

Community Legal Services on the Mid North Coast – Systemic Advocacy Project

Background

For many years local community members and professionals have been concerned about access to affordable legal representation for disadvantaged communities living on the MID NORTH COAST of NSW.

Approximately eight years ago the Kempsey Neighbourhood Centre, in collaboration with Port Macquarie, Bellingen, Nambucca Valley, Forster and Yarrahappinni Neighbourhood Centres submitted a joint expression of interest to access funding for a CLC on the Mid North Coast to the Legal Services Section of the Attorney General's Department. No response was received.

In late 2005 a group of interested people, including local solicitors, local government representatives, community service providers and community members met to discuss the possibility of working towards obtaining ongoing funding to establish a CLC on the Mid North Coast. For various reasons this group disbanded after approximately one year. *Disability Advocacy NSW* which operates 3 offices on the MNC in Port Macquarie, Taree and Coffs Harbour coordinated a new push for the group to re-form in early 2008.

DA's particular interest was that people with a disability in this region had poor access to legal support.

From the first meeting in March 2008 the Mid North Coast CLC Project Group was re-formed, drawing on a wide range services, representing many of the groups identified as having high needs as well as the geographical spread of the Mid North Coast. The number of community services and individuals committed to support the Mid North Coast CLC Project (approximately 100 individuals) is an indication of the perceived need for a CLC on the Mid North Coast.

The Mid North Coast CLC Project group made an application to the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW in May 2008 for a small grant to prepare a Legal Needs Analysis (LNA) which would require the collection and analysis of statistical data from across the Mid North Coast region. The Mid North Coast CLC Project group was successful in this application and in July 2008 began collecting data relating to the legal needs of the people on the Mid North Coast.

In addition to this project, the Mid North Coast CLC Project Group has developed a Legal Resources Directory and organised training on AVOs for service providers in Taree.

Current Situation - 2010

Following the release of the Legal Needs Analysis the *Disability Advocacy NSW* Deputy CEO and Project Group members met with the Attorney General (with the assistance Federal and State MPs Robert Oakeshott and Peter Besseling) who asked for a proposal to be put to him for a MNC CLC. This was developed & submitted by *Disability Advocacy NSW*. Following this proposal the AG announced funding for a generalist MNC CLC and worked with the NSW government to also contribute towards the funding for the new centre.

Post Script - 2011

DA formed a new group called Advocacy Law Alliance www.advocacylaw.org.au and was successful in its tender to establish and operate the Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre. The Centre commenced operations in 2011 with 4 legal staff and assists people with a disability with legal support, as well as other disadvantaged groups. The MNCCLC office is in Port Macquarie www.mncclc.org.au.