

Media Release

From Central Highlands Community Legal Centre Inc.

Ararat to have Family Violence duty lawyer service

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ararat will have an additional duty lawyer service from January next year after Central Highlands Community Legal Centre received funding from the Victorian Government through the *Family Violence Duty Lawyer Fund*. The service will be in addition to the current service provided by Victoria Legal Aid.

On Friday, Attorney-General Martin Pakula announced CHCLC will receive over \$52,000 to provide Duty Lawyer services to the Ararat Magistrates Court during family violence hearings. The Duty Lawyer service means that both an applicant and respondent to family violence matters will have access to a solicitor to ensure the process is fair and just. The lawyer will be able to provide advice, obtain instructions and act for their client in court and complete ongoing case work in relation to family law matters.

Research indicates that access to adequate legal representation helps to improve legal outcomes for both parties and ensures that the legal process is understood, is fair and equitable.

Central Highlands Community Legal Centre will begin the recruitment process for a solicitor next month. The part time position will involve some travel between Ararat and Ballarat.

Central Highlands Community Legal Centre Inc. is a not-for-profit community organisation that provides free legal advice, casework and community legal education to people who live, work and study in the Grampians Region. Our main office is located at 15 Dawson Street North, Ballarat. We also provide a, Outreach service one Wednesday per month to Ararat and Stawell. Further information about the service can be found at www.chclc.org.au.



Example of the impact a Duty Lawyer can have on people experiencing family violence.

Samira, 30, approached us having filed an application with the Magistrates' Court for a Family Violence Intervention Order to protect herself and her 2 month old child from her abusive ex-partner, Aden, who was also the child's father.

Aden had become abusive towards Samira when he discovered that she was pregnant. He would verbally abuse her, follow her around the house, yell at her if she was upset, prevent her from leaving the house and often kick her out of the house or refuse to pick her up from events. Samira successfully left the relationship whilst she was still pregnant, but was coerced back into the home when he offered to attend relationship counseling if she moved home. Aden alienated Samira from her local community by spreading rumours within the community that she was mentally unstable, and publishing derogatory comments on her Facebook page that she was not fit to be a mother. Aden also threatened that he would not support Samira and the child financially once the child was born, and would often refuse to give her money for basic items she required.

Samira was able to leave the relationship again shortly before the child was born. Following the birth of the child, Aden would harass Samira by constantly sending her text messages to find out where she was and what she was doing.

CHCLC represented Samira at the Magistrates' Court as the duty lawyer on the day. Aden chose not to attend the Court despite being served with the application for the intervention order by the Police. After hearing evidence, the Magistrate granted an intervention order to protect Samira and the child. The order will last for 12 months and prohibits Aden from contacting Samira, going to her house, publishing anything on the internet about her or keeping her under surveillance.

Quotes Attributable to Glen Ludbrook, Principal Solicitor

"Having access to a Family Violence duty lawyer at court can help reduce client stress and help achieve the best outcomes for both parties"

"Family violence matters can often more along faster if both parties are represented by a solicitor rather than self-representing"

END

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