
Mikayla Kuhne
Naomi Hayes
Natalie Morris
Nathan Ethridge
Neha Rao
Nicole Cooper

Robert Black
Roisin Somerville
Shama Dean
Storme Hay
Thomas Baldwin
Tinashe Makamure
Tony Zhou
Yen Yen Hooi
Zenab Khalil

2012-2013 Student Placements

Audi (Abdon) Reyes
Constance Lee
Moiria McIntosh
Pamela Taukuro
Seone Woolf

Pro-bono Lawyers
Andrew Kennedy



Rachel's Story...

Rachel came to Welfare Rights Centre with a \$6000 Family Tax Benefit (FTB) debt which was raised after a period when she was twice involuntarily admitted into a mental health ward and in between was given part-time care of her daughter. Because the Department of Child Safety had obtained Interim Accommodation Orders for her child to be placed with foster carers or her mother, Centrelink took the view that the child was not her FTB child and that she had failed to inform Centrelink of this, and therefore they raised a debt.

Welfare Rights was able to obtain evidence from Rachel's Psychiatrist that she lacked the capacity to advise Centrelink of the change in her circumstances throughout that period, even when she was seen as well enough to leave hospital and return to partial care of her daughter. The fact that the debt arose through no fault of hers and that she did provide substantial care for her daughter for large parts of the debt period were seen as special circumstances and the outstanding debt was waived.

This was of significant assistance as Rachel had considerable credit card debts from having committed to higher rent and mobile plans whilst she was working and then having bills accumulate whilst she was hospitalised. Rachel also faced significant ongoing gap costs in order to regularly see a Psychiatrist, as there is insufficient mental health funding for the level of treatment she needed.



Sadia's Story...

Sadia, a full time student, was referred to Welfare Rights Centre by a homelessness intervention service. While Sadia, originally from Bangladesh, had been a permanent resident since 2005, her husband, Rasel, was not and was currently on a bridging visa. As a consequence Rasel had no entitlement to a Centrelink payment (not having the specific type of visa required for eligibility for special benefit). Rasel was also prevented from working by the conditions of his visa. Thankfully Sadia and Rasel lived in public housing, but with a recent rent increase, Sadia had been finding it more and more difficult to support the both of them on the partnered rate of Newstart Allowance and, having accumulated some rental arrears, had been given notice to leave by Department of Housing.

The Welfare Rights Centre made contact with Centrelink on Sadia's behalf to request that Centrelink exercise a discretion available to them under s24 of the Act to pay her at the higher, single rate of Newstart on the basis that there were special circumstances in the case preventing her and Rasel from pooling their finances and as a result they were in financial hardship. Centrelink granted this request, increasing Sadia's rate of payment. Further advocacy from the Welfare Rights Centre resulted in Centrelink finding a basis for this rate being paid from an earlier date resulting in Sadia receiving additional arrears paid as a lump sum. Sadia was now in a position to work with the homelessness intervention service to resolve her housing problems.

Staff

Georgina Warrington—Director

For me, working at the Welfare Rights Centre is challenging, frustrating and ultimately rewarding. Challenging because many of our clients need our help to obtain the necessities of life as this is dependent upon securing a basic income. Frustrating because we can't always provide all the assistance needed or we have to turn people away since decreasing funds have resulted in reduced capacity to provide services. Rewarding because we know that this service makes a positive difference to the lives of our clients and to the broader community.

Patrick Cranitch—Senior Solicitor

Achieving a successful outcome for a client who might otherwise have fallen through the social security safety net is one of the most rewarding aspects of my work at the Welfare Rights Centre. I gain immense satisfaction from these cases, which are invariably demanding, knowing that I played a role in qualifying a client for a pension or benefit that will result in a better standard of living and quality of life.

Andrew Davison—Solicitor

I enjoy being able to explain how the Centrelink rules impact on people's situations, coming up with options and advising clients on what they need to do to convince decision makers that a discretion should be exercised or how to change their circumstances to better fit the Centrelink rules. I also get great satisfaction from representing vulnerable people who are unable to do so themselves due to how complex their matter is.

Teresa Grahame—Social Worker

Working at the Welfare Rights Centre enables me to provide support to some of Centrelink's most disadvantaged clients, many of whom are coping with mental/physical health issues

as well as struggling financially. My job involves assisting the more capable clients with information about their rights and their Centrelink issue; and providing more intense assistance to the more vulnerable clients by advocating directly with Centrelink at an early stage and through the appeals process if necessary. The gratitude shown by our clients for the assistance that we provide makes working at the Welfare Rights Centre a satisfying experience.

Bryony Walters—Welfare Rights Advocate

I'm passionate about free access to legal services so I love working at WRC. Many of the people who approach us are unaware of their right to review and it's very rewarding to provide advice and early intervention assistance to a client that can actually make a material difference in their life. Systemically, I believe welfare systems are a form of social investment that should support those in need of assistance in ways that allow them to increase their capacity for self-reliance. I'm very proud to be part of an organisation that shares the same view and advocates systemically on that basis.

Jodie Moffatt—Disability Discrimination Advocate

Working at a community legal centre gives me an enormous sense of satisfaction at the end of the day. Most people cannot afford legal representation and so many of their matters go unheard. At WRC we assist homeless, impoverished and disadvantage members of the community by providing them with a voice to fight for their legal rights. It is not about winning but providing a fundamental right to be heard that should be equally available for all Australians and not just the privileged few.

Sue McComber—Finance Officer

I have been involved with the Welfare Rights Centre both as a volunteer and a paid worker for more than ten years. It is a privilege to support the work of the Centre in assisting/empowering often vulnerable people to negotiate sometimes complex areas of law in order to address issues of social and economic disadvantage

Georgina Lawson—Policy and Communications Officer

I enjoy examining the Social Security system and how legislation and policy impacts on vulnerable people. More importantly I have the opportunity to contribute my ideas to law reform activities and provide solutions on how the system could be better. I believe that given Australia is a first world country, our government has a responsibility to ensure that people have a decent standard of living while on welfare payments. I am happy to play a role in advocating for social justice and fairness and appreciate working in an organisation that shares my values.

Nicole O'Keane—Office Administrator

After working at WRC for the past 7 years, I am still thankful for the opportunity to interact with such a widely diverse group of people as our clients. It has also made me realise that there are so many barriers which can limit our clients' abilities to self-support or advocate for themselves, some of these can include cultural, religious and/or racial diversity. The work that WRC does to support these clients is extremely worthwhile and to be a part of this team is very rewarding.

Joel McComber—Casual Administrative Assistant

Since beginning work at the Welfare Rights Centre I've been consistently struck by how seemingly small changes and events can lead to the most complex consequences in people's lives. However, at the same time, I've also been struck by how even the sometimes seemingly small contributions made by the Welfare Rights Centre can similarly have similarly significant consequences.

Andrew Kennedy—Locum Solicitor

My time at Welfare Rights was an extremely rewarding experience. The staff are bright, dedicated, and share the same values which allows for a great service to those clients that we assist. To be able to clarify issues for clients when they are caught in the complex law and policy area involving Centrelink is satisfying, whether it is helping them review decisions, or to walk them through applications so that they know what they need to demonstrate to qualify for assistance to financially survive. It makes a difference to people's lives. Especially satisfying, is to successfully represent the most vulnerable at a Tribunal, after they have had the frustration and stress of Centrelink decisions go against them, and ultimately the tribunal finds that this should not have been so.

Treasurer's Report

As per normal operations, the Welfare Rights Centre budget is closely monitored by Georgina Warrington, Sue McComber and the committee. Via this attention to detail, the Welfare Rights Centre is able to track unnecessary expenditure and have an almost "forensic" analysis of spending.

This year the Auditors have made a change in accounting treatment of redundancy and expense provisions. These changes comply with national accounting standards and bring the Welfare Rights Centre into line with current practice in the not for profit sector. Due to that change we have added \$54,600 in "abnormal" Other Income for the 2013/2014 year. Without this one-off occurrence, the Centre's surplus for the year would have approximated \$4,000 rather than the reported \$58,582.

At times the lack of funding can become overwhelming and I am constantly amazed at the amount of quality work that the Welfare Rights Centre is able to do within such a tight budget. Thanks to the team at Welfare Rights for keeping focused on the big picture of positive outcomes for clients as so this enables the Committee to stay focused on how we can ensure the funding best meets service delivery demands.

The future funding landscape is probably as uncertain as it ever has been going forward into 2014. Continued work by Welfare Rights in collaborating and partnering in the sector to ensure that the issues related to income protection and disability discrimination are upheld will continue. Building and maintaining strategic relationships will assist in keeping Welfare Rights as part of the vibrant community sector of Queensland.

Until next year.....

Rachel Watson

Please note that the following is an extract from the audited financial report. A complete report may be obtained by contacting wrcqld@wrcqld.org.au or 07 3421 2510

WELFARE RIGHTS CENTRE INC.

**INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2013**

		2013	2012
		\$	\$
INCOME			
Donations		895	1,708
Grants and funding received	2	653,710	676,664
Interest received		14,971	17,250
Memberships		191	518
Other Income		54,608	(3,062)
Sponsorship		8,000	8,000
Total Income		<u>732,375</u>	<u>701,078</u>
EXPENSES			
AGM expenses		275	523
Audit fees		4,600	4,600
Bank Charges		257	403
Cleaning		795	1,092
Computer expenses		1,962	3,261
Conference expenses		4,923	1,064
Consultancy		-	(1,742)
Depreciation		4,877	4,520
Document destruction and storage		1,850	1,851
Equipment - minor		389	487
Insurance		2,285	3,060
Levy to NACLC		3,476	3,882
Library		2,217	2,729
Light and power		3,956	437
Management committee		676	612
Relocation costs		-	25,000
Postage, printing and stationery		4,844	7,168
Practising certificate		2,290	2,545
Program cost		429	4,324
Rent		19,476	19,849
Repairs and maintenance		2,737	2,301
Staff expenses	3	587,273	646,703
Subscriptions and registrations		2,539	2,346
Telephone, fax and internet		16,166	18,079
Travelling expenses		1,849	1,776
Planning Day expenses		1,696	927
Volunteer costs		158	111
Website design and maintenance		1,795	(1,040)
Total Expenses		<u>673,790</u>	<u>756,868</u>
Surplus/(deficit) before income tax		58,585	(55,790)
Income tax expense		-	-
Surplus/(deficit) after income tax		<u>58,585</u>	<u>(55,790)</u>
Accumulated surplus at beginning of year		64,184	119,974
ACCUMULATED SURPLUS AT END OF YEAR		<u>122,769</u>	<u>64,184</u>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

WELFARE RIGHTS CENTRE INC.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2013

NOTE 1 - GRANTS AND FUNDING RECEIVED

	2013 \$	2012 \$
Grants received: - LPTAF	85,267	85,865
Funding received: - Legal Aid - Core Funding - Legal Aid - C.L.S. Project - Other funding	567,107 1,136 89	585,196 8,114 89
Total grants and funding received	653,470	679,169

NOTE 3 - STAFF EXPENSES

Salaries and on-costs	555,792	585,406
Staff expenses	630	741
Staff training	973	2,856
Superannuation	65,217	52,168
Workers' compensation	4,685	4,816
	587,277	646,703

NOTE 4 - CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS

Cash on hand	289	359
Cash at bank	286,665	284,345
	286,885	284,554

NOTE 5 - CREDITORS AND ACCRUALS

CURRENT		
Trade creditors	23,233	24,815
Other payables	18,233	30,107
	41,466	54,922

NOTE 6 - UNSPENT FUNDS

Other income	-	24,269
C.A. Ovarach	20,960	27,812
CLIP	-	3,236
Other	2,380	-
	23,200	54,513

WELFARE RIGHTS CENTRE INC.

BALANCE SHEET
AS AT 30 JUNE 2013

	NOTE	2013 \$	2012 \$
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and Cash Equivalents	4	286,885	284,554
Prepayments		4,271	5,258
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		291,156	289,812
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Plant and equipment - at Cost		38,509	78,509
Less accumulated depreciation		(88,203)	(63,435)
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		10,306	15,074
TOTAL ASSETS		301,462	304,886
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade and other payables	5	41,466	54,922
Employee benefit provisions		114,527	131,271
Unspent funds	6	323,200	56,513
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		179,193	242,706
TOTAL LIABILITIES		179,193	242,706
NET ASSETS (LIABILITIES)		122,269	62,180
MEMBERS' FUNDS			
Accumulated surplus		122,269	62,180
TOTAL MEMBERS' FUNDS		122,269	62,180

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.
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