

Profile of new staff at NCLC

Denise Leavy & Ros Palmer.



The Law centre would like to welcome a number of new staff that started work with the centre during the summer. Ros Palmer as the Community Education & Volunteer Coordination, Ros is responsible for the running of the Community Education Programme and the coordination of all our volunteer barristers for the Thursday evening clinic. Ros has worked in the community and voluntary sector for the past six years.

Denise Leavy is our new Senior Administrator. Denise is now responsible for the day-to-day running of the office, website maintenance, office Health & Safety and managing the support function within the NCLC. She has a BSc Business Management and Administration and has worked for over 10 years within an office environment.

Community Education Programme

This summer the Law Centre successfully ran a two-day Disability Law Course this course gives an over view of the legal framework that exists in relation to disability issues. Nineteen participants completed the course.

This autumn the Law Centre will roll out a comprehensive programme of community education courses. These include Practical Advocacy Skills courses I, II and III, an Introduction to the Legal System course, a course concerning Mental Health and Capacity and Mortgage Debt Course. The Family Law Matters course, and Employment Law Fundamentals course run in conjunction with Ballymun Community Law Centre. Both the Family Law Matters and Employment Law Fundamentals courses run for

12 weeks and are FETAC accredited through the National College of Ireland. Both courses have been well subscribed, as have all the courses launched this year, showing the strong demand for community education courses.

We were also delighted to be involved in several community education projects organised by various community organisations in the area such as the "Know Your Rights" course organised by K.L.E.A.R which ran for several weeks in the Adult Education Centre in Kilbarrack and covered such areas as Family Law, Wills, Debt, Housing, Employment Law and Social Welfare Law. We will be delivering the "Know Your Rights" in TARGET in Donaghmede in early 2008. For more details on any of the courses please contact the Law Centre on 8477804.

Northside Community Law Centre Membership 2007-2008

We would like to invite you to become an Associate Member of the Law Centre, which runs from September until 1st October each year. It costs €50 for individuals and €250 for Community & Voluntary Groups.

As an Associate Member of the Northside Law Centre you will be automatically circulated with our newsletter and other publications. From September 2007 only Associate Members from outside our catchment will be entitled to access free legal advice and support from our Solicitors on a range of issues including:

- Family Law ■ Employment ■ Equality ■ Housing ■ Debt
- Social Welfare ■ Consumer Issues ■ Human Rights.

All members are entitled to a 20% discount on our Community Education Courses (see our website for details). We hope that you will take this opportunity to become a member of the Law Centre.

Northside Community Mediation Course

Another service offered by the Law Centre is Mediation. Community mediation offers constructive processes for resolving differences and conflicts between neighbours, local groups and community based organisations. It is an alternative on the one hand to avoidance where disputes fester and on the other hand to prolonged litigation which can be expensive ending up with a win/lose outcome.

Editorial Note: Welcome to the 11th issue of the Northside Community Law Centre Newsletter. The last six months have been a very busy time for the Law Centre. This issue will bring you up to date on all the work of the NCLC together with articles on the Welfare Rights Group and also an article on a housing case. There are also a number of new people who have joined the team at the Law centre they will be profiled in the newsletter. If there is a particular issue you would like us to raise in the Newsletter please contact the Law Centre.



Above all mediation gives local people in conflict an opportunity to take responsibility for the resolution of their own dispute and to come up with their own solutions. Where this happens, relationships and connections between neighbours get re-built and the sense of community becomes stronger following the resolution of each dispute. There is a growing movement of community mediation in Ireland characterised by the following principles:

- The use of trained community volunteers as the primary providers of mediation services: volunteers are not required to have academic credentials
- The mediation service is provided by a voluntary, non-profit or independent community agency with its own governing board
- Volunteer members, staff and Board members are representative of the diversity of the community served
- The public can directly access the service through self-referral regardless of their ability to pay
- Provides an opportunity for dispute resolution at the earliest stage of conflict and before litigation has started.

For more information on the service contact Valerie Gaughran the Mediation Coordinator on 8482988.

Establishment of Welfare Rights Group

The Law Centre is interested in setting up a Welfare Rights Group the aim of which is to bring together groups who are working in the area of social welfare in order to identify common issues affecting the groups and to formulate a strategic approach to address those issues. The Law Centres provides advice to clients on social welfare rights and entitlements and also represents clients before the Social Welfare Appeals Office in respect of claims that have been disallowed or denied. Through this casework we have been able to identify issues concerning the operation of the appeals system which prompted us to carry out research into the accessibility, effectiveness, independence and fairness of the social welfare appeals system. This research was published in 2005 which was entitled "The Social Welfare Appeals System: Accessible & Fair?".

The researcher identified key issues which arose during the research and consultation process concerning for instance the effectiveness of the information and communication system regarding the appeals office, the need for independent information and advice, the role of medical assessors and the lack of transparency caused by the non-publication of records and outcomes of appeals. Various recommendations were made to address these issues such as the publication of all decisions and the rationale for those decisions, an independent panel of doctors and specialists to be appointed to provide medical assessments and various other recommendations. As a result of the research the Law Centre set up a database of cases taken by the Law Centre

accessible through our website to assist those taking cases.

The Law Centre is keen to continue this process in order to assess the common issues affecting clients of the groups working in the area of welfare rights, to identify emerging trends and to discuss ways of addressing those issues in a strategic manner. Social Welfare entitlements are constantly subject to amendment by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs. Frequently those amendments can have a disproportionate impact upon certain groups within the community often those who are the most vulnerable and marginalised. For instance the amendment to the rules regarding rent supplement which were introduced some years ago with devastating effects for those who could not afford to meet the criteria regarding renting privately is an example of where a collective campaign was instrumental in reversing those amendments.

Other examples of such measures include the introduction of the habitual residency requirement whose effects across a range of sections of the community particularly those most vulnerable and at risk of poverty such as migrant workers, immigrants, asylum seekers, returning emigrants and their children need to be assessed in order to adopt a more co-ordinated and effective approach to highlight the problems caused by the requirement and to discuss ways of reform. The Law Centre has identified through its casework various issues such as those mentioned above and would be very interested in hearing from other groups and organisations who would be interested in joining this group.

Free Legal Advice Clinics

Northside Community Law centre provides a free legal advice on a confidential basis to people living in our catchment area and to locally based community groups. We provide information, advice and in some cases representation on the following matters, family law, social welfare, employment equality, debt, consumer rights, housing, refugee asylum. Our catchment area comprises of constituencies in Dublin North East and Dublin North Central. The advice clinic takes place every Thursday from 6.00pm –7.30pm in the Law Centre with is situated in Northside Civic Office on Bunnratty Road. No appointment is necessary.

Volunteering

This summer Elizabeth Hawkins an American a law student from the University of Washington volunteered with the Law Centre. Elizabeth worked closely with the solicitors in the centre on submissions for the Equality Tribunal. She also updated the case database. The Law Centre would like to thank Elizabeth for all her hard work during her time with us.