

## ***Snapshot of the NNWCLS Inc.***

*The North and North West Community Legal Service Inc was officially opened by Rt Hon Ian Sinclair in Armidale on 22 April 1996.*

### **History**

The Service began in April 1993 when Jennifer Crew began the Armidale Community Legal Service run solely by volunteer solicitors from Armidale. In 1995 Jennifer Crew, Ted Wright, and Rhonda Weinand began research and consultation with the community to establish the need for a funded Community Legal Centre to service the whole New England & North West regions of NSW. The resulting submission to the Commonwealth Government was successful and the North and North West Community Legal Service Inc was created. In April 2002 the Service became the auspice for the Northern Regional Tenant Resource Service (NRTRS) and in October 2002 became the auspice for the New England and Western Advice and Advocacy Service (NEWTAAS). The sudden growth in the Service required it to relocate from shared accommodation in the Armidale Neighbourhood Centre to its own premises in the Minto Building. It also opened offices in Dubbo and Broken Hill for the tenancy service, both co-located with the Community Legal Centres in those cities.

From July 2004 to September 2005, the NNWCLS took on the temporary auspice of the Western Aboriginal Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service, with offices in Dubbo, Broken Hill and Bourke. In April 2005, the NNWCLS auspiced the Community Cottage.

In September 2005, the Western Aboriginal TAAS was handed over to an Aboriginal organisation, Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise to auspice, and in January 2006, the Northern Regional Tenant Resource Service self-incorporated to become an independent Service.

In May 2007, the North and North West Community Legal Service re-located to new premises in a more central position in the CBD and close to the Court House which has proved most successful. NEWTAAS remained at the Minto Building.

### **Geography and Demographics of Our Region**

Each of the three services provided by the North and North West Community Legal Service has a different 'service footprint'. The legal service covers the New England and North West regions, The tenants resource service covers the New England, North West, Far North Coast and North Coast regions and the tenants advice and advocacy service covers the New England, North West, West and Far Western



Service Area Map:  
Northern Statistical Division

regions of New South Wales. Together, the three services cover a vast area of NSW from the western and southern borders to the northern beaches. Our main office is based in Armidale with smaller offices in Dubbo and Broken Hill. In the New England and North West regions of NSW all three services provide advice, advocacy and support to a population base of approximately 176,000 people over an area of 98,000 square kilometres, covering 10% of the area of New South Wales. Our staff travel considerable distances on a regular basis including regular ‘circuits’ to Tamworth, Narrabri, Gunnedah, Moree, Inverell and Glen Innes by our solicitors, regular trips to Tamworth and other centres for ‘duty’ advocacy by our tenant workers and extensive ‘regional tours’ by our Regional Tenant Worker. Our face-to-face client contact is supplemented by free call numbers that are accessible to all people in the regions we cover.

The regions we service are extremely diverse, although all are rural centres with agriculture generally comprising the major industry. In the New England, education (tertiary and secondary) beef cattle and wool growing predominate whereas the more northwestern regions are cotton and wheat growing areas. The western and far western areas have extensive grazing and food growing industries with mining also playing a major part. Tourism is a fast growing industry across all the regions, especially in the northern coastal areas.

While the coastal regions are experiencing a boom in population growth the regions west of the dividing range have static or declining populations. Indigenous Australians comprise a much higher percentage of our population than the state average. For example in the New England and North West regions people of aboriginal descent comprise 5.8% of the population as against the state average of 1.9% (about 10% of the State’s Aboriginal population live in this region). The service area has a lower than average population of people from language backgrounds other than English with about 2.6% born in non-English speaking countries (State average 15.7%) and 2.0% speaking a language other than English at home (State average 16.8%). In terms of age the population is slightly older than the State average with 27.7% being over 50 (State average 26.6%). People with disabilities comprise 19.0% of the population (State average 18.2%) with physical disabilities being most prevalent. For both men and women educational disadvantage is higher in the region with 69.6% of women and 61.4% of men having no skilled post-school qualifications (State averages 65.2% and 53.0% respectively).



Historically the regions have recorded higher unemployment rates than State or National averages (around 2 percentage points higher on average) with persons of Aboriginal descent experiencing employment rates as high as 46%. Similarly the regions experience a much lower median income level than both State or National figures indicate. The median weekly income for a single person is 17% below the national figure on average and the

median weekly income for a household is 21% below the national figure. The percentage of one-parent families in the region is 20.3%, which is over 30% higher than the national average of 15.5%.

The overall picture portrayed by the 2001 census indicates the region has lower levels of income, higher levels of unemployment, and higher levels of socio-economic and other forms of disadvantage than the national average. Our clients are generally disadvantaged due to socio-economic, gender, age, educational or disability factors. Our region is notable for its large indigenous population, below average educational participation and low average incomes. The region has a declining population.