

KWILS - servicing the Katherine region

By Kris Wallwork, Katherine Women's Legal Information Service (KWILS)

Katherine Womens Information and Legal Service ('KWILS') is a free legal service provided to women in the Katherine Region.

KWILS offers four levels of assistance in family law, child-in-need matters and various areas of civil law. The level of assistance provided to clients is managed on a case-by-case basis, in consideration of resources and expertise. KWILS strives to provide as much assistance as possible.

KWILS has grown over the last four years, with additional funding being provided by the Federal Attorney-General's Department.

In considering the use of those funds, the organisation reflected on some of the ongoing issues in service provision that have been provided by way of feedback. An ongoing concern is the perception that there is a lack of commitment and continuity to service delivery, given the high turnover of staff in regional remote organisations. Obviously, recruitment and retention are ongoing hurdles in regional/remote employment, so KWILS has considered ways in which the impact of those hurdles is felt less by the client group.

As part of one of the recurrent grants KWILS receives, it was decided to employ community based workers, initially in three communities. These workers would be the 'face of KWILS' on the communities, and provide support to clients, promote referrals and a liaison point for staff based in Katherine. The workers were identified through consultations with stakeholders and other community organisations providing services to the community.

These women needed to feel comfortable working within



KWILS delivering legal services in the community of Ngukurr

communities, where sometimes pressures such as family conflict can be difficult to manage. KWILS has employed two young women in the hope of developing the role and sourcing funding to provide ongoing training to develop the skills of these young people.

The response to this project has been extremely positive. The positions are currently filled in Borroloola and Lajamanu, and it is generally considered that KWILS now has a strong presence in these places and has trust within the community to provide appropriate and committed service delivery. KWILS now travels to the communities identified as part of this program, at least at the times prescribed by the bush court circuit, but also additional times throughout the year given case load and requests from the community.

Unfortunately, the two recurrent grants that KWILS receives are relatively small. The funds received as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) have allowed KWILS to manage a greater capacity, and free up the Principal Solicitor/Coordinator from carrying the entire caseload. The funding for the second solicitor's position is not recurrent. Although important work and effective and efficient service delivery is being developed and facilitated throughout the Katherine Region, it is tenuously based on further funding being received. Despite our financial crisis, KWILS hopes the government is able to see the huge benefits in the work that is being done and consider it a social, political, legal and economic responsibility to continue to support the service at its current capacity.