

LGBTI legal service first for Queensland

WRITTEN BY RON HUGHES | 15 JULY 2010

A new LGBTI legal service has begun operating in Queensland.



The LGBTI Legal Service Inc is staffed entirely by volunteers and began operations on July 7.

Coordinator Julie Howes told *Queensland Pride* that despite there not being advance publicity, the service was already getting referrals.

“QAHC [Queensland Association for Healthy Communities] has been great,” Howes said. “When we first approached them they said ‘Yes, we’ll give you space to operate, free of charge’ and once we started operating they hit their own communications networks and helped promote us.”

Despite other general community legal services doing good work for the LGBTI communities, it’s believed this is the first LGBTI-specific service of its kind in Australia.

“My background is in community legal services and I looked around and realized there was no service of this kind available in Queensland, or in the country, really,” Howes said.

“So I approached Mark Thomas of Caxton Legal Services and it went from there.”

They began approaching people to form a management committee that would be a mixture of lawyers and non-lawyers.

“The trouble with having all lawyers is that they can sometimes miss the bigger picture, so we wanted representatives from every section of the LGBTI communities as well,” Howes explained.

“Unfortunately we don’t have an “I” yet...”

Howes describes the LGBTI Legal Service as having a holistic approach to helping clients.

“Not only do we give legal advice but we also give referrals to social work and health services,” she said.

“For example if someone comes to us with a discrimination case and say that they’re feeling depressed we will encourage them to seek medical advice as well as working on the case.”

The service is currently unfunded with all set-up costs being met by the management committee.

“Once we can research and show the need for such a specific service we can apply for funding and employ solicitors and so forth,” Howes said. “But that’s down the track.”

The service expects to deal mainly with family law matters, domestic violence, surrogacy and parenting rights, criminal law, discrimination, victims support, civil matters, legal issues in relation to government decisions, Centrelink matters, and employment matters.

Merran Lawler who is president of the LGBTI Legal Service said in a statement:

“We will provide free legal advice and information to clients who have legal problems which arise from their identification as LGBTI and/or because they feel more comfortable in dealing with a solicitor with specific skills, interest and understanding of LGBTI legal issues and/or the barriers experienced by LGBTI peoples in accessing the legal system. Our services are provided free of charge and no means test is applied.”

Currently the service is holding advice sessions every Wednesday night from 6pm at 30 Helen Street, Teneriffe. Bookings are unnecessary as it is a drop-in service and consultations are expected to take around 20 minutes.

For people in rural areas, however, simply call Julie Howson on 0401 936 232 and arrange a telephone interview with a solicitor for the next evening session.