

Welfare Rights Centre

Annual Report

July 2008 to June 2009

Prepared for 2009 Annual General Meeting

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Introduction

The Welfare Rights Centre is a Community Legal Centre which specialises in Social Security law, administration and policy. Established in 1983, the Centre provides expert advice and representation on Social Security and Family Assistance matters. Now in its twenty fifth year, the Centre currently employs 13 workers and benefits from the service of unpaid volunteer workers and its Board members to provide a wide range of services covering casework, policy analysis and advocacy, publications and community education.

1.0 Casework

1.1 Casework service

The Welfare Rights Centre provides a casework service to people with income support problems that come under Social Security and Family Assistance law and to agencies assisting people with such problems. The aim of the Centre's casework service is both to achieve 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, 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 law and appeals. Further assistance may be provided in complex cases, matters of wide application, and matters in which 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 2008 to June 2009 the Centre provided assistance to 3,164 clients. We provided 4226 "advice activities" and opened 497 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).

Age	2007-08	2008-09
• 0-18	2%	2%
• 18-34	15%	19%
• 35-49	22%	28%
• 50-64	18%	22%
• 65+	7%	11%
• Not supplied	36%	18%

Gender	2007-08	2008-09
• Female	56%	56%
• Male	39%	41%
• Not supplied	5%	3%

Country of birth

The top countries of birth of clients who disclosed country of birth was as follows. Note that early on in the last financial year the Centre ceased using our database's "default" position of assuming a person who has not disclosed their country of birth was born in Australia. This has resulted in a larger number of clients recorded as not having disclosed their country of birth (551), and a lower percentage of clients recorded as having been born in Australia.

	2007-08		2008-09
• Australia	72%	Australia	60.2%
• New Zealand & Cook Is	2.8%	United Kingdom	3.9%
• United Kingdom	2.8%	New Zealand and Cook Is	3.5%
• Lebanon	2.1%	China	2.9%
• China	1.7%	Lebanon	2.2%
• Philippines	1.1%	Egypt	1.5%
• Vietnam	1.1%	India	1.5%
• Italy	0.8%	Greece	1.3%
• Iran	0.8%	Philippines	1.2%
• Turkey	0.8%	Vietnam	1%
• Fiji	0.8%	Italy	0.8%
• Italy	0.8%	Chile	0.8%

Clients of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background:

3% of all clients identified themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, or both.

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

• Disability Support Pension	688
• Parenting Payment	561
• Newstart Allowance	555
• Age Pension	324
• Youth Allowance	207
• Family Tax Benefit	187
• Carer Payment	126

1.3 Casework issues during 2008- 2009

Debts and prosecutions

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 - particularly where the client is at risk of criminal prosecution in respect of their debt.

The range of debt-related casework undertaken by the Centre's caseworkers in the last financial year has been varied. At any one time we were providing assistance and advocacy in relation to debts raised due to "member of a couple" determinations, income and asset assessments and other situations where Centrelink has decided that a person was not qualified for income support of family assistance payments in a past period. We have also done intensive work in "newer" types of debt determinations, including some high-profile cases where Centrelink has assumed a level of income based on a person's "patron transaction data reports" compiled by Star City Casino. In the 2008-2009 year we saw some successes at the SSAT in arguing that this method of assessing income was incorrect at law, and we now await an AAT decision on this issue.

Throughout the year the Centrelink continued to work on Social Security payment debts caused by the non-assessment of income, where our clients were overpaid despite the fact that their income was properly assessed by Centrelink for the purpose of assessing their Family Tax Benefit entitlement. This issue has been on our casework radar for several years, and we aim to take up the broader policy issues with the relevant Departments as part of our "debt prevention strategy" work.

Our efforts to secure funding to engage a criminal solicitor continue. This year we were fortunate to have a solicitor volunteering for us who previously worked for the Commonwealth DPP. She assisted by way of advising clients what to expect in the prosecution process, and providing feedback to caseworkers. Where there are no grounds for waiver, or where we judge it wise to allow the prosecution to run before administrative review of the debt, the clients she has spoken to have at least been aware of issues that should be canvassed with their criminal solicitor – either in terms of their plea, or regarding mitigating factors that may influence sentencing. Her invaluable contribution has reinforced our belief that it is imperative that we secure funding to employ a criminal solicitor to go part of the way towards meeting this huge unmet need in the community.

Recognition of same-sex de facto relationships

We were contacted by over 100 people since late January 2009 regarding the recognition of same-sex de facto relationships under Social Security and Family Assistance law. We are provided one-off advice to inter-state callers - advising them to call their local Welfare Rights if ongoing representation was required. Callers have included:

- people in long-standing relationships who plan not to declare their relationship, and who are taking steps to "cover their tracks" so as to avoid Centrelink scrutiny;
- people who have sponsored same-sex partners for immigration purposes and are confused about the interaction of Social Security and Immigration law regarding de facto relationships;
- people who fear coming out to Centrelink, and want to know whether this may be avoided;
- people wanting to know whether there is any way their partner can retain Social Security after 1 July, because they are unwilling or unable to support them;
- a lesbian couple, one of whom is on Age Pension and the other supports herself on an overseas pension; and
- people who continue to reside in a close relationship with an ex-partner, and who do not know how to explain the nature of their ongoing close relationship.

As we anticipated, several clients have contacted who declared their same-sex relationship to Centrelink as being de facto now regret having done so and may not, in fact, be members of a couple for Centrelink purposes. We have had long interviews with these clients, establishing whether they have grounds to retract their declaration, or whether they may be able to seek to be treated as single under section 24 of the Social Security Act. Where there are issues regarding access to a partner's assets, we consider the Hardship Provisions, whereby the value of assets may be disregarded if "special circumstances" exist.

We have set up folders in the NACLC BBS "intranet" which contain same-sex relationship resource materials for welfare rights advocates. Resources currently include:

- issues papers prepared by Welfare Rights, and by other organisations
- primary resources, eg, research papers – qualitative and quantitative
- referral information
- community education resources

Payment Pending Review

The Centre raised its concerns regarding the restrictive Payment Pending Review guidelines with Centrelink's Business Manager of Legal Services. After much negotiation, new guidelines were put in place which addressed our concerns. We are now finding it much easier to secure payment pending review.

New Zealand and residence issues

We have observed that Departmental and Centrelink policy guidelines regarding eligibility for DSP under the NZ Agreement are confused (and confusing) – both in terms of what constitutes a “severely disabled” under the Agreement and the Agreement’s convoluted definition of residence requirements for DSP. We successfully represented a client at the AAT on this residence issue. Centrelink asserted that he could not qualify under the Agreement because he did not have ten years “working life residence” in New Zealand; we successfully argued that there is no such requirement in the Agreement.

In the 2008-2009 year we also saw a resurgence of newly arrived resident’s waiting period cases – generally skilled migrants who have no means of support and who cannot find work due to the economic downturn. This means a return to the frustrations of trying to establish a “substantial change of circumstances beyond the person’s control”.

2.0 Policy Report

2.1 Introduction - work shared with the National Welfare Rights Network

Much of the Centre’s policy advocacy is done in conjunction with, and often on behalf of, the National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN). Set out below is therefore just a brief summary of some of the highlights of the policy work that Sydney was particularly involved in over the last 12 months.

Key achievements in 2008/09

Key areas of policy and media activity work over the year are outlined below. We were able to work strategically and effectively with a wide range of community organisations and relevant stakeholders to achieve a number of positive results.

In particular we were:

- instrumental players in a broader campaign to draw attention to the inadequacy of payments, with a particular focus on the rates of Newstart Allowance, which was around \$60 a week less than the rate of the pension and payments for young people studying, which can be as low as \$86 a week;
- first to alert the community that the Federal Government planned to break the historic link between payments to sole parents and payments to other pensioners in the 2009/10 Federal Budget;
- able to bring about a relaxation of strict, inflexible rules which made it difficult for parents to combine their roles as parents with their requirements imposed under the harsh “welfare to work” regime; and
- able to expose that 15 per cent of people who lost their payments under the harsh compliance regime under the “welfare to work” rules became homeless.

While we were not successful in convincing the Rudd Government to cease to impose eight week no payment penalties we did achieve much greater levels of discretion for both employment services and Centrelink to not impose penalties and had a major victory with the introduction of a less brutal Centrelink penalty system. We achieved significant modifications to the design of the new penalty system so that where penalties are imposed job seekers will at least get sufficient warning before their payments are “docked” under the “no show, no pay” system.

Our advocacy resulted in significant benefits for unemployed people as the impacts of the global financial crisis began to take effect. This is both remarkable and unprecedented, particularly in the context of the harsh treatment that unemployed people endured under the previous Government. We achieved a temporary relaxation of the Liquid Assets Waiting Periods. In addition, people who lost jobs as a result of the global financial crisis were able to gain

immediate access to personalised assistance such as career advice and training instead of having to wait at least three months as under the previous system. The Government made this extra assistance limited until 2011 and provided for a review of the revised threshold before that time. The Centre continues to lobby the Government to make these beneficial changes permanent features of our system of support for newly unemployed people.

From 1 July 2009 the new Job Services Australia saw a move from “work first” to a “work ready” approach, one which we had consistently argued for over many years. The new employment services system promised greater assistance, support and training for disadvantaged and long-term unemployed people. “Caps” were removed from a range of important services and programs which supported vulnerable and disadvantaged job seekers. This meant that job seekers in the Personal Support Program and young people in Jobs, Placement, Employment and Training Program who have significant non-vocational barriers to employment will no longer have to languish on queues waiting for a place in a program.

Community concern over the living standards of pensioners and the acknowledged difficulties living on low, fixed incomes for a prolonged period of time ignited a storm of protest and indignation about the living standards of pensioners in Australia. The Centre took part in a broad community campaign which drew attention to the need for increased levels of income support for unemployed people, students and single parents. Unfortunately, the Government rushed legislation through Parliament with minimal opportunities for scrutiny.

The Centre sought to highlight changes to our system of income support for unemployed people and we were able to successfully draw attention to the inadequacy of payments for unemployed people, young people and students through community debate. Addressing the paltry levels of payments for unemployed people remains our key task for the year ahead.

The 2009/10 Federal Budget resulted in historic gains for those pensioners seen as more “deserving” and an unfortunate and unprecedented break in the nexus between benefits for age and disability pensioners, and the levels of support provided to single parents. In other areas our public advocacy brought a modicum of success, with the Government responding positively to our proposals for reform of the system of students’ income support although the implementation dates for these changes has now been deferred. This will result in changes to the Age of Independence, an increase to the Parental Income Test level to bring in into parity with that for Family Tax Benefit A and earnings income tests, extension of payment for Masters by Coursework and a range of other annual grants for those commencing university courses. These changes should increase the opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue a formal education.

We were able to effectively utilise the experiences of our clients through our casework to achieve major long needed changes to the eligibility for Carer Payment (Child) which will see wider eligibility for parents of children with a disability. It is estimated that about 20,000 parents will benefit from the change.

Our critique of numerous problems with the Job Capacity Assessment process found fertile ground, with a series of modifications announced over the past 12 months with more positive changes in store. The Government took on board our concerns regarding the problem caused by the automatic referral for reassessment of people in receipt of Disability Support Pension if they voluntarily looked for work and amended the law to remove this risk to pension entitlement of participation in employment.

The Government’s response to the Homelessness White Paper, *The Road Home*, saw the adoption of a number of key policy reform proposals that had long been championed by the Centre, including the option of weekly payments for people who were vulnerable and a greater focus on prevention and support.

Our advocacy led to significant changes to the Department’s litigation practices. Our intervention has led to considerable savings for Government, and a fairer deal for income support recipients when accessing their appeal rights with AAT appeals lodged by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) falling from 45 per month prior to the review and to around 2 per month.

2.2 Submissions and letters

The Centre contributed in a significant way to the preparation and presentation of a number of submissions to various inquiries and also presented evidence to a number of public hearings. Highlights included the following:

- submission to Senate Inquiry into Schooling Requirements Bill
- submission to Senate inquiry into Same-Sex relationships reforms
- submission to Senate Inquiry into Pension reform
- submission to Employment Services Review
- submission to Senate Inquiry into Employment Services Contracts
- 2008-09 Federal Budget Priorities Submission.

The Centre took up a number of important policy issues with Federal Government over the recent period. Matters raised with Government and Departments included: difficulties caused by Centrelink's failure to send out individual notices regarding the 1 July 2009 same-sex reforms; problems with Centrelink's assessment of "income" for people with gambling problems and its use to determine whether clients had Centrelink overpayments and practical problems experienced by job seekers in meeting strict rules regarding early release of superannuation under the hardship provisions. A more extensive list of submissions and meetings that the Centre participated in over the past year is included in the 2008-09 Annual Report of the NWRN.

2.3 Papers and presentations

In 2008-2009, the Centre addressed and/or presented papers at the following conferences:

- 27 February, "Climate Change Issues", Public Interest Advocacy Centre Conference, Sydney
- 12 March, Presentation at ACOSS Seminar – Payment Reform: problems and the way forward, Sydney
- 25 March, "Banking for Good or Evil" Parliament House, Sydney
- 3 April, "Tackling Poverty in Australia" Politics in the Pub, Sydney
- 15 May, "Consumer Credit Crisis Roundtable", Melbourne
- 5 June, "TAFE Teachers State Equity Conference", Sydney

2.4 Liaison with Government agencies, departments and the community

Over the year the Centre contributed to the Network's delegations meeting with representatives from a range of Government departments and agencies, including Centrelink; the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Human Services. The Centre also met with Centrelink at our offices on a number of occasions during the year.

The Centre co-chaired the NSW Centrelink Homelessness Reference Group and is part of a NSW Homeless Alliance. We also took part in Government consultations around the Review of Australia's Future Taxation System and The Pension Review. Staff at the Centre also fulfill the important role as income support and employment policy adviser to the Australian Council of Social Service, and have taken part in many NWRN meetings of both the Committee and the Members over the past year. A productive working relationship was also established between the Centre and the Australia Institute.

Particular mention should be made of the efforts of the Centre over the past year in increasing community awareness of the serious detrimental impacts of the Government's same-sex reforms on many Australians, particularly on older people and people with HIV. Gay and Lesbian organisations relied heavily upon the expertise and knowledge of the Centre in understanding and explaining the impacts of the changes on vulnerable Australians. The Centre was engaged in numerous meetings and briefings with community organisations about potential problems with the Government's same-sex reforms and the need for grandfathering provisions (which the Government decided not to accept).

Community organisations (and Centrelink) relied heavily upon the expertise of the Centre in the development of information for income support recipients about the 1 July 2009 changes and a large number of clients were assisted by the Centre in the lead up to the changes. A staff member from the Centre represented the NWRN on the Centrelink Same-sex Consultative Community Reference Group and the Centre's work resulted in a successful grant from the Attorney General to provide casework advice and assistance for people affected by the same-sex reforms.

The Centre also provided a staff member to represent NWRN on the DEEWR Participation Taskforce, which was charged with examining inflexible participation requirements for parents, and ways to assist parents better meet their requirements to look for work while raising children on their own. In the 2009/10 Federal Budget a number of significant changes were announced which will result in parents being able to better combine their roles as carers with their participation requirements. Government agencies will also take steps to increase the awareness amongst parents of the various exemption policies which can assist families in times of crisis, including during times where families are experiencing the effects of domestic violence.

The Centre's Principal Solicitor took part in the DEEWR Litigation Taskforce, which was established by the Secretary of DEEWR to review the principles for litigation and to address concerns over the extraordinarily high level of Departmental appeals which, according to Welfare Rights, placed unrepresented clients at a distinct disadvantage.

2.5 Other policy issues

The first year of the new Government resulted in a busy and challenging time for the Welfare Rights Centre, which undertook a significant role in policy debates around payment reforms, review of the tax and transfer system and a move to a more responsive system of support for disadvantaged job seekers. Responding to Government policies and Centrelink practices in contributing to, and exacerbating homelessness, was also an important part of the Centre's contribution over the past year.

2.6 Media

The Centre regularly provided background to the media on a wide variety of Centrelink and income support issues, with the most consistent topics being inadequate rates of payments for unemployed people, eight week no payment penalties, homelessness, employment service reforms and the impact of the same sex changes on income support recipients. The Centre made a number of media statements over the year on Federal Budget changes, employment services changes, pension reforms and the need for extra support for job seekers and problems caused by the imposition of Social Security penalties.

In the last year the following media releases were produced for the NWRN:

- 18 November 2008 Tough Rudd welfare changes to leave parents with children and mentally ill out in the cold
- 21 January 2009 Government study reveals Centrelink penalties leads to homelessness
- 13 February 2009 Government and Greens deal to help newly unemployed
- 24 February 2009 National Welfare Rights Network welcomes help for unemployed people
- 12 March 2009 Single parents neglected by Pension Review
- 11 April 2009 Single parents seek refuge as pension anxiety starts to bite
- 1 May 2009 Youth compact could save a generation, but handle with care
- 11 May 2009 The most vulnerable need protection in Budget of tough choices urges National Welfare Rights Network
- 13 May 2009 Government delivers historic increase for pensioners but where is the "fair go" for parents and the unemployed?
- 14 May 2009 Welfare challenge to backbenchers: live on \$227 a week

2.7 Projects

The Centre put a funding proposal to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to produce a wallet card for job seekers about the new Social security penalty system from 1 July 2009. DEEWR agreed to provide resources for the production of an independent information product as part of a job seekers rights and responsibilities awareness project.

3.0 Community Education and Training and Volunteer Workers

3.1 Long term goals

The community education and training goals are:

- to provide high quality, accessible and targeted community legal education;
- to ensure that the work of the Welfare Rights Centre is widely known and supported throughout NSW in order to maximise its accessibility and strengthen community support for the Centre;
- to ensure that the Welfare Rights Centre plays an appropriate role within, and for the advancement of, the Community Legal Centre movement in Australia.

3.2 Education and community liaison

In 2008-2009, the Centre continued to target disadvantaged groups for education. CLE seminars were targeted to community organisations that support disadvantaged groups and new resources were developed. Particular focus was given this year to same-sex and compliance changes to Social Security law.

More than 50 training seminars were presented to community organizations, including youth centres, women's refuges, homelessness and accommodation services, hospital social workers, youth and migrant organisations, financial counsellors, other community legal centres and other community organizations advocating on behalf of disadvantaged clients.

Regional training was held in Lismore in relation to same sex changes to Social Security law. Our program of training for Community Legal Centres and the Legal Aid Commission Network continued.

New resources that were developed in response to legislative changes include new factsheets on compliance and same sex changes, a "wallet card" on the new compliance regime and material for inclusion in a NSW Department of Corrective Services DVD for prisoners.

Throughout 2008-2009, the Centre continued to be involved in the NSW Multicultural Advisory Forum as community co-convenor and in the NSW Centrelink Homelessness Reference Group.

3.3 Volunteer workers

The Centre's volunteer workers program continued with new volunteers being recruited and a number of group and individual induction sessions being held throughout the year.

The number of volunteer workers at the Centre increased to about 15 to 20 at any point in time. Volunteers who left generally did so because they obtained paid employment or because of study commitments. Ongoing training was provided to volunteer workers in addition to a formal training and feedback session. Volunteer contribution was again acknowledged with two social functions during the year as a small token of our thanks. Feedback from volunteer workers continues to be positive.

4.0 Publications

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 empower the community about Social Security issues, payments and rights; and;
- improve the Social Security system in Australia.

In pursuit of these goals, the key publications for 2008-2009 were:

- "rights review" quarterly newsletter
- Independent Social Security Handbook ONLINE
- Independent Social Security Handbook 6th edition hardcopy
- Social Security Reporter
- Wallet Card for job seekers and young people
- Factsheets
- 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 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 2008-2009, reporting every three months on changes to Social Security law and administration. In 2008-2009 particular themes or issues in "rights review" focused on the needs of unemployed people, the new compliance regime, the same-sex reforms and social security prosecution. "rights review" was used as one of the Centre's key advocacy tools, and also provided an important update on changes to Social Security and Family Assistance law through the regular "what's happening when" feature in each edition.

4.3 The Independent Social Security Handbook

In 2009-2009 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 2008-2009 to take into account changes to Social Security law and policy. In the 2008-2009 financial year there were substantial changes to the Social Security system including the same-sex reform and new compliance regime. 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, and Queensland due to arrangements made between the Centre and the relevant state government department.

In 2007 HSNet withdrew its agreement to fund the ONLINE edition. The Law and Justice Foundation of NSW generously provided a grant of \$25,000 in order to fill the gap in the 2007-2008 financial year so that we could continue to provide free access to the ONLINE edition for community workers and organisation in NSW. The Centre

was not able to secure funding for 2008-2009. In the event that a bulk interagency subscription is not purchased by the NSW government, the Centre will seek funding agency by agency. If that fails, the Centre will be obliged to seek individual annual subscriptions from community organisations. The Centre has set this process in train in Victoria, and Western Australia. The Queensland Government has outsourced its funding for this type of project to QCOSS. QCOSS will take out a bulk subscription for 2009-2010 and hopefully following years.

The Centre is still hopeful that the NSW Government will take out a bulk subscription to ensure that community organisations and agencies who are assisting vulnerable and disadvantaged people continue to receive free access to the ONLINE Handbook. We will be pursuing this objective as vigorously as possible in 2009-2010.

4.4 Independent Social Security Handbook 6th edition hardcopy

In 2007-2008, a major rewrite and edit of the 6th edition of the Handbook was undertaken to take into account all the major changes to Social Security law and policy since the publication of the 5th edition in April 2004. In 2008-2009 the 6th edition Handbook was published and distributed. The official launch of the Handbook was attended by dignitaries such as the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Mr Alan Kirkland, Chief Executive Officer of the Legal Aid Commission, and Mr Geoff Mulherin of the Law and Justice Foundation.

The Centre exceeded our aim of selling 500 copies. All individuals or organisations that purchased the 6th edition of the Handbook were also provided with a free subscription for 12 months to the ONLINE edition, which is updated quarterly, with encouragement to eventually take out an annual subscription.

4.5 Social Security Reporter

The Centre has producing this publication from 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 Administrator is the Project Manager of this publication and Centre staff members contribute to each edition of the Social Security Reporter.

4.6 Wallet card for job seekers and young people

In 2008-2009, the Welfare Rights Centre received a grant from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to produce a wallet card aimed at young people and jobseekers. The project was timed to coincide with the introduction of the new compliance regime, which came into effect 1 July 2009, and contains information about job seekers' rights, responsibilities and obligations. It also simplifies the complex new compliance regime, explaining the different types of penalties and how to appeal.

Young people are disproportionately affected by Social Security penalties. In 2007-2008 one in four of all participation failures were imposed on young people between the ages of 18 and 21 years. More than ever, young people need independent advice and information about Centrelink. The wallet cards have all the telephone numbers of Welfare Rights services around the country.

The Centre also had designed and produced a Welfare Rights poster to match the wallet cards. The poster has all details about how to contact the Welfare Rights Centre for advice or assistance with Centrelink or Social Security matters.

4.7 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 2008-2009, the Centre fully updated the 30 existing Factsheets with all the changes to Social Security law, published on the website and in print, to assist and inform people about Social Security matters. A new Factsheet "Declaring your same-sex relationship to Centrelink" was developed with a small grant from the AURORA foundation.

4.8 National Welfare Rights Network Website www.welfarerights.org.au

The NWRN website, which is hosted by the Welfare Rights Centre, Sydney, continued to be updated and maintained by the Centre's Administrator. 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.

5.0 Funding

5.1 Major funders

Funding for the period 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 was received from:

- NSW Department of Community Services – \$374,734
- Commonwealth Government - Welfare Rights Program – \$320,962
- CLC Funding Program - (NSW) – \$114,829

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 Teachers Federation;
- NSW Nurses Association;
- NSW Independent Education Union;
- NSW Branch of the Australian Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Worker's Union (Miscellaneous Workers Division);
- 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 greatly appreciative of this support and the opportunity it provides the Centre to assist low income working people. Throughout the 2008-2009 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 casework services to HESTA and the trade unions above, the Centre also continues to generate further income through sales of the newsletter ("rights review") and sales of the ONLINE EDITION of the Handbook. The Centre has also received grants from the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW towards both the ONLINE and 6th hardcopy edition of the Handbook.

5.4 Auditor's Report

The audit for this period was conducted by Kazzi and Associates. The Auditor's Report forms part of this Annual Report and is attached at section 7.

6.0 Management

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 2008-2009 were:

- Alan Kirkland (resigned October 2008)
- Eleri Morgan-Thomas (appointed October 2008, resigned June 2009)
- Estelle Adamek
- Liz Biok
- James Campbell
- Diana Covell (Chairperson)
- Tony Eardley
- Carol Howard
- Michelle Jones (appointed October 2008)
- Meghan Magnusson
- Terry Mason
- Kerry O'Neil
- Cristina Pebaque

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

6.3 Paid workers

- Dianne Anagnos Acting Principal Solicitor (since February 2009)
- Melissa Coad Caseworker/Education & Community Liaison Officer (resigned July 2008)
- Lua De Burgh Administrative Secretary (part-time)
- Amy Fearnley-Sanders Caseworker/Handbook Researcher (resigned January 2008)
- Jackie Finlay Principal Solicitor (on leave since February 2009)
- Linda Forbes Casework Coordinator
- Catalina Loyola Administrator
- Melissa Lubowski Publications Officer/Solicitor
- Amelia Meers Handbook Researcher then Education and Community Education and Liaison Officer
- Jemima Mowbray Administrative Secretary (part-time)
- Maree O'Halloran Director (from October 2008)
- Michael Raper Director (resigned August 2008)
- Danny Shaw Publications and Funding Officer (resigned August 2008)
- Gerard Thomas Policy and Media Officer
- Sam Trinity Financial Administrator (part-time)
- Ian Turton Solicitor (temporary)
- Cass Wong Solicitor/Caseworker (temporary)

- Phillip Wardle Administrative Secretary (casual)
- Katie Wrigley Handbook Researcher/Caseworker (from October 2009)

In the course of 2008-2009, some staff resigned and others went on leave. The Centre has 12 positions, most full-time but some part-time.

6.4 Paid workers – contract

The following people were employed on a temporary, contract basis:

- Sam Trinity – Financial Administrator

6.5 Volunteer workers

The Centre's success could not have been achieved without the help of our unpaid volunteer workers throughout the 2008/2009 year. The Centre had about 20 people helping us through the year. At any given time the Centre has about 13 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 4,226 advice matters through 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 \$120,000 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 2008 – 2009 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 2008-2009 were:

- Amanda Frazis
- Anna Doyle
- Prue Alexander
- Alison Chan
- Amanda Haigh
- Anthea Karras
- Brendan Cook
- David King
- Denise Fairservice
- Denny Cifuentes
- Estelle Adamek
- Gremn Lim
- Jessica Chan
- Jo Ang
- Joel Hankinson
- Julia Doyle
- Karen Lau

- Karthiga Nageswaran
- Laura Campbell
- Mahi Papakonstantinou
- Marie Muir
- Mathew Butt
- Michael O'Halloran
- Neil Guo
- Nina Lau
- Petrina Slaytor
- Prishika Raj
- Ray Horsburgh
- Sheila McMahon
- Shirley Innes
- Vanessa Annewandter
- Yvonne Xu

6.6 Pro-bono assistance

The Centre would like to thank the following organisations for their pro bono assistance over the year:

- Breakout - printing of business cards for all staff
- Gilbert & Tobin – provision of meeting room for the Centre's Annual Planning Days
- Freehills (through PILCH) – design of business cards, letterheads and Centre brochures
- Mr Carlos Mobellan of Counsel – pro bono advice
- Mr Tom Brennan of Counsel – pro bono at the AAT.

7.0 Auditor's Report

The Auditor's Report, prepared by Kazzi and Associates, is part of this Annual Report. It is available on request because it is produced in a different format.