

Welfare Rights Centre

Annual Report

July 2009 to June 2010

Prepared for 2010 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 case management, expert advice and representation on Social Security and Family Assistance matters. Now in its twenty seventh 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 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 2009 to June 2010 the Centre provided assistance to 2,874 clients. We provided 3,543 "advice activities" and opened 399 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. We also gave direct advice to a small number of children under 18 years of age in relation to Youth Allowance and Special Benefit.

Age	2008-09	2009-10
0 - 18	2%	1%
18-34	19%	20%
35-49	28%	27%
50-64	22%	22%
65+	11%	11%
Not supplied	18%	19%

Gender	2008-09	2009-10
Female	56%	57%
Male	41%	38%
Not supplied	3%	5%

Country of birth

The top countries of birth of clients who disclosed country of birth was as follows

	2008-09		2009-10
Australia	60.2%	Australia	52.5%
United Kingdom	3.9%	New Zealand	3%
New Zealand & Cook Is	3.5%	United Kingdom	3%
China	2.9%	Lebanon	1.7%
Lebanon	2.2%	China	1.2%
Egypt	1.5%	Vietnam	1.1%
India	1.5%	Fiji	1%
Greece	1.3%	Philippines	0.9%
Philippines	1.2%	Iraq	0.8%
Vietnam	1%	Iran	0.7%
Italy	0.8%	Egypt	0.7%
Chile	0.8%	India	0.6%

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	707
Newstart Allowance	488
Parenting Payment	421
Age Pension	299
Youth Allowance	176
Family Tax Benefit	156

Carer Payment	116
Special Benefit	77

1.3 Casework issues during 2009 - 2010

Debts and prosecutions

Once again 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. This is particularly where the client is at risk of criminal prosecution in respect of their debt.

Debt matters covered a range of issues including debts raised due to under-declared income, non-disclosed assets, member of a couple determinations and receipt of arrears of compensation or income.

A too often heard story is that a client under-declared their income due to confusion about what and how to declare. Clients report that even when they ask Centrelink officers for help they are still left in the dark as to which section in Centrelink they need to report their income.

Again the Centre has assisted a number of clients to appeal against their debt when they were simultaneously facing prosecution action. When successful in their appeal against the debt, any prosecution action is usually dropped. We remain concerned that these clients faced prosecution action in the first place, as there is usually evidence on the Centrelink file that the client did not intentionally under-declare their income.

People with illnesses and disabilities

The Centre advised a large number of clients in receipt of activity tested payments, such as Newstart Allowance or Parenting Payment, who have an illness or disability. Some of these clients had Disability Support Pension claims with Centrelink; others were just seeking temporary exemptions from activity test or participation requirements. These clients often called because they were unhappy with Centrelink's decision to refuse their Disability Support Pension claim or to refuse to accept their medical certificates. They were usually referred by Centrelink to Employment Services providers and had requirements imposed by these providers. Most of these clients were confused (understandably) about their activity test or participation requirements, who they must speak to, who is making decisions about their payments and what they can do to appeal. In many cases they were required to do multiple things at the one time - appeal the Disability Support Pension cancellation, appeal the rejection of their medical certificate, attend appointments with Employment Services providers and look for work (even though they were not well enough to do so).

These types of advices are resource heavy and often there was no satisfactory answer we could give the clients. This is an area of concern to the Centre, and our clients.

Income maintenance periods

One of the more notable trends in casework this year was an increase in the number of cases about "income maintenance periods". These are essentially waiting periods that apply before income support can be paid. The length of the waiting period is based on the amount of leave and redundancy payments a person receives after leaving employment. They often result in intense hardship for our clients, who are on the whole unaware that they will have to face a long waiting period before obtaining payments after they leave work. Some of the "income maintenance periods" we have seen have been over a year long. They are very difficult to have overturned, and there is often little we can do to change the outcome on appeal.

Recognition of same-sex de facto relationships

We advised over 120 people between July 2009 and June 2010 regarding the recognition of same-sex de facto relationships under Social Security and Family Assistance law that came into effect on 1 July 2009. We provided one-off advice to people across Australia. We also opened seven cases and represented some clients at the Social Security Appeals Tribunal in matters relating to whether or not people are partnered for the purposes of Social Security law.

Many clients expressed fear at coming out to Centrelink, and concern at losing their sole means of financial support. This issue was particularly prevalent amongst clients who were receiving the Parenting Payment at the single rate and receiving the appropriate Family Tax Benefit payments.

Member of a couple

The question of whether or not a person is a “member of a couple” is often a fraught one. A significant portion of our casework service throughout the year was spent advising and representing clients who were challenging Centrelink decisions that they were a “member of couple”. Many of these clients had large debts raised as Centrelink determined that the relationship existed for sometimes up to 10 years, prior to the decision to cancel payments. It is noticeable that many appeals relate to people who continue to reside ‘under the one roof’ with an ex partner, many citing the high cost of housing as a deterrent to moving into separate accommodation and the support provided to children of the relationship. Many cite the wish to “co-parent” their children, something that we note the Federal Government encourages through the amendments to the Family Law Act and its Family Relationship Centres.

New Zealand citizens

New Zealand citizens who moved to Australia since February 2001 have had extremely limited access to Social Security payments. If they fall into hardship while living in Australia, often the only avenue for financial support is to seek Act of Grace payments from the Federal Government. Generally these are refused on the basis that the law was changed in 2001 to prevent New Zealand citizens from obtaining Social Security payments, and to make Act of Grace payments is counter to that change.

The Centre is now seeing clients who were brought to Australia as children with their New Zealand citizen parents. These children are seeking Youth Allowance or Parenting Payment (if they themselves now have children) and are shocked to discover that notwithstanding that they have lived in Australia for close to 10 years, attended school, their parents may have worked and paid taxes in Australia, they are denied income support.

The Centre has sought Act of Grace payments for some of these clients who are in dire situations. But clearly this is not a long term solution to what will be a long term problem.

2.0 Policy Report

2.1 Introduction

Over the last year the Centre has been engaged in a program of law reform and policy advocacy. The Centre has worked in co-operation with a number of other community organisations including the National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN).

The Australian Social Security system is a complex, tightly targeted and intrusive system of residual income support. 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, and
 - 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.

Key achievements in 2009/10

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.

The Welfare Rights Centre’s policy priorities over the past year have focussed on protecting basic rights that underpin our income support system in Australia and convincing Government that reforms are needed to address the adequacy

of payments for unemployed people, students and young people, and to increase the level of assistance to help people into work.

The Welfare Rights Centre critiqued the legislation in June 2009 which extended compulsory income management across the Northern Territory. This legislation dismantled key underpinnings of the Social Security system.

Key achievements over the last year were:

- the introduction of weekly Centrelink payments for vulnerable income support recipients;
- drawing attention to the inadequacies of financial support for unemployed people;
- exposing the poor quality of Centrelink decisions when it comes to discretionary matters;
- achieving fairer rules for parents seeking exemptions from activity requirements and more flexible participation rules for parents seeking to combine work and study and caring responsibilities;
- highlighting the intention of state and territory housing authorities to “claw back” a quarter of the 2009 pension September pension rise. Subsequently, all jurisdictions, except the NSW Government agreed to ensure that the full benefit of the historic pension increase went to pensioners;
- highlighting the unfair rules applying to young people and vulnerable Australians seeking access to their superannuation under the hardship provisions; and
- advocating for a successful resolution to the Youth Allowance income support reforms.

2.2 Submissions and letters

Submissions

In 2009-10 the Centre made submissions in our own right to Parliamentary Inquiries and Government Departments as well as making a significant contribution to a number of NWRN submissions. We gave evidence at a number of inquiries, including the inquiry into the September 2009 pension increases and the extension of income management. Many letters seeking beneficial law reform on behalf of our client base were written to Ministers at federal and state level as well as government officials.

We provided comment through the following submissions:

- Senate Economics Committee Inquiry into Economic Stimulus Payments;
- The Welfare Reform and Reinstatement of Racial Discrimination Act Bill 2009, the Other Legislation Amendment Act Bill 2009 and the Restoration of Racial Discrimination Act Bill 2009;
- Supplementary submission to Senate Inquiry into Welfare Reform and Racial Discrimination Act Bill;
- Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth Inquiry into Homelessness Legislation;
- Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Inquiry into Immigration Treatment of Disability;
- House of Representative Standing Committee on Youth and Housing, Inquiry into Homelessness Legislation, 2009;
- Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, Inquiry into Student Assistance Bill Social Security Bill, 2009;
- Commonwealth Attorney General's Department Access to Justice Taskforce Report;
- Department of Human Services, Better Dealings with Government: Innovation in Payments and Information Services, Discussion Paper for Industry Consultation; and
- 2010-11 Federal Budget Submission.

2.3 Liaison with Government agencies, departments and the community

Staff members have attended many meetings with Government agencies and departments as well as within the community sector. The Centre took part in biannual meetings with Centrelink as part of the NWRN delegation and also met separately with the Commonwealth Ombudsman, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and

indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and the Department of Human Services.

The Centre meets regularly with ACOSS and the Centre's Policy and Media Officer, Gerard Thomas, is an ACOSS Board member. The Centre works closely with NCOSS and is also a member of the NSW Homelessness Community Alliance and the Bail Reform Alliance which operate at the state level.

2.4 A summary of the major policy issues in 2009-10

Law reform initiated by the government resulted in a busy and challenging time for the Welfare Rights Centre, which undertook a significant role in policy debates around payment reforms, the review of the tax and transfer system and the needs of disadvantaged job seekers, parents and young people. Responding to Government policies and Centrelink practices which contribute to, or exacerbate, homelessness, was also an important part of the Centre's contribution over the past year.

Henry Review into the Tax and Transfer System

The Centre was disappointed with the Government's response to the widely- anticipated tax reform report from the head of Treasury, the Future of Australia's Tax and Transfer System. While some of the recommendations from the Henry Review of concern (such as cutting Parenting Payment once the youngest child turns four), there was much in the report to be positive about. We will continue to advocate for the parties to address deficiencies in the current tax and welfare arrangements, by reducing the \$120 a week gap between payments and fairly indexing payments over the long term.

Independent review of penalties system

The Federal Government has initiated an independent review into the Social Security penalty system it introduced in July 2009. Under the new system financial penalties still disproportionately affect young and Indigenous job seekers.

Centrelink decision making

The Centre undertook an examination of the quality of Centrelink decision making at the Authorised Review Officer level and found it of concern. This issue was raised with Centrelink and with the Commonwealth Ombudsman. Nine out of 10 decisions overturned at the SSAT are because Centrelink got the law wrong, got the facts wrong, or because the SSAT discovered further relevant information.

Overpayments and prosecution

Issues of Centrelink overpayments and prosecutions continued to be a large part of our policy work because the issues affect so many of our clients and their children. Three members of the NWRN took part in a debt prevention workshop with Centrelink, FaHCSIA, the Department of Veteran's Affairs and the Department of Human Services.

The Centre assisted Centrelink in the development of its 2010 Compliance Report and met with the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) regarding their review of Centrelink's debt and fraud programs. We also facilitated meetings with other Welfare Rights members with both Centrelink and the ANAO on debt and prosecution issues.

The lack of effective legal assistance and independent advocacy for people facing a Centrelink prosecution, and the unfairness of the existing referral processes by Centrelink and the practices of the Director of Public Prosecutions continues to be an issue of major concern to the Centre.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

The Centre joined a community-led campaign supporting an examination of the feasibility of introducing a national disability insurance scheme in Australia. We wrote to Ministers Macklin and Shorten about the national disability insurance scheme, as well as a range of issues related to our casework experiences.

Same-sex reforms

The Centre has continued to play a role in relation to the same-sex reforms, and we are participants in the current, high-profile, celebrity Wear It With Pride Campaign. We have also arranged distribution of the NWRN Member of a Couple booklet to the Gay and Lesbian community.

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 low income Australians. A media statement was released on average of one per fortnight, with a total of twenty three media releases released in 2009-10. 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.

A great deal of effort also went into briefing journalists and explaining income support policies and their impacts upon individuals and families. In addition to the considerable press coverage that the Centre achieved, we also did a significant amount of radio interviews.

The Welfare Rights Centre is seen as a credible and reliable source of comment and analysis on issues affecting people receiving income support payments, and on Social Security law and Centrelink. In terms of national prominence, analysis of media coverage over the past 12 months indicates that the Centre is the second most cited and quoted source of independent information on Social Security matters in Australia, behind the Australian Council of Social Service.

3.0 Strengthening Community: Community Education 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; and
- 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 2009-2010, the Centre continued to target disadvantaged groups for education. Community Legal Education seminars were targeted to community organisations that support disadvantaged groups and new resources were developed. Particular focus was given this year to members of the Gay and Lesbian community because of same sex law reform and resulting amendments to Social Security law. The Centre was invited, for example, to provide training to the members of the SSAT on this issue. In addition, the Centre also focussed on Centrelink issues for older people in conjunction with Legal Aid NSW and The Aged Rights Service.

More than 40 training seminars were presented to community organisations, including youth centres, TAFE, homelessness and accommodation services, domestic violence court support workers, youth and migrant organisations, financial counsellors, other community legal centres and community organisations advocating on behalf of disadvantaged clients. Regional training direct to community members was held in the Blue Mountains in relation to same sex changes to Social Security law.

Throughout 2009-2010, the Centre was involved in the NSW Multicultural Advisory Forum, the NSW Centrelink Homelessness Reference Group, the NSW Homelessness Community Alliance, the NSW Bail Reform Alliance and the Centrelink Same Sex Reference Group. More than 80 community liaison activities were undertaken including work for Anti-Poverty Week 2010.

The Centre plans to develop a stronger relationship with TAFE Colleges in 2010-2011 to deliver Community Legal Education and possibly a legal clinic program for students under 18 receiving Youth Allowance.

3.3 Volunteer workers

The Centre's volunteer workers program continued to interest volunteers from a broad range of backgrounds, including students to retirees mostly from the law or social work background. Throughout 2009-2010 volunteer workers continued to provide the Centre with invaluable casework and administrative assistance. The Centre would not have functioned so smoothly without the dedicated work of our volunteer workers. There are around 20 casework and administrative volunteers at present.

We conducted a number of group and individual induction sessions throughout this year and volunteer workers continued to receive feedback and on-going training.

The volunteer program has been reviewed this year. A number of volunteer projects have been planned for the coming year.

We have again acknowledged our volunteers' contribution with two social functions during the year as a small token of our appreciation. Volunteers who left generally did so because they obtained paid employment or because of study commitments. Feedback from volunteers continues to be positive. They feel that they were able to learn, contribute and enjoy their time at the Centre.

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 2009-2010 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; 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 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 2009-2010, reporting every three months on changes to Social Security law and administration. In 2009-2010 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 2009-2010 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 2009-2010 to take into account changes to Social Security law and policy. In the 2009-2010 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 Tasmanian Government and QCOSS respectively.

The Centre also received funding from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in 2009-2010 to assist with the publication of the ONLINE edition.

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

4.5 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 wallet 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. The wallet card was completed in August 2009.

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.

4.6 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 2009-2010 the following Factsheets were revised for accuracy: Appeals; Newstart Allowance; Sickness Allowance; and Penalties for non-compliance. The Parenting Payment Fact sheet was revised to reflect 1 July 2009 legislative changes, and the Youth Allowance factsheet was revised to reflect April and July 2010 legislative changes. New Factsheets were also produced including "Earn or learn", "Activity test and participation requirements" and "Waiting periods – why can't I get paid?"

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 2009 to 30 June 2010 was received from:

- NSW Department of Community Services – \$381,535
- Commonwealth Government - Welfare Rights Program – \$292,088
- CLC Funding Program - (NSW) – \$117,546

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 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 2009-2010 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 SSR and sales of the ONLINE EDITION of the Independent Social Security Handbook.

5.4 Project Grants

The Centre successfully made submissions for "one off" funding to undertake projects. These projects include a national advice line for people regarding the effects of the same sex law reform and the production of a "wallet" card for young people about the new penalty system which came into effect on 1 July 2009.

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

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 2009-2010 were:

Estelle Adamek

Liz Biok

James Campbell

Diana Covell (Chairperson)

Tony Eardley

Carol Howard

Michelle Jones

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 (resigned March 2010)
Lua De Burgh	Administrative Secretary (casual)
Jackie Finlay	Principal Solicitor
Linda Forbes	Casework Coordinator (resigned August 2009)
Jo Kwan	Solicitor/Volunteer Co-ordinator (on secondment from Legal Aid NSW)
Karen Lua	Administrative Secretary
Catalina Loyola	Administrator
Melissa Lubowski	Publications Officer/Solicitor
Amelia Meers	Community Education and Liaison Officer/Caseworker
Carolyn Odgers	Solicitor/Caseworker
Maree O'Halloran	Director
Gerard Thomas	Policy and Media Officer
Danny Shaw	Caseworker (casual)
Ian Turton	Solicitor (temporary)
Cass Wong	Caseworker/Funding Accountabilities Officer
Phillip Wardle	Administrative Secretary (casual)
Katie Wrigley	Handbook Researcher/Caseworker

In the course of 2009-2010, two staff members were on parental leave and one on leave without pay. The Centre has 11 ongoing positions, most full-time but some part-time.

6.4 Paid workers – contract

The following people were employed on a 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 2009/2010 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 3,543 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 2009-2010 were:

- Amanda Frazis
- Anna Doyle
- Amanda Haigh
- Anthea Karras
- Brendan Cook
- David King
- Denise Fairservice
- Denny Cifuentes
- Estelle Adamek
- Gremn Lim
- Jo Ang
- Joel Hankinson
- Julia Doyle
- Karen Lau
- Karthiga Nageswaran
- Laura Campbell
- Marie Muir
- Mathew Butt
- Michael O'Halloran
- Nina Lau
- Petrina Slaytor
- Prishika Raj
- Sheila McMahon
- Shirley Innes
- Vanessa Annewandter
- Yvonne Xu
- David Lineham
- Farsana Choudhury
- Louisa Lo-Cao
- Karen Chen
- Julia Zboromirsky
- Maria Nawaz
- Tallulah Rosicky
- Eugenie Cheung
- Morgan Steinmetz

6.6 Pro-bono assistance

The Centre would like to thank the Legal Aid NSW for publishing on a pro bono basis the Social Security Appeals Tribunal guide which was written by staff members at the Welfare Rights Centre.

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.