

Director's Report 2015-16

This year has again demonstrated the worth of legal aid to the Federal and State Courts. Our lawyers and private legal practitioners acting on grants of legal aid represented over 30 000 people in their cases before the courts. If representation had not been available, these people would have faced representing themselves in court or could not have pursued their rights.

Our legal advisers provided over 100 000 legal advices and legal education sessions. Our websites were accessed over 1 000 000 times by people seeking legal information and advice to assist them in their daily lives.

Our legal researchers responded to 37 proposals by government for legislative change.

780 family dispute resolution conferences were provided to parents in conflict over care issues for their children, with 77% resolving their differences without a court hearing.

I thank the dedicated staff of the Legal Services Commission for contributing their expertise for the benefit of these South Australians.

I also thank the private legal profession who acted on grants of legal aid, receiving payment for such services at substantially lower fees than if the client had been in a position to pay their legal expenses.

Nearly 700 legal practitioners have now joined the Commission panels. Service delivery contracts clearly set out our expectations of lawyers acting on grants of legal aid, with regular random audits assisting compliance.

This year saw the reduction of our staff numbers through voluntary separation. Some long serving staff members chose to pursue other career paths and I thank them for their years at the Commission.

Programs to curb domestic violence in our community have been the focus of government this year. The Commission was pleased to be funded through the Women's Safety Package to deliver new services in the northern suburbs through a Health/Justice Partnership and to expand grants of aid for clients facing the impacts of domestic violence who might otherwise not qualify for aid.

A recent survey indicated that 79% of family law representation files included issues related to domestic violence. This alarming statistic justifies government's concerns of this pervasive problem.

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Our legal advice and education services have expanded through the use of social media and the introduction of a Legal Chat service. I acknowledge the hard work of the staff in Access Services in bringing this project to fruition in a timely and economic manner. In just 10 months we have provided 3 289 client sessions through Legal Chat.

I have been pleased to continue my participation on the Criminal Justice Sector Reform Council. It is here the leaders of criminal justice sector agencies gather to discuss improvements to the criminal justice system. My participation ensures the voice of the client is heard among the views of the police, prosecution, corrections, courts and the government.

I thank the Deputy Premier and Attorney-General of South Australia, the Hon. John Rau MP and the Attorney-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, the Hon. Senator George Brandis QC for their ongoing commitment to legal aid.

There is always more that we can do as an organisation to help South Australians in need, and I look forward to providing expanded services into the future.

Gabrielle Canny
Director, Legal Services Commission