

**Welfare Rights Centre Ltd (NSW)**  
**ABN 76 002 708 714**

**Annual Report**

**July 2011 to June 2012**

**Prepared for 2012 Annual General Meeting**  
**17 October 2012**

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# Introduction

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The Welfare Rights Centre is an independent, not for profit, community organisation which holds charitable status. The Centre provides specialist information and advice about social security, family assistance and employment assistance. The Centre also runs a multi-disciplinary casework service. Much of our casework has an emphasis on early intervention to prevent placement in out of home care, homelessness and incarceration.

Advocacy with a rights-based approach is a hallmark of the Centre. This includes advocacy for individuals and families as well as systemic advocacy with an emphasis on full employment, targeted employment assistance and a better social security system.

Groups of clients the Centre regularly assists include:

- families and carers;
- victims of domestic or family violence;
- young people;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- former refugees;
- people with disabilities;
- people with a mental illness;
- those with substance abuse or gambling problems; and
- people experiencing homelessness.

The Welfare Rights Centre is in its thirtieth year having been established in 1983 as a result of community worker campaigning. The Centre's goals are to alleviate poverty and to help people in need to stabilise income support, participate where possible in the paid workforce and relieve pressure on other service delivery agencies in NSW. The Centre's core establishment and ongoing recurrent funding has been provided by the NSW Department of Youth and Community Affairs and successor departments.

The Centre is staffed by paid workers and volunteers. We could not operate without our dedicated volunteers.

The Centre provides two statewide services in NSW. The first is an information, referral and intensive casework service for families with children up to 18 years of age, or young people between 15 and 18 years of age. This service is funded by NSW Families and Communities. The second is a welfare rights and community legal services program for people who are having difficulties with Centrelink and require legal casework assistance, for example, at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. This service is funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and Legal Aid NSW and includes a law reform component and a community legal education component.

The Centre also undertakes its own income generation activities to supplement our statewide services. Examples of these activities include the recent production of the 7th Independent Social Security Handbook for community workers and our trade union program to assist casual workers and people who have lost their jobs.

Many individuals and families have benefited from the work of the Welfare Rights Centre. The Centre also provides a direct, economic benefit to the state of NSW by ensuring that accurate Commonwealth social security payments are provided to NSW residents. Many people including families, single parents, young people, people with disabilities and age pensioners end up owing a debt to Centrelink. In many cases, this debt does not exist at all and Centrelink has made a mistake. People are then forced to pay back money to the Commonwealth even it though is not actually owed. In other cases, there is a debt but the person's special circumstances warrant the debt being waived. Advocacy is often required to convince a decision-maker that the debt should be waived.

In calendar year 2011, the Welfare Rights Centre, through its representation, had almost \$2 million worth of debt owing to the Commonwealth either found not to exist at all or waived. This represents more income in family budgets, more money in the state of NSW and less pressure on other NSW community services.

Affiliations: The Welfare Rights Centre is a member of the Australian Council of Social Services and the NSW Council of Social Services. The Centre's peak national organisation is the National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN) and much of the Centre's policy and law reform work is undertaken under the auspices of the NWRN. The Centre is also a member of the National Association of Community Legal Centres.

#### Snapshot of the Centre in 2011/12

No of advices provided:	3,978
No of families with children 18 or under given assistance:	1,200
No of cases opened:	868
Debt waived or prevented in 2011 calendar year:	\$2 million
No of education activities:	48

# 1.0 Casework

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## 1.1 Information, Advice & Casework service

The Welfare Rights Centre provides an information, advice and casework service to people with income support problems related to social security and family assistance law and to agencies assisting people with such problems. The aim of the Centre's casework service is to achieve beneficial outcomes for individual clients and for classes of clients, and to utilise our casework to improve equitable access to income security.

The casework service comprises a telephone advice service, research, assistance with self-advocacy, interventions directly with Centrelink, written advocacy on behalf of clients and written or personal representation before the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT), the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT), or the Federal Court in some cases. Advice is given on almost all aspects of social security and family assistance. Further representation may be provided in complex cases particularly where children are at risk, matters of wide application, and matters where the client has no money at all or where they may not adequately represent their own interests.

Telephone advice and assistance is available Monday to Friday, for a four hour period each day. However, ongoing clients may contact the Centre at all times between 9 am and 5 pm. The Centre has a toll free number to facilitate access for clients in country and outer-metropolitan areas and a TTY for people with hearing impairments. Initial advice is generally provided by telephone; however, the Centre has an access and equity policy to ensure that people unable to obtain assistance by telephone are not disadvantaged.

The Centre's casework service could not function without the valuable contribution of unpaid volunteer workers. Their contribution is gratefully acknowledged in section 6.5 of this Annual Report.

## 1.2 Casework statistics

The following statistics are compiled from information provided to us by our clients. Some clients choose not to provide some of their personal information. The percentages are calculated on the total number of people volunteering particular information and may not represent the complete picture. Nevertheless, they provide a good overview of the casework of the Centre.

### Number of clients

From July 2011 to June 2012 the Centre provided assistance to 2,930 clients. We provided 3,978 "advice activities" and opened 868 new cases in the period. This advocacy included representation of clients in internal Centrelink reviews and with appeals to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT) and Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).

A high percentage of our "advice activities" and our cases involved securing stable and ongoing income or reducing debt for people with children aged between 0 and 18 years old. Approximately 45% of our clients have children. We also gave direct advice to a small number of children under 18 years of age in relation to Youth Allowance and Special Benefit.

<b>Age</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>
0 - 18	1%	0.4%
18-34	18%	23%
35-49	26%	30%
50-64	27%	33%
65+	14%	14%

<b>Gender</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2011-12</b>
Female	53%	57%
Male	39%	42%

## Country of birth

The countries of birth disclosed by our clients were as follows.

	2010-11	2011-12
Australia	49.5%	56%
New Zealand	2.6%	3.2%
United Kingdom	2.6%	3.8%
Lebanon	2.4%	2.9%
China	1.9%	2.9%
Egypt	1.6%	1.3%
Iraq	1.5%	1.3%
Fiji	1.1%	1.0%
Vietnam	1.0%	0.9%
India	0.9%	1.1%
Greece	0.9%	1.1%
Turkey	0.8%	1.1%

## Clients of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background:

In 2011/12 4.1% of all clients identified themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, or both. In 2010/11 the percentage was 3.7%

The most common payment types for matters over the period were:

Disability Support Pension	763
Newstart Allowance	511
Parenting Payment	207
Age Pension	319
Youth Allowance	163
Family Tax Benefit	228
Carer Payment	152

Parents and grandparents caring for children were represented amongst all payment types.

## 1.3 Casework issues during 2011- 2012

### Debts

The most resource-intensive issue for our advice and casework service continues to be related to the raising and recovery of social security and family tax benefit debts. In particular, the Centre assisted numerous clients with member of a couple (MOC) debts which proved to be very resource intensive. The debts were usually in excess of \$70,000 and the Centre had many successes with these cases. It is of concern that in many of these cases Centrelink raises a MOC debt covering a period of many years even though the client had been keeping Centrelink informed of their living

arrangements throughout the relevant period. In some cases, it is observed that during the debt period Centrelink had reviewed the person's living arrangements and decided at that time the person was entitled to the single rate of payment. Despite this Centrelink decision makers invariably fail to take into account previous decisions by Centrelink, where it had accepted that the person was single. The retrospective nature of these decisions is of significant concern.

The Centre also provided assistance to many students who had debts raised on the basis that they were not undertaking full-time studies. Many of these students were enrolled in OTEN.

We also see cases where Centrelink systematically fails to take into account the person's income when calculating their rate of payment. This highlights the numerous Centrelink errors in the causation of debts. This is particularly the case where the person advises the Family Assistance Office of their income but that income is not used to assess the person's social security payment.

### **Compensation preclusion periods**

We continue to see a large number of compensation preclusion period cases. This year our Centre has had some great success in getting lengthy preclusion periods reduced and assisting clients in hardship to get onto appropriate social security payments.

### **People with illnesses and disabilities**

Approximately 25% of the people who contact the Centre are seeking assistance in relation to the rejection or cancellation of disability support pension. Due to the level of demand the Centre generally restricts its service to the provision of advice only.

The Centre continued to advise a large number of clients on activity tested payments, such as Newstart Allowance or Parenting Payment, who have an illness or disability. A difficulty in this area is where Centrelink refuses the request for an exemption from the activity test even though the person had obtained a valid medical certificate stating that they are unable to undertake any activity. In addition, the new changes to the Disability Support Pension with the introduction of the program of support requirements will invariably have implications for our clients in these situations.

## **1.4 Case Studies - Early intervention casework practice and legal casework**

### **Case study 1 - Restoration and arrears of Parenting Payment and ABSTUDY**

Tanya is an Aboriginal mother of eight children (six school age and two older). In March 2010 she had the younger children in her care and was living in regional NSW. A series of unfortunate events occurred, including serious flooding, and she lost her housing. She sent her younger children to live with their older siblings in Sydney while she tried to sort out new accommodation.

Unfortunately, Centrelink decided that she no longer had care of her younger children. Centrelink raised a debt for Parenting Payment of nearly \$50,000 and cancelled her Parenting Payment and the children's ABSTUDY payments. Without Centrelink payments, she was unable to secure new housing.

She tried, unsuccessfully, to obtain work in Sydney. She had been working on a part-time basis before the floods. She advised Centrelink that it was only a temporary arrangement that her younger children were residing with her older children. Tanya retained the legal responsibility for her younger children and was still making the decisions about their daily care and welfare.

Tanya had received no Centrelink payments for about 18 months before she contacted the Welfare Rights Centre. We interviewed her and the children and liaised with Centrelink. We contacted third parties to collect evidence (for example, of school enrolment details, about who are the parent/guardian and letters from her older children). We arranged an appointment with Centrelink and attended the appointment with her. By the end of the two hour appointment with Centrelink, Tanya's Parenting Payment debt was zeroed, her Parenting Payment was restored, her Family Tax Benefit had been restored for the five younger children in her care and 18 months arrears for her and the children's payments were paid in full.

## **Case study 2 – Grandmother carer at risk**

Jennifer took custody of her grandchildren (aged three and seven) when both of her own daughters died within a twelve month period. At the time, she had been made redundant from her job. She had separated from her husband and he was renting elsewhere.

This was an extremely traumatic time for her. She was dealing with grief, custody disputes with the fathers of her grandchildren and the change in her financial circumstances having gone from paid employment to being on the disability support pension with dependent young grandchildren in her care.

Her ex-husband told her he needed to return to the home or else he would have to force its sale by way of a property settlement, because he could not afford his share of the mortgage and private rent at the same time. She was desperate not to sell the family home as she considered it essential to keep the house to provide housing and emotional stability for her grandchildren. Jennifer and her ex-husband agreed to live separated under the one roof in the interests of the grandchildren. She rang Centrelink and explained clearly the reasons for his return to the house.

A decade later, Centrelink reviewed her situation and decided retrospectively that she had in fact reconciled with her ex-husband. Centrelink raised a debt of almost \$200,000 on the basis that she was paid as a single person when she should have been treated as partnered. In effect, Centrelink backdated the member of a couple decision by a decade.

The Welfare Rights Centre intervened. Owing to the size of the debt and the length of the period of time involved, the case was very complex. Our caseworkers interviewed Jennifer at her home and took photos of her living arrangements so that they could make representations on her behalf. They also represented her at the Social Security Appeals Tribunal and wrote five submissions on her behalf.

Eventually, the caseworkers were successful and the debt of \$200,000 was found not to exist. Jennifer was refunded the payments she had made towards the debt. As a result her income was made more secure and her housing stabilised resulting in safety for her and her grandchildren. The caseworkers took the time to investigate and listen to Jennifer's story. They were open-minded and practical about what needed to be done to protect Jennifer and her grandchildren.

## **Case Study 3 - \$100,000 debt incorrectly raised**

Zaina's Parenting Payment (single) was cancelled after Centrelink decided that Zaina was a member of a couple. A debt of \$100,000 was raised which was all of the Parenting Payment and some Family Tax Benefit she had received from 2002 until 2011. Surveillance footage was obtained by Centrelink, showing Zaina's ex-partner arriving and leaving her house with the children.

Zaina separated from her husband and had lived separately since 2002, but her husband visited her often to see the children, to help them with their schoolwork and pick them up and take them to school. He had some of his mail re-directed to her address as it was easy to pick up from her house. Zaina never knew his address after they separated, as she always used his mobile phone to contact him about the children. She tried to explain this to Centrelink but Centrelink did not accept her explanation.

Zaina appealed to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal and told the Tribunal more information about her situation. Welfare Rights helped take statements from her family and friends who all knew about her separation in more detail. The Tribunal agreed that Zaina was not a member of a couple for the entire period of the debt. Zaina's Parenting Payment (single) payment was restored, her debt was zeroed and the \$2,000 she had repaid towards the debt was paid back to her. She was extremely relieved not to have such a large sum of money owing to Centrelink, which she would very likely be paying off for the rest of her life.

Zaina told our Centre that it was also important to her to have the Tribunal accept that she was telling the truth.

## **Case Study 4 - Early intervention a success**

Mary married John in 2002. They planned to start a family but decided to work first to put themselves in a sound financial position. However, their plans went astray when a car that John was driving was involved in an accident. Mary was a passenger in the car and injured her back and neck. She received compensation as a result of her injuries.



They decided to pay off some of their mortgage and fix up their house with the compensation payment. Mary thought this was sensible financial decision given that John was working full-time and could continue to support the family. In 2009 Mary became pregnant and gave birth in March 2010. She stayed at home to look after her son while John continued to work. Then in October 2010 John left Mary and moved out of the family home. He continued to pay the mortgage but that was all. Mary used the Family Tax Benefit (FTB) to purchase food for herself and her son.

When Mary contacted the Welfare Rights Centre she was understandably distraught given that she was now a sole parent with no money. She applied for Parenting Payment but Centrelink rejected the claim as she was subject to a compensation preclusion period until 2014.

We lodged an appeal to a Centrelink Authorised Review Officer (ARO) requesting that the preclusion period be reduced due to Mary's special circumstances. Those circumstances were obvious to anyone who looked at her situation. Mary had suffered a substantial change to her circumstances since the commencement of the preclusion period.

Until November 2011 she was living with her ex-husband who was financially supporting her and their son. This situation had dramatically changed as she was now sole parent for her nine month old son. Her financial position was precarious with Mary supporting herself from her FTB. She had no other income. Mary was unable to work due to her caring responsibilities. Also she had served about 80% of the preclusion period.

The ARO immediately recognised Mary's precarious position. The ARO waived the remainder of the preclusion period allowing Mary to be paid parenting payment. The ARO correctly applied the policy and showed compassion and understanding of Mary's difficult circumstances in doing so. This decision was greatly appreciated by Mary who as a result could support herself and her son.

## **1.5 Tribunal representation**

The Centre represented approximately 35 people at the Social Security Appeals Tribunal during 2011-2012. Cases included large member of a couple debts (\$200,000), to rejection of claims due to residency and compensation preclusion periods. The Centre represented a number of people at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Most of these cases were settled. One Carer Allowance case went to hearing with a successful outcome.

## **1.6 Criminal advice evening shift**

In April 2012, the Centre established a fortnightly criminal evening advice service staffed by volunteer solicitors and barristers. Advice is provided to clients about the criminal prosecution process and the relationship between administrative and criminal law. This service was established with a "one off" grant of funding from the City of Sydney and will finish on 30 September 2012.

# 2.0 Policy Report

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## 2.1 Introduction

The Centre undertakes its law reform and public policy advocacy primarily via our peak bodies which are the National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN) and the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS).

The Australian Social Security system is complex and tightly targeted. The Welfare Rights Centre has a clear set of goals to guide its important law reform and policy advocacy activities. Those goals are:

1. to develop and advocate proposals for reform of Social Security legislation, administration and Government policy in order to minimise hardship and poverty in Australian society in general, and for Social Security recipients and their children in particular;
2. to ensure that the Social Security system is:
  - based on rights and entitlements, responsibilities and obligations which are clearly stated in legislation and enforceable;
  - administered under clear, publicly accessible policy guidelines;
  - characterised by a robust review and appeals systems that allows individual decisions to be challenged; and
3. to promote fair and accessible administrative law particularly in the field of income support.

## 2.2 Submissions and letters

The Welfare Rights Centre contributed to many NWRN submissions seeking to influence key Federal Government decisions in areas of social security legislation, tax reform, job seekers' engagement, employment assistance and support for people living on low incomes or in disadvantaged circumstances.

### The key submissions in 2011-12 are listed below:

- submission to Senate Standing Committee on Economics re: Inquiry into Schedule 4 of the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Further Election Commitments and Other Measure) Bill 2011.
- submission to Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) on cost of 1800 and 13 numbers, Submission on Numbering, ACMA Consultation Paper 4.
- submission to Australian Law Reform Commission Inquiry into Family Violence and Commonwealth laws
- submission to Department of Climate Change for community information campaign on Carbon Price and the Compensation arrangements.
- submission to 2011 Tax Forum.
- submission to Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into Disability Employment Impairment Tables: Provisions of Schedule 3 of the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2011.
- submission to Office of the Information Commission on Discussion Paper on charges for freedom of information requests.
- submission to Australian Council of Trade Unions Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work.
- 2012-13 Federal Budget Policy Submission Priorities Statement
- 2012-13 Federal Budget Services Submission – Improving Centrelink Services and Funding Welfare Rights programs – Priorities Statement submission to the Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work conducted by Brian Howe
- submission Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into the Stronger Futures and two related Bills, 2012.
- 13 June 2012, Submission to Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee on Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (2012 Budget and Other Measures) Bill 2012.
- Submission to Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights on payment cuts affecting single parents.

## **Appearances at Parliamentary Inquiries**

The Welfare Right Centre, working as a member organisation of the National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN), was called to give evidence at a number of Senate inquiries during the past year:

- 6 September 2011, Evidence to Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into Disability Employment Impairment Tables: Provisions of Schedule 3 of the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2011.
- 28 February 2012, Evidence to the Independent Australian Council of Trade Unions inquiry into in-secure work.
- 6 March 2012, Evidence to Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into the Stronger Futures and Related Bills 2012.
- 14 June 2012, Evidence to Parliamentary Inquiry into Submission to Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee on Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (2012 Budget and Other Measures) Bill 2012.
- 21 June, Evidence to Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights on payment cuts affecting single parents.

## **Formal letters to Politicians and relevant Government Agencies during 2011-12**

The Welfare Rights Centre endeavours to engage constructively with Members of Parliament and government agencies on policy options and the impact of its income support proposals on the lives of ordinary people. During the past year the Welfare Rights Centre contributed to the following letters which were sent via the NWRN to various politicians and agencies on a broad range of matters, including:

- Federal Budget priorities and NWRN's funding proposals;
- problems with the design and administration of the Special Benefit payment;
- inadequate rates of Newstart Allowance for people looking for work;
- changes to processes at the Brisbane Social Security Appeals Tribunal;
- problems debt collection practices by Dunn & Bradstreet & Recoveries Corp;
- impact of telephone call costs and waiting times for Centrelink recipients;
- proposal for a Disallowable Instrument to address problems with particular debts;
- on the need for Public Hearings to be held by the Senate Community Affairs legislation Committee inquiry into the extension of income management in the NT and across other disadvantaged locations and the inquiry into removal of the 2006 'grandfathering' Welfare to Work provisions;
- Centrelink deficiencies with debt prevention and debt waiver rules;
- funding for legal advice and information on income management issues in the Northern Territory and in the five areas subject to income management after 1 July 2012;
- priorities for the new Minister for Human Services;
- payment cuts affecting parents, young people and tougher job seeker compliance penalties;
- Federal Budget cuts for parents and Newstart Allowance increase;
- the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights inquiry into single parent changes affecting over 100,000 single parents; and
- concerns regarding the lack of indexation to the Pensioner Education Supplement.

## **2.3 Liaison with Government agencies, departments and the community**

### **Anti-Poverty Week**

The Welfare Rights Centre held the Chair of NSW Anti-poverty week in NSW during 2011, coordinating many meetings and events and providing administrative support, which made the week an outstanding success. Like many of our activities

during the year, we sought to link our work to the campaign to increase the rate of Newstart and other allowances by \$50 per week.

During Anti-poverty week in October 2011 the Welfare Rights Centre released the findings of surveys that we commissioned from The Australia Institute. The surveys revealed that Australian's believed that the rate of Newstart Allowance was too low, that, on average, it should be increased by \$86 a week. We also asked people to indicate what changes they would need to make if they unexpectedly found that they had to live on just \$35 a day. Sixty per cent stated that they would have to stop buying fresh food; almost half would not visit a doctor when sick. Seventy seven per cent would cut back on electricity or gas. Nearly one in two (45 per cent) would stop studying or training.

## **2.4 Liaison with Government agencies and the community**

Staff members have attended many meetings with NSW and Federal Government agencies as well as within the community sector.

The Centre regularly attends a variety of local meetings to consult with the Department of Human Services on service delivery issues. These meetings include:

- the Department of Human Services Homelessness Advisory Group (NSW)
- the Department of Human Services Mental Health Advisory Group (NSW)
- the Department of Human Services Employment Services Advisory Group (NSW)
- the Department of Human Services Aboriginal Advisory Group (NSW).

The Centre also participated in consultations with the development of the NSW Ageing Strategy that was recently released by the NSW Minister for Ageing.

Gerard Thomas, one of the Centre's staff members, is an ACOSS Board member and is also an ACOSS policy adviser on employment and social security issues. The Centre also works closely with NCOSS and is a member of the NSW Homelessness Community Alliance.

## **2.5 Media**

The Centre sought to ensure that issues affecting Australians on income support received sufficient scrutiny. We responded to issues as they arose, but also sought to raise broader issues facing people whose primary source of income is a Centrelink pension or allowance. In addition to writing and distributing media releases for the Welfare Rights Centre, we also wrote and distributed media releases on behalf of the National Welfare Rights Network.

Ten media statements were released in 2011-12 for the NWRN and one was released directly for the Centre. That release was about positive proposals by the NSW Government with respect to boarding house reform. Examining the level of media coverage on matters related to income support and social policy in Australia the Centre has achieved considerable success in gaining coverage for what are often very complex and at times controversial issues.

# 3.0 Community Education and Liaison

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## 3.1 Long term goals

The community education and training goals are:

- to provide high quality, accessible and targeted community education; and,
- to provide specialist support to other NSW community agencies.

## 3.2 Education and community liaison

### Education and community liaison

In 2011-2012, the Centre continued to give priority to community agencies, community workers and dis-advantaged groups for education.

From June 2011 to July 2012 the Centre provided bi-monthly training sessions on social security law to groups of community workers who service clients in our target disadvantaged groups. The courses also received accreditation from the Australian Association of Social Workers in June 2012. In addition, we continued to provide targeted training to community organisations that support disadvantaged groups. Particular focus was given this year to interagency and community groups within the Bankstown local government area about the introduction of income management to the area, and to community and advocacy groups working with people with disabilities on the changes to Disability Support Pension.

Throughout 2011-2012, the Centre was involved in the National Multicultural Advisory Group, the NSW Centrelink Homelessness Reference Group, the NSW Homelessness Community Alliance, the NSW Federation of Non-Government Organisations (FONGA) and the ACOSS Board.

# 4.0 Publications

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## 4.1 Long term goals

The Centre's overall publication goals are to produce and distribute clear, informed, effective and targeted, information and policy advocacy material designed to:

- increase accessibility to the social security system;
- educate and increase community awareness about Social security issues, payments and rights; and
- improve the social security system in Australia.

In pursuit of these goals, the key publications for 2010-2011 were:

- "Rights Review" quarterly newsletter;
- Independent Social Security Handbook ONLINE;
- Social Security Reporter;
- Factsheets; and
- Website.

## 4.2 "Rights Review"

"Rights Review" is the quarterly newsletter of the Welfare Rights Centre. Its purpose is to:

- provide information on recent changes to social security law and administration;
- raise awareness of social security and employment matters;
- assist community workers to help their clients; and
- promote the services provided by the Centre.

The Centre published four issues of "Rights Review" in 2011-2012, reporting every three months on changes to social security law and administration. In 2011-2012 particular themes or issues of the journal focused on early intervention casework, best practice Centrelink decisions, practitioner's guides for community workers and brief updates of all the policy work outlined at section 2 of this Annual Report.

## 4.3 The Independent Social Security Handbook

In 2011-2012 the Centre continued to produce the ONLINE EDITION of the "Independent Social Security Handbook". The primary purpose of the Handbook is to inform community workers about social security law and Centrelink administrative practices and to assist them to better advocate for their clients with regard to Social Security payments.

The Centre updated the ONLINE Handbook four times during 2011-2012 to take into account changes to social security law and policy. In the 2011-2012 financial year there were substantial changes to the social security system including changes to the rules regarding the Disability Support Pensions and the extension of income management. The Handbook fully encompassed all these changes and more to help community workers and other users of the resource to assist their clients with social security problems.

The Handbook ONLINE continued to be available free to community workers in Tasmania with the support of the Tasmanian Government.

In 2011/12 the drafting was undertaken for the 7th hardcopy edition of the Independent Social Security Handbook with an emphasis on casework scenarios and practical solutions.

## 4.4 Social Security Reporter

The Centre has produced the Social Security Reporter (SSR) since November 2005. The purpose of the SSR is to

provide a useful ready reference for Social Security practitioners and others with a particular interest in this area of the law. The SSR provides an easy and accessible means of ensuring that practitioners can keep abreast of important case law developments. It also serves as a useful reference tool for research on particular Social Security issues.

The Centre Office Manager is the Project Manager of this publication and Centre staff members contribute to editions wherever possible.

#### **4.5 Factsheets and brochures**

The Centre has 30 Factsheets available to assist and inform people about Social Security matters. Two Factsheets are available in five languages other than English (Spanish, Mandarin, Serbian, Arabic and Vietnamese). A complete list of the publications produced by the Centre and the NWRN can be found on the NWRN website.

In 2011-2012 we again revised our existing Factsheets to take into account changes to social security law and policy.

#### **4.6 National Welfare Rights Network Website [www.welfarerights.org.au](http://www.welfarerights.org.au)**

The NWRN website, which is hosted by the Welfare Rights Centre (NSW) continued to be updated and maintained by the Centre's Office Manager. The NWRN's website, which is hosted and managed by the Centre, has over 300 pages of information to assist people with social security and welfare rights matters. During 2011/12 all the groundwork was laid for the launch of a new website.

# 5.0 Funding

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## 5.1 Major funders

Funding for the period 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012 was received on a recurrent basis from:

- NSW Family & Community Services – \$403,468
- Commonwealth Government - Welfare Rights Program – \$231,200; and
- NSW Government Community Legal Centre Funding Program – \$121,977.

## 5.2 Welfare Rights Trade Union and HESTA Programs

Throughout the year the Centre continued to provide service to and receive support from the following unions involved in its Trade Union Welfare Rights Program:

- NSW Independent Education Union;
- NSW Nurses' Association;
- NSW Teachers Federation;
- NSW Branch of United Voice;
- Public Service Association (NSW); and
- Police Association of NSW.

In addition, the Centre has continued its service arrangement with HESTA, under which HESTA members who are injured or ill and without income support, are provided with advice and assistance in relation to their social security entitlements and income protection.

The Centre is appreciative of this support and the opportunity the Trade Union and HESTA program provides the Centre to assist low income working people. Throughout the 2011-2012 year, the main features were:

- advising and representing trade union and HESTA members with regard to their Social Security matters;
- providing quarterly bulletins to each union with updates of changes to Social Security Law; and
- writing articles for publication in trade union journals to inform readers about their correct social security entitlements.

## 5.3 Income generation

In addition to the revenue from HESTA and the trade unions detailed above, the Centre also continues to generate further income through sales of the newsletter ("Rights Review"), the Social Security Reporter and sales of the ONLINE EDITION of the Independent Social Security Handbook.

## 5.4 Project Grants

The Centre successfully made a submission for a "one off" grant of funding from the City of Sydney to provide a volunteer program to assist clients facing prosecution for social security offences.

## 5.5 Auditor's Report

The audit for this period was conducted by Steven J Miller & Co. The Auditor's Report forms part of this Annual Report and is attached at section 7.



# 6.0 Management

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## 6.1 Board of Directors

Throughout the period the following people played the very important role of planning and overseeing the Centre's work in their capacity as members of the Board of Directors.

## 6.2 The Directors who held office at any time during 2011-2012 were:

- Estelle Adamek
- Liz Biok
- James Campbell
- Diana Covell (Chairperson until 19 October 2011)
- Tony Eardley
- Carol Howard
- Michelle Jones
- Meghan Carruthers
- Terry Mason (Chairperson from 19 October 2011)
- Cristina Pebaque
- Stella Topaz

Details about each of these Board Members are set out in the Auditor's Report.

## 6.3 Staff Members

- Matthew Butt                      Litigation Solicitor
- Lee Hanson                        Principal Solicitor
- Karen Lua                         Administrative Secretary
- Catalina Loyola                 Office Manager
- Amelia Meers                     Community Education and Liaison Officer/Caseworker
- Carolyn Odgers                 Solicitor/Caseworker
- Maree O'Halloran               Director
- Gerard Thomas                 Policy and Media Officer
- Danny Shaw                      Senior Caseworker
- Cass Wong                        Volunteer Coordinator/ Caseworker
- Katie Wrigley                    Handbook Researcher/Caseworker

Centre had 11 ongoing positions in 2011/12, most full-time but some part-time.

Trinity Business and Accounting services are engaged to undertake the Centre's accounting requirements.

## 6.4 Volunteer workers

The Centre's success could not have been achieved without the help of our unpaid volunteer workers throughout the 2011-2012 year. At any given time the Centre has about 10 casework assistant volunteers who provide an invaluable service each week on our advice shifts. Special mention should also go to our administration volunteer workers who help with the administrative functions in the office. These volunteers perform their duties with style, diligence, patience and much skill.

The casework volunteer workers, who have the challenging task of direct contact with people who contact us for advice or referral, assisted in 3,978 advice matters throughout the year. They displayed excellent communication and interpersonal skills in assisting many highly distressed clients. Their dedication and enthusiasm provides an inspiration to all of us at the Centre.

The Centre gratefully acknowledges the role played by all our volunteer workers.

These workers contribute services to the Centre valued at over \$130,000 each year. We hope they have enjoyed being at the Centre as much as we have enjoyed having them and we look forward to their continuing involvement with the Centre. To those who left the Centre in the 2011–2011 year we wish them well in their future endeavours and thank them for their years of service.

The volunteer workers who were at the Centre at any time during 2011-2012 were:

- Estelle Adamek
- Suzanne Castellias
- Jowa Chan
- Katrina Chianese
- Jessica Chiu
- Clancy Goslett-King
- Shirley Innes
- David King
- Millicent McCreath
- Shanu Rana
- Joni Sham
- Lisa Soo
- Petrina Slaytor
- Adam Stipcevic
- Tanya Sun
- Stephen Tan
- Mark Tang
- Emma TenKate
- Sharissa Thirukumar
- Sarah Trau
- Hannah Vieira
- Mary Warner
- Daniel Wells
- Scarlet Wilcock
- Shanni Zoeller

The Centre is also greatly appreciative of the volunteer work undertaken by the following lawyers as part of our City of Sydney program: Dr Richard Brittain, Caroline Dobraszczyk, Nick Felton, Anna Kerr.

## **7.0 Auditor's Report**

The Auditor's Report, prepared by Steven J Miller & Co, is part of this Annual Report. It is available on request because it is produced in a different format.