

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CLINICAL LEGAL STUDIES PROGRAMME

Speech

Friday, 30th October 2015

The Honourable Justice David North

1. Some 25 years ago in 1990 a number of Townsville legal practitioners and members of faculty of the James Cook University Law School formed a steering committee which led to the establishment of the Townsville Community Legal Service Inc.
2. Since then many of Townsville's prominent lawyers have at times acted as volunteers assisting members of the community who have needed advice or assistance upon a range of legal problems.
3. It is a tribute to the public spirit and professionalism of the legal profession in this city and the faculty at JCU that this organisation has, for so many years, been able to perform and continues to perform such an important community service. The objectives of the Townsville Community Legal Service are to provide free and accessible legal advice, to seek legal and social change, to address inequalities in the law and in society, to promote legal education and to provide counselling and support or referral to appropriate agencies.
4. Advice or assistance is provided in a number of fields. Not just generalist legal advice. There is a welfare rights service, a seniors' legal and support service, family law advice and access to a registered migration

agent and lawyer who can provide migration advice and assistance by appointment.

5. But tonight's occasion marks another interesting and important aspect of the collaboration between the legal profession and the law school at James Cook University which has been fostered or facilitated by the Townsville Community Legal Service.
6. This gathering marks the 20th year of the Townsville Community Legal Service's involvement in the law school's clinical studies subject.
7. This subject has, for 20 years, provided law students with the opportunity to appreciate the importance of access to justice, to develop professional skills and ethics, to learn to take responsibility for their work and to experience the limitations of the law and legal process.
8. In total approximately 270 final year James Cook University Law Students have completed the clinical subject since its inaugural year and many of those have gone on to volunteer at the Townsville Community Legal Service's Thursday and Tuesday evening legal advice clinics.
9. The subject provides an important opportunity for law students and for the university to engage in direct community service for disadvantaged people. Since the inception it is estimated that law students as volunteers have provided advice in all areas of law - civil, criminal, and family and have advised more than 3,000 persons.

10. On average students provide 300 client appointments a semester under supervision of admitted legal practitioners. Without the commitment of the legal practitioners, the faculty and the students many Townsville residents who lack the means to pay a private solicitor would otherwise not receive legal advice.
11. There is another aspect to this course, it gives final year students the opportunity to have experience of legal practice and making informed decisions about entering the legal profession. It is said that the experienced gained from this course has encouraged many of the law school's graduates to stay within the region, that is North Queensland, having acquired a taste for the satisfaction that can be gained from using one's skills and knowledge for the advantage of others.
12. The subject description of LA4014 – Clinical Legal Studies for this year describes the content of the course. It is worthwhile reading from that –

“The subject involves several components, namely a theory/instruction component; clinical/practical component and a reflective component. The theory or instruction will take approximately 26 hours in the first four weeks of semester and will be conducted at the Townsville Community Legal Service premises. Students will receive instruction regarding file management; office procedures; confidentiality; professional standards and ethics and client interview techniques.

Clinical and practical components will involve the student as an observer in real client interviews; and as an advisor in both supervised and unsupervised interviews. This component also takes into account general file management and the drafting of file memos and letters of advice. This component is expected to take up to 40 hours.

In the course it is expected that students will attend the Community Legal Centre for up to one day per fortnight.”

13. It will be seen from the course description that students gain from this course important legal training and experience including how to conduct oneself in an interview and how to assist clients in a practical and principled way. It provides valuable training and experience in some of the routine aspects of work as a lawyer – file management, record keeping, writing advices and follow up.
14. It can be expected that students will learn valuable skills including interview techniques and how to communicate with and thus advise and direct clients, many of whom may be otherwise challenged in being able to attend to such matters and see to their own interests.
15. I wish to take the opportunity tonight to congratulate the students on their efforts and achievements in what is an important milestone in their legal education leading towards their admission to the profession. Moreover I wish to congratulate and acknowledge the members of the faculty at James Cook University who have for 20 years now facilitated

this course and encouraged students towards it and through it. Of equal significance I wish to acknowledge and congratulate the staff and the volunteers of the Townsville Community Legal Service Inc who have assisted in mentoring and instructing students for the last 20 years and who have also contributed so significantly to the law in this city and in North Queensland by giving of themselves to assist members of the public.

16. It is an important aspect of a professional that he or she conducts oneself honourably in the interests of the law and in the interests of justice and one aspect of that is the willingness to give one's time and one's knowledge and experience to those in need.

17. So this evening, on behalf of the Court and may I dare say the public at large, I wish to congratulate all of you – the students, the faculty and the staff and members of the profession who constitute the Townsville Community Legal Service Inc.