

**LESSONS FROM THE
PROVISION OF LEGAL
SERVICES TO PEOPLE
EXPERIENCING
HOMELESSNESS IN THE
UNITED STATES**

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INTRODUCTION

This is a report on a study trip undertaken by Philip Lynch of the Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic to the United States from 20 February to 4 March 2003 to observe the provision of legal services to people experiencing homelessness.

The aims and objectives of the study trip were to examine:

- the range of legal issues confronting homeless people in the United States;
- models and methods for providing legal services to homeless people in the United States;
- litigation and law reform strategies used to promote and protect the rights of homeless people in the United States; and
- educational initiatives and programs used to promote and protect the rights of homeless people in the United States.

For this purpose, meetings were convened with the following organisations:

- Public Counsel Law Centre, Los Angeles
- Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco
- San Francisco Bar Homeless Advocacy Project, San Francisco
- National Coalition for the Homeless, Washington DC
- National Law Centre for Homelessness and Poverty, Washington DC
- Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, Washington DC

Additionally, I attended the 2003 Pro Bono Institute Conference in Washington DC.

The trip was funded by monies granted to the Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic by the Victorian Department of Human Services and the Victorian Department of Justice.

SUMMARY

As in Australia, homelessness is a significant socio-economic issue confronting the United States. In 2002, it was estimated that at least 3.5 million people experience homelessness across the United States each year. Each night, as many as 86,000 people are homeless in Los Angeles, 12,000 people are homeless in San Francisco, and 10,000 people are homeless in Washington DC.

The pathways into homelessness in the United States are complex and varied. They include structural causes (such as poverty; inadequate affordable housing; unemployment; and inability to earn a sufficient livelihood), government fiscal and social policy causes (such as economic reform; the availability of public housing; welfare expenditure; health services; and education) and individual causes (such as mental illness, disability or disorder; gambling, substance and alcohol addiction; domestic violence; family fragmentation; and severe social dysfunction). In many cases of homelessness, these causes are intersectional and inter-related.

Since about 1985, a range of organisations have engaged in direct service provision, litigation, law reform work, public policy advocacy, community organising and public education for the purpose of using the law to alleviate, ameliorate and end homelessness across the United States. These organisations include:

- Public Counsel Law Centre – a public interest law organisation that provides, and facilitates the provision of, legal services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
- San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness – a community organisation that works with and for homeless people to vindicate their rights and achieve economic justice;
- San Francisco Bar Homeless Advocacy Project – a project of the San Francisco Bar that provides integrated legal and psychosocial services to people who are chronically homeless;
- National Coalition for the Homeless – a national network of advocates, service providers and homeless persons who aim to prevent and end homelessness through law reform work, public policy advocacy and public education;
- National Law Centre on Homelessness and Poverty – a community organisation that works, through litigation, education and policy advocacy, to use the law and a human rights framework to address causes of homelessness;
- Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless – a homeless persons' law firm that provides free civil and administrative legal assistance to homeless people and conducts law reform work and policy advocacy.

As in Australia, the primary legal issues confronting homeless people in the US are:

- social security;
- housing and tenancy;
- public space regulation;
- debt;
- bankruptcy;
- mental health;
- consumer affairs; and
- discrimination.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on my meetings with, and observation of, homelessness legal service providers in the United States, I make the following findings and recommendations to improve the management, legal service delivery, law reform work and public education programs of the Clinic.

Recommendation 1

In Los Angeles, a specialist homeless persons' court has been established to identify and address the underlying causes of a homeless person's 'offending behaviour' by linking misdemeanour adjudication with social service intervention. The court sits on a regular basis in crisis shelters and homelessness agencies.

I recommend that the Clinic undertake research and community consultations to determine whether a specialist homeless persons' court should be developed and implemented in Victoria.

Recommendation 2

In San Francisco, the Coalition on Homelessness conducts regular street outreaches to inform homeless people of their rights and to provide them with legal assistance in relation to violations of those rights.

I recommend that the Clinic consider undertaking street outreaches for the purpose of informing homeless people of their legal rights and, where appropriate, referring them to a Clinic location for legal assistance.

Recommendation 3

In San Francisco and Washington DC, homelessness legal service providers engage homeless people in law reform work and public policy advocacy by convening meetings designed to enable them to articulate their interests and concerns, and by assisting them to give testimony to parliamentary inquiries and at public hearings.

I recommend that the Clinic undertake more extensive consultations with homeless persons in relation to law reform submissions and public policy proposals that affect them, including by directly involving homeless people in drafting submissions and providing evidence at public hearings.

Recommendation 4

The Homeless Advocacy Project in San Francisco and the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless in Washington DC seek to provide holistic solutions to clients' legal problems by identifying and addressing the psychosocial issues that often underlie legal problems. This is achieved by employing a social service coordinator whose role is to identify any psychosocial issues confronting a client and, where appropriate, to refer that client to another service provider.

I recommend that the Clinic investigate funding opportunities for the employment of a social service coordinator whose role would involve working with lawyers to identify and address clients' psychosocial issues and make appropriate referrals.

Recommendation 5

The Homeless Advocacy Project in San Francisco has developed a network of non-legal professionals who are willing to provide pro bono services to HAP clients in order to assist them with their legal issues. For example, volunteer doctors are available to provide medical reports required for social security application purposes.

I recommend that the Clinic develop formal relationships with non-legal professional bodies, such as the medical profession and the accountancy profession, to facilitate clients obtaining free non-legal professional services in connection with their legal problems.

Recommendation 6

The National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Law Centre on Homelessness and Poverty have drafted a comprehensive bill designed to ‘prevent and end homelessness’ in the US. The bill includes targeted and extensive housing, income, health care and civil rights provisions. The bill will be introduced in the 108th Congress by the Democrats.

I recommend that the Clinic undertake a law reform project that aims to identify and, if necessary, consolidate and strengthen federal and state legislative responses to homelessness.

Recommendation 7

All homelessness legal service providers visited employ one or more policy officers whose role is to identify and coordinate law reform work and public policy advocacy.

I recommend that the Clinic investigate funding opportunities for the employment of a policy officer.

Recommendation 8

All homelessness legal service providers visited receive substantial financial support and in-kind contributions from law firms.

I recommend that the Clinic consider requesting that each participating law firm organise at least one fundraising event for the Clinic each year.

Recommendation 9

The Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless in Washington DC produces a monthly newsletter for clients which provides advice in relation to substantive legal issues and advises of forthcoming meetings, parliamentary inquiries and public hearings.

I recommend that the Clinic consider producing a regular newsletter for clients.

Recommendation 10

The Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless provides training for law enforcement officers in Washington DC to sensitise them to issues pertaining to homelessness and to equip them to refer homeless people to appropriate service providers rather than fine them.

I recommend that the Clinic investigate the possibility of providing homelessness sensitivity and response training to law enforcement and public transport officers in Victoria.

PUBLIC COUNSEL LAW CENTRE

Contact details

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Date of meeting

Friday, 21 February 2003

Overview of organisation

Public Counsel is a non-profit organisation that provides, and facilitates the provision of, pro bono legal services to community organisations and to people who live at or below the poverty line.

Public Counsel is the largest public interest law firm in the United States, providing an estimated \$75 million in free legal services per year. Public Counsel employs 23 lawyers.

Public Counsel currently operates six key projects:

- Child Care Law Project;
- Children's Rights Project;
- Community Development Project;
- Immigrants' Rights Project;
- Consumer Law Project; and
- Homelessness Prevention Law Project.

Service delivery model

The Homelessness Prevention Law Project (HPLP) strives to reduce the number of homeless people in Los Angeles (currently around 86,000 people) by providing free legal advice to homeless people and by focusing on the needs of populations which are at risk of becoming chronically homeless.

For this purpose, HPLP works on-site in multiple Department of Public Social Services offices to ensure that homeless people are able to access social security, medical and food entitlements. Most of this advocacy is undertaken by volunteer law students under the supervision of a HPLP attorney.

HPLP also offers regular legal clinics at crisis shelters, veterans' facilities, juvenile halls and homelessness organisations. These clinics are staffed by law students and pro bono attorneys under the supervision of a HPLP attorney. The advice provided is most commonly once-off oral advice, with any ongoing work undertaken by a HPLP attorney. Pro bono attorneys generally act in their individual capacities and rarely

undertake ongoing advice work due to lack of capacity, lack of expertise and insurance concerns.

Law students and pro bono attorneys involved in HPLP are not required to undertake any formal training but are, instead, ‘taught on the job’ by HPLP attorneys.

Legal issues confronting clients

The principle legal issues confronting clients of HPLP are:

- access to social security and welfare payments;
- access to medical treatment and health care;
- access to food stamps; and
- ‘quality of life’ citations (that is, fines for infractions of public space ordinances that criminalise essential human activities – such as sleeping, bathing, lying, drinking or storing belongings – when such activities are performed in public space).

Litigation

HPLP does not generally conduct litigation on behalf of individual clients, but does undertake some test case litigation. Examples of current and recent test cases include:

- successfully challenging anti-begging ordinances on the basis that they infringe constitutionally enshrined rights to freedom of speech and expression;
- challenging ‘quality of life’ ordinances on the basis that they violate the constitutional proscription of cruel, unusual or inhumane treatments and punishments; and
- seeking access, under freedom of information legislation, to census statistics regarding the localities of homeless populations for the purpose of examining whether these localities receive equitable state and federal funds.

Given the current political climate, in which many judges have been elected by Republican electorates or appointed by Republican administrations, HPLP is presently steering away from test case litigation.

Law reform

HPLP seeks to work closely with governmental agencies and officials to influence public policy formulation regarding the homeless.

For example, HPLP has recently been instrumental in the development and implementation of a ‘Homeless Court’ and a ‘Homeless Persons’ Community Court’ in Los Angeles.

The Homeless Court is not really a court but a program that offers homeless or formerly homeless people the opportunity to resolve minor infractions and misdemeanour citations and warrants. Under the program, homeless persons who have completed 90 days in a training, educational, or rehabilitative program can apply to the Los Angeles Attorney for the withdrawal of citations and warrants for misdemeanours and minor offences. If an application is granted, the citations and warrants are ‘dismissed’ by a Superior Court Judge at a ceremony held monthly at homeless shelters throughout Los Angeles. Thus, the Homeless Court is not really a court, but an agreement between prosecutors and homeless persons’ advocates

designed to ‘clean the slates’ of persons who are trying to put their lives back together.

The Homeless Persons’ Community Court is a pilot specialist court that aims to identify and address the issues underlying a person’s homelessness and his or her offending behaviour by linking misdemeanour adjudication with social service intervention. A person who is homeless and pleads guilty to an offence may be referred to the Homeless Persons’ Community Court for ‘sentencing’. The focus of sentencing is rehabilitation and restoration. Only persons who make the commitment to taking the long road to putting their lives back on track are eligible for referral to the court. The Homeless Persons’ Community Court sits monthly in the PATH Mall in downtown Los Angeles. PATH (People Assisting the Homeless) is a collaboration of homelessness organisations which offers counselling, housing information and referrals, emergency accommodation, education, training, medical treatment, personal grooming and legal services under the one roof. Sentencing usually involves referring an offender to one or more of the PATH organisations for assistance, rehabilitation or treatment. The Court retains an ongoing power to supervise a referral.

The Homeless Persons’ Community Court is an innovative initiative that aims to bring justice to the people, assist in rehabilitation and restoration, and reduce recidivism by addressing underlying causes. With appropriate safeguards (such as referral to the court being at the option of the offender) such a court could operate in Victoria in a similar fashion to the Drug Court or the Koori Court. I propose to undertake further research and community consultations in this regard.

Education

HPLP aims to encourage involvement by law students at an early level and thereby instil a strong, enduring pro bono ethic. As discussed above, many law students volunteer as homeless persons’ advocates at Department of Public Social Services offices.

HPLP also conducts, on an ad hoc basis, community legal education seminars for clients and staff of homelessness organisations.

SAN FRANCISCO COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS

Contact details

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Contact person

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Date of meeting

Monday, 24 February 2003

Overview of organisation

The San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness (COH) is a non-profit organisation that aims to empower homeless and low income people to vindicate their rights and struggle for economic justice. It does this through an integrated approach that links outreach, peer support, leadership development, public education, advocacy and community organising.

Service delivery model

COH works to promote and protect the civil and human rights of homeless people by linking ongoing street outreach with community organising, advocacy and litigation.

Three times per week, two or three COH workers conduct 'Street Watch'. This involves outreaching to areas frequented by homeless people to educate them about their civil, political and property rights. Very practical 'Know and Protect Your Rights' information sheets are distributed for this purpose. Street Watch also involves monitoring interactions between homeless people and police officers, and engaging homeless people in community organising and strategising. Street Watch workers also collect 'quality of life' citations and warrants from homeless people and pass these on to a COH attorney who deals with them in court. The vast majority of these tickets are dismissed without prosecution. I was fortunate to participate in an overnight Street Watch that involved meeting with vehicularly-housed people to inform them of their rights, and then observing police officers evicting people from their cars pursuant to an archaic law that prohibits 'habitation' in a vehicle between 10.00pm and 6.00am.

Legal issues confronting clients

The vast majority of legal issues confronting COH clients pertain to violation of public space regulations and ordinances that prohibit essential activities such as sleeping, camping, lying, bathing, urinating and drinking in public spaces.

Litigation

COH has only one staff attorney and is principally an advocacy organisation rather than a legal service provider. Resultantly, COH's litigation efforts are restricted to dealing with misdemeanour citations and warrants for public space offences.

Law reform

COH is a very active participant in the political and public policy formulation processes. COH workers and their homeless clients regularly attend meetings of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to provide testimony in relation to the violation of homeless persons' rights and to lobby in relation to reform of the regulation of public spaces. They also regularly meet with the San Francisco Police Department for the same purposes.

COH regularly convenes meetings of homeless people to provide a forum for these people to articulate their interests and concerns. These meetings are very well attended and organised. As discussed above, I attended a meeting of vehicularly-housed people – attended by about 30 people – at which decisions were made to send a delegation to the Board of Supervisors, to obtain pro bono legal assistance to conduct test case litigation in relation to the prohibition on habitation of vehicles, and to conduct a demonstration and sit-in on an empty city block which could be used for people to park their residential cars and vans.

Education

COH publishes a monthly paper, the Street Sheet, which is written primarily by homeless and ex-homeless people. It is sold on the streets for \$1 and has a circulation of about 36,000.

COH also conducts regular television and radio interviews regarding issues surrounding homelessness.

SAN FRANCISCO BAR HOMELESS ADVOCACY PROJECT

Contact details

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Date of meeting

Tuesday, 25 February 2003

Overview of organisation

The Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP) is a non-profit organisation founded in 1988 as a project of the San Francisco Bar Volunteer Legal Services Program. HAP provides free civil and administrative legal services to people who are chronically homeless.

HAP employs:

- 5 attorneys;
- 2 social workers;
- 3 paralegals; and
- 3 administrative staff.

HAP has access to the services of approximately 200-300 volunteer attorneys and law students. Attorneys provide their services to HAP in their individual capacities, and not through their firms.

HAP is funded in the amount of \$2 million by a range of organisations and individuals including members of the San Francisco Bar, the US Federal Government, the City of San Francisco and various philanthropic trusts.

Service delivery model

HAP provides services to approximately 2000 clients per year. Client intake occurs on-site at HAP each Thursday from 1.00-4.00pm and is conducted by volunteer attorneys and law students under the supervision of staff attorneys. Intake involves completing comprehensive questionnaires which aim to identify legal and psychosocial issues. Following identification of such issues, a referral is made to a volunteer attorney, a social worker or another service provider as necessary.

Where a referral is made to a volunteer attorney, he or she becomes responsible for the ongoing conduct of the matter. Staff attorneys and 'expert volunteers' may be consulted for advice, guidance and direction. Most face-to-face client contact continues to take place at HAP and clients are able to call their attorneys at their places of work from HAP.

HAP does not provide outreach services due to an overwhelming demand for existing services. HAP recognises that this service delivery model is somewhat problematic in that a certain demographic of clients (arguably the most marginalised demographic) do not access legal services unless they are provided via outreach. HAP is keen, pending expanded funding, to implement outreach services.

HAP seeks to be a holistic service provider and to identify and address psychosocial issues that often underlie a homeless persons' legal issues. For this purpose, HAP has developed very strong cross-referral relationships with homelessness service providers and employs two in-house social workers to coordinate referrals. Approximately 20-30 of HAP's volunteers are non-legal professionals who are available to provide free psychiatric and medical reports, health care, counselling, accountancy services and the like.

HAP provides a comprehensive day of training and a 700 page legal advocates' manual to all volunteer attorneys and law students.

Legal issues confronting clients

The key legal issues confronting HAP clients are:

- social security;
- housing and tenancy issues (particularly in relation to eviction prevention);
- consumer affairs; and
- 'quality of life' citations and warrants (although HAP only assists with 'extreme cases' as over 17,000 such notices are issued to homeless people each year and the demand for services is overwhelming).

Litigation

HAP provides representation in relation to individual legal issues confronting clients but does not, as a general rule, conduct test case litigation.

Law reform

HAP is not active in the area of law reform or public policy advocacy, instead focusing scant resources on the provision of individualised legal assistance. This is due, in part, to the overwhelming client demand for services, the relative conservatism of the San Francisco Bar, and the strong public policy efforts of organisations such as COH. HAP would like to commit more resources to identifying and addressing structural and systemic issues.

Education

HAP has strong relationships with Stanford University and Golden Gate University, hosting their clinical legal education programs. Many Stanford and Golden Gate law students progress to become HAP volunteer attorneys.

NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

Contact details

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Date of meeting

Thursday, 27 February 2003

Overview of organisation

The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) was founded in 1984 as a national network of advocates, service providers and persons who have experienced homelessness, with the aim of preventing and ending homelessness.

The NCH Board is comprised of 50 directors from 35 states. Forty per cent of the Board are coloured persons and 35 per cent of the Board are homeless or formerly homeless persons.

NCH is funded in the amount of \$1.2 million by a combination of donations, foundation contributions and membership fees.

NCH has four key focus areas:

- housing;
- income;
- health; and
- civil rights.

NCH uses four principle strategies to achieve its aims:

- public policy analysis and advocacy;
- education;
- community organising; and
- technical assistance to other service providers.

Service delivery model

NCH is not involved in the provision of individual legal services.

Legal issues confronting clients

NCH identifies 'quality of life' citations and warrants, access to adequate housing, and access to social security as the primary legal issues confronting homeless people.

Litigation

NCH has intervened in both a plaintiff and an amicus curiae capacity in a number of law suits concerning the civil and human rights of people experiencing homelessness.

Law reform

A primary focus of NCH's work involves law reform and public policy analysis and advocacy. Key law reform initiatives have included:

- 'You Don't Need a Home to Vote' – homeless voter registration and participation;
- 'Illegal to be Homeless' – reporting and lobbying in relation to the regulation of public space and the increasing criminalisation of homelessness;
- addition of 'homelessness' as a protected attribute under state and federal anti-discrimination and civil rights legislation; and
- addition of 'homelessness' as a protected attribute under anti-hate crimes legislation.

Most importantly – and impressively – NCH has drafted the *Bringing America Home Act*, to be introduced in the 108th Congress by the Democrats. This comprehensive bill is designed to prevent and end homelessness in the US and includes housing, income, health care and civil rights provisions. Key provisions include:

- recognition of the right to adequate housing;
- creation of a national housing trust fund;
- provision of rent subsidies to persons in poverty or housing stress;
- increasing funding to public housing programs;
- mandating that surplus federal property be used to house the homeless;
- creating a universal living wage;
- expedition of the social security application process for homeless people;
- increasing levels of, and access to, social security payments for homeless people;
- presuming eligibility for supplemental security income (similar to our DSP) for people experiencing homelessness;
- improving and strengthening health care access and provision;
- provision of no-fee PO boxes to homeless persons and
- penalisation of states and cities that 'criminalise' homelessness.

Education

NCH seeks to educate the public about causes of, and solutions to, homelessness.

Specific projects include:

- 'Faces of Homelessness' panel – a presentation by a panel of people who have experienced homelessness at schools, universities, civic organisations and special events. The panel addressed over 250,000 people in 2002;
- 'Costs of Homelessness' campaign – a campaign that aims to educate the public and public policy makers about the economic costs of homelessness (eg, comparison of costs of criminalising, prosecuting and incarcerating with costs of housing, feeding and training homeless persons); and
- media releases and campaigns.

NATIONAL LAW CENTRE ON HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY

Contact details

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www.nlchp.org

Contact person

Maria Foscarinis
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Date of meeting

Thursday, 27 February 2003

Overview of organisation

The National Law Centre on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP) is a non-profit organisation that works, through litigation, education and policy advocacy, to alleviate, ameliorate and end homelessness. It is the peak law reform and public policy advocacy body of the homelessness movement across the US.

NLCHP is staffed by:

- Executive Director;
- 5 staff attorneys;
- 2 policy officers; and
- office administrator.

It is funded principally by contributions from law firms, foundations and individuals and has recently developed a 'membership' program to expand funding sources.

The key focus areas of NLCHP's work are:

- housing – uses advocacy, education and litigation to increase the level of adequate, affordable housing across the US;
- income – focuses on access of homeless people to social security payments, food stamps and public benefits;
- education – monitors and enforces compliance with the *McKinney-Vento Act*, the US Federal Government's primary response to homelessness; and
- civil rights – monitors, and advocates in respect of, laws that 'criminalise' homelessness.

Service delivery model

NLCHP does not provide direct individual legal assistance to people experiencing homelessness. It does, however, provide legal advice and expertise to non-legal homelessness service providers.

Legal issues confronting clients

Although NLCHP is not involved in direct service delivery, it identifies the following as the key legal issues experienced by homeless people:

- ‘quality of life’ citations and warrants;
- social security;
- housing and tenancy;
- mental health; and
- lack of enforcement of the *McKinney-Vento Act*.

Litigation

NLCHP regularly intervenes in litigation regarding homelessness.

NLCHP also regularly co-counsels with pro bono law firms to conduct ‘impact litigation’, particularly litigation pertaining to civil rights or to Federal Government compliance with, and enforcement of, the *McKinney-Vento Act*.

For example, Title V of the *McKinney-Vento Act* requires federal agencies to make unused federal property available, at no cost, to homelessness service providers. NLCHP has undertaken extensive litigation to ensure compliance with Title V, particularly in relation to unused military bases.

Increasingly, NLCHP seeks to refer, and have recourse to, international human rights law in its litigation efforts.

Law reform

NLCHP undertakes extensive law reform work.

Recent significant law reform projects include:

- working with NCH to draft the *Bringing America Home Act*; and
- working with the Department of Public Social Services to improve the access of homeless people to social security benefits. Specific recommendations have included that the Department outreach to homeless people, that homelessness be a category of ‘presumptive eligibility’ for disability support payments, and that claims filed by homeless people be expedited.

Education

NLCHP works extensively with other homeless service providers to educate them about homeless persons’ rights, particularly in relation to:

- education;
- health care;
- housing;
- social security; and
- public space.

NLCHP is currently working with the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) to roll out a ‘homelessness and human rights’ campaign targeted at people experiencing homelessness and their advocates.

WASHINGTON LEGAL CLINIC FOR THE HOMELESS

Contact details

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Contact person

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Date of meeting

Monday, 3 March 2003

Overview of organisation

Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless (WLCH) was founded in 1985 to provide direct legal services to homeless people.

The WLCH staff is comprised of:

- Executive Director;
- 5 staff attorneys;
- 1 bookkeeper;
- 1 social worker;
- 1 administrative coordinator; and
- 1 volunteer coordinator.

WLCH provides services to about 2000 clients per year, about 50 per cent of which are assisted by staff attorneys and 50 per cent of which are assisted by volunteer attorneys. Services to the value of \$3.8 million were provided in 2002.

Although WLCH continues to provide significant free direct legal services to individuals, the focus of WLCH is increasingly shifting to addressing systemic issues through law reform submissions, class actions and test case litigation.

WLCH is privately funded by law firms, individuals and foundations in the amount of approximately \$600,000 per year.

WLCH receives extensive support from several law firms. For example, accommodation for WLCH is provided by a major law firm which donates five offices and the use of conference rooms, computers, photocopiers and the like. Law firms and volunteer attorneys raised about \$180,000 through sporting events for WLCH in 2002.

WLCH is the convening body for numerous homelessness service provider advocacy coalitions, including:

- Fair Budget Coalition – focuses on fiscal policy and expenditure regarding homelessness. The Coalition seeks to encourage a synthesised and integrated budgetary response to homelessness;

- Welfare Advocates Group – focuses on access to, and maintenance of, social security payments to homeless people; and
- Affordable Housing Coalition.

Service delivery model

The WLCH service delivery model is intended to overcome logistical and psychological barriers to homeless people accessing legal services.

Services are provided at ten locations, including crisis shelters and soup kitchens, on a weekly basis. Services are provided on a rotational basis by about 200 volunteer attorneys, some of whom are involved in an individual capacity and some of whom are involved in an institutional capacity through firms. WLCH has close relationships with about eight firms. Volunteer attorneys are responsible for the ongoing provision of legal services in relation to each client they see, although staff attorneys are available to supervise and assist this process. Staff attorneys also maintain their own caseload.

WLCH provides a comprehensive day of training and a service provision manual to all volunteer attorneys. Training is compulsory.

WLCH adopts a very holistic approach to service delivery, and aims to practically and actively assist clients to address the socio-economic and psychological issues underlying their homelessness and their legal issues. For example, WLCH negotiated with post offices to donate about 400 PO boxes and with telecommunications companies to donate about 400 voicemail boxes in order to overcome impediments to maintaining contact with clients.

Legal issues confronting clients

The primary legal issues confronting WLCH clients are:

- social security;
- access to housing;
- eviction defence;
- consumer affairs;
- debt;
- bankruptcy;
- discrimination;
- veterans' affairs; and
- 'quality of life' citations and warrants.

Litigation

WLCH provides individual client representation in relation to all the legal issues discussed above. Additionally, WLCH is regularly involved in class action and test case litigation, including a recent petition to the Supreme Court for the declaration of State of Emergency in relation to the nature and extent of homelessness across the US.

Law reform

Recent WLCH law reform projects have focused on:

- the right to housing;
- the 'criminalisation' of homelessness; and
- 'costs of homelessness'.

WLCH places a strong emphasis on client involvement in decision making and policy formulation. For example, clients are encouraged and assisted to testify at public hearings and parliamentary inquiries. I was fortunate to attend public hearings conducted by the Washington DC Department of Human Services at which several WLCH attorneys and clients gave testimony in relation to access to housing, health care and income.

Education

WLCH engages in extensive public education regarding homelessness, rights and the law. Educational efforts include:

- a monthly newsletter to clients. The newsletter addresses substantive legal issues, advises of forthcoming parliamentary inquiries and public hearings and the like;
- homelessness sensitivity and rights training for law enforcement officers in Washington DC. This training aims to equip police to refer homeless people to appropriate service providers rather than to fine them;
- media releases and more direct activism. For example, WLCH recently conducted a mock trial of public policy regarding homelessness on the steps of the Supreme Court. Many clients gave testimony at the trial, which received extensive media coverage; and
- a law course at Georgetown University School of Law entitled 'Homelessness and Legal Advocacy'.