

## What you can expect from HPLS

- Legal help from HPLS is free.
- HPLS will respect your right to privacy: everything you talk about with the lawyer will be confidential unless you agree otherwise.
- HPLS will treat you with respect.
- HPLS will give you advice, but it is your decision how you use it.
- If HPLS can't help with your legal problem, we will tell you who can.

### To contact HPLS

Visit one of the HPLS Clinics.

Phone: (02) 8898 6545

E-mail: [homelessproject@piac.asn.au](mailto:homelessproject@piac.asn.au)

For an electronic copy of this newsletter send us an e-mail to the above address.

## Contributors to this edition of STREETRIGHTS<sub>NSW</sub>

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## Your views and ideas

HPLS welcomes contributions to *STREETRIGHTS<sub>NSW</sub>*. If you have a comment about anything that's covered in this newsletter please contact HPLS.

HPLS would also love to hear from artists and cartoonists who want to contribute.

HPLS is very keen to get contributions from people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the PILCH members that provide lawyers for the clinics: Allens Arthur Robinson, Baker & McKenzie, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Deacons, DLA Phillips Fox, HWL Ebsworth, Gilbert + Tobin, Henry Davis York, Legal Aid Parramatta and Minter Ellison.

And to the host welfare agencies: Edward Eagar Lodge, Matthew Talbot Hostel, Newtown Mission and Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, Norman Andrews House, Parramatta Mission, The Station Ltd, Salvation Army Streetlevel, Wayside Chapel, Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre.

PIAC acknowledges the funding support that makes this service possible, which is received from the NSW Attorney General, through the Public Purpose Fund. *STREETRIGHTS<sub>NSW</sub>* is produced by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre Ltd.

ISSN 1834-4496 (Print) ISSN 1834-450X (Online)

## THE HPLS CLINICS

Day (weekly)	Time	Location
Monday	10:00 am - 12:00 noon	The Station Ltd 82 Erskine Street, Sydney
Monday	10:00 am - 12:00 noon	Wayside Chapel 29 Hughes Street, Potts Point
Tuesday	11:00 am - 1:00 pm	Matthew Talbot Hostel 22 Talbot Lane, Woolloomooloo
Tuesday	12:30 pm - 1:30 pm	Norman Andrews House 77 Roscoe Street, Bondi
Wednesday	11:30 am - 1:00 pm	Parramatta Mission 119 Macquarie Street, Parramatta
Wednesday	12:30 pm - 2:00 pm	Salvation Army Streetlevel Derby Lane (off Albion St), Surry Hills
Thursday	1:00 pm - 3:00 pm	Edward Eagar Lodge 348a Bourke Street, Darlinghurst
Friday	12:30 pm - 2:30 pm	Women's & Girls' Emergency Centre 361 Riley Street, Surry Hills
Friday	1:30 pm - 2:30 pm	Newtown Mission 280a King Street, Newtown

## HPLS turns 5!



Five years ago on 20 May 2004, the Homeless Persons' Legal Service (HPLS) was launched by the then NSW Attorney General, the Hon Bob Debus, and Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore. When HPLS started out we had four clinics across Sydney.

In the five years since then, HPLS has kept growing and growing! We now have nine clinics across Sydney and we have provided legal advice and representation to over 2,800 different clients!

As you may know, we can help you with a wide variety of legal problems. Some of these are:

- negotiating about fines, penalty notices and enforcement orders;
- negotiating about debts, including with banks or other financial institutions;
- negotiating with government agencies, like Centrelink and Housing NSW;
- assistance with the internal review of government decisions that affect you;
- assisting with tenancy matters, including negotiating with real estate agents or landlords;
- victims compensation applications;

- discrimination complaints;
- assistance with complaints to the Ombudsman;
- getting documents under the *Freedom of Information Act*;
- probate searches;
- assisting with legal aid applications;
- representation in some minor criminal charges, like offensive behaviour, offensive language, minor drug possession, shoplifting.

Unfortunately, HPLS doesn't have the expertise to help with every legal problem, but if HPLS can't help you, we will do our best to recommend someone who can. The legal problems we won't be able to help with are:

- family law;
- personal injury;
- criminal law where there is a possibility of going to jail;
- immigration;
- writing wills; and
- neighbourhood disputes.

As well as providing legal advice, HPLS works to find ways of making laws and government policies fairer. HPLS keeps an eye out for issues that commonly cause legal problems for homeless people and makes submissions to government agencies about useful and practical law reform.

HPLS could not achieve positive outcomes for homeless people without the continued support of staff at the host agencies, PIAC, PILCH members and their lawyers. We thank you for five very successful years and look forward to many more.

If you have any questions about how HPLS can help you, please ask an HPLS lawyer at any one of our clinics. The time and location of the clinics are on the back page.

## Street Care

Street Care is a group of homeless and formerly homeless people that has been set up to make sure that the voices of those on the street are heard by governments and other decision makers.

Street Care is supported by the Homeless Persons' Legal Service, but still has its own independent



voice. Street Care are very keen to make sure it is not only their ideas that are heard by decision makers but that everyone on the street has a chance to have their say!

Since starting up in February 2009, members of Street Care have been invited to:

1. visit NSW Parliament House and meet with the Hon David Borger MP, NSW Minister for Housing;
2. speak at two different homeless sector conferences about their personal experience of homelessness; and
3. work with HPLS and PIAC to ensure homeless people have input to the national human rights consultation.

Street Care also produce a newsletter called *Street Cred*. If you would like to contact Street Care or receive an e-mail copy of *Street Cred*, please let us know at [streetcare@piac.asn.au](mailto:streetcare@piac.asn.au).

Street Care is funded by the City of Sydney.

## Human Rights consultation events by Milk Crate Theatre

During May, HPLS and PIAC worked with Milk Crate Theatre to put together four events on how homeless people feel their human rights are being protected. Milk Crate Theatre put on performances at Edward Eagar Lodge, Samaritan House, Newtown Mission and Salvation Army Streetlevel.

The reason for the events was to make sure that homeless people have their say as part of the national human rights consultation process. HPLS and PIAC wanted to ensure that homeless people were able to send a strong message to the Government that everyone's right should be protected!

The events were a lot of fun and very interactive. Milk Crate Theatre acted out some real life examples of how the human rights of homeless people are not being protected. Then the audience got to choose what could have been changed in the story and been done better so that homeless people were treated with respect and fairness. The human rights issues included breaches the right to housing, the right to

social security, the right to dignity and the right to be treated fairly by the Court.

Over 100 homeless people came along and took part in the consultations. Some even got up on stage with Milk Crate Theatre to act out what protecting someone's human rights might look like in a perfect world! After the performances, everyone was offered the chance to vote on what they would like the Government to do about human rights. Everyone also had the chance to write to the Government to tell them what they think about current human rights protection in Australia. HPLS will send all of the feedback that we received directly to the national human rights consultation as part of the HPLS submission.

HPLS would like to thank everyone who came along and participated in the consultation events, the agencies for hosting us, PIAC for helping organise and pay for the events and PILCH members for their ongoing support.

## What has HPLS done for homeless people?

In five years, HPLS has helped almost 3,000 clients. We don't win all the time, but we do the very best we can for every client. Sometimes our wins are small. But, every so often, HPLS lawyers achieve remarkable and positively life-changing results for our clients.

### Fines

HPLS lawyers have given advice to over 300 clients with outstanding fines about what their options are for dealing with the debt. For many of those clients, we have been able to help them get their fines written off by the State Debt Recovery Office (SDRO). Some clients have asked HPLS to help them negotiate over fines debts of over \$5,000 and the lawyers have been successful. A write-off means that you do not have to pay any of the outstanding fine debt that you owe, even if it is years old. In return for the write off, for the next five years you must not get any more fines sent to the SDRO for enforcement. At the end of the five years, the debt is completely gone forever. If during the five years you do get more fines that you don't pay and they go to the SDRO for enforcement, the fines debt that was written off can be reinstated against you.

Another option that HPLS lawyers have helped lots of clients with is negotiating a time-to-pay arrangement. Sometimes you may not have a very big fines debt, but you just can't pay it all off in one go. HPLS lawyers can write to the SDRO and ask if the fine can be paid in instalments at an amount that you can easily afford.

### Government departments

HPLS has helped more than 1,000 clients deal with government departments like Centrelink, Housing NSW and Births Deaths and Marriages. If you are having a problem with a government department, like getting enough identification points or your payments have been stopped, HPLS might be able to make some telephone calls or write a letter on your behalf to help sort it out.

### Debt

Nearly 500 clients have come to HPLS to ask the lawyers for help in organising to repay debt, such

as credit card debt, mobile phone bills or unpaid income tax debts. HPLS lawyers can make some calls or write on your behalf to help sort this type of problem out. Depending on the circumstances, HPLS may be able to get the debt waived, so you don't have to pay anything, or work out a repayment plan that suits you.

### Minor criminal matters

HPLS has a criminal law solicitor advocate who can represent you in court if you have been charged with some minor criminal offences, such as offensive language, possession of a small amount of drugs or shoplifting. In the past, the Legal Aid Duty Solicitor has always been available in the local court to help with these sorts of charges. The HPLS solicitor advocate is different to Legal Aid, and in some cases may be more appropriate, because he is able to spend more time with you before going to court to work out the best option for you. Another advantage is that the same solicitor will represent you from the start to the finish of your case. Like all HPLS lawyers, the solicitor advocate can meet you at one of the HPLS host agencies or somewhere else that it is convenient and easily accessible for you.

