

Annual Report 2006-2007

CONTENTS

Background	3
Board of Directors	4
Staff	5
Placements	6
Volunteers	7
Sponsors and Supporters	8
Director's Report	9
More on Volunteers	11
Community Activities	12
Submissions	14
Mallesons	15
Lawstuff	16
CROC	20
Financial Reports	21

The National Children's and Youth Law Centre

The National Children's and Youth Law Centre (NCYLC) is Australia's only national community legal centre dedicated to representing the rights and interests of children and young people. The Centre provides advice and information for children and young people about the law and their rights and responsibilities. It also works with those who support and advocate for children. It lobbies governments to consider children when developing legislation and policies. The Centre was established in 1993 and is a non-profit non-government organisation.

Our Mission:

The Centre aims to:

- Provide advice and information to children and young people about their legal rights and responsibilities
- Supports test cases on behalf of children and young people to clarify or further their legal rights
- Bring about changes to laws, policies and practices to advance the rights of children and young people
- Promote the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Be a Centre for research, training and policy development in matters of children's rights
- Promote opportunities for participation by children and young people in decision making at all levels

Our Three Core Areas of Work:

ADVOCACY

The Centre is at the forefront of public advocacy for the rights of children and young people, and promotes the full recognition and acceptance of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has played a key role in the preparation of the NGO Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on Australia's compliance with the Convention.

EDUCATION

The centre piece of the Centre's service delivery is to provide advice and information to children and young people as well as their parents and advocates and the wider community. In 1997, NCYLC established *Lawstuff*, a website providing legal information to all young Australians. Since its establishment, the site has attracted over 20 million hits. In 1998, the *Lawmail* facility was added, allowing young people to seek legal advice, referral and information via email. Currently the Centre responds to about 25 requests for legal advice per week.

INFORMATION

The Centre undertakes a range of projects to further the interests of young people. These projects are published to raise community awareness and are distributed to children and young people and to the wider community including governments, advocates, educators and employers. These publications include research and discussion papers.

The Board of Directors

The National Children's and Youth Law Centre is governed by a Board of Directors. Board members bring their expertise, vision and commitment to children's rights to guide the Centre through its challenges and to build its profile, performance, resource base and partners.

The Board meets during the year as required either in person or electronically. It is supported by its own Finance Committee which monitors the financial health of the Centre on a more regular basis.

The Finance Committee currently comprises the Chair and the Deputy Chair.

The Board currently operates as Sydney-based but is supported to have a national focus by the Centre's national networks – such as the National Youth Advocacy Network - and its partners that operate nationally - such as Malleon Stephen Jaques.

Board Members

Simon Moran	Board Member, 2003 to the present Management Committee Member, 2003 – 2005 <u>Chair</u> , January 2006 to the present
Pheona Arndell	Board Member, November 2004 to the present <u>Deputy Chair</u> November 2006 to the present
Christine Foster	Board Member, January 2006 to the present
Michael Chaaya	Board Member, January 2006 to the present
Sarah Nicholson	Board Member, 1999 to the present
Judy Cashmore	Board Member, August 2004 to the present
Garner Clancy	Board Member, November 2006 to the present
Jodi Nicholls	Board Member, November 2006 to the present
Sarah Winter	Board Member, July 2007 to the present

The Staff

James McDougall

Director

Jan 2005 – Present

Ali Haberfield

IT Support Officer

June 2006 – Present

Christine Pollard

Financial Administer

Oct 2006 – Present

Marie Hennessy

Mallesons Secondee

Aug - Nov 2007

Benjamin Chinnock

Communications Officer

Sep 2007 - Present

Julianne Elliott

Cyber Volunteer Project Manger

Sep 2007 - Present

How We Do It

The National Children's & Youth Law Centre operates its services to children and young people principally over the internet.

In this way our clients are able to access the information that we provide in their own time and to use the information as they see fit.

We believe that it is important to provide children and young people with accurate information that is explained in language that they can understand.

We also provide them with support to make decisions and link them with others in their communities that will support them.

For those of us that also operate in the adult world, our office hours are generally between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday each week.

The staff of the Centre have comprised a Director (full-time), Centre Manager (full-time), a Placement Lawyer from Mallesons Stephen Jaques (full-time on rotation every 3 months), a part time Finance Officer and a part time IT Support Officer.

In the new year, the Centre Manager's position will be replaced with a Communications Officer position and we will be joined by a part time Cyber Volunteer Project Coordinator.

But much of the work of the Centre is done by our volunteers!

Our Mallesons Placement Lawyers

Stephen Bray	May to August 2006
Tony Caddick	August to November 2006
Jodi Gray	November 2006 to February 2007
Kathryn Burke	February to May 2007
Andrew Hii	May to July 2007
Emma Keane	June to July 2007

Our Mallesons Key Contacts

Stephen Bray	December 2005 to May 2007
Kathryn Burke	May 2007 to the present

Centre Champions (friends and former Placements)

Louise Pounder	Sydney
Kate Fennessy	Sydney
Marc Jaku	Mallesons
Steven Yates	Canberra
Liz Mifsud	Japan

VOLUNTEERS

On-site Volunteers

Kate Stevens
Richard Zhang
Agnieszka Piskorowska
Eileen Murphy
Stephen Stokes
Iris Chan
Donna Roussi
Wen-Jing Tan
Fanny Chan
Nisha Jholl
Rachel Bray
Peter Myat
Dee Balacharige
Jaspreet Singh- Bains
Julia Sharparlinski
Marita Swain
Sarah Norman
Ganesh Kumar
Gabriel Watts
Jess Li
Joyce Ng
Katie Wright
Kit Yap
Zoe Paterson
Surya Gopalan
David Hull
Elizabeth Nicholson
Trisha Randhawa
Catherine Tat
Evan Hammon
Melissa Shaw
Tammy Steiner
Tim Chan
Jon Cheung
Micheal Bradley
Anita Power
Daniel Corbin
Bandini Chhichhia
Andrew Wright
Rosemary Grey
Jessica Hatherall
Sophia Yeung
Rachel Szekely
Simathi Samiayah
Afsoon Nejadiran
Danielle Benecke
Janet Chow
Joanne Yeoh
Kate Fisher
Mark Bailey
Lisa Washington

UNSW Social Justice Interns

Claudia Mangel
Jenny Radford
Crystal Png
Rebecca Piechocki
Tim Chan

Interstate Friends & Cyber Volunteers

Linda Crebbin (ACT)
Damien Batholomew (Qld)
Louise Paulsen (Qld)
Anna Copeland (WA)
Anna Radonic (Vic)
Kelly Bunyon (SA)

Mallesons Brisbane Pilot Project

Emmanuel Pappas
Rhys Casey
Samantha Duffy
Laura Hulett
Rowena Kennedy
Sarah Snip
Donovan Ferguson
Shelly Miller
Kate Muller
Carly Long
Lorelle Porter
Cassie Burchill
Ingrid Fuentes
Mel Graham
Jennifer Passagne
Sarah Svensson
Alexandra Gasteen
Sue Green

Sydney University External Placement Programme

Alice St. George
Gayathri Alles

Sponsors and Supporters

The **Federal Attorney General's Department** is our principal source of funding and currently our only recurrent source of funding.

Mallesons Stephen Jaques is our strongest supporter from the private legal profession and has a longstanding commitment to working with the Centre in a variety of innovative and important ways.

The **NSW Department of Ageing, Disability & Home Care** has provided us with computers, funding to develop our websites for children with a disability and introduced us to our IT partner ...

Squiz a Web Development company have agreed to provide us with technical support and advice on the development of our websites and communications strategy.

The Law & Justice Foundation of NSW has provided us with project funding to develop new media approaches to community legal education for young people.

The Melbourne Community Foundation has previously provided project funding to the Centre and is discussing with us the possibility of future work together.

The University of New South Wales has been a generous provider of accommodation to the Centre for over twelve years.

Oxfam and **UNICEF** have worked with the Centre on the development of effective reporting on Australia's compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Defence for Children International (DCI) continues to work closely with us on child rights advocacy.

The University of Sydney and **the University of Wollongong** provides the Centre with intern placements.

The National Youth Advocacy Network helps to ensure that the Centre is informed of youth justice issues around the country.

The Director's Report

At the end of a financial year, we look at the bottom line. Where do we stand compared to the same time last year? For community organisations, it can be a dispiriting time. So we quickly turn to the activity of the last twelve months – to reassure ourselves that despite our limited financial assets, we have again achieved a lot. We console ourselves with our busyness and leave the business side to the auditor and the finance officer.

This year I will resist that temptation for a moment – and dwell a little longer than usual on an examination of our assets. This won't be a purely financial exercise. As part of the process of developing our budgets for the next financial year, I had a go at something I've been meaning to do for some time – attempt a valuation of our volunteer and pro bono contributions. It was an illuminating exercise.

When you place a monetary value on the time that our volunteers give – our Board members, our law students, our partners and our corporate friends, you discover that the small organisation with an income of under \$200 000 is actually a lot richer than you expect. And interestingly your volunteers and in-kind sponsors give a lot more than your financial sponsors. By a rate of about two-to-one. So in fact we operate a 'business' with a turnover of over half a million 'dollars' a year.

And so as we sign off on another year, we can see our strengths in terms of structure, operations and relationships. The other challenge in being clear about our internal strengths is to recognise that our most effective activities are not solely our own to take credit for anyway.

The last year has seen the latest development in our ongoing relationship with Mallesons with the operation of the Cyber Volunteer Pilot Project – run out of the Brisbane office of Mallesons. The evaluation of the Pilot has been favourable and will lead in the new financial year in the rollout of the National Cyber Volunteer Project – a very exciting collaboration between the Centre and the firm. Warm thanks to all those involved – particularly Donovan Ferguson from the Mallesons Brisbane office and Jane Farnsworth the Mallesons National Pro Bono Coordinator.

Our collaboration with UNICEF has seen the consolidation of the Child Rights Taskforce – a network that will be a valuable vehicle for steering the next Shadow Report on Australia's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Our newest partnership will also produce a worthy collaboration – addressing one of our most intractable problems over the last few years – how to develop our online presence with a collection of daggy websites of variable quality and accessibility. We look forward to working with Squiz on our review of our online services.

The year also ended with a strong endorsement and message of support from our principal funding body, the Federal Attorney General's Department – with an IT upgrade in the form of two new laptops and a kind donation personally sanctioned by the Attorney General himself of \$20 000 to offset the costs of our restructuring.

Thanks also to the Director and Assistant Director of the Community Legal Services Section Joan Jardine and Wendy Spicer.

We welcome two new Board members Garner Clancey and Jodie Nicholls who have already brought new vision and energy to the Centre.

We have also seen an evolving role for some of our Centre champions – a group of friends - usually former Mallesons Placements – who have been able to offer support and insight of strategic value – Stephen Bray, Louise Pounder and Kate Fennessy who both made great contributions to our recent Planning Day – and our growing pool of friends interstate and overseas (Stephen Bray, Jodi Gray, Steven Yates and Liz Mifsud).

Special thanks to Board member Pheona Arndell who in the previous year negotiated a donation of computers from the NSW Department of Disability Ageing & Home Care and this year has guided us in how to make a successful bid for funding for improving Web Accessibility for children with a disability AND introduced us to Squiz.

Thanks again to Simon Moran who has settled comfortably into the role of Chair and the leadership of the Centre (a development that has been a surprise only to him).

Finally returning to my opening remarks a big thank you to all of our volunteers.

Our work – in providing information and advice to children and in researching and supporting our advocacy and policy development would not have been possible without the commitment of the bright young stars that devote their time and their brilliance to the Centre.

Stay tuned for more news of collaborations and projects.

James McDougall

TOP TEN LAWMAIL VOLUNTEERS

1. Ganesh KUMAR
2. Jodi GRAY (Mallesons)
3. Gayathri ALLES
4. Jessica LI
5. Claudia MANGEL
6. Evan HAMMAN
7. Sumathi SAMIAYAH
8. Jon CHEUNG
9. Rachael SZEKELY
10. Kelly BUNYON (South Australia)

TOP THIRTY LAWMAIL VOLUNTEERS

11. Anna RADONIC (Victoria)
12. Jaspreet SINGH BAINES
13. Kate FISHER
14. Kit YAP
15. Eileen MURPHY
16. Daniel CORBIN
17. Kathryn BURKE (Mallesons)
18. Weng Jing TAN
19. Janet CHOW
20. Stephen STOKES
21. Zoe Paterson
22. Catherine TAT
23. Alice ST GEORGE
24. Rose GREY
25. Fanny CHAN
26. Andrew Hii (Mallesons)
27. Stephen BRAY (Mallesons)
28. Tony Caddick (Mallesons)
29. Anita POWER
30. Kate STEVENS

Closely followed by Yanke Zhang, Afsoon NejoDIRAN, Surya Gopalan, Katie Wright, Agnieska Piskorowska and Carly Long.

Community Activities

CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS AND TRAININGS

During the year the Centre attended or spoke at various conferences, workshops and seminars for networking and / or community legal education. These included:

- Schools Education Day – UNSW Law Society
- National Association of Community Legal Centre’s Conference - Wollongong
- NSW Youth Justice Coalition Planning Day
- Victoria Youth Law’s Human Rights Youth Forum
- National Youth Advocacy Network Meeting – convened – Wollongong
- UNSW Social Science Summer School – 2 Lectures
- Mallesons Melbourne Human Rights Group – talk
- Farewell for Streetwize Communications
- National Youth Affairs Conference – Melbourne
- Address to Noffs Foundation Planning Day
- Federal AGD Family Law Section – Towards Best Practice for Children
- ALRC Privacy Roundtable
- Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies Consultative Group
- Federal Department of Human Services Access Card consultations
- Human Rights Conference – Victoria
- Consult with HREOC, DTP, Oxfam on Indigenous Advocacy Network Project
- Reception for Australian National Commission for UNESCO – Opera House
- Meeting with Commissioner for Children – Northern Ireland
- Mallesons Brisbane training – 2 sessions
- Meetings with
 - Ulrike Schuerman
 - Ursula Kilkelly (Ireland)
 - DCI Uruguay
 - Tara Collins (Canada)
 - Federal Shadow Youth Minister Tanya Pilbersek
 - UNICEF Deputy Director (Europe) Hans Olsen
 - Tasmania Children’s Commissioner Paul Mason
 - The Smith Family Youth Program staff
- Meetings with UN Human Rights Committee Deputy Chair Sir Nigel Rodley
- National Human Rights Network Steering Committee
- Consultations on Centre Communications Strategy – with Mallesons Web developer Rupert Hanson; UNICEF Education Officer Felicity Stafford; Squiz Director Stephen Barker.
- Consultations with University of Western Australia Crime Research Centre – Harry Blagg and David Indermaur
- Consultations with Youth Legal Service WA
- Presentation to delegation from Legal Aid Taiwan.
- Host with UNICEF Australia CEO Caroline Hardy the visit to Canberra of the Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child Professor Jaap Doek to meet the Federal Attorney General and representatives of the Federal Attorney General’s Department.
- Attend luncheon for Professor Doek hosted by the NSW Commissioner for Children & Young People Gillian Calvert.
- Attend launch of Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission website for students

- Attend ASIAL Conference (Australian Security Industry Association Limited)
- Selection Panel for Law & Justice Foundation Award - Pro Bono Partnership
- Attend 21st Birthday for Youth Legal Service WA
- Consultations with ARACY - on Commitment to Young Australians
 - Youth Policy
 - Youth Justice / Child Protection Network
- Consultations with Duncan Chappell on criminology research projects
- Presentation - UNICEF HIV/AIDS Adviser East Asia Pacific, Wing-Sie Cheng
- Attend Consent to Medical Treatment Forum – NSW Parliament House
- UNICEF launch of Michael Mucci Exhibition of Works inspired by CROC
- Consult with Judith Bessant, Professor Youth Studies and Sociology, RMIT University, Melbourne
- Consults with Youth Law Victoria
- Attendance at ARACY COAG Forum at AMP Limited.

NETWORKS AND MEMBERSHIPS

The NCYLC has maintained an active involvement in the following networks:

- National Youth Advocacy Network – convened
- NSW Youth Detention Coalition – initially convened
- National Association of Community Legal Centres
- New South Wales Community Legal Centres Combined Group
- University of New South Wales Law Faculty and Social Justice Centres
- Youth Justice Coalition – NSW
- ACCC Consumer Consultative Committee – Canberra – 3 meetings
- Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission
- NACLC Human Rights Network
- Public Interest Advocacy Centre
- Australian Research Alliance for Children & Young People including consultations on communications strategy
- Children In Detention Advocacy Project
- Child Taskforce Group with UNICEF co-convenors
- NT Youth Justice Campaign on Naming Young Offenders
- QLD Youth Justice network
- Criminal Justice Research Network
- Youth Network of Tasmania

The Centre convened the National Youth Advocacy Network teleconferences and the CROC Steering Committee.

2006/2007 SUBMISSIONS

A key aspect of the work of the NCYLC is to respond to inquiries conducted by all levels of Government, Government Departments, Academic research and inquiries conducted by private consultations on issues and areas which impact on the rights, interests and well being of children and young people. During 2006/2007 the NCYLC prepared the following submissions:

- **Productivity Commission Inquiry into National Consumer Policy Framework**
- **Federal Parliament Joint Committee on Intelligence & Security – Review of Security and Counter Terrorism Legislation 2006**
- **Submission to the AccessCard Taskforce and Fact Sheets for Community Consultation on the impact of the proposed Card on young people**
- **Letter to the Attorney General on the Copyright Amendment Bill**
- **Letter to the Christian Democratic Party on the Education Support for Dyslexic Children Bill 2007**
- **Overview on Issues relating to Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child in Australia**
- **Comments on NSW Health’s Policy on the Use of Photo Documentation Collected by NSW Health Sexual Assault Centres**
- **Submission to the NSW Attorney General’s Review of Section 61AA of the Crimes Act 1900 (the lawful correction reference)**
- **Comments on the Graffiti Prevention Exposure Draft Bill Discussion Paper (Victoria)**
- **Submission to Statutory Review of Terrorism (Police Powers) Act 2002 (NSW)**
- **Submission to ALRC Inquiry into Privacy Laws**

SOCIAL JUSTICE INTERN (UNSW) PROJECT

The NCYLC continues its involvement in the UNSW Social Justice Project. The Social Justice Project was established in 2000 through the UNSW Law School and part of its role is to develop and coordinate joint activities on social justice issues with other centres, staff and students at the University.

The Social Justice Intern Program gives UNSW law students an opportunity as part of their course to gain experience working at one of the Centre’s affiliated with the Law Society. Students undertake specific projects as well as contribute to the tasks involved in the day to day operations of the Centre.

Jenny Radford will commence her internship with us in July 2007. Rebecca Piechocki and Crystal Png were our interns for the first session of Uni 2007. All of these students assisted with general administration duties, answering telephone inquiries, researching and drafting of LawMails and the updating of the Lawstuff Website. Rebecca and Crystal reviewed children’s issues with regards to the internet focusing on Copyright, privacy and safety issues.

We wish Jenny, Rebecca and Crystal every success with their future studies and careers.

MALLESONS STEPHEN JAQUES

The National Centre has been partners with Mallesons Stephen Jaques since 2001.

The relationship has included targeted pro bono legal assistance, financial assistance, policy development, volunteering and other contributions.

The success of our partnership with Mallesons was recognised at the 2005 Law and Justice Foundation of NSW Awards where it was awarded the Pro Bono Partnership Award. Judges commented that they were particularly impressed by the depth of support provided by this partnership.

One of the most important features of the partnership is the secondment of Mallesons solicitors to the NCYLC for three month periods at a time. This considerably improves our ability to provide advice and legal information to young people.

In March 2007 the Mallesons cyber volunteer project was piloted in the Brisbane office with great success. From March to May the Brisbane Mallesons volunteers answered 58 LawMail enquiries. The volunteer programme involves a variety of work and the Brisbane office has also been involved with the Queensland Lawstuff updates and contributed to the verification and re-writing of legal information contained in the Queensland edition of Streetsmart. The volunteers are currently drafting an advice for a Queensland Tafe on the privacy and confidentiality issues surrounding counselling. The cyber volunteer program will be rolled out to the other Australian Mallesons centre over the next 12 months.

Our relationship continues to strengthen and we thank Mallesons Stephen Jaques for their ongoing support and commitment and we look forward to the further development of this partnership.



LAWMAIL

Since its inception, LawMail has provided a vital avenue of service provision to children and young people. They demonstrate an eagerness for information and search out answers to questions that they have not been able to find elsewhere or they wish to test information that they have been given from other sources (peers, teachers, parents, media, other internet sources). We understand that children like to access sites that are designed specifically for them. They gain access to the internet either at home, youth centres, libraries, cafes, school or at a friend's place). They often prefer the anonymity that the service provides.

**During the year from 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007
the Centre provided responses to 1240 LawMails.**

The number of LawMails answered by the Centre decreased by 14% (down from 1438 LawMails in the previous financial year). Given the time spent this year reviewing the information on Lawstuff, this may be due to more potential inquiries being addressed at an early stage. Interestingly the number of requests from boys has increased by 3%. Given the historical imbalance towards inquiries from girls, this is a good sign for the service .

Our work on the content, tone and accuracy of the responses has also paid off. As well as providing accurate information based on up-to-date research, responses seek to use language that is clear and easy to understand, tone that is appropriate to the age of the reader and treats the reader with respect and good humour. This still involves the exercise of considerable skill and sometimes guess-work (as we do our best to interpret the email text that we are provided with!).

Lawmail and Lawstuff are now given significant focus as the Centre's primary service activities. Both services rely on both onsite and cyber volunteers. All LawMails and Lawstuff text updates are signed off by the Director.

The Centre is working to extend our Cyber capacity. Ali and the Communications Working Group have been working on designing a new interface for the NCYLC website with Squiz.

Traffic to the Lawstuff website for the year was:

Visits – Jul to Dec 06 –70,144; Jan to Jun 07 – 76,276; TOTAL – **146,420**
Page Views – Jul to Dec 06 – 658,319; Jan to Jun 07 – 683,829; TOTAL – **1,342,148**
Hits – Jul to Dec 06 – 1,962,346; Jan to Jun 07 – 2,050,518; TOTAL – **4,012,864**
Average Time per Visit – 3:49 minutes

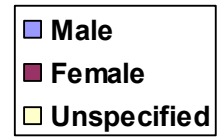
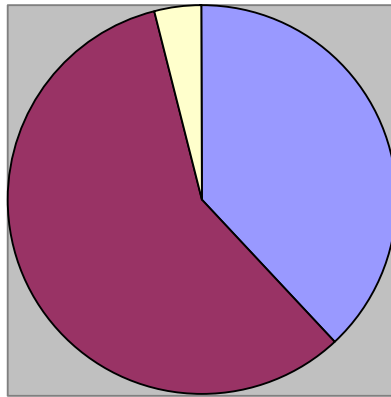
Most visitors followed links from (top is most common)

1. google.com
2. google.com.au
3. cyh.com (SA Government website on child & youth health)
4. reachout.com.au
5. HREOC.gov.au

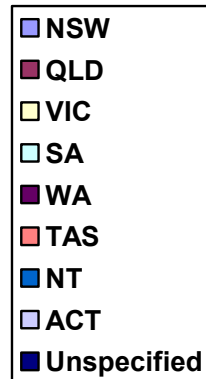
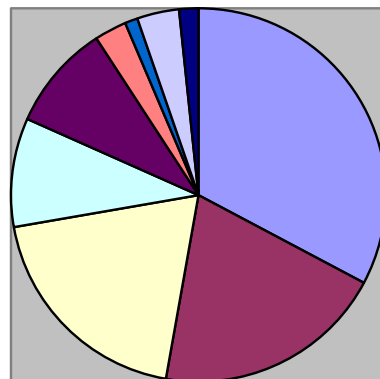
LawMail Statistics for Period: 1 July 2006 – 30 June 2007

Total Received
Number: 1240

Gender Spread
Male: 468
Female: 724
Unspecified: 48



State Spread
NSW: 406
QLD: 250
VIC: 239
WA: 114
TAS: 34
SA: 119
NT: 14
ACT: 43
Unspecified: 21



LawMails by Topic

Topic	Previous Year		Current Year	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
assignment	68	5%	62	5%
age of consent + sex	108	8%	72	6%
law and process	135	9%	99	8%
harassment + discrimination	51	4%	42	3%
other	38	3%	126	10%
alcohol, drugs, smoking, tattoos + piercing	107	8%	73	6%
employment	76	5%	48	4%
school powers	87	6%	90	7%
motor vehicles + riding	48	3%	47	4%
assault + domestic violence	47	3%	34	3%
sexual assault	55	4%	40	3%
relationships	17	1%	37	3%
change of name + passports	28	2%	19	1%
consumer including internet	67	5%	34	3%
police powers + criminal law	62	4%	70	6%
privacy + FOI	34	2%	24	2%
property + goods	54	4%	11	1%
leaving home	93	7%	66	5%
Marriage	14	1%	11	1%
family law	160	11%	159	13%
counseling referrals	26	2%	9	1%
care + protection	41	3%	47	4%
Feedback	8	1%	6	1%
	1424	100%	1240	100%

Notes

1. In the event of a Lawmail with multiple issues, we categorise according to what appears to be the most serious concern to the client.
2. There are a certain number of Lawmails that are simply feedback on Lawstuff. This does not reflect the full extent of our feedback system.
3. The enquiries that we receive in relation to sexual assault, assault + domestic violence and care + protection require special attention in view of the personal nature of some of the questions – and the mandatory reporting obligations that exist for most professional settings. There is a balance required between these obligations and the confidentiality required by the lawyer – client relationship. For more detailed information on the Centre's approach, contact the Director and Principal Solicitor.

There is a pattern of four topic areas that we receive enquiries about consistently. These topics are leaving home, employment, school and family law issues and a brief analysis if these statistics follows.

Over the last four years the largest percentage of Lawmails have been about Family Law. It is clear from the Lawmail statistics that Family Law issues are a concern to young people, particularly 11, 13 and 15 year olds. An extremely large percentage of Family Law Lawmails are about parental orders and how they can be put in place or changed. Children want a say in Family Law proceedings and they want their opinion to count when the decision is made regarding the parent that takes care of them and the parent they spend time.

In June 2005, the Court received \$239,604 in funding from the Attorney-General's Department to pilot a new model for working with families. The project, entitled the 'Child Responsive Dispute Resolution Program', was funded on a one-off basis for 12 months and commenced in the Court's Melbourne Registry last October in tandem with the Children's Cases Program. While the formal evaluation of the pilot is yet to be completed, the preliminary results are encouraging, particularly in terms of early settlement rates and parties' willingness to try new parenting arrangements. The Court will consider the feasibility of introducing the new approach on a national basis after the evaluation is completed. National implementation, however, is dependent upon the availability of adequate funding. As yet there are no published statistics of this pilot program, although the report indicates they will be published.

It is not clear that this approach will necessarily extend to mediation processes. An evaluation and commitment to ensuring that all children affected by family law processes are given the opportunity to be involved and heard by appropriately skilled practitioners and counsellors.

The Lawmails on leaving home are almost always request for information on the minimum legal age to move out of home. The age bracket ranges from 13 to 17 but the majority of Lawmail on this topic come from 15 and 16 year olds. The high proportion of cases on this topic suggest that young people are looking for a certain level of independence.

Employment is another popular Lawmail topic. The requests for information on correct pay and work conditions are indicative of an awareness of a right to be paid appropriately and treated as any adult employee expects to be treated at work. These requests largely come from 15 to 17 year olds.

As much of a young person's life is spent at school it is not surprising that we receive a large number of Lawmails on this topic. Children aged 14 to 16 are particularly interested to know their rights in relation to disciplinary measures, appearance (specifically uniform requirements) and bullying.

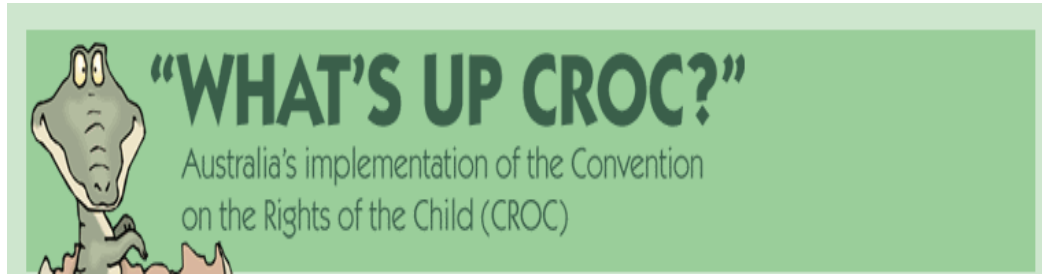
The National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century, agreed to by all State and Territory education ministers, include an emphasis on educating students to understand their role in Australia's democracy. The National Goals state that students, when they leave school, should:

- be active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life (Goal 1.4);
- have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world; to think about how things got to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their own lives, and to accept responsibility for their own actions (Goal 1.3).

Since the Discovering Democracy initiative and the publication of the National Goals, all States and Territories have recognised that civics and citizenship education is central to effective schooling and have incorporated civics and citizenship education into their curriculum documents and school practices.

Conspicuously absent from the Goals is any reference to the rights of children or a human rights perspective.

Australia continues to fail to meet its obligation to educate the Australian community on the terms and application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – in itself a breach of the Convention.



In 2006 a Child Rights Taskforce (**Taskforce**) was formed with members from the following organisations:

- UNICEF;
- NCYLC;
- DCI;
- Oxfam;
- NYAN;
- UTS;
- Combined Community Legal Centres;
- ACT Youth Coalition; and
- UN delegation members.

The Taskforce has taken on a number of projects including a followup of the CROC Observations & Recommendations. The NCYLC has encouraged consultation with the Attorney Generals and Government Departments that have been identified as having a responsibility in relation to CROC. UNICEF contribute through its Child Protection priority area and section 4 of the Concluding Observations which deals with the Family Environment and Alternative Care. NYAN's focus was on Youth Participation and increasing youth awareness of CROC and youth involvement in monitoring the progress and local activities.

Youth Law is creating a toolkit with the potential to be a useful monitoring kit for the CROC report. This kit has been prepared with the consultation of young people in out-of-home care to help develop and pilot the kit. They are now exploring how this can become a consistent method for young people to have a voice in the shadow reporting process.

The reporting process has been a priority for the Taskforce. In August 2006 James McDougall attended meetings of the UN CR Committee with Carolyn Hardy, CEO UNICEF Australia, and Professor Jaap Doek, Chairperson of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child where this issue was discussed.

Since meeting with the Human Rights Committee Deputy Chair and the Human Rights Network to discuss an appropriate strategy for the non-government sector to approach the report the reporting process on the ICCPR and ICESCR has begun. The Human Rights Network is developing its collaboration and there is the opportunity for people and organisations to get more involved. The aim of the network is to build knowledge and skills in the NGO sector about effective reporting.

UA proposed that a new interactive CROC website be developed using child friendly language and allowing feedback from young people and the community. The NCYLC is updating its CROC site and UNICEF Australia has offered to assist with this process.

The Child Rights Taskforce continues to meet at regular intervals to work to increase the visibility and awareness of child rights.