

# Media Release



**Thursday 17 May 2012 – for immediate release**

## **Volunteers a mainstay of community legal help**

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This year's joint timing of Law Week with Volunteer Week has afforded a vital opportunity to highlight the contribution of volunteers to Victoria's community legal centres (CLCs), according to the Victorian Federation of Community Legal Centres.

In the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of CLCs, the extent and impact of that contribution has now been detailed in a new report by Michael McKitterick, Clinical Supervisor of the Sunshine Youth Legal Centre. *The Volunteer Cycle*, made possible with the support of the Victoria Law Foundation's CLC Fellowship, will be launched at the University of Melbourne today ([Thursday 17 May](#)).

"CLCs started 40 years ago as volunteer organisations which recognised that access to justice is a right, not an act of charity bestowed on the disadvantaged. Now, over 1000 lawyers and law students volunteer in Victorian CLCs every year. On a conservative estimate, volunteers contribute around \$8 million worth of free legal help to needy Victorians each year.

"Volunteers are a mainstay of community legal help, and the Federation pays tribute to their great contribution," said Hugh de Kretser, Executive Officer of the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

However, he said CLCs were struggling to meet rising demand for affordable and effective access to justice for people unable to pay for private lawyers.

"For many people confronted by family violence, family law issues, urgent problems around housing or employment, the need for quality legal help is not optional. They come to CLCs with problems that only get worse if they are left unresolved. In getting legal help, CLCs are often their only choice. Volunteers are an essential part of ensuring justice, but their contribution needs to be recognised and supported with stronger Government funding of CLCs themselves," de Kretser said.

*The Volunteer Cycle* found the key reason to volunteer was to make a difference to the community, and this was also the number one benefit volunteers derived from their important work.

"A key finding of the report is the need to improve the resourcing, training and recruitment of volunteers, many of whom go on to employment in CLCs in a sustained commitment to providing essential legal assistance to the disadvantaged," de Kretser said.

Hugh de Kretser will speak at the launch of *The Volunteer Cycle*, to be held [at 10.30am Thursday 17 May](#) at the Staff Common Room of the Melbourne University Law School, [185 Pelham Street](#), Carlton.

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